



**I-ACCESS  
IMPLEMENTING THE ACCESSIBILITY TO URBAN HISTORIC  
CENTER'S USE AND KNOWLEDGE**

***SCHEDA DI ACQUISIZIONE DEI DATI  
SUI MONUMENTI DEL PERCORSO***

***DATA ACQUISITION FORM  
ON THE ROUTE MONUMENTS***

**7 – Our Lady of Victory Church**

**CENNI SULLA STORIA DELLA FABBRICA  
NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF THE MONUMENT**

**1.PERIOD (concerning the first construction) 1566 – 1752**

**2.INQUADRAMENTO STORICO-URBANISTICO**

**2.HISTORICAL-URBANISTIC FRAMEWORK**

This church has the singular distinction of being the very first building (1567) to be raised in the new city of Valletta. The church was built subsequent to the foundation ceremony of 1566 but probably not, as popular tradition would have it, where the foundation stone of the new city was laid.

It is dedicated to the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin but it is often referred as Our Lady of Victory church as it is associated with the victory of the Knights of St John over the Ottoman Turks on 8 September 1565. The title 'Our Lady of Victory' has, on the other hand, been 'coined' by the Knights before reaching Malta's shores - in Rhodes, to commemorate yet another victory over the Turks – that of 1480.

The epic victory of 1565 – 'il- Vitorja' is still an appellation attached to Our Lady of Victory and at the time of the Knights, the feast of 8 September was celebrated with great pomp and solemnity. A grand procession, led by the Prior would leave St John's church, circuit about the city and end at Our Lady of Victory where officials and the Grand Master's entourage would take part in a ceremony in praise of the Blessed Virgin.

In 1617 the church was raised to the status of a Parish of the Order and was dedicated to St Anthony the Abbot. Slaves and converts were baptised here.

During the French 'interlude' Our Lady of Victory church became property of the French State. The effacement of the coats-of-arms on the facade is a result of the French revolution when French troops sought to remove all traces of the nobility and the 'ancien regime'. The coats-of-arms formerly displayed were those of **POPE INNOCENT THE XII**, Inquisitor in Malta from 1646-9, the Order and **GRAND MASTER RAMON PERELLOS Y ROCCAFUL**. A trace of the outline of the coats-of-arms can still be made out.

During the British period, since 1837, the church became a 'garrison' church for the Malta Fencibles Artillery and Roman Catholic sailors. In 1859, Reverend Gavino Mamo instituted the Congregation of the Good Shepherd for the purpose of teaching catechism to young children – an activity that stopped only with the advent of World War II.

For more information on the Church's history:

Degiorgio, S., 2011. The Hospitaller church for Our Lady of Victory. M.A. Hospitaller Studies Dissertation. University of Malta, 2011.

For more information on Pope Innocent the XII:

<http://www.vassallomalta.com/Pignatelli.htm>

For more information on Grand Master Ramon Perellos Y Roccaful:

<http://www.vassallomalta.com/Grandmasters/GM2/GM.htm>

### 3.COMMITTENZA

#### 3.PATRONS

#### **GRAND MASTER JEAN DE VALLETTE**

Grand Master Jean de Vallette commissioned the building of this church. When de Vallette died in 1568, he was buried in this church but in 1579 his remains were moved to the main church of St John.

#### **GRAND MASTER RAMON PERELLOS Y ROCCAFUL**

Grand Master Perellos's focus to improve the internal administration of the Order Convent was warmly seconded by Pope Innocent XII, who from the very beginning of his reign showed great interest in the welfare of the Order of the Knights of Malta. As a mark of recognition Perellos y Roccaful caused a bust of Innocent XII to be placed on the high front of the facade of Our Lady of Victory church. This Grand Master commissioned the decorations of the vault of this church such that these bear this grand master's coat of arms.

#### **The BAILIFF DE MONTELLIEU**

The bailiff de Montellieu is recorded to have been a generous contributor towards this church – from the stalls for the clergy and musicians, paintings and gilding, a pulpit, stairways for access to the belfry and the crypt, receptacles for the preservation of holy objects in the sacristy and alterations of the chaplain's house.

For more information on Grand Masters de Vallette and Perellos;

<http://www.vassallomalta.com/Grandmasters/GM2/GM.htm>

For more information of Bailiff de Montellieu:

Degiorgio, S., 2011. The Hospitaller church for Our Lady of Victory. M.A. Hospitaller Studies Dissertation. University of Malta, 2011.

### 4.FASI COSTRUTTIVE

#### 4.CONSTRUCTION PHASES

The church as we see it today is an expanded development of the first original structure. The original small church was built in 1567.

Its façade was modelled in Grand Master Perellos' time in 1699 as attested by the inscription in honour of Pope Innocent XI. The west front of the church is believed to have been extended prior to 1752 while the final remodeling of the western front appears to have taken place in 1756-7.

Originally the church stood aligned to a higher street level, without the need for the flight of steps and small parvis that we see today. The lowering of the street gradient that took place in the mid-18th century also necessitated the additions of stairways to the building adjacent to this church, including St Catherine's Church just across the street.

In 2000, the National Trust of Malta, Din l-Art Ħelwa, started a project of restoration along with the Valletta Rehabilitation Project and the Museums Department. The exterior restoration was completed by 2004, while work on the interior of the church continued. For more information: <http://www.ourladyofvictory.org.mt/page03.html>

#### 5.TIPOLOGIA E RIFERIMENTI ARCHITETTONICI (descrizione dell'interno, dell'esterno, materiali e tecniche costruttive tradizionali...)

#### 5. ARCHITECTURAL TYPOLOGY AND COMPARISONS (description of the interior, exterior, traditional materials and construction techniques...)

The church faces north-east in line with the grid pattern of the city. The original church was enlarged on the west front and its façade was given a Baroque style inspired by classical Italian Baroque.

The church's façade is of graceful proportions. It is dominated by a vertical perspective that invites one to look from the main portal to the crowning pinnacle. Its doorway is surmounted by a broken pediment bracing two defaced escutcheons. These in turn support an arched window over which one can observe a white-marbled sculpture that commands attention. Both the window and sculpture break two cornices that run in parallel, the bottom one resting on pilasters of the Ionic order.

Interior - the church has a rectangular nave with a semi-circular choir-apse and is capped by a barrel-vault, decorated with an important cycle of paintings showing scenes from the life of the Virgin. The church has four side altars recessed within alcoves.

#### 6.OPERATORI COINVOLTI

#### 6.ARCHITECTS, DESIGNERS AND MASONS INVOLVED

**GIROLAMO CASSAR** – architect of the original church structure.

Girolamo Cassar built the first original church which was much smaller to the present day plan – the result of enlargement on its east and west fronts.

**ALESSIO ERARDI**- Baroque painter of the vault ceiling

Alessio Erardi (c.1671-1727) was the son of the accomplished painter Stefano Erardi. Enrico Regnaud (1692-1764) is said to have assisted Erardi with the ceiling decorations of this church.

For more information on Gerolomo Cassar: <https://vassallohistory.wordpress.com/maltese-architects/>

For more information on Alessaio Erardi: <https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/22758>

## 7.FONTI BIBLIOGRAFICHE

## 7.BIBLIOGRAPHIC SOURCES

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Degiorgio, S. *The foundation of the church of Our Lady of Victory in Humillima Civitas Vallettae: from mount Xebb-er-ras to European Capital of Culture*. Margaret Abdilla Cunningham, Maroma Camilleri and Godwin Vella eds. Valletta: Heritage Malta, 2018.

Degiorgio, S., 2011. *The Hospitaller church for Our Lady of Victory*. M.A. Hospitaller Studies Dissertation. University of Malta, 2011.

Galea, M., 2011. *Valletta : statues, niches, small churches, public fountains, public clocks, monuments, marble tablets*, Valletta: Allied P.

Hughes, Quentin J. *The Building of Malta during the Period of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, 1530-1795*. London: London : Alec Tiranti, 1956.

Zammit, Lewis. "The use of Architectural Ornament on the Street Elevation of Secular Building in Valletta, between the Late Sixteenth and the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century : An Art Historical Survey." M.A.HIST.OF ART, 2004.

## 9.ISCRIZIONI, LAPIDI, ETC...

## 9.INSCRIPTIONS, PLAQUES ETC.....

The inscription on the facade was added in perpetual commemoration of the gratitude of the fraternity towards the Holy Pontiff Pope Innocent XIII. The verse set over the portal carrying the date 1756 commemorates the facade alterations that took place prior to this date.

The commemorative tablet also affixed to the exterior of this church, dated 1924 claims (erroneously) that the church stands on the site of the foundation stone of the city.

The commemorative marble slab in the sacristy records the exceptional contributions of Bailiff de Montellieu.

#### **10.ELENCO E DESCRIZIONE DELLE OPERE D'ARTE**

#### **10. WORKS OF ART INVENTORY AND DESCRIPTIONS**

The exterior of the church carries the bronze bust representing Pope Innocent XII. This was executed by Giuseppe Mazzuoli (1644-1701), a disciple of Bernini. The bust was erected in 1700 in recognition of this Pope's service to the Order.

Inside the church, one can admire the high altar, the choir-apse, altar and sacristy paintings, the baptismal font, the organ as well as liturgical vestments and reliquaries. The decoartions of the vault were commissioned by Grand Master Ramon Perellos y Roccaful. They are the work of Maltese painter Alessio Erardi (1669-1727).

The titular painting shows The Nativity of Our Lady. This dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Another main work of art is the high altar in fine marble which bears the coat-of-arms of Bailiff de Montellieu. In the apse of the church one finds four panels representing Saint Anthony the Abbot, Saint Anthony of Padua, Saint John the Baptist and Saint Paul. Here one also finds a painting on copper of the Virgin Mother in prayer which subsequently became known as the icon of Our Lady of Victory. Apart from the three original altars of the church, a fourth altar, situated on the left side of the church, is dedicated to St Eligius and was built by the blacksmiths' brotherhood in 1744. The painting of The Good Shepherd hanging in the sacristy was executed by Antonio Falzon in 1860, and is a memento of the Good Shepherd Society (see Historic-Urbanistic section, above).

**Researched and compiled by Ruby Jean Cutajar (May 2020)**