

**The painting  
“Raising of Lazarus”  
held at the  
Basilica of St. George Martyr  
in Victoria, Gozo**



**On the occasion of  
the formal presentation and blessing of  
the restored painting  
commissioned by the  
Grand Priory of the Maltese Islands  
of the Military & Hospitaller Order  
of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem  
on the 23rd June 2007**

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bon Kings of France. It suffered a setback following the French Revolution when it lost the temporal protection of the French Government and sought the spiritual protection of the Greek Melchite Patriarchs. In 1930, the Grand Magistracy was again assumed by the House of Bourbon. This has been maintained with elected grandmasters being generally members of the Spanish House of Bourbons.



The *Grand Priory of the Maltese Islands* pertains to the group giving allegiance to H.R.H. Don Francisco de Borbon y Escasany, Duke of Seville, as Grandmaster. The Order originally reached the Maltese shores in the mid-sixties as a Commandery and was raised to the status of Priory in May 1969 during a Grand Magisterial Meeting held in Malta; eventually Grand Priory. It established a Delegation in Gozo in 1972, but this was discontinued after some years. In 2005, the Gozo branch was revived as a *Commandery of Gozo*.



Since its introduction in Malta, the Priory of the Maltese Islands has contributed towards a number of humanitarian causes, including supporting services to ameliorate the life of victims of leprosy. It continues contributing towards humanitarian improvements locally and abroad. During 2005, it has affiliated the *Step-by-Step Foundation* and made a close liaison with the *Special Rescue Group - St. Lazarus Corps* to help it continue its hospitaller and philanthropic activities for the benefit of those emarginated in Maltese society. The Grand Priory further undertook to finance the restoration of the old titular painting depicting the raising of St. Lazarus by the professional art restorer Godwin Cutajar held by the *Basilica of St George the Martyr* at Rabat, Gozo. The project was formally commissioned in April 2006 and finalized in February 2007.

Chev. Prof. C. Savona-Ventura



## The Order of St. Lazarus

This ancient Christian Order was originally founded to care for victims of leprosy in the Holy Land after the fall of Jerusalem to the Crusaders in 1098. The Order of St. Lazarus assumed the management of the existing leprosarium sited outside the walls of Jerusalem and which had been established by the fourth century. There, the monks of the Order worked towards the amelioration of those falling victims to leprosy.

Pressures from the Islamic forces necessitated the adoption of a military role to protect pilgrims visiting Jerusalem and retain the Holy Land for the Latin forces. In this role, the Knights of St Lazarus often joined forces with the Knights of St John and Templars in fighting against this common enemy, and many of them lost their life in battle. The Order of St. Lazarus was expelled from the Holy Land, together with remaining Christian forces, after the fall of Acre in 1291.



The Order transferred its headquarters to France where it received Royal protection. There it continued serving victims of leprosy besides participating in the continual struggle against the Islamic threat. Its hospitaller work spread out to various parts of Europe. Through hospices and leprosy houses the Order carried on in its Mission of charity and service. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Order of St. Lazarus had become a French Chivalric Order enjoying the protection of the Bour-

## Historical Background

The newly-restored painting depicting the *Raising of Lazarus* held by the Basilica of St. George in Gozo is painted in the mannerist style of the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. As a stylistic label, "Mannerism" is not easily pigeonholed. The word derives from the Italian *maniera*, or "style," which corresponds to an artist's characteristic "touch" or recognizable "manner". Artistic artificiality, as opposed to Renaissance and Baroque naturalism, provides one of the common features of mannerist art. Mannerism is particularly notable for its artificial and intellectual qualities.

The newly-restored painting was definitely not extant there in 1575. That year was highlighted with the Apostolic Visit of Mgr. Petrus Dusina whose subsequent report includes a description of the parochial church dedicated to St. George in Rabat-Victoria, Gozo. The report states that "in this parochial church there are three altars with no burdens attached to them.... These altars, most probably were erected for the decoration of the church".<sup>1</sup> It is very likely that the painting was commissioned around 1620 when the Confraternity of St. Lazarus or of Charity was erected.<sup>2</sup> With the setting up of the

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1. *Juntas dictam Ecclesiam parochialem sunt tria altaria, ultra maius, in quibus nullum est onus, nec alia necessaria, sed potius ad Ecclesiae ornamentum fuerunt constructa.* In: G. Aquilina, S. Fiorini (eds.): *Documentary Sources of Maltese History. Part IV. Documents at the Vatican. No.1 Archivio Segreto Vaticano. Congregazione Vescovi e Regolari. Malta: Vista Apostolica no.51 Mgr Pietro Petrus Dusina, 1575.* University Press, Malta, 2001, p.140

2. A. Ferres: *Descrizione storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo.* A. Ferris, Malta, 1866, p.554; G.P.F. Agius de Soldanis: *Il Gozo. Antico-moderno e Sacro-profano, Isola Mediterranea adiacente a Malta Africana.* Gozo: Manuscript National Library, 1746 [english translation by A. Merceica: *Gozo. Ancient and Modern, Religious and Profane.* Malta: Media Centre Publ., 1999, p.60

Confraternity, the right main side altar of the parochial church was dedicated to St. Lazarus of Bethany and was subsequently embellished by a titular painting depicting the raising of the saint from the dead. The artist of this painting remains unidentified. A benefice was subsequently willed by Anglu Cassar in 1637 to enable mass to be further celebrated at this altar every Saturday. The altar dedicated to St. Lazarus was described in the report of the Pastoral Visit of Bishop Mgr. Lorenzo de Astira in the 12<sup>th</sup> June 1673.<sup>3</sup>

The 17th century saw a spate of Confraternities being set up in the Diocese of Malta and Gozo. Until 1575, only one confraternity had been established in the Maltese Islands, this being the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament erected in Senglea, Malta by Pope Paul III in 1539. Mgr. Duzina insisted upon the establishment of the Confraternity of Corpus Christi in every parish on the islands. By 1681, the Diocese of Malta and Gozo could boast of 140 confraternities.<sup>4</sup> The Confraternity of St. Lazarus was formed by the humblest members of the parish who wore sack-cloth vestments during their functions. The Confraternity of St Lazarus continued its activities in the subsequent decades and was often at loggerheads over the issues of precedence with other confraternities.

Significant structural modifications were undertaken in the Basilica during the period 1672-1678 when the church was given the form of a Latin cross with four altars on each side. The reconstruction project probably led to the commissioning of a new painting depicting the

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3. N. Vella Apap: *Il-Vizita Pastorali ta' L-Isqof Mons. Lorenzo de Astira (1670-1678) fil-Parrocchia ta' San Gorg fit-12 ta' Gunju 1673*. Festi San Gorg, 1998, 24:p.87

4. A. Bonnici: *History of the Church in Malta. Volume II Period III – 1530-1800*. Catholic institute, Malta, 1968, p.95; G. Aquilina, S. Fiorni (eds.): *op. cit.*, 2001, p.43

5. This painting was restored by the art restorer Godwin Cutajar dip. IAAR, ICR Roma in 1998 the work being supported by the Ladies Society of the Basilica. G. Cutajar: *Xoghol ta' konservazzjoni u restawr fuq il-kwadru "San Lazru" fil-Bazilika ta' San Gorg Martri, Rabat*. Festi San Gorg, 1998, 24:p.37-39. K. Sciberas places the date at 1677: K. Sciberras: *L-Arti barokka f' Malta*. PIN, Malta, 2003, p.62.

pertaining to the lower middle class. The Rector's silver medallion of this Confraternity is still extant and is an exquisite piece of local craftsmanship.

As regards the dedication of the altar in St. George's Basilica to Saint Lazarus of Betania, it has been mooted that since the altar of St. Lazarus is not mentioned in Dusina's apostolic visitation of 1575, it is to be assumed that the cult to St. Lazarus originated after this date. In fact Dusina fails to mention the dedication of the other altars of the Church, apart from the main altar. This does not exclude the fact that any one of them was dedicated to St. Lazarus, the relative icon having perished in the numerous "razzie" which the church periodically suffered in the hands of the Barbary pirates.

The cult to St. Lazarus is an oriental cult. The dedication of the church to St George, another saint very popular in the oriental rite points to this direction. A Greek or Siculo-Greek community was extant in the town in the early middle ages as evidenced by contemporary documents.

One may also assume that the dedication of an altar to St. Lazarus "migrated" from a desacrated chapel in the vicinity. This was the case of the altar of St. Catherine of Alexandria in the same church. But this is mere speculation! One hopes that our historians will uncover in the future some document which may shed more light on the Lazarite cult in St. George's Basilica.

Chev. Dr. Paul Pisani



## The Confraternity of St. Lazarus

So far no document proving the exact date of the foundation of this confraternity has been traced. Relying on Achille Ferres' s "Descrizione Storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo" (Malta, 1866), the date of 1620 has been mooted as the foundation date. Ferres refers to this confraternity as "Confraternita di San Lazzaro o della Carita" (p.554).

In fact the dedication of the altar in St. George's Basilica is to St. Lazarus of Betania, while the charitable works are associated with another "Saint" Lazarus, namely the poor man feeding himself on the crumbs falling from the rich man's banquet, mentioned in the Bible. We all know the sequel to this parable, namely the incapacity of the rich man, now dead and presumably in hell, to convince Lazarus, now in heaven, to speak to the rich man's family in order to change their ways and avoid the same fate as their opulent father.

This parable inspired various charitable works to be named after St. Lazarus, foremost amongst them the "Lazzarettos" which survived well into the last century. Ferres speaks of this confraternity as "della Carita" and in fact there were various confraternities at the time, in Europe, especially in Italy, Spain and France, dedicated to the performance of charitable works. However St . Lazarus was also invoked as patron saint of the cobblers. Confraternities of cobblers were dedicated to the saint in Florence, Rome and Sicily.

It is to be kept in mind that the various altars in St. George's Basilica had confraternities attached to them which were "organized", supported and maintained by the various professions and occupations. Thus the confraternity of St. Michael was composed of "bottegai" or shop keepers, tailors patronized the altar of St. Onobono, while the Confraternity of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary was patronized by clerics, teachers, clerks, medics, lawyers, notaries, pharmacists and land owners. Finally the Confraternity of the Holy Crucifix was patronized by the lower classes.

In the absence of written documentation, one can only assume that the confraternity of Saint Lazarus was strictly "della carita" since cobblers were tradesmen much in demand at the time and presumably discreetly well off,

raising of St. Lazarus from the dead. The artist commissioned to draw the new titular painting was Giuseppe d'Arena nicknamed 'il Romano' [b. c.1633; d. 1719]. The old titular painting was replaced in 1689 by the more elaborate Baroque-style painting which still serves as the altar's titular, joining other Baroque-style titular paintings in the Basilica drawn by famous local artists such as Mattia Preti [b.1613; d.1699], Stefano Erardi [b.1650; d.1733], and Francesco Zahra [b.1680; d.1765].<sup>5</sup>

The presence of the altar dedicated to St. Lazarus with its titular d'Arena painting is reconfirmed in the report of the Pastoral Visit of Bishop Mgr. Alpheran de Bussan in 1745.<sup>6</sup> The report describes the side altar dedicated to St Lazarus, its titular painting, and its associated benefices. The altar was said to be linked with the Confraternity of St Lazarus who celebrated the saint's feast every year on the 17<sup>th</sup> December. The celebration of Mass was further carried out on the feast of St. Mary and every Saturday and Sunday as determined by benefices left by Pietru Grima and Anglu Cassar. The procurator responsible for the altar was Fr. Martin Bugeja.<sup>7</sup>

Chev. Prof. C. Savona-Ventura



6. T. Terrible: *L-Isqof Alpheran de Bussan jzur il-Parrocca ta' San Gorg fl-1745*. Festi San Gorg, 1998, 24:p.61

7. Another contemporary mannerist-style painting depicting the raising of St. Lazarus by Andrea Vicentino [b. c.1539 ; d.1614] is held by the National Museum of Fine Arts in Malta. P. Mayo: *The National Museum of Fine Arts*. Heritage, Malta, 1995, p.9-11. Another painting showing the raising of St Lazarus by an unknown artist is found in private holding. This is possibly an 18<sup>th</sup> century neoclassical-style painting whose depicted figures appear to be based on D'Arena's 17<sup>th</sup> century painting.

## Rapport Tekniku dwar xoghol ta' Konservazzjoni u Restawr

**Teknika u Storja:** Il-pittura hi mahduma fuq support maghmul minn zewg xkejjer ta' l-istess ghamla mehjutin flimkien; il-hjata fejn jinghaqdu z-zewg xkejjer hi orizzontali 92cm minn fuq. Fuq dawn ix-xkejjer inghatat preparazzjoni fina ta' lewn kannella car. Iz-zebgha tal-pittura generalment b'konsistenza ta' velaturi opaki, probabli ghandha z-zejt bhala legant. Jidhru zewg petimenti: il-kappell tar-ragel b'mantell ahmar fuq ix-xellug jidher li kien sa jkollu ghamla differenti u l-komma tal-lemin tal-mara b'velu abjad magenb Kristu giet imcekkna. Il-pittura kellha ta' l-inqas intervent wiehed ta' konservazzjoni qabel dan prezenti, jew iktar minn wiehed. F'dawn l-interventi sarulha xi rqajja fuq wara biex jinghalqu xi taqob jew ticrit li seta' kellha, fosthom hemm bicciet ta' drapp ikhal, ohrajn huma pagni (karti) li tqattghu minn xi pubblikazzjoni u gew inkullati fuq in-naha ta' wara tal-pittura. L-ghamla differenti ta' dawn l-irqajja tista' tfisser li fl-imghoddi fuq il-pittura saru iktar minn intervent wiehed ta' konservazzjoni fi zminijiet differenti. L-irqajja kienu nkullati b'adesiv li jinhall bl-ilma. Il-pittura hi wiesgha 130cm. Il-parti l-mimduda t'isfel hi meqruda ghal kollox u ghalhekk mhux hafif inkunu nafu kemm kien id-daqs il-wieqaf; dan gie meqjus bhala 162.5cm ghax iz-zebgha daqshekk tasal minn fuq s'isfel. Il-pittura tinsab migbuda fuq tilar ta' l-injam, li kellu traversa orizzontali u erba' traversi dijagonali, wahda ghal kull angolu ghas-sahha, izda llum ebda traversa ma baqa'. Tinsab imwabhla mieghu bi msiemer ta' l-injam u ohrajn tal-metall, xi drabi msammrin direttament goz-zebgha. It-tilar jidher qadim u hu ftit ikbar mill-pittura. Il-pittura qeghda go gwarnic ta' l-injam li qed ighatti medja ta' 5cm madwar il-pittura kollha,

**Stat ta' Konservazzjoni:** Il-pittura waslet fi stat hazin hafna ta' konservazzjoni. It-tilar li fuqu kienet il-pittura ghandu hafna toqob tas-susa, hu mherri u m'ghadux jiflah igorr il-pittura fuqu. It-truf tal-pittura fejn hi msammra mat-tilar huma mqattghin u fihom bosta toqob li jistghu ikunu ta' msiemer ohra li qabel kienu qed izommu l-pittura ma' xi tilar izghar. Il-pittura kienet ixxarbet, tilfet it-tensjoni u f'bosta partijiet it-truf huma maqlugha minn mat-tilar. Ghandha deformazzjonijiet superficjali, tilfet hafna zebgha bil-preparazzjoni u l-parti l-mimduda isfel spiccat ghal kollox. Il-pittura ghandha fuqha trab hafif, taqtir ta' xemgha u kollox ma kollox ma tantx tidher prezentabli.

**Interventi ta' Konservazzjoni u Restawr:** Il-qagħda hazina strutturali tal-pittura kienet mehtieg li tissahhah, u mod ta' kif isir dan hu billi l-pittura titwahhal fuq support gdid li jsahhah ix-xkora originali u jorbot l-istrati pittorici bejniethom. Il-pittura giet imnehhija minn fuq it-tilar. In-naha ta' wara gie mfarfar u l-irqajja li kellha tnehhew. Wara dan giet imwabhla ma' support gdid ta' xkora b'adesiv u sistema tradizzjonali "colla di pasta". Giet imbagħad imsammra fuq tilar gdid expandibbli ta' l-injam. Wara l-provi tad-tindif il-pittura giet imnaddfa b'sistema kimika u mekkanika. Il-partijiet nieqsa gew l-ewwel mimlija bi stokk tradizzjonali, imbagħad b'velaturi opaki ta' zebgha. Fl-ahhar inghatat strat protettiv. Dan ix-xogħol sar bejn April 2006 u Frar 2007.

**Konservazzjoni Preventiva:** Il-pittura ghandha titqieghed f'imkien ventilat u fejn ma tixxarrabx. Kull sitt xhur ghandha tkun iccekkjata quddiem u wara biex jekk tkun qed issir xi hsara jsiru interventi mill-ewwel.

Art Restorer Godwin Cutajar

