

**THE WORKS OF ART IN THE  
CHURCHES OF MALTA  
AND THE GOVERNOR'S  
PALACE, VALETTA**

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The Works of Art in the Churches of Malta and the Governor's Palace, Valetta by Giuseppe Calleja

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THE WORKS OF ART  
IN  
THE CHURCHES OF MALTA  
AND  
THE GOVERNOR'S PALACE, VALLETTA

BY

*Giuseppe Calleja*

TEACHER OF DRAWING

AT THE LYCEUM, VALLETTA.

*Translated and Edited by*

The Rev. G. J. Godwin

Chaplain to the Forces.

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MALTA

Printed at the Maltese Press

L'IMMACOLATA

Strada Forni No. 193b. Valletta.

1881.



## Preface

*This little work has been written for the use of the lovers of the Fine Arts in general, and more especially as a guide for the use of English visitors who find their way to Malta in considerable number during the winter months.*

*It aims at correcting as far as possible the inaccurate statements which are but often made by badly-informed sacristans and unintelligent guides, and the Author hopes that it will be favourably received by all those who delight to make the Fine Arts their study.*

*The thanks of the Translator are due to Sig. A. Ferris to whose admirable "Descrizione Storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo" he is greatly indebted for much valuable information.*

*Malta, April, 1881.*

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N. B.—In mentioning the works of living artists, the author prefers to refrain from criticism of any kind.

**I**N the centre of ever bustling, ever pleasant Strada Reale stands the Conventual Church of St. John the Baptist—the crowning glory of Valletta.

It was in 1573, when the Order of Jerusalem has existed in Malta for 43 years that the Grand Master Levesque de la Cassière, commenced, at his own expense the building of this celebrated Church, under the direction of the distinguished architect and engineer Girolamo Cassar, a Maltese, to form an idea of whose merits we have only to read the following extract from the Original Registers of the Council of the Order for the years 1579-81. (Fol. 270).

“ The Grand Master Giovanni Levesque de la Cassière certifies that Girolamo Cassar of the Maltese nation, architect in ordinary and engineer of the Order has, for many years, given his services in the above mentioned capacity viz : from the year 1565 until the year 1581, during which period the Island of Malta having been besieged by the Turks, the said Cassar was not sparing of labour on behalf of the Order, and courageously faced every danger in order to repair the havoc caused by the enemy, and to enable the troops to defend themselves against continuous assaults.

Further, the said Grand Master certifies that the said Cassar was one of the Engineers under whose direction the City of Valletta has been built, and rendered an invincible fortress. The plans for the 7 Auberges of the 7 Languages are the work of the before mentioned Cassar, as is also the Magisterial Palace, and, what is more remarkable, the Conventual Church of St. John the Baptist. The plans for the Parish Church of S. Paolo, of Santa Maria di Porto Salvo, del Carmine, S. Agostino, and of Santa Maria di Gesù are by him.

He has in like manner designed not only all the buildings of the Bakcry and Mills, but also other houses belonging to the Order of Jerusalem, and to private persons.

The said Grand Master concludes by declaring that Cassar is much beloved by himself and by the whole Convent; and that he is acceptable to the whole Maltese population, and in order that his praise worthy merits might be known to all men in every future age, the said Grand Master made this attestation on his behalf on the 18th day of May 1581."

We may remark here that architectural taste was at that period on the point and eve of declining; the celebrated Cassar therefore, being by no means a slave to, nor a blind follower of servile rules, as men of genius are wont to be, acted as a free man, but in a reasonable manner as a master of his art. There reigns in his works, unity of thought, solidity, and a grandeur which are improving without being colossal. He was an enemy to all crooked and spasmodic lines, an enemy lastly of everything useless and superfluous.

Such is the idea which this magnificent church presents to an intelligent eye.