

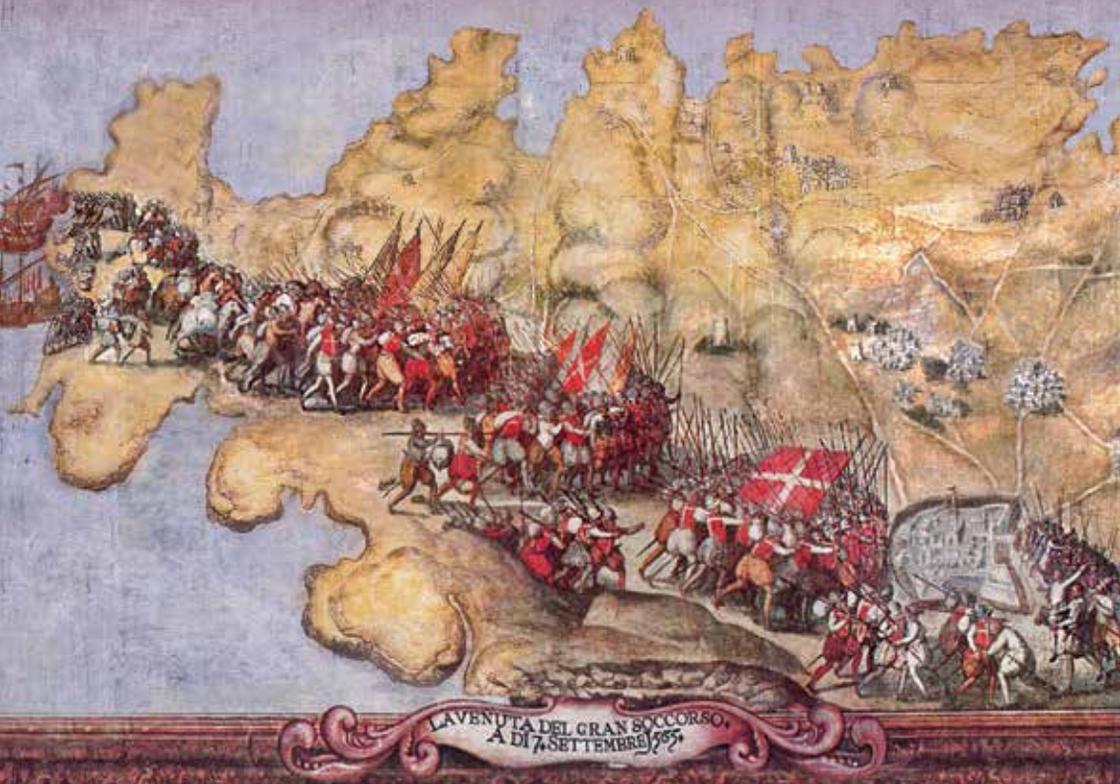


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# Mariano Girada: A Maltese Sculptor from Valencia

Sandro Debono

## Introduction

It was unusual for an eighteenth-century Maltese sculptor not to proceed to study in Rome, where he could also acquaint himself with classical antiquity and the works of leading renaissance and baroque artists and the latest trends in art. However, Mariano Girada (1771–1823),<sup>1</sup> the leading sculptor of his time, did not in fact study in the Eternal City but instead went to Spain. As far as is known, he is the only Maltese artist to have secure and documented links with the city of Valencia. This paper reviews Girada's artistic activity within the broader context of eighteenth-century Hispano-Maltese connections. This paper will argue that the economic links between Malta and Spain, particularly with Valencia, could be the reason why Girada studied in the Iberian Peninsula. Consequently it will suggest that this period of study empowered him to introduce new sculptural styles and forms into Malta.

Girada hailed from Hal Tarxien, then a small village with a population of about 900 inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> He was not related to practising artists and sculptors and does not seem to have been apprenticed to any of them. The Tarxien *Status Animarum* parish records note his 13-year absence from Malta between 1783 and 1796, during which time he was securely identified as a workshop collaborator and apprentice of the well-known Valencian sculptor José Esteve Bonet (1741–1802) (see Fig.1). In January 1789 Esteve Bonet described Girada as Maltese (*Mariano Grada Maltes*) and an apprentice and follower

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1 The sculptor always signed as Girada such as in the case of the notarial deeds for the commission for the statue of *The Virgin of the Rosary* (Siġġiewi) and *St Catherine of Alexandria* (Zurrieq). The records of the Academy of St Charles in Valencia also refer to Mariano's surname as Girada. His signature on his final will is also, likewise, Girada. The date of birth has been revised following a thorough analysis of *Status Animarum* documents, baptism registers at Hal Tarxien Parish Church, and other sources. S. Debono, 'Maltese Art and Spain (1750–1830), The Case of Mariano Girada (1771–1823)', unpublished MA dissertation, University of Malta 2008, 92–4.

2 K. Sant and M. Vassallo, 'Hal Tarxien in the XVIIIth Century: A Statistical Portrait', *Melita Historica*, vii, 4 (1979), 363–71.

(*aprendiz y discípulo*).<sup>3</sup> Girada was also documented as a student at the Royal Academy of St Charles in Valencia, where he won at least four prizes (*premios mensuales*).<sup>4</sup> The prizes confirm Girada's rapid progress during his first year at the Academy, along with students who were later to become famous in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Valencia. His early success at the Academy may have stood him in good stead to compete for the coveted general prizes, entitling winners to further their studies at the Royal Academy of St Ferdinand in Madrid. Records confirm that Girada competed for two of these, placing second in the competition held in 1795.<sup>5</sup>



**Fig. 1.** Agustín Esteve, *Portrait of the Sculptor José Esteve Bonet*, Museo de Bellas Artes, Valencia (Spain)

These contemporary documentary records demonstrate Girada's presence in late eighteenth-century Valencia. It is surprising that the talented young Maltese artist managed to successfully secure an apprenticeship in the workshop of Valencia's most important sculptor. Esteve Bonet had close connections with the Vergara brothers, the painter José (1726–99) and the sculptor Ignacio (1715–76), who had dictated style and aesthetic taste in eighteenth-century Valencia. His workshop produced mainly polychromed sculptures and was patronised extensively by the Valencian clergy and nobility. Esteve Bonet also became director general of the Department of Sculpture of the Academy, albeit for a short period. In 1790, on completing a number of figurines for the royal crib known as the *Belén Del Principe*, Esteve was granted the title of Honorary Royal Sculptor to King Charles IV of Spain (1788–1808).<sup>6</sup>

3 A. Igual Ubeda, *José Esteve Bonet – Imaginero Valenciano del siglo XVIII*, Valencia, 1971, 83.

4 Archivo de la Academia Valencia (AAV), Libro Tercero, Acuerdos en Limpio de Juntas Ordinarias desde el año 1787 asta 1800, Junta Ordinaria de 4 de Jenero 1789, 17 de Avril 1789, 3 de Mayo 1790. The earliest is dated June 1788 when Girada won second prize in the '*premio de piés*' probably referring to the drawing of feet. In January 1789, Girada won second prize in the category '*premio de manos*' subsequently winning first prize in the category '*premio de cabezas*' in April 1789. In May 1790, Girada won first prize in the category '*premio de figuras*'. These three competitions concern drawings of hands, heads, and figure drawing.

5 AAV, Libro Tercero, Acuerdos en Limpio de Juntas Ordinarias desde el año 1787 asta 1800, Premios Generales, 1795. The general prize for which he competed in 1795 was also in the second sculpture class.

6 Igual Ubeda, 78.

Girada's association with Esteve Bonet would have surely assisted him in his attempts to study at the Academy and perhaps secure commissions from Valencian and other Spanish clients.

### Girada's Valencian style

Valencia undoubtedly shaped Girada's style. This can be seen from the works he made on his return to Malta in 1796. Sharply defined folds, a concern for the essential features and the expression of feelings through emphatically pronounced gestures are his main stylistic traits. His style was clearly indebted to his training at the Academy. Some of the official speeches delivered during the awards of the General Prize define the ideal Valencian artist which the Academy was striving to train.<sup>7</sup> Girada would have been expected to capture the spirit of his subjects through careful study of set emotive responses and subsequently project these sentiments in the figures' gestures. The focus had to be on the main action of the subject portrayed, avoiding superfluous details such as ornamentation and arabesques. Imitation and blatant copying was strongly discouraged.<sup>8</sup>

Girada's artistic formation in Esteve Bonet's workshop provided him with the technical exposure he required and put him in touch with the works, style and working methods of one of Valencia's most important eighteenth-century sculptors. Some of his actual compositions too could have been derived from Esteve Bonet's workshop, but his style is also indebted to the broader context. The distinctive companion putto which features in some of Girada's works is a typical Valencian element and can also be seen in the works of the Vergara brothers. The facial types of Girada's statues of the Madonna, to which his biographer Saverio Ignazio Panzavecchia referred, were probably inspired by the painter José Vergara, who was Girada's mentor at the Academy.<sup>9</sup> The incisive drawing and the clear contours of these facial types also recall the style of Juan de Juanes (1523–75), Valencia's leading Renaissance artist, whose works include the well-known *Cristo Eucarístico* (Real Colegio de Corpus Christi, Valencia, 1570), and which were then recognised as being of seminal importance.

On his return to Malta in 1796, Girada's artistic baggage resembled that of any Valencian eighteenth-century sculptor of repute. His permanent transfer back to Malta also led to the introduction of a comparatively alien aesthetic language into the islands, in contrast to the existing late Baroque style, as exemplified by the works of Antoine Favray

7 F.J. León Tello, *La Estética Académica Española en el Siglo XVIII: Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Carlos de Valencia*, Valencia 1979, 139–44.

8 *Ibid.*, 145–50.

9 Cathedral Archives Mdina (CAM), Pan 79, Fondo Panzavecchia, f. 161r; M.A. Orellana, *Biografía Pictórica Valentina*, Madrid 1930, 601; D. Gimilio Sans, *José Vergara (1726–1799): Del Tardobarroco Al Clasicismo Dieciochesco*, Exhibition Catalogue, Valencia 2005, 92.



Fig. 2. Mariano Girada, *Our Lady of the Rosary*, Siggiewi Parish Church, detail

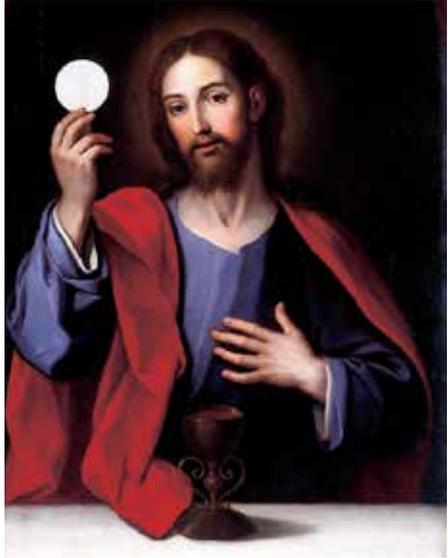


Fig. 3. José Vergara (after Juan de Juanes), *Cristo Eucaristico*, Museo de la Ciudad, Valencia, detail



Fig. 4. Mariano Girada, *Our Lady of the Rosary*, Siggiewi Parish Church, detail



Fig. 5. José Vergara, *Virgin of the Annunciation*, Real Academia de San Jordi, Barcelona (Spain), detail

(1706–98) and the sculptor Vincenzo Dimech (1768–1831).<sup>10</sup> Patronage of Spanish and Iberian art works by the Order of St John, even when the grand masters of the Order were themselves Spanish, was virtually negligible. The Valencian Grand Master Ramon Perellos y Rocafull (1697–1720), who had ruled almost a century before Girada returned to Malta, is a case in point. Perellos's funerary monument was commissioned from the Rome-based sculptor Giuseppe Mazzuoli (1644–1725), and completed before the grand master's demise. His choice of sculptor and style for such a personal project is in sharp contrast to his Valencian identity, manifest in his promotion of Valencian cults in Malta, namely the cult of St Vincent Ferrer and the Virgin of the Abandoned (*la Virgen de los Desamparados*).<sup>11</sup> In 1716 Perellos presented the radius bone of St Vincent Ferrer in a silver reliquary to the chapel of the langue of Aragon at the conventual church of St John (now St John's co-cathedral) to be later held within an appropriate marble receptacle on the altar steps, as well as a silver antependium with the image of St Vincent Ferrer.<sup>12</sup> The relic had been brought from France in 1716, four years before Perellos's death, on his specific instructions.<sup>13</sup> In 1689, prior to becoming grand master, Perellos had built a church dedicated to the Virgin of the Abandoned in Wardija (St Paul's Bay).<sup>14</sup>

### The commercial connections

Mariano Girada's studies in Valencia came about as a result of commercial interests in the brigantine trade which his family had in South-Eastern Spain. This phenomenon, amply discussed by Carmel Vassallo,<sup>15</sup> related to the export of cotton from Malta to Spain, particularly to Barcelona, and the business in luxury goods conducted by Maltese merchants on brigs sailing to Iberian coastal towns which generated significant profits. Vassallo makes reference to the large sums invested in the brigantine trade during the 1750s and 1760s, varying between 188,200 *scudi* in 1756 to a peak of 585,877 *scudi* in 1765.<sup>16</sup> Brigantine expeditions funded by local investors are known to have berthed in Valencia, Alicante, Cartagena, Almeria, Motril, Malaga, Cadiz and other key southern Iberian ports after purchasing textiles and luxury goods for resale from Catania, Messina, Naples, Leghorn and other Mediterranean ports. Business was at first conducted through street peddling but grew and became more established by the third quarter of the eighteenth century. This was largely due to royal decrees. The one issued in 1771 obliged

10 A brief overview of eighteenth-century statuary and polychrome sculpture in Malta is provided in S. Debono, 11–49.

11 On the cult of the Virgin of the Abandoned in Valencia, see G. Rafael Blasco, *La Virgen de los Desamparados*, Valencia 1867.

12 G. Scarabelli, *Catalogue of the Records of the Order of St John of Jerusalem in the National Library of Malta*, Vol. XIII (2), AOM 1952–1953, 642, Rome 2004.

13 Archives of the Order of Malta (AOM), Corr. Perellos 1716, ff. 234v–89.

14 V. Borg 'Marian Devotions in Malta' in *Marian Devotions in the Island of St Paul (1600–1800)*, ed. V. Borg, Malta 1983, 208. Another chapel was built later in 1758 in Zebbug.

15 C. Vassallo, *Corsairing to Commerce: Maltese Merchants in XVIIIth Century Spain*, Malta 1997.

16 *Ibid.*, 27.

Maltese traders to become Spanish citizens and either set up shop in Spain or leave the country.<sup>17</sup>

Both Mariano's father, Antonio, and his brother Giuseppe are known to have handled monies invested in commercial ventures. The evidence is as yet sporadic but nonetheless significant. In 1776 Antonio was a partner in securing monies possibly amounting to over 1,200 *scudi* with the purpose of investing in a commercial venture in Valencia and Alicante.<sup>18</sup> The sum of money is significant by the standards of the time and suggests hefty commercial interests. Other members of the family followed suit. On 30 January 1796 Giuseppe, Mariano's elder brother, acquired 100 *scudi* to invest in trade in Valencia.<sup>19</sup> The deed also refers to cargo earmarked for shipping on one or two vessels, bills of exchange (*cambiali marittimi*) probably covered by as yet unidentified notarial deeds, and a reference to Salvatore, that is, Mariano's and Giuseppe's younger brother, as a business partner. Although largely fragmented, this evidence suggests that the Giradas had direct business links with Spain, like other Maltese merchants active in the brigantine trade. The 1771 royal decree, which dictated that all Maltese doing business in Spain should settle permanently or leave the country, could have made the Giradas rethink their business strategies and decide to establish themselves in the town of Segorbe (Castellón, Valencia).<sup>20</sup>

The Maltese community in South-East Spain maintained contacts with Malta well into the nineteenth century. Some people returned to Malta to acquire capital and, whilst on the island, also participated in the business and administration of the lay confraternities to which they belonged.<sup>21</sup> Salvatore Chetcuti, the rector of the Żejtun Confraternity of the Rosary, is noted as a Spanish subject on his return to Malta in 1789.<sup>22</sup> Some also bequeathed property or funds. In his will of 1829, Antonio Mamo, a member of the Cospicua Confraternity of the Crucifix, bequeathed three houses to his confraternity valued at around 800 *scudi*; this was endorsed at San Lucar de Barrameda by Notary Emmanuele Marques Vascas.<sup>23</sup> The records of lay confraternities also registered the deaths of members that happened abroad during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The archives of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament at Żejtun parish

17 Ibid., 8.

18 Notarial Archives Valetta (NAV), Not. Felice Vella (R 470 Vol. 12) 7 January 1777, ff. 292v–4; 29 January 1777, ff. 367v–8v; Not. Aloisio Vincenzo Bonnici (R 76 Vol. 4) 13 January 1777, ff. 236v–7v.

19 NAV, Not. Francesco Garoffalo (R279, Vol. 21), 1796–97, ff. 228v–9.

20 NAV, Not. Francesco Glison (R296, Vol. 12) 1779–80, ff. 923v–4; J. Debono, *L-Istatwa Titulari ta' L-Assunzjoni u l-Iskultura Tagħha*, Malta 2006.

21 Vassallo quotes a memorandum read at a meeting of the Sociedad Economica de Madrid in 1778 stating that, 'every two years the members of these (Maltese) companies returned to their countries and are substituted by others whom they eventually replace, taking turns.' Vassallo, 30.

22 Parish Archive Żejtun (PAŽ), Vol. 178, f. 34v, August 1789, '*dal signor familiare di sua M.R. di Spagna Salvatore Chetcuti nostro attuale rettore*' (collected from Salvatore Chetcuti, our rector and subject of his Majesty the King of Spain).

23 Archives of the Archbishop of Malta (AAM), Suppliche Vol. 26, f. 566.

church record the demise of its members in Valencia,<sup>24</sup> Alicante,<sup>25</sup> Malaga<sup>26</sup> and in general terms as having occurred in Spain.<sup>27</sup>

In effect the brigantine trade was not greatly affected by the 1771 royal decree and continued to have a direct financial impact on local communities. Evidence suggests that a share of registered profits was allotted to local church procurators although the extent of this practice remains unclear. In 1791, for example, 50 *scudi* were allotted in advance to the procurator of the Virgin of Graces at Żabbar parish church from the profit of an expedition to Cadiz.<sup>28</sup> Insurance companies involved in the brigantine trade also contributed monies to churches, religious communities and related projects. In 1794, the firm of Michelangelo Fenech and Mario Ellul donated one-fourth of a business share to the commissioners of the new silver monstrance then being made for Cospicua parish church.<sup>29</sup> Absenteeism of Maltese nationals active in the brigantine trade could also have had a negative impact on revenues collected by local church procurators. In 1734, the procurators of the new parish church project at Ghaxaq could not collect the necessary funds to continue construction works owing to the absence of part of the male population on brigantine expeditions in Spain.<sup>30</sup> The return of these nationals to Malta would have meant that the procurators could collect the necessary funds to finance their project and such chroniclers as Ignazio Saverio Mifsud mention the arrivals of the brigantines as a much expected event.<sup>31</sup> Ancillary facilities which the export of cotton required were also put to good use as revenue generating investments. During the mid-eighteenth century, the procurator of the church of Our Lady of Porto Salvo (St. Philip Neri) in Senglea constructed a mechanism, possibly similar to a crane, with which to lower bales of spun cotton into ship holds.<sup>32</sup> Revenue generated through this activity went towards the upkeep of the church and must have attracted the attention of the procurators of the Senglea parish church who soon enough invested in a second loading crane.<sup>33</sup> Two facilities proved to be too much for the local demand and the Senglea parish church procurators soon had to back down but such initiatives do confirm that local churches

24 PAŽ, Vol. 119, f. 88v: Death of Giovanni Ellul (Valencia).

25 PAŽ, Vol. 119, f. 7: Death of Pietro Cutajar (Alicante); f. 88v: Death of Gaetano Cassar (Alicante) and f. 89: Death of Giuseppe Cassar (Alicante).

26 PAŽ, Vol. 119, f. 90: Death of Filippo Zammit (Málaga) and f. 93: Alberto Gatt (Málaga).

27 Ibid., f. 26: Giuseppe Bonavia (nelle Spagne); f. 95: Giacomo Deguara (nelle Spagne); f. 96: Paolo del fu Angelo (nelle Spagne); f. 97: Michele Busuttill del fu Aloisio (nelle Spagne) and f.188: '*mori nelle Spagne due anni sono*' Francesco Gatt.

28 C. Vassallo, 134. Vassallo quotes NAV, Not. Francesco Saverio Zammit (R 496, Vol. 14) 23 November 1791, ff. 237–8.

29 NAV, Not. Simeone Farrugia (R 820, Vol. 1), 25 August 1794, '... altro quarto da consegnarsi alli signori procuratori della girandole d'argento, che dal popolo della Citta Cospicua offerir si deve alla sua veneranda chiesa parrocchiale'. (... another quarter to assign to the procurators of the silver monstrance which the Cospicua community will be donating to the parish church).

30 AAM, Suppliche, Vol. 5, f. 672. 'parte del popolo e partita colli brigantini di Spagna e parte non ponno fare limosina pma. della raccolta delli loro terreni, pr tanto detti oratori non ponno seguitar detta fabbrica' (part of the population has left on the brigantines to Spain and the rest cannot present offerings before harvest time. As a consequence, the undersigned have to stop construction works.)

31 National Library of Malta (NLM), MS. 14, f. 126.

32 NAV, Not. Cristoforo Frenzo, (R840, Vol. 3) 16 November 1791, ff. 76–81. The machine is described as 'La macchina del trau'.

33 Ibid.

and lay confraternities were aware of the potential gains of the brigantine trade and were also direct beneficiaries.<sup>34</sup>

The foundation set up by Don Giovanni Barbara in 1759 at Hal Tarxien parish church is a good example of how revenue generated through the sale of cotton and the brigantine trade funded works of art and embellishment accessories for local parish churches.<sup>35</sup> A list of deeds securing investments in the brigantine trade, presented to the procurators of the Foundation in lieu of outstanding payments for services rendered, is indicative of revenues and profit.<sup>36</sup> Don Giovanni Barbara's investments during the decade 1746 to 1756 suggest an average investment of 2,900 *scudi* per year, with higher peaks registered for 1748 (3,450 *scudi*) and 1754 (3,708 *scudi*).<sup>37</sup> Thanks to these funds the parish church acquired silk damask hangings for the entire church, a marble main altar complete with gradines, three silver sanctuary lamps, a complete set of church vestments and other necessary items commissioned over time, including silver chalices and silverware, hangings for the main altar canopy and various utensils.<sup>38</sup> The new main altar cost 1,595 *scudi* and the total cost of the damask hangings was in the region of 8,000 *scudi* with additional commissions for damask hangings increasing the cost even further.<sup>39</sup>

### Imports of a different kind

The economic impact of the brigantine trade on Maltese eighteenth-century society was indeed extensive. What may have not been given as much attention – even if it is directly related to this economic activity – is the importation of Spanish works of art into Malta, particularly sculpture works. This is the case of a number of busts representing the Virgin of Sorrows, known as *La Virgen de La Soledad*, most of which are to be found in the harbour area. Some are securely documented, as in the case of a version at the church of St Liberata (Capuchin fathers, Kalkara), known to have been transferred from Malaga.<sup>40</sup> Others, particularly those at Cospicua and Vittoriosa collegiate parish churches are recognised as Spanish.<sup>41</sup> None of these images was commissioned or acquired directly by the church procurator concerned, and almost all of them are known to have been presented as gifts by their former owners, at a time when dressed imagery was

34 Ibid.

35 Tarxien Parish Archives (TPA), Vol. 24, K. Sant, 'Storja tal-Fundazzjoni Barbara – Hal Tarxien 1759–1959', 1960, unpublished manuscript.

36 TPA, Fondazione Barbara, Vol. 24, Nota delli Stromenti che il fu Rdo. Sign. Don Giovanni Barbara ha fatto stipolare per atti di me Not. Michel'Angelo Saliba sotto le giornate infrascritte.

37 Ibid.

38 TPA, Sant 1960, 32–3. Sant provides a list of items commissioned over two centuries by the foundation.

39 Ibid., 39, 41.

40 Borg, 353. The image was donated to the Capuchin community of Kalkara in 1767 by Matteo Cutajar from Cospicua who imported this piece from Málaga (Spain).

41 M. Buhagiar, 'The Artistic, Architectural and Technological Patrimony' in eds. L. Bugeja, M. Buhagiar, S. Fiorini, *Birgu – A Maltese Maritime City*, Vol 1, Malta 1993, Vol. 2, 502; S. Debono, 72.



Fig. 6. Style of Pedro de Mena, *Virgen de la Soledad*, Parish Church of St Paul Shipwrecked, Valletta. An inscription commemorating this donation is included on the family ledger stone originally sited right in front of the altar of St Gaetan where the image is still displayed. The inscription also mentions that this piece was brought from Spain (*ex hispaniam translata*).

falling out of fashion, to be replaced by fully sculpted figures.<sup>42</sup> This suggests that the values which define their significance for local communities were probably not purely aesthetic but cult-related. Their former owners may have nonetheless known about the artistic merits of some pieces, which may be why particular donations were commemorated on marble plaques and ledger stones. This is the case with the *Virgin of Sorrows* at the collegiate parish church of St Paul Shipwrecked (Valletta), which is perhaps the best example of its kind, donated to the parish church in 1811 by the Grech family.

The quality, type and condition of both image and dress suggest the style of the Granada sculptor Pedro de Mena (1628–88) and may well be by Antonio Asensio de la Cerda, a member of one of the family of sculptors working in Malaga in the late eighteenth century.<sup>43</sup> It is a devotional piece, '*de contemplación*', of which Mena and his followers produced numerous versions. The son of Alonso de Mena (1587–1646), a leading sculptor in early seventeenth-century

Granada, Pedro de Mena learnt his trade in his father's workshop and later worked with Alonso Cano (1601–67) who influenced his subsequent production. He is known to have travelled to Madrid and also worked for Toledo cathedral where he was named sculptor to the cathedral chapter. He was mainly based in Malaga where he produced most of his

<sup>42</sup> This process is discussed in *ibid.* Debono 2008, 11–20.

<sup>43</sup> Regarding the latest attribution of this piece, see Juan Antonio Sánchez López and Antonio Rafael, 'An 18th-Century Spanish sculpture by Antonio Asensio de la Cerda', *Program tal-Festa tan-Nawfraġju ta' San Pawl* Malta 2015, 69–72. For the essential bibliography on Pedro de Mena see R. Orueta y Duarte, *Pedro de Mena*, Madrid 1914; Ricardo de Orueta *et al.*, *Pedro de Mena: Homenaje en su Tercer Centenario, 1628–1928*, Malaga 1928; Ignacio Henares Cuéllar *et al.* *Pedro de Mena. III Centenario de Su Muerte 1688–1988*, Andalucía 1989; José Miguel Morales Folguera, *Pedro de Mena y Su Época*, Andalucía 1990; Luis Luna Moreno y Rosario Fernández González, *Pedro de Mena y Castilla*, Exhibition Catalogue, Valladolid 1989; J. Anderson, *Pedro de Mena – Seventeenth-Century Spanish Sculptor*, United Kingdom 1998; M. Trusted, *Spanish Sculpture: A Catalogue of the Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum*, London 1996, 64.

important works, including the cathedral choir stalls (1658). Half-length bust versions by Mena and his followers of the *Virgin of Sorrows* are known throughout Spain, and almost all date from c.1669–79.<sup>44</sup> They were generally produced as pendants to images of the *Ecce Homo*.

### 'Spanishness' in Girada's works

Mariano Girada is a product of the Valencian school and his particular style reflects the latest trends in Valencia where the Academy of St Charles had become the yardstick for taste and commissions. Girada's works are nonetheless grounded within this broader relationship with Spanish art coming to Malta through the brigantine trade. The sculptor's response to the demands of local patrons is a compromise between the novelty of his artistic baggage, in comparison to what local artists were producing and the conservative taste of the same patrons. Girada does occasionally come across as unwilling to compromise but he nonetheless succeeds in proposing modern versions of well-known Valencian or Spanish typologies that by time also acquire canonical status and are emulated or deliberately copied.

Girada's artistic production in Malta can be clearly classified in three phases. It includes monuments, church furniture and street shrines, besides polychromed sculpture. He may also have produced small-scale pieces of which only a few examples have been identified to date. Girada was largely patronised by lay confraternities, church procurators, private individuals of note and the civil authorities.<sup>45</sup> The first phase of Girada's career concerns his time in Valencia where he also acquired his artistic training and formation. The only known work from this Valencian phase is a bust of the *Virgin of Sorrows* at the Discalced Carmelites of Cospicua, identified in documents as having been produced by Girada in Spain.<sup>46</sup>

The second period of activity roughly spans the first sixteen years of Girada's known presence in Malta, between 1796 and 1812. This phase includes some of Girada's best pieces. Works are worked out in clean, sharp contours and drapery folds are carved in fluent, dynamic folds in imitation of different textiles. The most prestigious known commission of this period is probably the figurehead of the flagship of the Order, the *San Giovanni*, constructed by the naval architect Giuseppe Maurin and inaugurated in 1798, shortly before the expulsion of the Order by the French.<sup>47</sup> Other works by Girada include the limestone monument of the *Virgin of Graces* (Żabbar) and two works at Siġġewi, namely, the street shrine of *Our Lady with Souls in Purgatory* and a limestone *Virgin of the Rosary* in the main village square. Polychrome sculpture works dateable to this phase

44 M.E. Gómez Moreno, 'Pedro de Mena y Los Tipos Iconográficos' in Henares Cuéllar et al. 1989, 77–95.

45 E.F. Montanaro, 'L-Iskultura Mariano Gerada (1766–1823)' in *Lehen is-Santwarju – Żabbar*, Malta 1989, is the most important work published on Girada so far.

46 NAV, Not. V. di Domenico (R 755 Vol. 24) 18 August 1851, ff. 177–8.

47 CAM, Pan 79, Fondo Panzaveccia, f. 161r.

include the titular processional statue of the *Virgin of Graces* (Parish Church, Żabbar), the *Virgin of the Immaculate Conception* (Parish Church, Senglea), the *Virgin of the Rosary* (Parish Church, Siġġiewi) and the processional statue of *Our Lady of the Assumption* (Parish Church, Għaxaq).<sup>48</sup> A copy of the large marble group representing the *Baptism of Christ* by Giuseppe Mazzuoli (1644–1725) at St John's co-cathedral for the baptismal font at Cospicua parish church (1814) and an *Ecce Homo* (Parish Church, Xewkija) also belong to this phase.

The third phase is roughly dateable to the final ten years of Girada's life, between 1813 and 1823. Works produced during this period are simplified in form with drapery folds suggested rather than fully worked out, and the volume includes heavy undercutting to accentuate strategic points and define the volume of his figure. There is no known reason for the change in style from that of the second phase, although it could be related to the death of his elder brother Giuseppe in January 1812 and the subsequent plague outbreak in 1813. Public monuments in stone include two identical copies of *St Roque* for Żurrieq and a second version at Għaxaq, *St Catherine of Alexandria* for the main square of Żurrieq,<sup>49</sup> the *Unicorn* and *Lion* fountains at Valletta and the British royal coat-of-arms on the marina gate of Valletta, now Victoria Gate but then known as Porta del Monte. Additional works include the titular piece in high relief of the altar of the *Virgin of Pilar* in the church of the Holy Ghost at Żejtun and two combined reliefs in the adjacent building, now a nunnery, representing the then bishop of Malta, Ferdinando Mattei and the Spanish consul in Malta, Alberto de Megino.<sup>50</sup> Church furniture items include four apostles from a set of six representing St Peter, St Paul, St Andrew and St James at Cospicua parish church.<sup>51</sup> Polychromed sculpture works stylistically dateable to this phase include an *Ecce Homo* for Għarb parish church and *St Michael the Archangel* for Cospicua parish church. Girada also completed the polychromed sculpture of *St Catherine of Alexandria* for Żurrieq parish church.<sup>52</sup>

Some of Girada's works are distinctively Valencian. His *Virgin of the Assumption* (Għaxaq Parish Church, 1808) features the typically Valencian putto to the side. It is also distinctively Valencian in pose and interpretation, including the emotive response of the subject in the chosen gestures. Girada might have been free to suggest and propose. This was a private commission although probably intended from the beginning as a processional statue. Other commissions are more complex given that Girada may have come across as challenging established prototypes. This is the case of the Siġġiewi *Virgin*

48 Debono.

49 A. Mangion and K. Zerafa, *Santa Katarina: Il-Festa u s-Socjeta Mużikali Tagħha fiż-Żurrieq*, Malta 1989, 94.

50 E.B. Vella, *Storja taż-Żejtun*, Malta 1927, 77. 'Dak il-baxx reliev tal-Madonna tal-Pilar li hemm fuq l-artal tal-lemin tal-knisja jgħid li hu xogħol l-iskultur kbir Malti – Mariano Gerada.' (The Virgin of Pilar in low relief, titular altarpiece to the altar on the left of the church, is said to be the work of the great Maltese sculptor Mariano Gerada).

51 NAV, Not. G.S. Randon, R413 Vol. 6, 9 March 1823, ff. 91r–3r. The deed lists outstanding monies due to Mariano Girada and payments already effected in connection with four apostles costing an average of 112 *scudi* each. The statues then completed by Mariano Girada include St Peter, St Paul, St James, and St Andrew.

52 Mangion and Zerafa, 102.



Fig. 7. Melchiorre Cafà, *Virgin of the Rosary*, Dominican Church, Rabat (Malta)



Fig. 8. Mariano Girada, *Our Lady of the Rosary*, Siggiewi Parish Church



Fig. 9. Mariano Girada, *Virgin of Sorrows*, Church of the Discalced Carmelites, Cospicua



Fig. 10. Pedro de Mena, *St Ignatius of Loyola*, Church of Santiago, Malaga (Destroyed in 1931)



Fig. 11. José Esteve Bonet, *Virgin of Sorrows*, Parish Church of Torrent, Valencia

of the *Rosary* commissioned in June 1803. This invention is atypical when compared to late eighteenth-century sculpture works in Malta given the established practice of emulating or producing exact copies or replicas of Melchiorre Cafà's well-known *Virgin of the Rosary* at the Dominican friars of Rabat executed in 1660.<sup>53</sup>

This polychrome sculpture as completed may be a compromise between the usual copy-version after Cafà's *Virgin of the Rosary* and an original invention proposed by Girada. The notarial deed for this commission mentions that the plinth had to be a replica of Cafà's *Virgin of the Rosary* and the preliminary drawing of the statue which Girada is documented as presenting was also revised by the parish priest.<sup>54</sup>

Girada's *Virgin of the Rosary* became the recognised version of Cafà's original typology. Successive versions revised Girada's and included the Christ child in the arms of the Virgin as in Cafà's rather than standing on a cloud formation as in Girada's *Siggiewi* version. Girada's *St Michael the Archangel* (Cospicua Parish Church) completed around 1819 was even more widely recognised by successive sculptors as the prototype to follow. This also replaced a late seventeenth-century *St Michael the Archangel* (St Paul Shipwrecked Parish Church, Valletta) believed to have been designed by the sculptor Domenico Guidi (1625–1701) which was emulated and copied by eighteenth-century sculptors. The ease with which this prototype was replaced may have to do with kinship and identity values. Cafà was a Maltese sculptor. His *Virgin of the Rosary* is one of his few works in Malta, unlike the anonymous albeit high-quality sculpture piece of *St Michael the Archangel*. Girada's *St Michael the Archangel* is a rethought and simplified Valencian-styled version of a popular prototype in Spain and Viceregal South America. By contrast, his *Virgin of the Rosary* is a compromise between a local widely recognised prototype and his Valencian style.

The bust of the *Virgin of Sorrows* (Disalced Carmelites, Cospicua) is Girada's version of the half-length busts of the *Virgen de la Soledad* imported to Malta of which the version at St Paul Shipwrecked parish church attributed to the Spanish sculptor Pedro de Mena is, perhaps, the best surviving example.

This particular variant, also known to have been commissioned in Valencia, is also inspired by Mena's four busts of Jesuit saints (Church of Santiago, Malaga). Esteve Bonet is known to have produced such versions and Girada may have acquainted himself with this typology through Esteve's works of which two are known to date to the 1780s.<sup>55</sup> The version produced by Esteve in 1773 (Assumption of Our Lady Parish Church, Torrent, Valencia) compares well to Girada's albeit Esteve's is Baroque and more decorative.<sup>56</sup>

53 On Cafà's *Virgin of the Rosary*, see K. Sciberras, *Roman Baroque Sculpture for the Order of Malta*, Malta 2004, 15; J. Montagu, 'Melchiorre Cafà's models for Ercole Ferrata' in *Melchiorre Cafà – Maltese Genius of the Roman Baroque*, ed. K. Sciberras, Malta 2006, 72.

54 NAV, Not. Nikola Azzopardi (R 37 Vol. 6) 23 June 1803, ff. 209–11v.

55 Igual Ubeda, 69, 65. These works are dated March 1783 and March 1781. Esteve also produced other versions that antedate these two versions.

56 *Ibid.*, 48.

Girada's version was also imported from Spain to Malta and later, in 1851, donated to the Discalced Carmelites of Cospicua. The donors then declared that the piece was made by the 'famous Maltese sculptor Mariano Girada' in Valencia.<sup>57</sup> Considering that this piece was manufactured by Girada in Valencia, it is to all intents and purposes an import from Spain, analogous to the Spanish imported pieces discussed earlier. This typology may have been known in Malta before then and a small-scale version (Casa Rocca Piccola, Valletta) datable to Girada's third phase (1813–23) suggests this possibility. In comparison to Mena's widely diffused typologies and Esteve Bonet's versions of Mena's, Girada's works represent the latest trend in religious imagery produced in Valencia, of which very little survives, and imported to Malta.

## Conclusion

Girada is generally perceived as a traditional Maltese sculptor working mostly for parish churches and local communities. This is a misconception which needs to be reviewed. His artistic formation and his style are instead the by-product of business activity, particularly the brigantine trade and the benefits which local systems of patronage enjoyed thanks to it. Funds and profits empowered patronage but they also provided for the importation of works of art from Spain. To what extent these were recognised, accepted, or misunderstood is another matter. Girada's Valencian style and its impact on Maltese late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century artistic activity in Malta is one of several artistic imports which the brigantine trade brought to Malta. Girada's Valencian style was possibly misunderstood and oftentimes subject to compromise but his works became recognised prototypes to emulate and copy.

This context, to which Girada belongs, is remotely related to the Order of St John and its systems of patronage. The brigantine trade and the broader remit of networks and connections, including those which are art-related, is an independent economic system of exchange. This may suggest that Maltese art history cannot be exclusively read in terms of the connections and systems of patronage which the Order of St John and its members promoted. This 'Spanish' eighteenth-century network based on the dialectic between art and economics is now, by and large, defined but its extent remains to be understood in more detail. This paper merely provides the proof of evidence thanks to Mariano Girada, his style and his works.

<sup>57</sup> NAV, Not. V. di Domenico (R 755 Vol. 24) 18 August 1851, ff. 177–8.

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