

PICTURING HISTORY. LEONELLO SPADA'S FRESCO CYCLE AT THE GRAND MASTER'S PALACE IN VALLETTA

DOI: 10.17401/lexicon.s.5-agius

Frederica Agius

Lecturer, University of Malta

fredericaagius@gmail.com

Abstract

*This research focuses on the fresco cycle at the Grand Master's Palace painted by the Bolognese artist Leonello Spada (1576-1622) in 1610. The cycle depicts scenes from the early history of the Order of the Knights of St John and was commissioned by Grand Master Aloff de Wignacourt (1547-1622). The frescoes will be analysed and the capability of the artist to project the narrative through the then popular style of Bolognese classicism will be assessed. And finally, the way in which the artist incorporates the visual and literary sources into the narrative programme will be explored in detail. The main literary source, *Dell'Istoria Della Sacra Religione et Ill.ma Militia di San Giovanni* by Giacomo Bosio has been identified and the illustrations of Antonio Tempesta were utilised as the inspiration for the composition of the scenes. Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* was used both as a literary and visual source.*

Keywords

Fresco, Bologna, Order of the Knights of St John, Wignacourt, Bosio, Tempesta, Ripa

This paper discusses Spada's extensive fresco cycle of the early history of the Order of the Knights of St John for the Grand Master's Palace in Valletta that was commissioned in 1610 by Grand Master Aloff de Wignacourt (1547-1622) and planned by prominent Italian knights within his court¹. The fresco's narrative has a complicated intellectual, didactic and propagandistic nature, which corresponds to the carefully edited story that the Knights wanted to give to their troubled history. The frescoes celebrate the Knight's virtuous legacy and demonstrate the sophistication of Wignacourt's patronage and his desire to project a work that reflects the manner in which grand palaces were decorated. This paper discusses the patronage pattern of the fresco cycle, that has already been well established, and further analyses the way it illustrates the literary and visual sources for its heroic narrative².

In reality, even though the 500-year-old history of the Order of St John was dotted with successes and glorious moments, it was in general one of military retreat. Over the centuries the Knights were displaced further away from the city of Jerusalem, which was the very essence of their institution and existence³. It became imperative that in their own Magistral Palace the Knights presented a favourable heroic slant to what was essentially a history of refuge, which saw the Order lose territories that had been in Christian hands from the eleventh and twelfth centuries⁴. The result is a cycle that honours, promotes and demonstrates the military achievements, religious duty and virtues of good governance to the elite audience of the Palace. At the onset of this commission the Order's chroniclers and the intellectuals behind Spada's decorative scheme had to face this issue and select episodes that responded to their desire to decorate their Palace with a particularly favourable view of the Order's history. In 1601 Wignacourt was elected as Grand Master of the Order and took up residence in the Grand Master's Palace⁵. The Palace stands out in its setting where it commands the space of the main square in

Valletta along the principal road of the city⁶ [fig. 1]. Spada's fresco cycle is located on the *piano nobile* of the building, along the wing known as the 'summer apartments.' The cycle of twenty-four episodes maps out the Order's history in a chronological sequence over three rooms.

The cycle begins in 1060 with the Order's institution and narrates their movements through illustrious personages in virtuous scenes of military campaigns, miraculous occurrences and political alliances. The cycle concludes with their move to Viterbo in 1522, a few years prior to their transfer to Malta⁷ [fig. 2]. The history culminates in the next room, the Grand Council Hall, with earlier frescoes by Matteo Perez D'Aleccio (1547-1628) carried out in the 1570s depicting the *Great Siege of 1565*, a glorious battle in the Order's history⁸ [fig. 3]. The first room in Spada's decorative programme illustrated the conquest of the Holy Land. The scenes narrate the beginning of the religiously charged crusades and the Knights' mission in defending the Holy Land. The Order's intent to display the themes of miracles, the expression of good governance and their administrative role create a powerful political message on the walls of their own Palace. This research has delved into the propagandist intent of the Order expressed through the choice of episodes.

The episodes narrate subjects from the Order's history including early sieges and tradition that found their roots during the 11th and 12th centuries. The selected narratives describe the duality of the Knights' vows and character, and dichotomy of peace and war in their history. The early protagonists of the Order's history are commemorated through these scenes, most notably, Peter the Hermit, Blessed Gerard and Master Raymond du Puy. These principal characters direct the narrative through episodes of the crusades, warfare, arrivals and departures.

In the second room the subject of defeat is retold in a triumphal manner and other devices are employed by Spada to evoke pity and compassion within the audience at the Palace. The



Fig 1. View of the Façade of the Grand Master's Palace, Valletta (photo credits Michael Calleja).



Fig. 2. View of the third room showing Leonello Spada's frescoes. The images were taken by the author during an onsite study.

framing allegories of virtues intensify the sentiments of bravery, courage, justice, honour and valour that are analogous to chivalry and complement the propagandist tone. The presence of King Andrew II of Hungary, Frederick II, Richard Count of Cornwall and St Louis in the scenes is a reminder of the Order's alliances and clout within the wider crusading context in Europe. Spada's decorative programme in the final room illustrates the aftermath of the Order's expulsion from the Holy Land. The episodes detail the Order's movements from the years 1291 till 1522 and maps out their journey from Cyprus, through to Rhodes and their arrival in Viterbo. Six of the eight episodes are set in Rhodes, where the Knights settled for over 200 years. Leading figures in the Order, including Pierre d'Aubusson and L'Isle-Adam, ruled the Knights during this time of exile. The inclusion of Amadeus V the Count of Savoy, reinforces the political alliances despite the circumstances. The inclusion of Jem Sultan, who is referred to as Zizzimi in the narrative, enhances the Knights' status in an episode where the Order played a pivotal role as 'political brokers' in an event that linked Europe, Papal Rome and the Knights with the Eastern Empire where they successfully accommodated the sultan's brother. Spada's scheme combined two scenes and three framing figures as a frieze along the upper part of each wall, in a format similar to the Great Siege frescoes at the Grand Master's Palace and the mythological scenes at Palazzo Fava in Bologna⁹. Spada's episodes are set as *quadri riportati*, identified by de-

scriptive cartouches. The cartouche plays a fundamental role in identifying the narrative and its protagonists, as well as giving the defined heroic slant to the cycle. The framing figures, referred to as *telemomi*, follow an independent scheme that enhance the significance of the narrative. The framing figures in the first room represent the Beatitudes, which are symbolic of the eight-pointed cross worn on the habit of the Order. The scenes in the second room are flanked by virtues that are extolled in the main episodes. Characters from the Old Testament frame the scenes of the last room and through their inscriptions; form a metaphor for the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ that run parallel to tragic and victorious scenes in the Order's history. Apart from this, these represent the theme of exile, which characterises the narrative of the room. An analysis of the format, iconography and sources of Spada's frescoes at the Grand Master's Palace classifies them within the tradition of fresco decoration in Renaissance Europe, most notably Italy, through its informed patronage, intellectual narrative, decorative scheme and contemporary stylistic manner. The episodes depicted have a clear relation to their literary and visual sources which through this study have been defined as the literary work of the historian Jacomo Bosio (1544-1627) and the printed matter of Antonio Tempesta (1555-1630)¹⁰. Crusading ideology was ushered by rhetoric, which is intimately tied to propaganda. Rhetoric observes the modes of persuasion through directing the audience's emotions and gaining their trust¹¹. In



Fig. 3. View of the Grand Council Hall with frescoes by Matteo Perez D'Aleccio, The Grand Master's Palace, Valletta. (Photo credits Joe Borg).

the case of Spada as an artist working for the Order, by following Wignacourt and his court's guidelines to portray the knights as benevolent and using Bosio's published *Dell'Istoria Della Sacra Religione et Ill.ma Militia di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano* as the trusted source, the audience's views are directed accordingly and are convinced through the proof given in the historical narrative. The fresco cycle is grounded in the humanist ideals surrounding Wignacourt's inner circles and through the style and subject matter one can isolate the preferences of the patron himself.

This humanistic quality in the narrative scheme shows it to be the work of a number of *cognoscenti* that moved in the intimate circles of Grand Master Wignacourt's government. In the absence of complete documentation it is possible to envision a scenario of the special committee assigned to this commission, which in this case was composed of prominent Italian knights. This could possibly include the Bosio brothers, Jacomo and Gionotto, who were both intimately tied to the Order through their family history and roles as Agent and Vice Chancellor respectively, and who both had a profound knowledge of the history of the Order.

By the date of Spada's arrival in Malta, Jacomo's brother Gionotto, was one of the most influential and powerful men in the Order. His role as head of the Chancellery meant that he was almost effectively in control of the everyday running of the island and that he had direct access to the Grand Master and to all that concerned the Order. His clout within the Palace makes it likely that Gionotto was also involved with the fresco commission¹². Fra Alessandro Orsi emerges as a protagonist through the Grand Master's letters in the archives and through his role of receiver for the Order in Bologna. He was responsible for communicating the selection of Spada to the Grand Master¹³. Francesco Dell'Antella acted as Wignacourt's cultural advisor on different occasions and his documented interest in this commission and the Order places him in direct involvement with the cycle. His involvement can be confirmed through a possible portrait of him that Spada included in the fresco cycle¹⁴. It is clear that these protagonists were partly responsible for the propagandist tone in their directed use of sources and political presence on the island.

Wignacourt's interest as a patron of high levels of sophistication for the Order is manifest through the commission of the last volume of Jacomo Bosio's *Historia* and the manner in which he accommodated the artist Caravaggio (1571-1610) in Malta prior to Spada's journey to the island¹⁵. It is evident that Wignacourt exercised direct control over Spada's fresco cycle through the involvement of his court, use of literary sources and his physical presence in the Palace. Wignacourt's own agenda was imprinted on the narrative through the emphasis of French Grand Masters and in the depiction of the miracle of the Virgin of Liesz in the first room, which was a personal devotion of his.

Prior to Spada's undertaking, the choice of episodes to be depicted was probably discussed in detail by this special committee as happened in other documented cases.

Previous studies highlight a 1606 document which reveals that Wignacourt sought to commission an unfortunately unnamed

Florentine *frescante* for work in the Palace¹⁶. The commission never materialised, despite its seemingly advanced planning stage. In 1609, a few months after Caravaggio's departure, Wignacourt returned to his wishes to decorate the Palace. Instead of re-establishing contact with Florence he directed his interest to Bologna, the leading centre at the time, to commission a *frescante*. This change of mind is extremely significant and proves that Wignacourt had stylistically revised his plans for the Palace in order to follow the latest trends in Italian courts. The parameters for Spada's path to Malta are recorded in the archives and follow the previous arrangements set for the Florentine *frescante*, whereby he was to stop in Naples for materials and provisions¹⁷. Spada is last documented in Bologna at the end of November 1609 and possibly left for Malta, along with his assistant, soon after. The Order's receiver in Naples Vincenzo Caraffa paid Spada 200 *Ducats* to purchase materials for the commissioned.

Spada emerges as a diverse figure in the first decade of the 17th century where he joined the reformist climate within the *Accademia degli Incamminati* and practiced the latest stylistic trends from the Carracci artists. By remaining in Bologna, Spada combined this aesthetic with an indirect classicist influence through Ludovico Carracci and remained attached to the artist. His scenes demonstrate simplicity in composition, naturalism and the influence of the Carraccis' style. Undeniably, Spada when in Malta could not have failed to make comparisons between the Grand Master's Palace and the palaces he knew well in Bologna. Spada was clearly well versed in this tradition and this is evident through his work in Palazzo Bonfiglioli-Rossi, where he collaborated with others for the decoration of three rooms. Spada's figures invade real space in their acute naturalness and sculptural quality. The dimensions of the frieze, the way the colour scheme of the frescoes match the ceiling palette and the depiction of *telemoni* in these rooms attest to the typology of fresco decoration Spada was versed in; rooted in the developments established by the Carraccis in Bolognese Palaces such as Palazzo Fava and Palazzo Magnani.

Wignacourt's requirements for the artist are clearly outlined to Alessandro Orsi, and it appears that these were discussed in detail prior to the selection of Spada. The artist was selected on account of his reputation and according to how well he fit the predefined criteria. Wignacourt specifically requested an artist who could work both in oil and fresco, which was highly valued due to the potential for commissions and uniformity in the decoration.

Spada was required to imbue his scenes with highly charged colours (*Pratica nel colorire*) and through his use of illuminative and realistic hues, brought Bosio's text to life in the most relatable way¹⁸. The Emilian naturalistic colouring that was characteristic of Spada's early years clearly emerges in the Maltese frescoes.

Spada's *bravura* in painting in *quadratura* was well known, and although Wignacourt does not specifically mention the word, his prerequisite and reference to «fresco con fondamento di disegno di prospettiva»¹⁹ shows that he envisaged something typical of the term. This typology of painting within the Bolog-

nese context is best defined as «the new manner of mural decoration in Bologna which employed a frieze with scenes divided by atlantes of semi architectural character»²⁰ that aptly applies to Spada's typology of decoration for the Grand Master's Palace. The condition for *prestezza* in Spada's execution was possibly a logistical requirement for Wignacourt, however it relates to the technique of painting with speed²¹. This skill was admired in artists as long as the technique and quality of the work was not compromised.

Finally, another of Wignacourt's requests regarded Spada's code of conduct, «Bontà de costume, e del giuditioso et amabile suo modo di procedure»²² which alludes to the Grand Master's bitter experience with Caravaggio. Although Spada was well versed with the typology of fresco decoration, the subject of the early history of the Order was completely novel for the artist and he thus had to utilise literary and visual sources proposed by the Order. The main themes that run through the narrative are arrivals and departures, battles and alliances, and relics and miracles. The episodes depicted have a clear relation to their literary and visual sources namely the work of Giacomo Bosio and the printed matter of Antonio Tempesta as two of the major influences in the narrative sequence and compositional format. Giacomo Bosio was a *letterato* and seasoned diplomat in the Order's affairs, with degrees in civil and canonical laws. Bosio held the position as *Agente e Chronista* for almost four decades. His family connections and knowledge of the history and administration of the Order earned him this title and role within the Order's office in Rome where he resided.

The narrative for Spada's fresco cycle was dictated by the literary sources and a comparative study confirmed that the

wording on the majority of the *titoli* of the episodes is directly quoted from Bosio's *Historia*²³. Bosio's *Historia*, published in three volumes under the patronage of Grand Master Verdalle and Wignacourt, was the first successfully completed historical record on the Order of St John from its institution up until contemporary times. Bosio maps out the detailed narrative using a number of published and unpublished sources, archival evidence from the Order itself and the Vatican, and memoirs from his own family members who were prominent Knights. Naturally, the tone is favourable to the Order, due to the intimate ties of Bosio's family, his own role as agent and the fact that the Grand Master himself appointed him to publish the work. His writings, which are buttressed by a number of allegories, religious symbolism and political evocations show his commitment and profound knowledge of the Order and the potentiality of rhetoric. Through his well-documented role of *Chronista*, Jacomo was likely consulted for the fresco narrative, thus specific extracts from Bosio's text provide a wonderful description of Spada's frescoes.

It is recorded in the archives that Alessandro Orsi had a copy of Bosio's *Historia* during the time of the commission, thus it is very possible that Spada began to prepare and read Bosio prior to coming to Malta²⁴. The episode titles must have been presented to Spada, who looked up and read the relevant extracts for his scenes.

An example that illustrates the use of Bosio is one of the earliest and significant events in his *Historia* and the first episode for the narrative of Spada's fresco cycle. This episode depicts the institution of the Order, with Peter the Hermit leaving Jerusalem to canvass for a Crusading movement in 1060 [fig. 4]. The title of the episode is noted in a *cartouche* beneath the scene and



Fig. 4. L. Spada, The Campaign of Peter the Hermit for the Start of the Crusades, 1060, from the fresco cycle The History of the Order, The Yellow Room, The Grand Master's Palace, Valletta (Photo credits Martin Bonnici).



Fig. 5. L. Spada, The fall of Jerusalem and the Expulsion of the Hospitallers, 1187, from the fresco cycle The History of the Order, The Yellow Room, The Grand Master's Palace, Valletta (Photo credits Martin Bonnici).



Fig. 6. L. Spada, St Louis of France handed over by the Sultan of Egypt to the Hospitallers, 1250, from the fresco cycle The History of the Order, The Pages' Room, The Grand Master's Palace, Valletta (Photo credits Martin Bonnici).

reads *Padre Pietro Eremita Dal Hospi Di Gerusalem, Per Andare In Francia A Papa Urbano Secondo, Dove Ne Segui Poi La Spedizione Della Crociata, Per Recuperatione Di Terra Santa, L'anno 1060*. This is directly linked to Bosio's text as shown in the common language (underlined) between the two; «[1060] Dando tanta virtù & efficacia alle parole di Pietro Eremita, che non solamente furon bastevoli à far risolvere Papa Urbano Secondo d'andarsene in Francia... per ricuperazione di Gierusalemme, e della Terra Santa. This form of direct copying and inspiration can be noted in other examples in the fresco cycle».

Spada skilfully created a precise interpretation of the scene as described by Bosio, as for example can be observed in *The Fall of Jerusalem, 1187* in the first room [fig. 5]. This took place after the siege against Jerusalem, which is narrated over five pages in Bosio²⁵. The episode specifically depicts the Knights exiting the city of Jerusalem and the Turks entering it after their victory. It is clear that Spada pondered heavily on Bosio's text and imbues the figures of the Knights with gestures which illustrate, as Bosio described, *gravissima, & incomparabile perdita*. The Knights are illustrated as being evicted by the Turks almost exactly as is described by Bosio and the way they exit the city of Jerusalem whilst the Turks enter through the other side is presented by Spada in great accuracy to Bosio's text; «Partiti essendo gierusalemme i Latini, entrò dall'altra parte Saladino», which he uses to highlight the cruelty inflicted on the Knights. Spada experimented in the genre of naturalistic studies and caricatures at the *Accademia degli Incamminati*. Previous preparatory work records his studies in caricature and this experience was put into practice in Malta, where Spada includes two characters in a subtle satirical manner. In *St Louis of France handed over by the Sultan of Egypt to the Hospitallers, 1250* [fig. 6] Spada depicted two grotesque caricature-like figures holding the large sum of money the Order had to pay for the liberation of the King. The two figures almost mock the scene itself for its propagandist underpinnings.

Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* was by the time of Spada's commission one of the most iconic publications for artists²⁶. This work bridged the gap between the literary and visual sources for this fresco cycle²⁷. Spada utilised the 1603 publication for the depiction of the Beatitudes and allegories of virtues in the first and second rooms, and followed Ripa's descriptions in precise detail for their rendition. The 1603 edition was published with woodcut illustrations; five of these were used as visual sources for the relative allegories, Spada being directly inspired to the point of almost copying them. Thus, although the fresco cycle is grounded in traditional concepts, contemporary sources were used to enhance the significance of the narrative.

Other visual sources can be cited for the depiction of battle scenes, which amount to half of the total episodes in the fresco cycle, keeping with the many battles that conditioned the Order's history. Strong correlations between Spada's scenes and the work of Antonio Tempesta, a reputable designer, engraver and artist in Rome at the time, show the latter to be the main visual source²⁸. Interestingly, Giacomo Bosio was a patron of Tempesta, and one of his most notable works, a plan of Rome, was dedicated to the historian²⁹. This attests to Wignacourt

and his court's direct control over the sources that influenced the fresco cycle. To further this point, Spada quoted an engraving from Grand Master Verdalle's Statute, where the scene depicting the Assembly of the first Chapter General is clearly lifted from this book.

Tempesta's scenes of combat depict the theme of *violenza plastica* that recreates a staged battle adapted for painted work, resulting in the effect of harmonious violence and somewhat 'peaceful' warfare that is far removed from the reality of the subject. This definition of the term *violenza plastica* can be applied to Spada's work at the Palace³⁰. [fig. 7 and fig. 8] Tempesta built his compositions from a long-stemming tradition rooted in the works of the Renaissance masters where they presented battles as compendiums of different poses and views of the human body, writhing in pain or poised in attack, whether on horseback or on foot. One of the leading characteristics of these battle scenes is the idea that order and harmony can coexist in a naturally chaotic scene. There is no harsh realism or violence that one would expect to see in such an episode, the artist instead allows for certain incongruities in favour of the overall scheme of the scene.

The 'charging' action of the frontal figure that begins the flowing movement in Tempesta's work is repeated in Spada's, as is the upfront skirmish. Interestingly Spada never copied one of Tempesta's battle scenes, but was clearly inspired by them. His previous battle scenes in Palazzo Bonfiglioli Rossi do not follow the same movement and thus it seems likely that Tempesta's prints were a directed source from Wignacourt's court. Each scene increased the comprehension of the text, while the transformation of the written rule into a pictorial representation highlights its importance and allows the Grand Master to imprint his patronage stamp on the finished product. The Maltese commission was one of Spada's most successful and to mark its prestige, he included his own self-portrait in the last scene of the fresco cycle. His gaze was perfectly planned to make eye contact with all those entering the last room as a strong message of pride in his work.

The fresco cycle is a triumph in patronage in the regional setting of Malta as an importation of *Cinquecento* Italian tradition in Spada's contemporary aesthetic, and through its strong affiliation to Bosio's *Historia*, thus directing Wignacourt's political interests as patron in its propagandist motives. By investigating the protagonists for the commission and their roles within the Order and the Italian Langue, the narrative in the Grand Master's Palace reveals a clear propagandist intent. The form, function and historic subject of the frescoes place the cycle within the tradition of *Cinquecento* Italy. The literary and visual sources for the fresco cycle attests to the informed patronage in updating the established tradition to the Order's requirements. The depictions of battle scenes, built on traditional aesthetics and the application of visual sources from the Order itself, presents the most vivid form of propaganda. Despite the regional Maltese context and difficulties involved with fresco painting on the island, Spada produced a work grounded in tradition and contemporary taste as a testament to Wignacourt's magistracy.



Fig. 7. A. Tempesta, Alexander Battling the Persians, from the series The Deeds of Alexander the Great, 1608, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Fig. 8. Leonello Spada, The Incursion of the Hospitallers at Ascalon and the Miracle of the Virgin of Liesse, 1131, from the fresco cycle The History of the Order, The Yellow Room, The Grand Master's Palace, Valletta (Photo credits Martin Bonnici).

Note

¹ For the most recent survey on Leonello Spada and his works see PIRONDINI, 2002. See also MALVASIA, 1678; GATTI, 1887; MARANGONI, 1911; COPERTINI, 1953; GREGORI, 1974; FRISONI, 1975; FRISONI, 1994; MACIOCE, 1994; BOESTEN-STENGEL, 1998; SCIBERRAS, STONE, 2001 and SCIBERRAS, 2009.

² This paper is taken from studies carried out for my Ph.D. thesis 'Leonello Spada, Alof de Wignacourt and Jacomo Bosio: An Analysis of the Mechanics of Patronage and the Literary and Visual Sources for Spada's Fresco Cycle at the Grand Master's Palace in Valletta,' 2020 under the guidance of my supervisor Professor Keith Sciberras and co-supervisor Professor David M. Stone. I am grateful for my supervisor's invaluable support, knowledge on the fresco cycle and context of baroque art in Malta. He guided me through the extensive published material in order to highlight lacunas in knowledge on the fresco cycle; which then formed my own research.

³ For modern publications on a survey history of the Order see especially SCICLUNA, 1970; BRADFORD, 1972; LUTTRELL, 1978; EDGALL, 1983; LUTTRELL, 1992; MALLIA MILANES, 1993; SIRE, 1994; LUTTRELL, 1999 and LUTTRELL, 2007.

⁴ The Order of St John acquired territory and revenues throughout the Kingdom of Jerusalem and neighbouring land in the 12th century. After the fall of Jerusalem in 1291, the Knights were confined to Tripoli and after losing Acre in 1291, the Knights relocated to Cyprus. The Cypriot period lasted until they moved to Rhodes in 1309. They lost Rhodes in 1522, and were given Malta in 1530.

⁵ Bosio describes and records this in his third volume of his *Dell'Istoria Della Sacra Religione et Ill.ma Militia di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano*, 1602.

⁶ For information on the Grand Master's Palace see CALLEJA, 1881; LINTORN SIMMONS, 1885; GANADO, 2001.

⁷ This is narrated in BOSIO, 1594, *parte prima* (referred to as 'I' hereunder) and *parte seconda* (referred to as 'II' hereunder) and BOSIO, 1602, *parte terza* (referred to as 'III' hereunder).

⁸ For information on the Perez D' Aleccio fresco cycles in Malta see ESPINOSA RODRIGUEZ, 2001; CINI, 2009; and SCIBERRAS, 2015.

⁹ On Palazzo Fava see EMILIANI, 1984 and EMILIANI, 2010.

¹⁰ Bosio's influence was first suggested by Keith Sciberras in SCIBERRAS, 2009, whilst the similarities to the work of Tempesta was proposed in PIRONDINI, NEGRO, ROIO and MONDUCCI, 2002, p. 31.

¹¹ For deliberation on the term propaganda in art see ARGAN, 1955; ARGAN, 1986 and LEVY, 2004. For the use of propaganda by the Popes in Rome see DE JONG, 2013.

¹² BOSIO, 1594, p. 5. Bosio acknowledges his brother for assisting him in his research on the history of the Order, and says that he could not have completed the work without him.

¹³ The letters to Fra Alessandro Orsi are recorded in Archives of Malta (AOM), 1388, *Lettere Wignacourt* 1609.

¹⁴ BOSIO, 1602, III. The inscription on the map reads; «al Molto ill.re Sig.r mio Oss.mo il Sig.r Jacomo Bosio. Sapend'io che nell'Istoria della nostra Sacra Religione V.S. tratterà dell'edificazione della fortissima Città Valletta, dalla detta Religione con piu che Regio animo edificata e parendomi, che sarebbe di gran sodisfazione a' lettori il vederla disegnata nel termine, c'hoggi di si trova; Per questo ne hò fatto di mia mano il prite disegno, il quale le mando, acciò lo possa fare stampare, se però le parerà cosa degna di tanto honore, o vero conservarlo in memoria della devotion, che porto al suo gran valore, e di cuore le bascio le mani Da Malta al primo di Settembre MDCCCVS molto ill.re, Serv.re Affett.mo il Cav.ro Fr Francesco dell'Antella».

¹⁵ Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio arrived in Malta on the 12th July 1607. For the most recent and up to date study on his stay in Malta see SCIBERRAS, 2023.

¹⁶ STONE, 1997.

¹⁷ AOM, 1388, *Lettere Wignacourt* 1609, f. 279v-280r (28 Aug.).

¹⁸ AOM, 1388, *Lettere Wignacourt* 1609, f. 279-280r (28 Aug.).

¹⁹ Malvasia was amongst the first to record this on p. 104.

²⁰ GEREVICH, 1922 quoted by FEINBLATT, 1992, p. 2.

²¹ For an assessment of *prestezza* in Cinquecento Italy see CERASUOLO, 2014 and CERASUOLO, 2017. The exhibition 'The Devil of the Brush' (16th Dec. 2017 - 25th Feb. 2018), curated by K. Sciberras at Palazzo Falson, Mdina, illustrated the notion of speed as artistic virtue perfectly with local Maltese examples from different eras. His essay on the exhibition outline and T.A. Racco's essay in the catalogue titled *Time as a Measure of Artistic Genius: the critical reception of prestezza in early modern art theory* greatly contributed to the understanding of this characteristic for Spada's commission.

²² AOM, 1388, *Lettere Wignacourt* 1609, f. 279-280r (28 Aug.).

²³ The link was first suggested by K. Sciberras.

²⁴ AOM, 1388, *Lettere Wignacourt* 1609, f. 245v (25 July).

²⁵ BOSIO, 1594, pp. 109-113.

²⁶ The *Iconologia* was first published in Rome in 1593. Other Italian editions followed in 1602 (Milan), 1603 (Rome), 1611 (Padua), 1613 (Siena), 1624-25 (Padua), 1630 (Padua), and so on. Editions in other languages were also produced in the seventeenth century.

²⁷ On Ripa's *Iconologia*, see WERNER, 1978, with earlier bibliography.

²⁸ I am grateful to Keith Sciberras for pointing out the link during the course of this research.

²⁹ For Bosio and Tempesta's relationship see LEUSCHNER, 2012. For a survey on Tempesta's works see LEUSCHNER, 2005. For Tempesta's engravings and Leuschner's commentary see *The Illustrated Bartsch*, Commentary Part 2., IX, 302 S., 2007.

³⁰ The term was first noted by ROMANA 1986, p. 202. This was used to describe the tradition of Emilian art that Spada also forms part of.

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