

Carlo Gimach (1651-1730) — Architect and Poet

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Carlo Gimach (b. Malta 1651 – d. Rome 1730) is one of the most interesting and colourful figures in the history of Maltese art. Very little was known about his life and works in Malta and abroad until the recent discovery by the writer of his biography, published privately in Lisbon in 1962.

The unusual circumstances of the coming of the Gimach family to Malta is told by Ignazio Saverio Mifsud in the seventeenth volume of his manuscript collection held at the National Library of Malta.¹ It is a strange story, but it has been corroborated by Gimach himself on at least two different occasions.

Carlo Gimach's paternal grandfather was an Emir living in Rama, or Ramleh or Ramla, a city of ancient Palestine between Jaffa and Jerusalem, the site of Arimathea of the New Testament.

He was converted to Catholicism and was afterwards involved in a militant movement by Christians aimed at re-instating christian rule in the Holy City. Gimaa', as he was known in his native land, was one of the movement's leaders and was eventually arrested and executed, and all his property confiscated. His wife Maria, accompanied by some of her relatives, escaped to Malta and arrived here about the year 1610. During her period in quarantine, Maria Gimaa' died at the Lazzaretto immediately after giving birth to a male child. Jean Paul Lascaris, then Commissioner of Health and later Grand Master, took compassion on the child and decided to take him under his care. He had him baptized in the parish church of St Paul Shipwrecked in Valletta and gave him his own name, Jean Paul or Gio Paolo. The surname Gimaa' was, at the same time,

1. NLM, Lib. Ms. III, Ignazio Saverio Mifsud, *Stromatum Melitense, Notizie Istoriche di Carlo Gimach*, ff. 247-250.



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changed into Gimac or Gimach. Lascaris also took it upon himself to educate the child, and always took him with him on his frequent visits to his native Nice and to his Commanderies. Gio Paolo Gimach, at the age of 22, accompanied Lascaris to Madrid when the latter was appointed ambassador to the Court of Spain in September 1632.² As a further sign of his esteem towards Gio Paolo, Lascaris when he became Grand Master in 1636, offered him the Barony of Tabria which, however, he politely declined. Gimach was later nominated as one of the administrators of the *Fondazione delle Galere*.³

Carlo Gimach's maternal grandfather, Pierre Sartre, came to Malta from La Rochelle in France with the *Commendatore Vatable*. La Rochelle, on the Bay of Biscay, was a Huguenot stronghold during the Wars of Religion and bore the brunt of Louis XIII's and Richelieu's persecutions. It subsequently fell to the Royal Forces in 1627-28 after it was starved out at the end of a long siege. Pierre Sartre must have therefore come to Malta about the year 1628. Here he met and married Margarita Micallef who, according to Mifsud, belonged to a noble and respected Maltese family that had given various prominent people to the country. Mifsud, writing in 1761, concludes his document with an apologia in favour of the Gimachs, father and son, and says: "Gio Paolo Gimac and his son Carlo maintained themselves in Malta by their own means, retaining their dignity and reputation, and were considered as having no taint of Moorish, mulatto or Jewish blood in their veins", a remark which today appears uncalled for, but acceptable at the time it was written.

Gio Paolo Gimach married Paolina Sartre, daughter of Pierre in 1643, and Carlo, the third of six children, was born in 1651. Godfather at his baptism, which also took place at St Paul Shipwrecked, was Fra Carlo Gattola, a captain of the galleys and later Admiral of the Order's fleet, and finally Prior of Capua in 1681.⁴

2. NLM, AOM, 256, f. 106; Bartolomeo dal Pozzo, *Historia della Sacra Religione Militare di S. Giovanni detta di Malta*, Verona 1703-1715, vol. 1, p. 807.

3. NLM, Lib. Ms. III, *Stromatum* ..., ff. 247-250.

4. Dal Pozzo, vol. 2, 236, 248.

Carlo Gimach received his education in Rome at the *Collegio Romano* run by the Jesuits, and stayed there for some years in the 1670s.⁵ Back in Malta, he is said to have been held in high esteem for his ability and talents in Architecture and Literature. He continued to live in Valletta with his father, who had become a rich merchant and a prominent member of the local commercial community. Gio Paolo Gimach's name appears frequently in the records of the Civil Courts, either as plaintiff or defendant, or as witness in matters involving commercial matters.⁶ He was frequently called to add his signature as witness to agreements and contracts between private parties, again in matters relating to trade and commerce and, to use a modern term, real estate. The elder Gimach was, at one time, in the service of Grand Master Lascaris (1636-1657), of Rafael Cotoner (1660-1663) and of his brother Nicholas (1663-1680)⁷ most probably in the procurement of supplies for the Grand Conservator. He is also given some credit for his knowledge of architecture.⁸ Carlo appears to have become a partner in his father's business, and we know for certain that he used to be entrusted by his father to collect debts for goods supplied by them to the galleys of the Order and to foreign vessels.⁹

Although Gimach's father appears to have declined the barony of Tabria offered to him by Grandmaster Lascaris, both he and his son Carlo became deeply involved in the running of the lands and buildings belonging to the noble fief of Tabria, probably as rent-paying tenants. Their involvement was discussed during a meeting of the Grand Council of the Order in August 1691,¹⁰ when Carlo and his father declared themselves debtors of a sum of over 7,000 scudi to the Lascaris Foundation which counted among its property the Tabria territory. All property, moveable and immoveable, belonging to Carlo Gimach, to his father Gio Paolo, and to his

5. Ayres de Carvalho, *D. Joao V e a Arte do Seu Tempo*, vol. 2, Edicao do Autor, Lisbon 1962, p. 251.
6. National Archives of Malta, Rabat, *Acta Originalia, Magna Curia Castellania*, Index of Cases, vol. V, 1665-1674 and vol. VI 1675-1683.
7. de Carvalho, 251.
8. *Ibid.*, 252.
9. *Ibid.*, 252.
10. NLM, AOM, 263, *Deliberazione circa un Chirografo del Tesoro sopra il debito di Carlo Gimach*, ff. 99v-100v.

brothers Claudio and Ignazio, had been hypothecated *in solidum* by all the Gimach family and, as a result, it was confiscated by the *Procuratore delle Cause* on instructions of the Order's Treasury.¹¹ Dottor Massimiliano Balsano, a distinguished man of laws, and one of the *Uditori* of Grand Master Nicholas Cotoner,¹² was a guarantor of a part of the debt to the amount of 2,000 scudi. The burden of the debt was somewhat made lighter by reason of certain improvements which Carlo, making use of his knowledge of architecture and civil engineering, had carried out in the Tabria lands.

To ascertain the value of these improvements, the Order's Council nominated the architect Giovanni Barbara (1642-1728), and Francesco Calleja, *capomastro de' falegnami*, who together drew up 'a most detailed and excellent report' outlining the works carried out at Tabria and their cost. The works consisted mainly in the reclamation of rocky land, the planting of fruit trees, improvements in methods of agriculture and rearing of farm animals, the restoration and embellishment of Palazzo Tabria, the transport of fertile soil for the construction of a garden, and the cost of timber and manufacture of trellises for a vine-yard.¹³ But the toil of Gimach was not enough to pay his debts, and Massimiliano Balsano again came to the rescue, binding himself along with his wife and children, to repay the Gimachs' debt at the rate of 500 scudi a month. Carlo succeeded in further reducing his debt in consideration of a share he had in a *tartana* which he had purchased with others at a public auction.¹⁴ This is the last recorded commercial operation of the Gimachs, and an unfortunate one indeed, before the father's death on 12 March, 1692 at the age of 82,¹⁵ and Carlo's definite departure from Malta soon after.

Probably because of his father's many connections with leading members of the commercial and trade community in Malta which counted among its members many Portuguese residents, Carlo

11. *Ibid.*
12. Gio. Ant. Vassallo, *Storia di Malta Raccontata in Compendio*, Malta 1854, p. 684.
13. NLM, AOM 263, f. 100v.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Porto Salvo Parish Records, Valletta, *Liber Mortuorum*, f. 322.

Gimach befriended some Portuguese knights, among whom were Fra Gaspar Carneiro and Fra Antonio Correia de Sousa Montenegro.

Carneiro was an outstanding member of the Order and occupied various important posts in its administration. He was Secretary of the Common Treasury in 1678¹⁶ and Vice-Chancellor three years later.¹⁷ He succeeded Correia de Sousa as Bailiff of the Priorate of Leça in Portugal in 1696.¹⁸ Correia de Sousa was, successively, Captain of the Galley *Santa Caterina* in 1647,¹⁹ General of the Gallies in 1679,²⁰ and Grand Chancellor in 1681.²¹ The most important positions in his career were, however, that of Ambassador of the Order to Portugal in 1670,²² and resident Ambassador in Rome in 1674.²³

Both these wealthy knights built stately homes for themselves in Valletta and, according to Gimach's biographer Ayres de Carvalho, it is certain that it was Gimach who designed and constructed the two palaces.²⁴

Fra Caspar Carneiro was the owner of the palazzo now known as the Auberge de Bavière. It was built in 1696 on the site of an old lime-kiln opposite the English Curtain and overlooks the entrance to Marsamxett harbour towards the open sea.²⁵ It may well be one of the last austere and staid buildings of the seventeenth century in Valletta and, although constructed in the closing years of the century, it is still far from the florid and decorated architecture of the eighteenth. On Carneiro's death, it formed part of his

16. Dal Pozzo, vol. 2, 459.

17. *Ibid.*, 486.

18. de Carvalho, 249.

19. Dal Pozzo, 163.

20. *Ibid.*, 486.

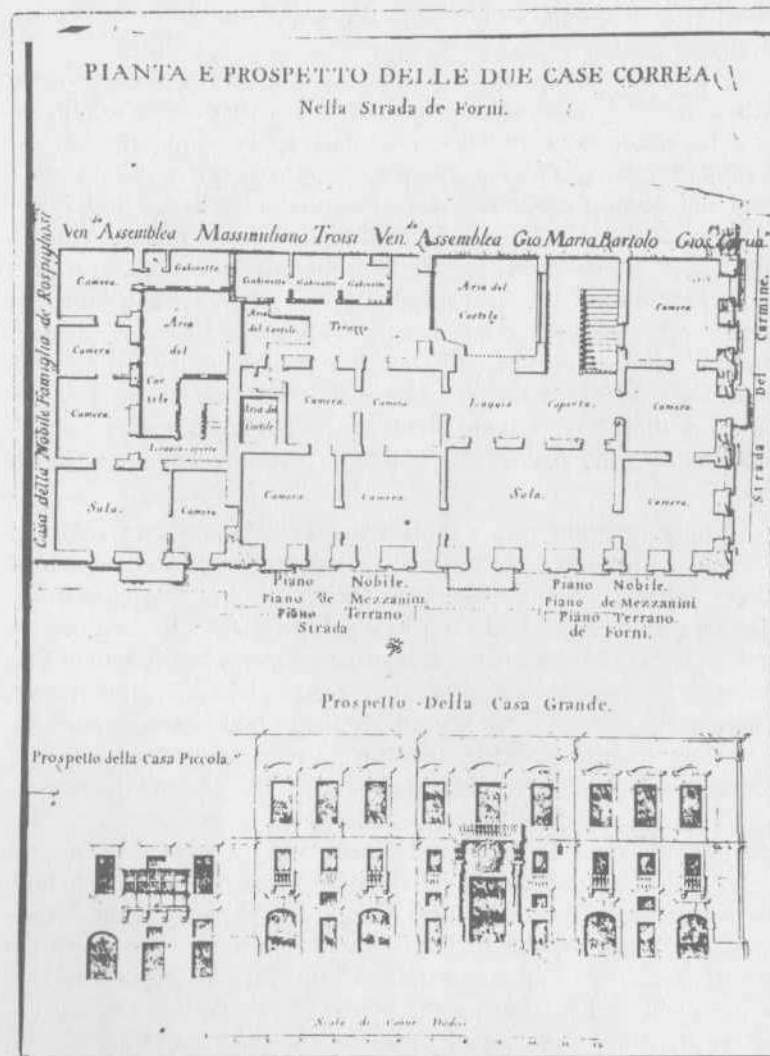
21. *Ibid.*, 486.

22. *Ibid.*, 386.

23. *Ibid.*, 450.

24. de Carvalho, 456.

25. Alfredo Mifsud, *The Knights Hospitallers of The Venerable Tongue of England in Malta*, Malta 1914, p. 105; Victor Denaro, "More Houses in Valletta", *Melita Historica*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1963, p. 31; Quentin Hughes, *The Building of Malta 1530-1798*, London, 1956, pp. 174-175; Leonard Mahoney, *A History of Maltese Architecture*, Malta, 1988, pp. 280-282.



Plans of the Correa houses in Old Bakery Street

inheritance or *spoglio* in favour of the Order, and thus became its property.

Palazzo Carneiro is a very large building on two floors, with a rather flat and monotonous facade, but with a series of finely moulded windows on each floor, regularly spaced and relieved by a slightly projecting centre-piece with an arched door-way at ground level and a balustrated open stone balcony in the upper floor. The two ends of the building are finished by the typical massive corner pilasters. It is interesting to note that the crowning cornice is one long continuation of the capitals of the pilasters, a Mannerist feature very much loved and frequently adopted by the renowned Maltese architect Girolamo Cassar more than a century earlier. The ground-plan is a departure from the usual palace architecture of the period in that the courtyard is not centrally placed, but is pushed back towards the rear of the building, certainly not for want of space.

The other building in Valletta from the drawing-board of Carlo Gimach is what was up to recently known as Correa House, in Old Bakery Street corner with Old Theatre Street, destroyed by bombing during the Second World War. The site is now occupied by St Albert the Great College. It was the property of the knight Fra Antonio Correia de Sousa Montenegro, a close acquaintance of Gimach. Built in 1689,²⁶ it was an imposing building constructed on three levels, with a mezzanine floor between the ground and first floors. As was usual during the period, the ground floor was reserved for rented shops, stables and other services. Its architecture heralds the more florid and decorated styles of eighteenth century Valletta. The corner pilasters are omitted, and two superimposed architectural orders, the Doric and the Ionic, appear perhaps for the first time on the facade of a residential private building. The decoration of the facade, especially the centre-piece which takes up the height of two floors, is a feature before its time, and is much closer to the palace architecture of Vilhena's time than any of its contemporaries.

26. Denaro, "Yet More Houses in Valletta", *Melita Historica*, vol. 2, no. 4, 1959, p. 213; Hughes, 179; Mahoney, 278-280.

The last work attributed to Gimach in Malta, this time an exercise in civil engineering, is the construction of a small shipyard.

The first arsenal of the Order was built in 1598; this was enlarged in 1607 and again in 1636.²⁷ It was on the quay at Vittoriosa and was, basically, a timber construction with stone supporting arches. The Order's Grand Council decided in 1691, and again in 1696, to have a new shipyard built rather than have the old one repaired. This decision was reached on the basis of a very interesting report by *Capo Mastri* Giovanni Barbara and Lorenzo Gafà, and by the *Capo Mastri delle Maestranze* Francesco Calleja and Custo Borg.²⁸ Gimach, however, could not have been involved in the new Vittoriosa arsenal, since this was obviously the exclusive responsibility of the Order's official architects and engineers. Gimach's intervention was in all probability a small shipyard which the Portuguese Balí Carneiro planned to build on the foreshore below his palace just described, in the area known as *Il-Fossa*, and for the construction of which he purchased a quantity of used timber from the Vittoriosa arsenal in 1676.²⁹ Another Portuguese knight, Ferrao de Castelbranco, was also involved in the project.³⁰ The timber construction at *Il-Fossa* has completely disappeared, but old engravings of Valletta show this area as having been a favourite anchoring place for a long number of years for the small boats which were used to carry the special hard-stone from quarries in Gozo, as well as brushwood which at the time grew profusely in Gozo, Comino and Cominotto.³¹

Gimach left Malta about the year 1696 for Portugal where he spent the next sixteen years of his life. Facts about his life and works in Portugal were very scanty, and only came to light some years ago with the publication of a book titled *King John V – The Arts in his Time*, by Ayres de Carvalho, the distinguished President of the Portuguese National Academy of Arts. The book was published

27. Ettore Rossi, *Storia della Marina dell'Ordine di S. Giovanni di Gerusalemme, di Rodi e di Malta*, Roma-Milano 1926, p. 104.

28. NLM, AOM 263, f. 95v.; AOM 264, ffl. 114v.-115v.

29. Rossi, 105.

30. de Carvalho, 256.

31. Engraving, 'Cité de Valette de Malthe', by Pierre Mortier.

privately in a limited edition by the author himself, and is practically unobtainable. It is not in the holdings of the British Library, and in my search for the book I was referred to the Harvard and Princeton University Libraries, through whose Retrieval Systems I was able to obtain a photocopy of the book from the author himself. The author of Gimach's biography was able to unearth many interesting facts about his ancestry, his family, his character and cultural background, mostly from the records of the Portuguese Inquisition following Gimach's request for admission to the chivalrous Order of Christ. Twelve witnesses, six of whom had passed some time in Malta and made his acquaintance here, gave evidence before the Inquisition in 1712 about his suitability and 'purity of blood'. Their evidence forms the basis of a considerable part of our knowledge of his life and that of his father in Malta.³²

Carlo Gimach was a man of great erudition, well-versed in Latin and Italian Literature, and an architect of talent. Count Gio Antonio Ciantar, who knew him personally and visited him frequently in Rome, writing in his *Malta Illustrata* in 1772, says of him that he was '*dilettante di Poesia e di Architettura*'.³³ The word *dilettante*, according to the *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*, meant, at the end of the eighteenth century, '*chi studia e approfondisce particolari questioni, persona competente, intenditore, esperto*'. Ciantar, after referring to two of Gimach's literary works, says that "he wrote various poems, mostly in Italian, some of which he used to read to us; his style is limpid; it is sometimes satirical, but always harmless".³⁴ The *Encyclopaedia of Architects ... in Portugal*, published in 1889, described him as "a man of admirable talent, an excellent Latinist, and a still greater poet, as is evinced by his verses both in Latin and Italian, and in whose ability one finds the best of erudition of the ancient classics".³⁵ His works are unfortunately lost to us, with the happy exception of one work which I have been able to trace in a Library in Rome and which will be described later on.

32. de Carvalho, 256.

33. Giov. Ant. Ciantar, *Malta Illustrata*, Malta, 1772, Lib. IV, Not. IV, CXXXVII, p. 578.

34. *Ibid.*, 579.

35. Sousa Viterbo, *Diccionario historico e documental dos Arquitectos*,

Gimach had left Malta for Portugal accompanied by his friend Correia de Sousa. The Portuguese knight took him to Lisbon, and then to his estate in the province of Beira, where Gimach designed and built a palace for de Sousa which, however, was never completed because of the latter's death in 1696. The building was a fortified house with massive walls and rooms surrounding a large central courtyard with three, and possibly, four tall battlemented towers. At the end of the eighteenth century, two of the towers were still intact, with a third one partly in ruins.³⁶

In 1708, a pamphlet printed by Valentine da Costa³⁷ was published anonymously in Lisbon with the title, in translation, *Description of the Triumphal Arch the English Nation commissioned to be raised on the occasion of the marriage of Their Majesties The Most Serene King of Portugal and of Maria Anna of Austria in front of the Cathedral of Lisbon*.³⁸

One must bear in mind that the oldest and longest political alliance in modern European history is that between England and Portugal. On this particular occasion, a squadron of the British fleet, consisting of no less than eighteen vessels, accompanied the Austrian Princess, daughter of Leopold I, on the vessel *The Royal Anne*, with a party of about 1,000 English and Austrian distinguished guests who formed her retinue. The anonymous author of the pamphlet describing the Triumphal Arch says textually: "So that this work could faithfully reflect the liberal greatness of the English Nation, Carlos Gimac, a son of the valiant Island of Malta, was entrusted with the building of this Triumphal Arch. In the space of a few days, Gimac completed a work which for its inherent qualities should have taken much longer to finish. The Arch was seventy pes, or Spanish feet high (about 23 metres), on two levels; on the third level it had a centre-piece of fourteen pes (4 metres), and crowning the edifice there was a pedestal carrying the equestrian statue of St George, Protector and Patron Saint of the

Engenheiros e Constructores Portugueses ou a servico de Portugal, Lisbon 1899, vol. 1, p. 424.

36. de Carvalho, 257.

37. Viterbo, 1, 424.

38. de Carvalho, 246.

two Nations, England and Portugal".³⁹ All the inscriptions and poetical praises to the new King and Queen of Portugal were similarly composed by Gimach. It was Lord Galway, a French Protestant refugee in the service of England and Queen Anne's ambassador to Portugal, who was instrumental in recommending Gimach for the construction of the Arch.⁴⁰ In the same year, and as part of the celebrations of the new Portuguese monarchs, Gimach invented and constructed what was then known as an 'architectural machine'. Imitating the fashion then prevalent in Rome in festivities of similar occasions, he constructed an imitation in wood and paper of the façade of a Roman temple, about 13 metres high and 9 metres wide, supported on six columns of the Composite Order with a complete entablature of architrave, frieze and cornice, all decorated in imitation marble. A statue of Venus and other mythological and allegorical figures adorned the crowning cornice. The composition was part of a colossal popular spectacle of pyrotechnics, and the theatrical and architectural machine, following days of viewing by the public, was made to explode, at the end of the celebrations, in a shower of light, colour and noise.⁴¹ Was Gimach inspired and influenced by the frequent firework shows which he had witnessed in Malta before he left for Portugal?

After the death of Correia de Sousa in 1696, Gimach was employed as architect with the noble family of the House of Arronches on their estate close to the Spanish border, and later by the Counts of St John in Lisbon.⁴²

The family of Arronches, which counted among its members a Cardinal Archbishop of Lisbon, availed itself of the services of Gimach when he was entrusted with the re-modelling and completion of the Bishop's Palace and the Convent of Santa Caterina de Ribara, both in Lisbon.⁴³

The years immediately following Gimach's arrival in Portugal were troubled years for the country. In December 1703, Portugal severed relations with the court of Philip V and, in the following

39. *Ibid.*, 275.

40. *Ibid.*, 279.

41. de Carvalho, 278.

42. *Ibid.*, 286.

43. *Ibid.*, 269.

spring, Spain declared war and invaded Portugal. King Pedro II died in 1706 and, after his death, the struggle went against the allies and the Anglo-Portuguese forces received some temporary setbacks. It was during such a situation that Carlo Gimach was employed by the Counts of St John as their architect. Gimach was no doubt familiar with military architecture, since the subject formed part of the formal training of architects at the time. Besides, having lived for more than forty years in Malta, he must have studied at first hand the Island's major fortifications in Valletta and the harbours. During his days in Malta, he also had the opportunity to observe, no doubt with a professional eye, the newly-built fortifications of Grand Master Lascaris (1636-1657) in Floriana and around the harbours, the coastal towers of Grand Master de Redin (1657-1660), Valperga's Cottonera Lines (1670-1680), Fort Ricasoli, begun in 1670, and Grand Master Carafa's re-modelling of various fortified works (1680-1690). The Counts of St John took advantage of the presence of Gimach on their estates and involved him in the reconstruction of the old abandoned forts on the Spanish border and, probably, in the building of a large military establishment in Campo Grande outside Lisbon.⁴⁴

After leaving the Counts of St John, Gimach entered the service, again as architect, of the Marquis de Fontes, himself an architect and engineer, and a powerful figure in the Court of Lisbon. Gimach had every opportunity to prove his ability to de Fontes who, impressed by his knowledge, introduced him to John V in 1707.⁴⁵

In 1707 gold was discovered in Brazil, and the Crown of Portugal became entitled to one-fifth of all precious metals mined, at a time when the total production reached the then staggering figure of about 3,200 pounds a year.⁴⁶ The gold of Brazil, and to a lesser extent ivory and ebony, became the source of wealth and power of John V, and ultimately of the Portuguese nation. A massive building movement was then set afoot, culminating in the

44. *Ibid.*, 271.

45. *Ibid.*, 271.

46. H. V. Livermore, *A New History of Portugal*, Cambridge University Press 1966, p. 198.

construction of the enormous monument at Mafra consisting of a palace, a library, a basilica and a royal country seat rivalling in size and exuberance the famous Escorial.

Gimach's fame spread and, as part of Portugal's vast building programme, he was called to the town of Salzedas in order to restore and partially rebuild the monastery of the Cistercians.⁴⁷ From Salzedas, he went to the ancient town of Arouca, between Lisbon and Oporto, after having been entrusted with the restoration of the church of the monastery of St Peter.

Originally founded in the beginning of the tenth century, the monastery had passed from its initial Rule of St Bernard to that of the Cistercians in 1226. During its long life, the monastery went through various changes and reconstructions. The convent itself consisted of a large rectangle of considerable dimensions with three wide patios separated by rows of cells of the monastic nuns. The cloister was built on two floors with a fine refectory along its longer side. The church and choir do not stand apart, but form an integral part of the convent building, so that the façade of the church is unobtrusively incorporated in the long outer wall of the convent. This is Carlo Gimach's best-known work in Portugal, and an author of a work on the Monastery of Arouca describes him as "a man of great ability and undoubtedly of vast experience".⁴⁸ The church has a single large nave with a barrel vault, bordered by richly-sculptured baroque altars and statues standing in niches between supporting pilasters. A grille with an elliptical arch which supports the upper choir separates the nave from the nuns' choir. The choir terminates in an apse, at the far end of which is a sumptuous altar of gilt wood.⁴⁹ Gimach perfected to a remarkable degree the mature architectural baroque, which differs considerably from the Italian and Spanish baroque. It is particularly Portuguese; the style, *Joannino* as it is known in Portugal, is a fully-fledged national art-form, elegant and gracious, and all the more extraordinary when

47. de Carvalho, 259.

48. Pedro Dias, *Mosteiro de Arouca*, Edicoes Portuguesas de Artes e Turismo Lda., Coimbra 1980, p. 30.

49. Georges Pillement, *Unknown Portugal*, English Translation, London 1967, pp. 214-215.

the hard granite of the north of the country is employed.⁵⁰ The best contemporary painters, sculptors, decorators and gilders embellished Gimach's work. Gimach's Arouca church of the Monastery of St Peter has now been declared a national monument by the Portuguese Ministry of Culture.

In 1710, Gimach was involved in a curious incident when a satiric pamphlet, full of venom against some members of the Portuguese nobility, was secretly printed and distributed in Lisbon. It alleged that some nobles of Portugal were not altogether free of Jewish, mulatto or Moorish blood. The matter was taken before the dreaded Portuguese Inquisition, and one witness declared that "It was a stranger by the name of Carlo Gimach who had found a copy of the pamphlet in a desk in the study of the Marquis de Fontes and, from further investigations, it was suspected that its author was a certain friar named Gaspar Barreto".⁵¹

Gimach became so well-known in Lisbon that, besides enjoying the protection of the Marquis de Fontes, he succeeded in penetrating the inner circle reserved for the Chaplain-General of the King, Don Nuno de Cunha, later to become one of the severest Portuguese Inquisitors and finally a Prince of the Church of Rome.

In 1712, de Fontes was appointed Portuguese Ambassador to Pope Clement XI and left Lisbon for Rome soon after. A haughty man with a pompous title, he took with him his large family and an imposing retinue of courtiers, poets, artists, confidants and domestic staff. On the eve of his departure, he succeeded in obtaining an allowance of more than 20,000 cruzados, and "for his own needs, he took with him a substantial sum in gold ingots over and above his income so as to be able to lead a tranquil life, befitting the lustre of his position and of the Court which he represented".⁵² Gimach, his constant companion, artistic adviser and confidant, left the Portuguese capital with the Marquis on the Genoese vessel *Senhora das Vinhas* and, after a perilous voyage and a forced stop in Cagliari, the ambassador and his retinue reached Rome. Gimach

50. David Wright and Patrick Swift, *Minho and North Portugal — A Portrait and a Guide*, London 1968, p. 156.

51. Manuel Rodrigues Simoes Junior, *In Defesa de Arouca*, no. 9, 25 June 1955.

52. de Carvalho, 284.

was offered comfortable living quarters in the sumptuous embassy of Portugal situated, Ciantar tells us, "in the Strada del Corso opposite Piazza Colonna".⁵³ From the famous maps of Rome drawn by Nolli in 1748, the Palace could be easily identified as the Palazzo Spada, now the site of the Galleria Colonna.⁵⁴

Gimach's artistic and architectural activities in Portugal and Rome revived an old relationship in the cultural and artistic connections between the Order of St John in Malta and Portugal.

As far back as 1530, Fra Diego Perez de Malfreise, a Portuguese military architect, was called from Syracuse by Grand Master Philippe Villiers de L'Isle Adam (1530-1534), along with a number of masons and carpenters, for the purpose of modifying Fort St Angelo and the Grand Master's residence in the same Fort.⁵⁵ De Malfreise also restored the church of St Julian's in l'Isola, later known as Senglea.

A painter by the name of Manuel Pereira is recorded, in a manuscript preserved at the National Library of Malta written by an anonymous Capuchin friar and subsequently copied by Conte Saverio Marchese, as having been to Malta towards the middle of the seventeenth century. During his stay here, he is said to have painted a *Nativity of the Virgin* for the small church at Mtaħleb in 1657, another painting of *San Alessio* for a church of the same name (now no longer extant) and later taken also to Mtaħleb, a *St Rocco* for the Mdina Cathedral after the plague of 1675, as well as the old altar-piece of St Bartholomew at Gharghur parish church, after a drawing by Mattia Preti.⁵⁶

The remarkable strides of art in Malta during the grandmastership of Antonio Manoel de Vilhena (1722-1736) and of Manuel Pinto de Fonseca (1741-1773) are perhaps the strongest link in the Portuguese connection but are, of course, outside the scope of this paper.

53. Ciantar, p. 579.

54. Gianbattista Nolli, *Nuova Pianta di Roma*, Roma 1748.

55. Giacomo Bosio, *Dell'Istoria della Sacra Religione*, Roma 1621-1629, part 3, p. 85.

56. NLM, Lib. Ms 1123; Achille Ferres, *Descrizione Storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo*, Malta 1888, p. 476; Giuseppe Calleja, *The Works of Art in the Churches of Malta*, Malta 1881, p. 105.

In Portugal, in the town of Estumoz, the church and convent of the 'Misericordia' were founded by the Knights of St John in 1539⁵⁷ and later converted into a hospital. The north portal of the church of Sao Cristovao, built during the reign of King Manuel, still bears the eight-pointed Maltese cross.

The Priory of Leca, at Leca do Balio, to which the Portuguese knight Correia de Sousa belonged, was founded in the eleventh century, and rebuilt in the fourteenth.⁵⁸ Several Portuguese knights of the Order who were attached to this Priory were buried in its church.⁵⁹

Another convent, built by the Knights of St John in 1538, is found at Flor de Rosa,⁶⁰ while in the town of Unhao, one can still see a Romanesque church which dates from the twelfth century with a fine three-pointed portal in the facade with stupendous capitals.⁶¹ In the tympanum the Maltese cross is framed by a knotted cross, which is the symbol of eternal life.

The presence of the Marquis de Fontes and of Carlo Gimach in Rome was instrumental in satisfying the Portuguese King's artistic inclinations, and his infatuation for collecting antiques and works of art. With Gimach's constant advice, de Fontes was able to purchase from the numerous outlets in Rome 'fine tapestries, excellent drawings ... paintings by famous Masters, medals, sculptures and a silver model of the Fountain of the Four Rivers of Piazza Navona, as well as plans and models of the principal churches and palaces of Rome', which all went to adorn the King's Royal Palace in Lisbon.⁶²

For services rendered to the Crown, Gimach was invested with the Portuguese honour of 'The Habit of Christ' in 1714, and became a Knight of the Order of Christ in 1716.⁶³

In the same year, the Portuguese Ambassador, imitating the custom of the time then prevalent in many European capitals, made

57. Cedric Salter, *Portugal*, London 1970, p. 99.

58. Pillement, 40.

59. *Ibid.*, 40.

60. *Ibid.*, 40.

61. *Ibid.*, 40.

62. *Ibid.*, 40.

63. *Ibid.*, 296.

APPLAUSO GENETLIACO
 ALLA REALE ALTEZZA
 DEL SIGNOR
 INFANTE
 DI PORTOGALLO,
 DA CANTARSI NEL PALAZZO
 DELL'ECCELENTISSIMO SIGNORE
 MARCHESE DI FONTES
*Ambasciadore Straordinario della Maestà
 Portoghese alla Santità di N. S. Papa*
 CLEMENTE XI.
 POSTO IN MUSICA
 DAL SIGNOR DOMENICO SCARLATTI
Maestro di Cappella di Sua Eccellenza.



In Lucca per Girolamo Rabetti. 1714.
 Con licenza de' Superiori.

The title page of the cantata written by Carlo Gimach in 1714

his official entry in the City. He entrusted Gimach with the design and decoration of a number of artistic coaches of which Ciantar gives us a colourful description. "The sumptuous coaches", narrates Ciantar, "were decorated with hieroglyphics and other symbols representing the various provinces subject to His Portuguese Majesty; the first coach was decorated by Gimach with two large marine horses in homage to the King's title of Lord of Navigation, of which that Monarch is extremely proud. The floor of the coach was decorated in chequer-board fashion with inlaid squares of ebony and ivory as a tribute to the King of one of his overseas provinces, Brazil; the first four coaches were adorned with fineries of lace and exquisite embroidery and gold fringes; all in such a manner that the sum of 90,000 Roman scudi was spent on that occasion".⁶⁴

When the heir to the throne of Portugal was born in 1714, the Embassy in Rome was the scene of great activities, and the Palazzo Spada was illuminated by torches placed in its balconies and windows. Gimach repeated his idea for an 'architectural machine' which had given him much fame in Portugal years before. For the newly-born Infante of Portugal he built and decorated a reproduction of the Temple of Circe in the centre of Piazza Colonna. For a number of days it was the centre of attraction and drew thousands of visitors when, to the delight of the Roman populace, it was turned into a brilliant spectacle of pyrotechnics.⁶⁵

For this special occasion, Gimach the poet wrote the words for a *Cantata* with the long title *Applauso Genetliaco ...*, in translation *A Homage on the Birth of The Royal Highness of the Signor Infante of Portugal to be Sung in the Palace of The Most Excellent Lord Marquis of Fontes, Ambassador Extraordinary of His Portuguese Majesty to His Highness Our Lord Pope Clement XI, set to Music by Signor Domenico Scarlatti, Maestro di Cappella to His Excellency*, printed by Girolamo Rabetti in Lucca in 1714. This libretto for a *Cantata*, lightly described by Ciantar as a *Serenata*, was published anonymously, and it is most probably for this reason that I searched for a copy in vain for a long time in the main libraries and archives in

64. Ciantar, 579.

65. Ciantar, 580.

Rome and Lisbon, until last year I was fortunate enough to trace it, indexed only under its title, in a Rome Library. The book is considered so rare that I was not allowed to have a photocopy of it made in one particular library, but finally succeeded in obtaining one from the only other library which holds a copy of the book. The possibility that there may be a copy in some private collection in Malta cannot be excluded, but it certainly does not form part of the holdings of our National Library.⁶⁶

Gimach's libretto is a representation, after the fashion of the day, of the often-told Homeric tale of Circe, daughter of the Sun, of Ulysses, the hero of the Trojan War and of the *Odyssey*, and of Aurora, the Goddess of Dawn and Harbinger of the Coming Light of the Day. Domenico Scarlatti's music of Gimach's *Cantata* was sung by three voices, according to Ciantar, 'the most excellent that could be found in Rome' with instrumental accompaniment.⁶⁷ The part of Circe was sung by Caterina Lelli Mossi, Aurora by Paola Alari and Ulisse by Vittorio Chiccheri.⁶⁸ Gimach, the author of the *Cantata*, must have been very familiar with Greek classical mythology and the overall treatment betrays a good knowledge of the classics. But the whole was an act of dutiful submission to King John of Portugal, as may be evinced from the concluding words of the *Cantata*:

*O Gran GIOVANNI, o gran Genitore
Ecco, ch'è giunto il tempo all' Impero
All' Grand' Avo promesso dal Ciel,
Tua pietade, tuo maschio valore
Spianeranno il difficil sentiero
Del Gran Figlio con braccio fedel.*⁶⁹

66. Since this paper was written in 1986, I came across another copy of the *Applauso Genetliaco* in the archives of an Academy in Rome.

67. Ciantar, 580.

68. *Applauso Genetliaco alla Reale Altezza del Signor Infante di Portogallo, da cantarsi nel Palazzo dell' Eccellentissimo Signor Marchese di Fontes, Ambasciadore Straordinario della Maestà Portoghese alla Santità di Nostro Signore Papa Clemente XI, Posto in Musica dal Signor Domenico Scarlatti, Maestro di Cappella di Sua Eccellenza*, In Lucca, per Girolamo Rabetti, 1714, p. 3.

69. *Applauso*, p. 9.

It is no small tribute to Gimach that Domenico Scarlatti, one of the most famous composers of the first half of the 18th century, should set his libretto to music. Scarlatti had entered the service of Maria Casimira, the exiled Polish Queen, in 1709 and became *maestro di cappella* of the Basilica Giulia in 1713. In 1714, soon after Casimira's departure from Rome, Scarlatti received a similar appointment with the Portuguese Ambassador to the Pope, the Marquis of Fontes. Scarlatti resigned his post in Rome in 1719, when he was invited to Portugal to become *maestro di cappella* of the increasingly opulent patriarchal chapel in Lisbon.⁷⁰ Unfortunately, the music by Scarlatti for Gimach's *Applauso Genetliaco* has been lost.

The other literary work by Gimach, also mentioned by Ciantar, was a *Dissertazione* written in Malta titled *La Virtù Forestiera all' Illmo Signore Prior di Navarra, e Siniscalco di Sua Eminenza, il Signor D. Giovanni de Galdiano*, consisting of a manuscript of 23 pages.⁷¹ This work, as far as can be ascertained, has not yet come to light.

The last chapter in the life and works of Gimach opens with the arrival in Rome of his close friend and protector Nuno di Cunha de Attayde, formerly Chaplain-General to the Court of King John, Portuguese Inquisitor-General, and now a Cardinal created by Clement XI in 1712 with the title of Cardinal-Protector of the Roman Church of Sant'Anastasia. The church, standing at the back of a small square close to the Circus Maximus, belongs to a very early foundation, dating back to the time of Constantine. It was already in existence in the 4th century, and was rebuilt and restored many times. The present façade, one of the very few in Rome with two western bell towers, dates to about 1636 when it was completely reconstructed by the Florentine architect Luigi Arrigucci (?-1639).

Cardinal de Cunha, well-acquainted with Gimach's architectural abilities in the Court of King John in Portugal, commissioned him to restore St Anastasia which was in a deplorable

70. Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Macmillan, London 1954, ed. Eric Blom, vol. vii, p. 457.

71. Ciantar, 580.

state at the time he was vested with its titular possession. Gimach's restoration saved the church from complete destruction and modified its basilican plan into a baroque church, with a main nave, two aisles with side altars, transepts and a semi-circular apse. At the western end of the nave, there are two L-shaped pilasters which are repeated at its far end under the triumphal arch, with a row of four pilasters in between. The spaces between the pilasters have alternate semi-circular and flat arches, a composition which creates a progression of elements which advance simultaneously on both sides from the start of the nave towards the centre.⁷² This makes a very pleasing architectural arrangement which Gimach further improves by the addition of grey marble columns attached to the end pilasters, with marble of a pinkish colour in the middle columns. The main nave has a flat timber ceiling, while the side aisles and the transept are cross-vaulted. Richard Krautheimer in his monumental work *Corpus Christianorum Romae*, published in 1937, says of Sant'Anastasia: "This magnificent architectural composition is the result of the transformation carried out in 1721-1722 by Carlo Gimach, the Maltese architect of Cardinal de Cunha."⁷³

One of the side chapels, built at the expense of Gimach, was dedicated to St George and St Publius, St George being the patron saint of the Order of Christ of which Gimach was a knight, and St Publius described by Gimach himself as 'my bishop and fellow citizen'. The chapel has a fine painting of the two saints, the work of the French painter Etienne, or Stefano as he was known in Rome, Parrocel.

A commemorative marble tablet, not an epitaph as has sometimes been said, was composed and set up by Gimach himself on completion of the restoration of the church in 1722. The inscription, in fine Latin, says: 'Carlo Gimach, born in Malta of a family originally of Palestine, descendant of the ancient and orthodox dynasty of Rama, through whose diligence and care this

72. Mariano Armellini, *Le Chiese di Roma dal secolo IV al XIX*, Roma 1942, p. 651.

73. Richard Krautheimer, *Corpus Basilicarum Christianorum Romae*, Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, Città del Vaticano, 1937, p. 46.

temple, dilapidated and in a state of collapse through the ravages of time, was restored to a more beautiful form, caused this chapel dedicated to the holy martyrs George and Publius, his bishop and fellow-citizen, to be erected at his own expense, with the consent of Cardinal Nuno da Cunha and by concession of the Canons in the year of Our Lord 1722'.

From a document preserved at the Cathedral Archives, Mdina, we learn that Gimach acted as intermediary for the purchase of some marble blocks and was responsible for the supervision, while in Rome in 1725, of the marble work for an altar commissioned by the Dean of the Cathedral, Don Giovanni Battista Balsani, a wealthy priest and a benefactor of the Cathedral.⁷⁴

Gimach has been erroneously described also as a painter by many past and present Maltese writers who, however, have never quoted primary sources to substantiate their theory. Nor does Gimach figure as such in the many references to him in Portuguese Encyclopaedias and Art Dictionaries. It is particularly significant that Ciantar, who knew him personally and had met him often in Rome, makes no reference to Gimach as a painter. Likewise, his biographer Ayres de Carvalho, who consulted the main Portuguese archives of the time when Gimach was working in Portugal, does not have one single mention of a painting ascribed to Gimach.

The answer to the whole matter is not far to seek. It is obviously a case of confused identities with Don Carlo Zimech, a priest-painter from Żebbuġ, who was born when Gimach was already forty-five years old. Paintings attributed to Gimach were probably the work of Zimech. Among these, perhaps the most important, is a painting of the *Immaculate Conception* at Cospicua.⁷⁵ It was originally hung in the church between 1738 and 1759, that is long after the death of Gimach in 1730. Zerafa attributes the Cospicua painting to 'Don Carlo Gimach of Żebbuġ', who obviously could not have been the subject of this paper, since he was neither a priest nor did he hail from Żebbuġ.⁷⁶ Calleja is completely silent about

74. C.A.M., *Conto del Denaro mandato da Malta a Carlo Gimach per fare un altare di marmo ...* I am indebted to Canon John Azzopardi, Curator of the Cathedral Museum, for drawing my attention to these papers.

75. Ferres, 297.

76. Calleja, 177, quoting Stefano Zerafa.

the painting, while present writers like Cutajar, Espinosa Rodriguez and Alexander Bonnici cast serious doubts on the true identity of the painter, and suggest the existence of a mix-up of names and identities. Mario Buhagiar says outrightly: "His (Gimach's) association with the Cospicua *Immaculate Conception* may, therefore, be considered entirely fictitious".⁷⁷

To Gimach has also been ascribed the painting of *San Carlo* at the church of Our Lady of Sorrows in Pietà by Ferres⁷⁸ among others, but the late Edward Sammut has definitely recognized the painting as the work of Don Carlo Zimech, whose initials DCZ appear on the canvas.⁷⁹ Other paintings at the Żejtun and Żebbuġ parish churches,⁸⁰ as well as one at Xaghra, Gozo, have also been attributed to Gimach, but contemporary art critics like Dominic Cutajar and others are very reluctant to agree with this attribution.⁸¹

Research in the volumes of correspondence between Grand Master Vilhena and the Order's ambassador in Rome, which I have recently carried out, has revealed that Gimach was responsible for extensive restoration works in the Palace of the Order in Via dei Condotti in the 1720s.⁸²

Carlo Gimach died on the last day of December 1730 at the age of eighty years and was buried in the chapel of St George and St Publius in the church of Sant'Anastasia.

77. Mario Buhagiar, *The Iconography of the Maltese Islands 1400-1900*, Malta 1988, p. 119.

78. Ferres, 246.

79. Edward Sammut, "Church of Our Lady 'della Pietà': Its History and Art Treasures", *Times of Malta*, 13 July 1950.

80. Ferres, 593.

81. Dominic Cutajar, "Carlo Gimach, Artist Malti tas-Seicento", *Il-Mument*, 23 January 1983.

82. An extension of this paper, including a long reference to Gimach's work in the Palace of the Order in Rome, is being planned for publication.