

THE CULT OF ST. CATHERINE OF ALEXANDRIA IN MALTA

BY MARIO BUHAGIAR

(Continued from pages 24-35, 76-84).

C. Churches not mentioned in the Dusina Report.

Gian Pietro Agius de Soldanis (1712-1770) in his manuscript history of Gozo, "Gozo Antico e Moderno, Sacro e Profano", mentions two other churches dedicated to St. Catherine in Gozo, which might have been contemporaneous to the above. Their omission in the Dusina Report, is unaccounted for and may cause some doubt on their real existence, especially as De Soldanis is not altogether trustworthy as a historian. They might indeed, have been so derelict at the time of Dusina's visit to Gozo in February 1575 as not to warrant even a mention in his report, or possibly, they might have been erected slightly after his visit. De Soldanis places both churches in Rabat, one in the burial ground adjoining the church of St. George and the other in a hallowed cemetery, close to the Augustinian Friary, the last vestiges of which were unfortunately destroyed a few years ago. The latter had been burdened with two masses a week and another mass every fortnight by one Antonius de Nasis. De Soldanis dates this burden back to 1545 and says that it is referred to in the pastoral visitation of that year. (57) Here he is obviously wrong as the earliest pastoral visitation in the diocese of Malta appears to have been that of Canon Antonio Bartolo, who as Vicar Capitular visited part of the diocese in 1570. The other church, in the burial ground of St. George's Church was, according to De

(57) AGIUS DE SOLDANIS GIAN PIETRO, *Gozo Antico e Moderno Sacra e Profano*, translated by Mgr. G. FARRUGIA. Malta Government Printing Press 1953; Book II, p. 116.

Soldanis, also burdened. It was apparently deconsecrated or abandoned in the 17th century when its burdens were transferred to the altar of St. Catherine in St. George's Church (58).

D. Churches dedicated to St. Catherine in the present day Malta.

1. The parish church of Zejtun.

The parish church of St. Catherine at Zejtun was built between 1692 and 1778 on the designs of Lorenzo Gafa' who, as an architect, dominated the second half of the 17th century. It was, however, opened to public worship in 1720, when only the nave had been completed, and consecrated by Bishop Alpheran de Bussan in 1742. (59) The transepts were added in the 1740's and the aisles were not completed before 1778. The lantern of the dome is recent and dates back to the early years of this century. The church is considered a masterpiece of early Maltese Baroque architecture and is probably Gafa's finest church. (60) Excluding the lantern of the dome, it has fortunately retained much of its original qualities. Graceful and elegant, it depends for its effects on good proportions and discipline in design. The building of the church, was to a large extent financed by Gregorio Bonnici, who also donated the lands on which the church is built.

The church is one of the richest parish churches on the island and contains much that is artistic and of note. Its interior has however, been over decorated and clustered with a lot of unnecessary ornaments often of questionable taste which tend to interfere with the beautiful simplicity of its architectural lines. Besides the main altar and the titular one of St. Catherine, it has nine side altars dedicated to St. Andrew the Apostle; St. Paul; Our Lady of Mount Carmel; Our Lady of the Rosary; Our Lady of Consolation; Pope St. Gregory; the Crucifixion;

(58) AGIUS DE SOLDANIS GIAN PIETRO, *op. cit.*, p. 49

(59) FERRIS ACHILLE, *Descrizione Storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo*. Malta 1866, p. 368.

(60) HUGHES QUENTIN, *Fortress — Architecture and Military History in Malta*. London 1969, p. 194; and *The Buildings of Malta 1530-1795*, London 1956 p. 100

St. Joseph; Holy Charity; and St. Michael the Archangel. They contain altar-pieces by Vincenzo Hyzler, Michael Busuttill, Francesco Zahra and Ramiro Calì. The high altar-piece, depicting the martyrdom of St. Catherine, is a rather feeble copy, attributed to Stefano Erardi, of Mattia Preti's painting for the church of Santa Caterina d'Italia. Worthy of note are the fine white marble baptismal font, executed in 1848 on the designs of M.C. Bonavia and donated to the church by parish priest Bartolomeo Sant and his nephew the Rev. Giuseppe Felice (61); and a small golden reliquary of St. Catherine donated by the Rev. Francesco Vella Mannicolo in 1876.

2. The old parish church of Zejtun (known as "Ta' San Girgor")

This church visited and described by Mgr. Dusina (see above), had apparently been rebuilt or enlarged in 1492. Abela in his "Della Descrittione di Malta", published in 1647, records the following inscription then apparently extant in the dome of the church:

"Hoc opus fieri fecerunt Venerabilis Czullus dictus Baldu, et Honorabiles Paulus Dalli, et Iacobus Bonnici Procuratores S. Catharinae de Zejtun MCCCCLXXXII. Ultimo Februarii X. Indictionis." (62)

The same inscription is reproduced by Achille Ferris (1866), who says that it used to exist in the dome (63) and E.B. Vella (1927) who maintains that it still exists. (64) There is indeed a Latin inscription in the dome, but it is altogether different from the one reproduced by Abela. It is difficult to read because there are no spaces between the words and few punctuation marks. It has besides, been whitewashed over several times and some of the letters are still filled with plaster. It reads as follows:

(61) FERRIS ACHILLE, *op. cit.* p. 369.

(62) ABELA COMMENDATORE GIO. FRANCESCO, *Della Descrittione di Malta etc.*; Malta 1647 Lib. III. Not. IV, pp. 364-365.

(63) FERRIS ACHILLE, *op. cit.*, p. 372.

(64) VELLA E.B., *Storia taż-Zejtun u Marsaxlokk Malta* 1927, p. 31.

Rmo D.N. PAULO. V. ANIISI
N. THO. GARGALLO. MATTH.
BURLO REGITre PROCURr LEONA ET (65)
MARIO TABUNI THO. BONICIO
PAULO ABELA ET FRANco XUEREB
OFFICIOSUS HUIUS PAROCHIAE
POPULUS AELEMOSYNIS TEMM(?) ZA
MINI SANCTUS ... AMPLIORE VE
NUSTIOREMQ FORMAN REDEGIT
ANNO D. MDCVI (66)

According to this inscription, therefore, the church was reconstructed or more probably enlarged in better form in 1606, during the episcopate of Mgr. Gargallo and the tenure of office of parish priest Matteo Burlo. This enlargement must have consisted in the addition of transepts to the east end of the existing late Mediaeval nave. (67) The transepts are vaulted with a true Gothic quadripartite vault, an unusual feature in Maltese churches. According to the inscription in the boses at the intersection of the rib-groins were erected in 1593 and 1603 respectively. As happened elsewhere (68), the crossing of the main axis of the church with the newly constructed transepts, was made the excuse for a dome. The date 1606 in the inscription, probably refers to its construction which must have terminated the work of enlargement. Low and saucer-like and resting on a squat drum, the dome is probably the earliest still remaining in Malta.

As it stands today, the church is one of the finest examples of 16th and early 17th century ecclesiastical architecture in Malta, displaying a grace and lightness of touch which, with the exception of the old parish church of Our Saviour at Lija, is

(65) LEONA can be an abbreviation for LEONARDO.

(66) The author is greatly indebted to Mr. J. Debono sacristan of the parish church, Zejtun, who brought this inscription to his attention.

(67) Few Maltese churches are properly orientated on the east-west axis, but for the sake of convenience, the author finds it expedient to refer to their parts as though they were.

(68) At the old parish churches of Santa Marija ta' Bir Miftaħ, Gudja; Siġġiewi; and Lija.

absent in churches of the period. The main façade has a beautiful Renaissance doorway with fluted columns, and a circular deep-eye in the bold face of the masonry above. A small bell-cot, probably added later and constructed mostly of reused stones, rests on a gable which straightens out on each side to receive a low parapet wall. Both nave and transept walls are externally buttressed. The buttresses on the nave walls, were added in the 19th century on the designs of Giuseppe Hyzler, but the buttress supporting the transepts' wall is older and much more massive so that seen from the east end, the church has all the appearance of a work of fortification.

Inside the church are three altars. The high altar-piece, depicting the martyrdom of St. Catherine, is an interesting 17th century work. The side altars are dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Pope St. Gregory. The altar-piece of the former has the coat-of-arms of Grand Master Perellos, while that of the latter bears the arms of the City of Mdina and those of the Prior of Ibernia, Fra Pietro Gonzales.

The church is today popularly known as "ta' San Girgor" because of its association with the annual votive procession of St. Gregory.

3. The parish church of Zurrieq.

The present parish church of Zurrieq, occupies the site of the old parish church visited by Mgr. Dusina (see above), and a contiguous church dedicated to St. Peter. (69) The old parish church had been rebuilt in 1448 during the time of parish priest Rainaldo Tabone. The following inscription in gothic characters, recorded this fact:

MCCCCXXXVIII. Donnus Renaldus Tabuni Cap. (70).
The new parish church was built between 1634 and 1656,
through the generosity of parish priest Dun Matteo Saliba. (71)

(69) FERRIS ACHILLE, *op. cit.*, p. 383.

(70) ABELA COMMENDATORE GIO. FRANCESCO, *op. cit.*, Lib. III. Not. IV., p. 369.

(71) FERRIS ACHILLE, *op. cit.*, p. 383.

It has had many alterations and additions, but it appears to have originally consisted of a three bay nave with transepts and a square apse. The aisles were added later. (72) The front elevation was rebuilt by popular contributions between 1753 and 1758 on the designs of Sebastiano Saliba and under the direction of master mason Angelo Bonnici. (73) The church had originally one campanile but in 1861, this was substituted by two bell towers designed by Dr. Nicola Zammit. (74) Perhaps the most interesting architectural feature of the church is the dome which shows a transitional stage between the early simple dome hidden behind a plain drum, exemplified by Tumas Dingli's dome at Attard, and the crowning domes of Lorenzo Gafa'. (75)

Like the parish church of Zejtun, the general appearance of the interior of the church has in recent years suffered through over gilding and drab ornamentation. The church contains, however, a number of remarkable paintings by Mattia Preti who lived for a time at Zurrieq. These include the monumental high altar-piece of the Martyrdom of St. Catherine, certainly one of Preti's most dramatic works and the altar-pieces of St. Andrew; the Martyrdom of St. Stephen; and Four Saints of the Plague Stricken; as well as the charming painting of the Visitation in the Vestry. (76) The small oval painting of the Eternal Father, above the high altar-piece, is also his. (77) Another interesting painting, is the old high-altar-piece of St. Catherine, attributed to Matteo Perez d'Aleccio. (78) This painting is unfortunately in a bad state of repair and requires urgent attention and restoration.

(72) HUGHES QUENTIN, *The Building of Malta*. London 1956. p. 94.

(73) FERRIS ACHILLE, *op. cit.* p. 383.

(74) *Ibid.* p. 384.

(75) HUGHES QUENTIN, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-95.

(76) CAUCHI J.A., *Mattia Preti*, in *The Order of St. John in Malta — Catalogue of the XIII. Council of Europe Exhibition*, Malta 1970

p. 84.

(77) Archiepiscopal Curia, *Visitatio Molina*, p. 179.

(78) ABELA COMMENDATORE GIO FRANCESCO, *op. cit.*, p. 368.

4. Church at Birkirkara.

This church has a dual dedication: St. Catherine and St. Anthony of Padua. The dedication to St. Anthony is the more recent but the church is today generally known as St. Anthony's. It was built in 1620, apparently on the site of the church seen by Mgr. Dusina (see above). In 1654, it was deconsecrated by Bishop Balaguer Camerasa, but following its restoration, it was consecrated again in 1659. The church was completely reconstructed in 1828. (79) It is a pleasant little structure built round a dome and has one campanile. Inside it is one altar surmounted by a painting of the Virgin and Child enthroned with St. Catherine, St. Anthony of Padua and St. Mark.

5. Church at Gharghur.

This church is situated at Tax-Xwejki, limits of Gharghur, but it is administered by the parish of Naxxar. It is today in a sorry plight and the roof has collapsed. It had apparently, already been neglected and deconsecrated by 1866. (80) By the beginning of the last war, it had reached such an advanced stage of dereliction that part of one of the nave walls was pulled down and the structure covered with a zinc roof and utilised as a garage. This was indeed a great pity for the church is a pleasant little building well worthy of preservation. Fortunately it is well documented by photographs taken by Mr. C. G. Zammit, the former Director of the National Museum, for the Museum records in 1935. (81)

According to the information contained in the file on the church in the Records of the National Museum, Valetta, the church was built by the heirs of Dun Giuliano Borg, parish priest of Naxxar, who left instructions for its erection in his will. Dun Giuliano died in 1610 and, if one can trust the date boldly incised in the round window surmounting the arched doorway on the main façade, the church was built in 1611.

(79) FERRIS ACHILLE, *op. cit.*, pp. 323-324.

(80) *Ibid.*, p. 341.

(81) National Museum, File on Santa Katarina tax-Xwejki.

The church consists of a rectangular nave 23 feet long by 16 feet wide with a square apse 3 feet deep and 8 feet wide. The apse which is decorated with Melitian mouldings, (82) contained a stone altar extant till 1935. The nave appears to have been roofed by a ribbed barrel vault. The westfront of the church is built in the Pre-Knights old Melitian style (popularly, though quite erroneously, called Siculo-Norman) and is probably the last example of this type of architecture in Malta. (83) It has a fine arched doorway with Melitian mouldings surmounted by a Gothic drip-mould which curls up at the ends to form a pair of rosettes. Above it is the usual circular deep-eye. This was originally filled with a delicate stone intracery which has unfortunately, been destroyed. Also destroyed is the fine gable on the apex of which rested a stone cross on pedestal.

6. Church at Gudja

Built in 1631, probably on the site of the old church seen by Mgr. Dusina (see above), the church of St. Catherine at Gudja, has no great claim to beauty but is nonetheless an interesting example of early 17th century rural ecclesiastical architecture. It consists of a plain rectangular block of building with a shallow gable formed by the slight pitch of the roof. The interior has a ribbed barrel-vaulted nave 25 feet long and 18 feet wide with a square apse 1 foot 6 inches deep and 9 feet wide. (84) The westfront is pierced by an arched doorway surmounted by the characteristic round window. Above it is a partly defaced inscription. The part that could be deciphered reads as follows:

(82) The Melitian Moulding, a slender shaft with shallow grooves on either side and "cushion" caps and bases, was used as a softening device for the hard angles of buildings and their openings. The term was first used by HUGH BRAUN in his *Introduction to Maltese Architecture*, Malta 1957, p. 17.

(83) BUHAGIAR MARIO, *Siculo-Norman Churches in Malta*, in *Scientia*, Vol. XXXIII. No. 3, p. 118.

(84) ACHILLE FERRIS in his *Descrizione Storica della Chiesa . . .* p. 354, says that the church is covered by a dome but he was probably confusing the church with that of the Annunciation in the same village.

SIT TIBI GRATA
DOMUS VIRGO
CATHARINA SACE
LLUM EX PIET

Inside the church is a small marble tablet above the apse with the following other inscription:

RENOVATA
EST ANNO
DOMINI
1631

The church is today used as a storeroom for the festa decorations and is in a pitiful state of neglect. It has one altar and, in the apse, a painting of St. Catherine of mediocre quality, surmounted by a good mural of a scallop shell.

7. Church at Mqabba.

This church is built on the site of the church of St. Catherine seen by Mgr. Dusina and a contiguous church dedicated to St. Peter. (85) Both churches were deconsecrated by Bishop Bartolomeo Rull during the pastoral visitation of October 1759. Rull found both churches in a bad state of repair and ordered their demolition and re-erection as one church with a dual dedication to St. Peter and St. Catherine. This church was built in the 1760's through the generosity of Giovanni Schembri. (86) It was consecrated by parish priest Giovanni Battista Tortella on Ascension Day 1774. It is a pleasant little structure with a dome, but its charm has, to some extent, been marred by a square corner bell turret, seemingly of later date.

Till before the last war, the church enjoyed considerable veneration and solemn high mass was celebrated and vespers recited on the feast days of St. Peter and St. Catherine. Today, it is unfortunately used only as a store-room for the festa decorations and it is fast becoming derelict. It has one altar and

(85) According to FERRIS, the church seen by Mgr. Dusina had been re-erected in 1550. Vide *Descrizione Storica della Chiesa . . .*, p. 458.

(86) FERRIS ACHILLE, *op. cit.*, p. 458.

above it, a painting of the Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine, painted in 1776 and presented to the church as an ex-voto as the letters V. F. G. A. show. (87)

8. Church at Naxxar.

The church of St. Catherine at Wied il-Ghasel, Naxxar, enjoys one of the most picturesque situations in the whole of Malta. It is a pleasant little structure with a small parvis or atrium in front of it, surrounded by a low stone wall. (88) According to the following inscription above the doorway, it was erected in 1607:

HOC OPUS MARIA-
NUS MANGION FIERI
FECIT IN HONORE BEA-
TE CATHERINE VT IP-
SA ORAT PRO EO
AD DEUM 1607

The church consists of a rectangular nave 22½ feet long by 14½ feet wide, divided into four bays by three flying arches. It has a small square apse about 2 feet deep and 8 feet wide. In it is a stone altar, probably of recent date and a painting of mediocre value, depicting St. Catherine between St. John the Baptist and St. Paul. The charming main façade is pierced by an arched doorway with large voussoirs, flanked on the left by a small oval window. In the bold face of the masonry above the doorway, is one of the finest round windows in the island, filled with a delicate rose pattern in stone. The window is flanked on either side by a defaced escutcheon. A small bell-cot rests on the apex of a squat gable formed by the slight pitch of the roof.

This church is today sadly neglected and has fallen prey to vandals who have ripped open the door and slashed the altar-piece in several parts.

(87) The letters V. F. G. A., stand for the Latin "Votum Fecerunt Gratiam Acceperunt".

(88) The majority of old churches in Malta have a similar enclosed space in front of them. This space called "zuntier" in Maltese, was usually reserved for burials. Vide BUHAGIAR MARIO, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

9. Church at Qormi.

This church seen by Mgr. Dusina (see above) was, according to Ferris, re-erected in 1696. (89) It is a rectangular block of building approached by a flight of four steps. Large pilasters topped with pinnacles define the corners. The pinnacles are in turn linked to a pedimented bell-cot. Panelling is used on the main façade which has an elaborate square-headed doorway flanked by the characteristic side windows and surmounted by a rectangular one above which is a defaced escutcheon crowned with an ecclesiastical hat with tassels.

The interior consists of a plain nave with a barrel vault with arched ribs springing from a high ledge. It has one stone altar and a painting of the Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine. The date 1911 and the emblems of St. Catherine are drawn in pencil on the altar front. These might have been originally intended for eventual carving or sculpting. At the bottom left hand corner of the painting is a coat-of-arms with the date 1681 and the name SEBASTIANUS.

The church is today neglected and used as a parish store room.

10. Church at Qrendi.

This church is situated in the tad-Torba district, limits of Qrendi and Mqabba. It is an interesting church which may constitute a landmark in the development of small church architecture in Malta. (90) Rebuilt in 1626, on the site of the church seen by Mgr. Dusina (see above), it consists of a severely box-like nave with a strange, somewhat heavy façade divided into two storeys by two massive corner pilasters which carry two horizontal bands of masonry. The ground floor is broken down into the characteristic three units of a central doorway, crowned with a canopy supported on two ornate corbels, and two side windows banded with heavy stone frames. The date

(89) FERRIS ACHILLE, *op. cit.*, p. 368.

(90) HUGHES QUENTIN, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.

1626 is incised on the canopy. On the first floor, the lower theme is echoed by three rectangular blocks of masonry, the centre one being larger than the other two. This treatment gives the façade a certain degree of recession and probably represents one of the earliest examples of panelling to be found in Malta. The slight pitch of the roof is concealed behind a low parapet wall, crenellated like a tower. A plain stone cross on pedestal rests on the central crenellation.

The interior originally consisted of one long plain rectangular nave with a fine ribbed barrel vault, 44 feet long by 15½ feet wide terminating in a square apse 2½ feet deep by 5 feet wide. At sometime, however, part of the nave was screened off by an elliptical stone wall, pierced at either end by two small doors, and used as a vestry. This elliptical screen today forms the reredos for a stone altar. The altar is recent and quite out of keeping with the style of the church (91), but the altar-piece, sustained from above by two grotesque stone angels, is a rather interesting painting. It depicts St. Catherine dressed as a princess, with the tools of her martyrdom gathered around her. At her feet kneel the diminutive figures of a man and a woman, possibly the donors.

11. Church at Rabat.

This church situated at tad-Daħla, limits of Rabat, was rebuilt on the site of the church seen by Mgr. Dusina (see above), by Andrea Vassallo and his wife Sapienza Micallef. In 1630, the church was burdened with five annual masses to be celebrated as follows: mass with first vespers on the feast day and eve of St. Catherine and low masses on the feasts of St. Andrew the Apostle, St. Paul the Apostle, St. Lucy and St. Blaise. To the rector was assigned the garden known as "tad-Daħla" and an annual remuneration of two "oncie" but he was under the obligation of lighting the altar lamp every Saturday

(91) The date 1859 is incised on it.

(92) Cathedral Archives, *Giuspatronati in Malta e Gozo* fs. 458/459.

and providing wax for the candles. (92) Andrea Vassallo died on the 29th May 1655 and was buried in the Church of Santa Maria di Gesù in Valetta. His wife died on the 20th January 1657 and lies buried in St. Lawrence Church, Vittoriosa. (93)

The church is a rectangular block of building with a pedimented bell-cot linked to corner pinnacles. It has an elaborate square headed entrance surmounted by a segmental headed window, and a walled parvis in front of the main façade. The interior consists of a barrel vaulted nave with arched ribs springing from a high ledge. It has one altar and a painting of St. Catherine holding the palm of martyrdom in one hand and a naked sword in the other. Also in the church is a papier-mâché statue of St. Catherine, the work of Girolmu Dingli of Rabat, modelled on the portable statue of the Saint at the parish church of Zurrieq.

The church is well looked after and serves the spiritual needs of the neighbourhood.

12. Church of Santa Caterina d'Italia, Valetta.

The Church of Santa Caterina d'Italia, abutting the Auberge of the Italian Langue in South Street, was built on the designs of Gerolamo Cassar in 1576, but has since been remodelled and rebuilt so that it is doubtful how much of the original plan remains. In its present form, the church is an octagon with a chancel set in a deep rectangular recess. The interior is light and pleasant and has a spacious dome with graceful narrow ribs which echo the octagonal shape of the walls and lead the eye to a small lantern which, from the exterior, is crowned with a stone ball topped with the eight-pointed cross of the Order.

The exterior was redecorated in 1713 when a fine porch, containing the steps leading to the main door, was added to the west-front. The following Latin inscription above the porch commemorates this event:

(93) *Ibid.*

D.O.M.
D. CATHARINAE V. ET M. INSIGNE RELIQUIIS
ARAO PRIVILEGIATA VETUS HOC TEMPLUM
VETUSTIOREM VERO PATRONAE SUAE CULTUM
ITALIA EQUESTRIS NATIO
INSTAURANDO ADAUXIT
ANNO DN. MDCCXIII

The church has three altars and contains a number of interesting paintings. The painting in the vault representing God the Father surrounded by angels is probably one of the very first works executed by Mattia Preti in Malta. It has been suggested that Preti may have started work in Santa Caterina d'Italia before being called to decorate the vault of the conventual Church of St. John. (94) The Santa Caterina painting is repeated in a simplified version in the centre of the third compartment in the vault of the Conventual Church. Probably when Preti started work in St. John's, the painting in Santa Caterina was not yet finished and the master left it to his assistants to complete. The angel beneath the Eternal Father, is a recent reconstruction by Luigi Pigazzini. (95) Also by Preti is the main altar-piece of the Martyrdom of St. Catherine. This painting is said to have been donated to the church by the painter in 1659, before he settled in Malta. (96) Another painting of note is the altar-piece of the Mater Addolorata by Benedetto Luti.

To the above list of churches, one may safely add the church of the Nunnery of St. Catherine in Kingsway, Valetta, which despite its dedication to the Presentation of the Virgin, is popularly known as St. Catherine's. The church was founded in the late 16th century by Olivier Vasco and his wife Caterina. (97) It was rebuilt in 1766, probably on the designs of Francesco Carapecchia, a Florentine Engineer, who was also responsible

(94) CAUCHI J.A., *op. cit.*, p. 77.

(95) CAUCHI J.A., *op. cit.*, p. 77.

(96) *Ibid.*, p. 82.

(97) FERRIS ACHILLE, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

for the building of the Nunnery, and consecrated by the bishop Mgr. Labini on the 15th July 1783. (98) It is an attractive little church with an imposing though somewhat heavy façade. The interior is built on a centralised plan. It is beautifully proportioned and has a graceful, spacious dome with a lantern which is the church's chief source of light. The high altar is set in a deep chancel. It has a fine altar-piece attributed to Enrico Arnaux, representing the Presentation of the Virgin with St. Catherine. (90) In the nave are two other altars set in shallow recesses, dedicated to the Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine and St. Augustine, respectively. The emblems of St. Catherine are carved in low-relief on the wooden doors of the church.

The Order of cloistered nuns of St. Catherine of Alexandria, stemmed from a pious institution founded in 1606 by a Jesuit priest with the help and financial backing of some rich friends. Its original purpose was to shield young girls from the dangers of the world. The girls, known as the "Orfane della Misericordia", were first housed in a building close to the Conventual Church of St. John. Work on the nunnery commenced in 1714 but it had to be suspended for a considerable number of years because of lack of funds. It was not completed before 1766. (100)

(To be continued)

(98) *Ibid.*

(99) *Ibid.*

(100) *Ibid.* p. 228.

JEAN DUMONT AND MALTA

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Jean Dumont was a native of Rouen, Normandy, where he was born in January, 1667. He first pursued a military career and participated in campaigns in the Rhenish Palatinate. Becoming disenchanted with military life he left this profession and travelled extensively in Italy and the Mediterranean area, visiting both Malta and Turkey. Returning to the Netherlands in 1692 by way of the Germanies he worked on an account of his travels and in 1694 published a book on the subject which appeared under the title *Nouveau voyage du Levant*. This work was reprinted in four volumes in 1699 with extensive additions and a slightly different title. Dumont also devoted his energies and his talents to teaching, to the study of law, and to the writing of various pamphlets quite critical of the government of King Louis XIV. In 1699 Dumont published *Mémoires politiques pour servir à la parfaite intelligence de la paix de Ryswick*. This work aroused the interest of the Count de Zinzendorf who brought Dumont to the attention of the Holy Roman Emperor. As an adviser and royal historiographer to the Emperor Charles VI the expatriate Frenchman lived in Vienna. In 1725 he was created Baron de Carlscroon. Dumont died in the Austrian capital in May, 1727 (1).

As one of the early advocates of international law Jean Dumont has an honoured place in the historiography of early modern Europe. He was a prolific writer as well as an active editor and compiler. Since 1699 he had been gathering material on treaties, and he is remembered as one of the chief compilers of treaty collections. His efforts bore fruit in the monumental

... (1) For further details see the article on DUMONT by V. DESTIANGES, in *Dictionnaire de Biographie Française*, Vol. XII (Paris, 1970) pp. 220-221.