A SHORT NOTE ON THE ARTIST
GIUSEPPE HYZLER (1787 - 1858)

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Towards the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Rome provided an artistic forum for what came to be known later as the Nazarene Movement. This was a quasi-religious Order with a membership of German expatriates mostly living as a brotherhood of Christian artists. The Order settled in Rome at about 1810 in the former Convent of St Isidoro where they inaugurated the community’s headquarters.

The artistic aim of this Nazarene Movement was principally to restore the ideals of an inherently religious attitude towards artistic work. Hence they discarded Baroque, which they thought to be insincere, to imitate rather the paintings of Fra Angelico who had made a name in the Early Renaissance. According to them, it was his paintings that were pregnant with deeply religious sentiments and emotions.

The heart of the Nazarene Movement was Fredrick Overbeck (1789-1869). It was he who was so adamant against Baroque aesthetic ideals and considered them pagan. Giuseppe Hyzler, in imitation to Overbeck and Franz Pfarr, his keen disciple, was the principal artist, mostly-known locally, to advocate similar philosophical attitudes to painting. Under Roman tuition, he drank of the fountain established by the Umbrian School, mostly Perugino and early Raphael. Thus, through him, Malta started to feel the impact of this Nazarene Movement. As its leading advocate, Hyzler strove might and main to cleanse sacred art from pagan impurities. In imitation to Overbeck, he hoped to instill in Malta reverential spiritual emotions that would guide the faithful closer to God. But new trends in arts take a long time for their establishment and, though he nearly succeeded in deviating the reigning course of ingrained art accomplished earlier by other artists through several artistic accomplishments commissioned by ecclesiastical authorities, his

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puritanical attitudes to the prevailing Baroque were thought to bring about disastrous consequences, at least to a section of Malta's artistic patrimony especially in St John's Church. Outrageous attacks in the papers reverberated across the island and finally stopped the artistic reforms which Hylzer tried to introduce locally. Still, Truth and Beauty, as expressed by the Nazarene Movement, survived Hylzer for so long after his demise that they rendered Hylzer's stature in local artistic talents most singular in the history of the Maltese cultural domain.

Profuse information already exists - both published and unpublished - that discusses Hylzer's artistic accomplishments and their impact on local artists who, like him, were followers of the Nazarene Movement. This short paper is meant to bring to light the unpublished primary sources of many of his late commissions with the ecclesiastical authorities. Despite the ailment which interfered with his productivity in later years, he succeeded to bring to perfection several important altarpieces, perhaps through the assistance of the artist Giuseppe Calleja (1828-1915). 3

The search for a studio
Giuseppe Hylzer spent about eight years of continuous study and experience in Rome studying art as then expressed by the Nazarene Movement. He returned to Malta in 1822 and set up a studio at No 3, Queen's Square, Valletta. 4

For unspecified personal reasons, on 18 January 1838 he rented the house situated at No 31, Saint Zachary Street, Valletta from Father Francesco Borg Olivier for a fixed period of two years at 325 scudi per annum. 5 Rent was payable in six-month instalments in advance. The lease was renewable for a further period of two years at the same amount if that proved acceptable to Hylzer. The amount of rent involved may suggest that Hylzer occupied this tenement to serve both as living quarters and a studio for work. By 1845, however, there was another change because his studio was then established in some rooms at the Auberge d'Italie where he both lived and worked. 6

Hylzer occupies a very unique and remarkable position in the history of Maltese art. His artistic supremacy dominated our island for a rather long period of time, 1822 to 1858. Apart from these three quoted premises, he may have rented other places to serve as his studios.

Hylzer's first known commission
Hardly had Hylzer returned to Malta from Rome on 19 August 1822, 7 when he received his first local commission, the painting of Our Lady of the Rosary (Plate 1) hanging in the north transept of the Dominican Church of Our Lady of Porto Salvo in Valletta. 8 On 15 September 1822, the members of the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary established at this church held a meeting under its Rector, Magistrat Bartolomeo Scifo who, together with

7. Cutajar, 251.
8. In the 19th century, this Priory could boast of two other paintings, The Visitation (Plate 3) and The Patriarch St Dominic (Plate 3), produced respectively by Pietro Paolo Caruana (1794-1852) and Tommaso Madonna (1803-64), two prominent artists living contemporaneously with Giuseppe Hylzer and who, like him, also shared similar artistic aspirations, namely those of the Nazarene Movement. In 1834, when the last stages in the construction of the Dominican Church were completed, it was not furnished with an altarpiece representing The Patriarch St Dominic. Consequently, on 9 October, Father Salvatore di Paleta, the Prior representing the Dominican community, commissioned Tommaso Madonna for the painting of the Patriarch in the full garb of a friar as it is usually worn by the Dominican Order. In size, the picture was to take the place of a smaller one, and be proportionate to the side-chapel on the south transept of the church. The community was first to present the desired theme to the artist for discussion purposes and, following that, he had to show them some sketches for their eventual approval. Madonna agreed to provide the necessary materials but stressed that, on completion, the painting would be valued at 1,000 scudi. He was so sure of an artistic accomplishment that he intended calling other local and foreign artists from Rome for their eventual approval and criticism and, in case they thought that the payment of 1,000 scudi was rather exorbitant, he would take back the painting and cancel the obligation. Madonna was exceedingly convinced that any artist called to review his work would appraise it at 1,000 scudi. His devotion towards the Patriarch made him minimize the burden on the friary by deducting 750 scudi from the lump sum. His request for 250 scudi was entailed in expenses in the purchase of canvas, oils and other needed materials. On behalf of the community, the Prior, ranking Madonna as a respected artist of high talents and a peculiar devotee of the Patriarch, thanked him for his generous offer. He was thinking that this painting would boost his fame and talents all over the island, probably at a time when he had just finished his studies in Rome: NAV, Not. V. Portelli, 840/14 (1833-34), ff. 314v-318 (1834). This painting was subsequently removed from its formerly-assigned altar and replaced by another one painted in 1898 by Giuseppe Cali. Presently, it hangs in the corridor of the first storey of the friary. E. Fiorentino and L. A. Grasso, Giuseppe Cali (1846-1940), Malta 1991, 54-6. See also F. Mical, L’Elégia di Rubruqis Kattari, Malta 1982, 65 and Fiorentino, 81-2. Caruana's titular painting in the same church came about in this way. On 24 December 1850 Father Giuseppe Bugajia, representing the Dominican community, commissioned Caruana to paint a representation of The Visitation of Our Lady to St Elizabeth for the High Altar. The artist had to bear all the expenses incurred in the purchasing of canvas, oils, colours and whatever

3. For further details on this artist, see J. Calleja, Giuseppe Calleja 1828-1915 The Man The Teacher The Artist, Malta 1992.
4. Espinosa Rodríguez, 99.
5. (Notarial) Archives (Valletta), Notary, T. C. Sciortino, MS. 1064/12, ff. 61-62.
its deputies Conte Vincenzo Fontani and Magistrate Giuseppe Zahra and its procurator Doctor Giuseppe Antonio Succhet, were to consult and discuss the matter in detail with Giuseppe Hyzler who was chosen to execute this painting.9

On the 23rd instant, the delegation reported back to the members of the Confraternity that they had met Hyzler who presented them with a sketch of the desired painting and the price he was asking. The members suggested a formal deed with the artist, which was drawn up on 27 September with five main clauses:

i. The artist obliged himself to paint on canvas measuring 13 palmi 2 oncie in height and 8 palmi 9 oncie in width the picture of Our Lady of the Rosary for the side chapel of the Dominican Church according to the sketch.

ii. The painting to be displayed, besides Our Lady with baby Jesus, two other saints namely, St Dominic and St Catherine of Siena exposing the wounds of the Stigmata.

iii. The artist was at liberty to add little angels but no other figures. He was relieved from painting the medallions depicting the Mysteries of the Rosary. Moreover, he had to abide by the decisions already taken by the Confraternity.

iv. Before starting the actual painting, Hyzler had to present a sketch in bright dark colours on a cardboard for examination purposes by the members.

v. The Confraternity would bear the expenses of the canvas and its frame.

else was needed for its completion. The painting, fixed at a price of 1,000 scudi, was to be ready by the following 4 August 1851 and to have equal dimensions to the one which was going to be replaced. The community paid 250 scudi in advance, promising to settle the balance within four years but keeping the right to pay other instalments during this period. Meanwhile, Lorenzo Pace guaranteed to return all monies paid to the artist in case of a default on his promise: NAV, Not. V. Portelli, R 402/20 (1846-50), ff. 145-146v (1850). Ten months later, on 7 October 1851, with the painting already in place, the Dominican community agreed with Caruana to pay interest at 6% per annum on the indebted balance of 750 scudi, still due to furn if it fell in arrears beyond the stipulated four years: ibid., R 402/21 (1851-55), ff. 125v-126v (1851). The issue was soon solved because on 17 October Ginevra Tommi, then living in Valletta, paid the debt herself to Caruana who agreed to give her private lessons and couch her in artistic design. The Dominican community promised to repay her within the remaining period: ibid., ff. 131v-133v. However, this took longer than anticipated for it was only on 19 February 1858 that Tommi received the remaining balance of 389 scudi 10 tari 17 grani to settle the indebted amount and accrued interest: NAV, Not. F. S. Macaffle, R 389/43, pp. 36-40. The Visitazione bore Caruana's inventiveness for it reached the peak of his imagination. It was one of his last commitments because, unfortunately, he died in April 1852.


The total price charged was 1,000 scudi of which 300 scudi, together with the expenses incurred for the canvas and the frame, were to be paid within a month from the following feast of the Resurrection. The remaining unpaid balance would fall due as soon as the work was completed. Because of his devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary, Hyzler was ready to deduct the amount of 300 scudi from the full sum to the benefit of the Confraternity.

For some inexplicable reason, perhaps due to lack of funds or some artistic discrepancies between the first sketch and the final picture delivered, this commission took some ten years to be executed. In October 1832, Giuseppe Hyzler sued the Confraternity for the sum of 344 scudi 2 tari 8 grani which included 44 scudi 2 tari 8 grani for the canvas and the frame together with ensuing court expenses.10 On 16 November, he presented a garnish for order for a sum of money and items of gold and silver belonging to the Confraternity.11 They were then under the custody of the procurator Dr Filippo Falzon who had taken over responsibility from Conte Vincenzo Fontani. On the 22nd instant, the court condemned Falzon to pay the contentious amount.12 The court ruled as well that the actual painting revealed all the contents of the sketch and this in accordance with clause four of the deed. Within less than two weeks, on 3 December 1832, Falzon abided by the court's judgement and paid Hyzler the sum of 371 scudi 8 tari 4 grani.13

Once the painting was completed, the Confraternity was still indebted to the artist for the outstanding balance of 400 scudi. Before effecting payment, the Confraternity held two separate meetings, on 16 April and on 1 July 1834, to discuss and deliberate on this issue and on the execution of the medallions depicting the Mysteries of the Rosary.14 Hyzler suggested that he could paint the Mysteries separately in bass relief on a wooden ornamented base looking like marble and fit to be placed around the painting. These were to resemble the presented sketches and be executed for 320 scudi. As enough funds were available, the Confraternity instructed its officials to finalize the project with the competent spiritual authorities.15

13. This amount included 300 scudi meant to be paid in anticipation of the deed of 27 September 1822, 44 scudi 2 tari 8 grani for the framed canvas and 27 scudi 5 tari 16 grani in court expenses: NAV, Not. T. C. Sciortino, MS. 1064/8, ff. 1357-1358v.
14. The deliberations of these two meetings are recorded with the deed: ibid., MS. 1064/10, ff. 737-738.
15. Unfortunately, the documentation and the design were lost when the archives of the Oratory of the Holy Rosary received a direct hit from aerial bombardments during World War II.
On 31 July 1834, Hyzler received from Falzon, procurator of the Confraternity, the remaining balance of 400 scudi. At last both parties were satisfied. Yet it appears that the medallions of the Holy Mysteries of the Rosary were never executed because the original painting still hangs in the north transept of the Dominican Church without them.

Schematically, the painting shows a throne placed at the centre of the canvas. Sitting majestically on it is Our Lady with baby Jesus, both of whom betray the religiosity of the Nazarener Movement. Just underneath is a triad of musical angels playing reverently to their Queen in her beatific glory. At the sides, as requested by the Confraternity, one can admire the lucid composition of the two saints, St Dominic and St Catherine of Siena, the two pillars that had spread, in their lifetime, the true devotion to the Rosary.

The altarpiece representing St Ignatius of Loyola and Our Lady of Manresa

When the present Jesuit Retreat-House dedicated to Our Lady of Manresa was built during the first half of the nineteenth century outside Rabat, Gozo, it was known as Santa Casa di San Calcedonio. The painting of the altarpiece of its chapel dedicated to St Ignatius of Loyola with the Virgin Lady of Manresa was entrusted to Giuseppe Hyzler some time before 1833.

On 15 July 1833, a few days before this Retreat-House was officially blessed, Francesco Frendo, a Gozitan from Gharb, promised to pay to Giuseppe Hyzler the sum of 100 scudi in part payment towards the altarpiece at the rate of 12 scudi 6 tari per year until its final settlement was effected. The first instalment was due the following October. The artist was to consign the work to the person delegated by the Director of the House, Father Gianbatista Ellul, to receive it.

It is not clear when this painting was actually handed over to the House of Retreat. But it was only on 19 August 1842, nine years after the agreement of 1833, that Giuseppe Hyzler declared to having received the full amount promised to him by Francesco Frendo in yearly instalments. Most probably the amount of 100 scudi indicates the final payment due to Hyzler for this

16. Dr Falzon encashed this amount from a larger sum of money which had been deposited at the Monte di Pietà. It consisted of two legacies bequeathed earlier to the Confraternity – 600 scudi from Giuseppe Mallia and 500 scudi from Clara Mallia: NAV, Not. T. C. Scirotino, MS. 1064/10, ff. 735-736; A. Ferras, Descrizione Storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo, Facsimile Ed., Malta 1985, 571.
17. NAV, Not. C. Frendo, MS. 840/82, f. 766.
18. NAV, Not. V. P. Frendo, MS. 843/8, ff. 249-249.
commission. It is said that the painting could have been inspired by the clear Umbrian environment to which Hyzler was exposed under the influence of the Movement. The picture was executed by Hyzler at the peak of his powers.

This painting has been described by Professor Buhagiar in the following terms:

‘... It is also a key work of the Nazarener School. Meticulously worked out with a miniaturist’s precision of touch, it evokes a mood of chaste purity reflected in the limpid quality of the light and in the subdued autumnal tonality of the gently modulated colours. Nothing much disturbs the placidity of the idyllic landscape in which Ignatius has his mystic experience but the work pulsates with a poetry that is tinged with a romantic response to nature. The Virgin is meek and spiritually intense, while the coolly articulated angel, who fills the right hand corner of the canvas with a mannered aristocratic grace, is hauntingly beautiful.’ 20

Some works of Hyzler’s final years

Achille Ferres mentions at least ten paintings to have been sketched and directed by Giuseppe Hyzler 21 but assisted in their execution by Giuseppe Calleja who helped him in his final years. It seems that it was habitual of Hyzler to collaborate with other artists including his brother Vincenzo (1813-49), Michele Bellanti (1808-83), Salvatore Micallef (1820-89) and Antonio Faison (1805-65). 22 However, Calleja’s co-operative relationship outlived that of the others.

Dominic Cutajar states that this practice of an assisted joint effort between Nazaréner artists was quite regular. Hyzler resorted to it too, especially after 1832, partly because of an unknown infirmity — no better defined than as ‘a nervous condition’ — which prevented him from prolonged physical exertion in painting. 23 Regarding this malady another author, Joe Calleja, claims that Hyzler’s helper-artist Calleja, started to observe and take cognizance of his master’s behaviour as early as 1848. These could be ‘probably the first ominous signs of a malady’. 24

21. Ferres, 216, 301, 216, 326, 427, 545 and 545.
23. Ibid., 216.
24. Calleja, 35.

Hyzler was highly popular then, so he would not expose himself to risk and allow his ailment endanger his artistic commitments with the public. Among the altarpieces undertaken during his illness ‘characterized by a trembling of the hands’ 25 that had impaired and weakened his painting abilities, one finds St Ursula with an Angel in the Cathedral Church of Gozo, Our Lady of Soccorso in St Augustine’s Church Valletta, Our Lady of Consolation in Lija Parish Church (Plate 4), two paintings representing Our Lady with St Cajetan and Our Lady of Charity in St Paul’s Church Valletta, Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Floriana Parish Church, The Visitation of Our Lady to St Elizabeth in the Franciscan Friars Minor Church Rabat, Malta, St Roque and the Martyrdom of the Apostles Peter and Paul in Attard Parish Church and two small paintings depicting The Sacred Heart of Jesus and The Sacred Heart of Mary in St Catherine Church of the Langue of Italy in Valletta. The collaborating artist, Giuseppe Calleja, comments in his published writings that, while Hyzler was compelled to execute only the design, he himself, having imbibed his master’s talents during such a long time of joint work, would finish the painting on his own. However, a close look at the signatures commissioning most of these obligations and receipts thereof reveals a rather steady hand. Had Hyzler been suffering from a really acute ailment, he would have appointed a procurator or representative to act in his name. 26

In a sitting held on 18 July 1848, the Augustinian community of Valletta discussed the implementation of a project to decorate their church. As a result, they contacted the Hyzler artists, Giuseppe and Vincenzo, 27 for a painting of an altarpiece dedicated to Our Lady of Help (Soccorso) and the restoration of two other damaged paintings. 28 Some two weeks later, on 3 August, the Hyzler artists accepted the commission. 29 This altarpiece had to contain the central figure of the Blessed Virgin holding baby Jesus, Pope St Gelasio, Blessed Cardinal and Archbishop Egidio, Bishop St Prospero, Blessed Agostino Novello, the Martyr St Antonino, son of the King of Frigia and nephew to King Teodoro of France and Duke and Count St Guglielmo as side figures. The artists were at liberty to insert other additions according to

25. For further details, see ibid., 36.
27. For further details on this artist, see Cutajar, 258-59.
their personal better judgement for its enrichment and composition. As it was to be placed facing another painting representing Our Lady of Consolation, it was to have similar dimensions in height and width. The artists were to provide the required sheet of canvas, oils, colours and whatever else was needed in raw materials. The Augustinians expected a perfect painting completed within eighteen months, otherwise the artists forfeited 200 scudi from the agreed amount of 800 scudi. The prior of the Augustinian community, Father Giovanni Agostino Hyzler, bound himself to pay 200 scudi every three months, starting on the commencement of the work. A similar amount of 200 scudi was to be paid on condition that the work would have proceeded smoothly. The other two paintings specified for restoration because of their bad state represented The Annunciation (a faithful copy of the original by Giotto Bondone) and St Nicholas of Tolentino (by Mattia Preti) for an additional sum of 200 scudi becoming due on termination of the work.

As the artist Vincenzo died in 1849 at the age of 36 years, only a very short time after the acceptance of this commission, he could have had a very limited part in its execution, if at all. When completed, the altarpiece also contained three angels playing musical instruments on either side of the Blessed Virgin embracing her child on her bosom. The Virgin herself was also surrounded with other heads of angels conveying the idea that she is their queen. Just underneath her feet, there lies another adornment depicting a landscape. The figures of the three saints on either side of the scene remind the viewer that Our Lady is the Queen of all heavenly saints.

Three months following this commission, on 7 November 1848, another painting with the main theme on Our Lady but under the title of Consolation was entrusted to Giuseppe Hyzler for Lija Parish Church. He agreed with Paolo Attard, as the legally constituted procurator of architect Gaetano Xerri from Lija, to execute this picture within the least possible delay. The painting, besides the central figure of Our Lady, was to include St Augustine, St Monica, St Joachim and St Anne with an option of including St Ignatius of Loyola if space permitted. Otherwise, St Ignatius of Loyola had to be painted as a separate picture. The commission included also the gilding of the façade of the chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Consolation, where it was intended to hang the altarpiece bearing its name. Moreover, he was authorized to insert any appropriate changes in the gilding works that he thought were necessary. Hyzler agreed to receive 1,000 scudi for this commission payable as follows: 250 scudi within four days from the signature of the obligation, 500 scudi during the execution of the work, and the final lump sum of 250 scudi on the satisfactory termination of the work.

By 16 April 1851, the gilding of the façade of the chapel had been completed and the altarpiece hung in place. Hyzler received 500 scudi still due to him from Paolo Attard who, in turn, was to be reimbursed with a similar amount from Gaetano Xerri. Hyzler, on his part, was still bound to execute a small framed painting representing St Ignatius of Loyola for the same altar. Hyzler’s altarpiece depicts these figures: two angels are crowning Our Lady embracing her son; she is flanked by her parents St Anne and St Joachim and, partly in front of them, there lie the prostrate figures of St Augustine and St Monica paying homage to her. The central background depicts a landscape for decorative purposes.

On 13 December 1850, the members of the Confraternity of Our Lady of Charity founded in St Paul’s Shipwreck Church in Valletta met to discuss the renovation of their altarpiece. Discussions led to the appointment of a commission of three members to discuss the issue with Giuseppe Hyzler. He agreed to prepare the first outlines for demonstration and, if these basic sketches proved satisfactory, they would later be integrated in a finished composition of the altarpiece in oils. When the sketches were ready and referred to for comment, they proved satisfactory both to the Confraternity members and to other public critics or experts. Consequently, the Confraternity met again on 18 June 1851 to proceed with the discussion as far back as the first years of the 18th century; for further details, see V. Borg, ‘Il-Knisja Parrokkjali ta’ Hal Lija sal-Jum tal-Konsagrazzjoni Taghha’, in Il-Knisja Parrokkjali ta’ Hal Lija Storja – Arkitettura – Pittura, ed. V. Borg, Malta 1982, 57-9.

30. For further details on these paintings, see M. Cauchi, L-Istorja tal-Knisja ta’ Santa Wwistin il-Belt, Valletta, Malta 1997, 107-9 and 112. In 2002-03 the artist-restorer Emanuel Zammit from Zejtun completed the restoration process of the whole Augustinian church including the altarpieces.
32. This power of attorney was given to Paolo Attard from Valletta by architect Gaetano Xerri on 5 November 1848: ibid., ff. 1095-1098.
33. There had been a long tradition of veneration towards these saints in this parish church of Lija. Indeed a similar picture painted by Enrico Reynaud was provided for the veneration of the faithful.
34. Lija Parish Church can also boast of another altarpiece: Our Lady of Mount Carmel by Giuseppe Hyzler. It includes the figures of St Joseph and St Simon Stock to whom Our Lady gave the Scapular: ibid., 36-8.
35. On 27 November 1850, Hyzler stated that he had received from Paolo Attard the sum of 500 scudi in two equal instalments – the first towards 8 November 1848 and the second some months later: NAV, Not. S. Tanti, MS. 1099/28, ff. 1158-1158v.
37. The commission was made of Antonio Borg, Dr Tommaso Agius and the actual general procurator Dr Francesco Savoio Borg Olivier: NAV, Not. T. C. Sciortino, MS. 1094/26, ff. 1220-1220v.
of the issue at hand. Hyzler had asked for the sum of 875 scudi for his artistic work but, after some haggling, he agreed to allow a discount of 75 scudi. The amount charged was to be paid in three equal installments: the first one with the signing of the agreement, another one on termination of half the entrusted work, and the remaining balance as soon as the altarpiece was hung in the chapel.

Hyzler accepted this commission on 23 July 1851, thus agreeing to paint in oils and colour the altarpiece dedicated to Our Lady of Charity and insert the additional figures of those saints presented earlier in the sketches — Joseph, Philip Neri, Raphael, Alphonse, Francis of Gerolamo and the Holy Souls in Purgatory. The artist had to terminate the altarpiece within eighteen months and in dimensions it was to be equal to the one to be replaced. The commission members paid him the first installment of 266 scudi 8 tari on that same day. The delay of over two years for the second payment suggests that the execution and completion of this painting took much longer than expected. Perhaps, personal ailments prevented Hyzler from coping satisfactorily with the entrusted work or, maybe, the commissioners may have changed their opinion about the insertion of the saints agreed upon earlier, most probably that of the Holy Souls in Purgatory. It was only on 22 October 1853 that Hyzler received 300 scudi from the still outstanding balance of 533 scudi 4 tari. Finally, on 20 May 1854, he received the last amount of 230 scudi, having gratuitously allowed 3 scudi 4 tari to the Confraternity.

In the early years of the twentieth century, this altarpiece was fixed to the ceiling of the Capitular Hall in the Collegiate Church of St Paul’s Shipwreck in Valletta after it was removed from its place in the chapel dedicated to the same name. The figures of the painting are arranged in a symmetrical shape. Our Lady embracing her son sitting on her knees stands prominently in the centre of the altarpiece; on her head, floating clouds symbolize heaven.

St Joseph and St Philip Neri stand respectively to the right and to the left of the Virgin. The four figures underneath them on both sides represent the Archangel Raphael guiding Tobias home and Saints Alphonse and Francis of Gerolamo. Running through in the middle of the painting is a landscape, blooming with tall trees growing by a nearby rivulet meandering down the hills. The Holy Souls in Purgatory may be represented by the corpse which is being carried for burial by the white-robed people. Holy Mary and Jesus will deliver them from their suffering. Scripture narrates that young Tobias’s father used to bury the dead as an act of charity towards his neighbours.

Four years later, this Confraternity dedicated to Our Lady of Charity commissioned Hyzler to paint two separate pictures representing St Francis Xavier and St Jerome to be hung on either side of the altarpiece already painted by him. On 16 November 1854, they deputed Dr Giuseppe Cauchi and Dr Francesco Saverio Borg Olivieri to discuss this decision with the artist. A memorandum of understanding was drawn up between the parties and, after being discussed and approved by the Confraternity, they agreed to finalize it. It was duly signed on 1 December when Hyzler bound himself to paint the two pictures within eight months for a total sum of 300 scudi. Half the amount was to be paid upon their consignment and the other half after the lapse of one year. Within two years and ten months Hyzler had received all his dues because, on 15 October 1857, he stated that he had been paid in full.

Hyzler’s adept hand at depicting Our Lady so solemnly was proving successful with the local church authorities. On this occasion, 12 June 1854, the commission dealt with the Visitation, when the Virgin Mary set off to visit her cousin Elizabeth at her home. Giuseppe Hyzler agreed with Count Knight Vincenzo Manduca Piscopo Macedonia, the apostolic syndic representing the Franciscan Friars Minor Friary at Rabat, to depict those figures and elements as represented in the design already consented upon earlier between them. This altarpiece, to be completed within one year, was to be equal in dimensions and size to the one already hanging in the choir of the church. The artist had to bear the expenses for its transportation from his workshop to the church, to affix it to the gilded frame of the painting to be...
replaced and to hang it in its place. This commission entailed an expense of 54 pounds sterling 3 shillings 4 pence, equivalent to 650 scudi in Maltese currency. 48 Half this amount was to be paid within six months and the balance on the satisfactory termination of the altarpiece in accordance with the terms of the obligation. By 26 December 1854, the artist had received half the amount charged, that is, 27 pounds sterling 1 shilling 8 pence. Within ten months of the commissioning of this altarpiece, the work had been completed and, on 14 April 1855, the remaining balance was paid. 49

This painting of the Visitation is very elaborate. Around the top arch are depicted three angels, guardians to Our Lady. The angel in the middle bears what resembles a sheet of parchment with the Magnificat. Right underneath him there is a column, perhaps representing the entrance to Elizabeth's house. Elizabeth herself lies there, prostrate before Our Lady; her husband is looking surprised with crossed hands in a praying attitude. Our Lady, a bold figure to the left of them, is carrying a walking stick in her hand. This may bring to mind the long walk which she had to undertake and which made her very tired to reach Elizabeth's home. A range of hills covering the background enhances this trend of thought. Mary looks lovingly at both Elizabeth and Zachary. Behind her is Joseph, Mary's husband, standing and looking happily at them. He is also carrying a lily blossom in his hand, the emblem of purity.

By way of contrast to these paintings representing Our Lady under different titles, on 7 February 1855, Giuseppe Hyzler accepted a commission from Paolo Borg, nicknamed ta` Sant`Anton to depict, in oils on a canvas sheet measuring 9 palmi in height and 6 palmi in width, the picture of St Roque flanked by the Martyrdom of the Apostles St Peter and St Paul. 50

Most probably, this painting was executed because of some sacred vow to St Roque as protector against the plague, a fatal and contagious disease which ravaged Malta on a number of occasions. The artist was also bound to fix it in its assigned place on the first altar on the right hand side of the principal door of Attard Parish Church. The painting was to be completed by the end of the year, even earlier if at all possible, at a cost of 28 pounds sterling 6 shillings 8 pence to be duly paid on its satisfactory completion. 51

This commission was fully complied with, for on 22 October 1855, Hyzler stated that he had received all his dues. 52 The painting depicts the central figure of St Roque with the usual dog lying by his feet. Two angels, as if descending from heaven, stand apart – one to his right and the other to the left. The martyrdom of St Peter is depicted on the left side of the picture at some distance, underneath one of the angels. He is being tied head downwards to a cross by a soldier who is also tormenting him. The keys nearby represent his supremacy in the church. On the right hand side, for the sake of symmetry, there is depicted the martyrdom of St Paul. He is kneeling in front of a block, looking downwards ready for execution. Again, a soldier is on guard ready to separate his head from his neck with his sharp sword. Unfortunately, this painting was at some time inadvertently damaged with a pointed instrument or a ladder and got torn. It needs urgent repairs for restoration purposes.

### Hyzler's talents in sketching or drawing

Hyzler's artistic reputation was very well received locally and meritoriously perceived both by private individuals and the church authorities. Apart from altarpieces, he drew designs for altar fronts and canopies, silver oil-lamps, marble tombstones and ornamental sculpture. Among these latter works, he designed a stone statue dedicated to St Gregory, later executed by Salvatore Dimech (1804-86). 53 One can still view this statue standing in front of the old Parish Church of Żejtun.

In the early 1830s, friction arose between the Community of the Franciscan Friars Minor in Valletta and the Confraternity of the Holy Cross established in their church. 54 To try and restore cordiality, on 24 April 1834, it was agreed between the parties that, as from the Saturday preceding Palm Sunday up to Good Friday, there would be placed on the high altar a Cross on its pedestal for adoration purposes. 55 This Cross had to lie inside a canopy proportionate to the altar, consisting of a wooden ornamental decoration to enhance glory to the Cross. The sketch of the canopy was to

48. This amount had already been collected by Father Salvatore Antonio, ex-curator of the Holy Land and the actual Provincial of the friaries of the Franciscan Friars Minor in Malta: *ibid.*, f. 160.
51. Most probably Paolo Borg was illiterate, for it was Father Giovanni Micalelff who signed the obligation on his behalf: perhaps it was a personal vow to the saint for some heavenly gift.
52. NAV, Not. S. Tanti, MS. 1099/38, ff. 867-867v.
54. A law suit was also presented by the Confraternity against the Superior of the Franciscan Friars Minor of Valletta: NAV, Not. D. Vella (Notary to Government), MS. 47, ff. 113-117v. For further details on this Confraternity, see G. Aquilina, *Il-Gzgheb l-Kbir l-Ijlaż*, Malta 1986.
be undertaken by the artist Giuseppe Hyzler and paid for by the members of the Confraternity. Subsequent to this agreement, Hyzler was contacted to supply copies of the required sketch. It was duly presented in duplicate on 16 January 1835; one copy was reserved for the Superior of the Franciscan Friars Minor and the other given to the representatives of the Confraternity of the Holy Cross, Michele Mamo and Antonio Zammit. In this way, the lawsuit entered upon by the Confraternity against the Franciscan Friars was peacefully concluded.

Another design commissioned to Giuseppe Hyzler was that of an altar and its two-stepped gradine or scannello. Having drawn the required sketch in duplicate, Hyzler handed a copy to Enrico Franzoni, keeping the other for himself. On this occasion, 9 May 1835, Hyzler personally authorized Franzoni to proceed to Carrara near Leghorn to order the marble slabs needed for this altar. The faces were to consist of one whole piece of the best white statuario marble without any cracks, defects or blots. Franzoni was to employ the necessary marble workers and offer them his personal guidance. Before any commitment in Carrara, he had to inquire about the approximate expenditure. If he found that the amount involved exceeded 165 pezzi colonnati, he could also avail himself of another 20 pezzi, otherwise Franzoni was to suspend the order, inform Hyzler accordingly by means of a letter, and wait for further instructions. If he decided that the amount sufficed for the execution of this order, then Hyzler had to send him (in Leghorn) half of the amount in liquid cash. Once the slabs arrived in Malta, Hyzler bound himself to defray the yet unsettled balance and all other extraneous expenses such as chartering and the insurance incurred on the deal. Unfortunately, there is no indication whether this commission was adhered to or in which church or chapel the altar and its two-stepped gradine were eventually placed.

As a master of art, Hyzler fully appreciated the salient features of other artists. Consequently, when the occasion presented itself, he purchased works of art executed by other artists. These he could keep for himself as an art collector or else, after some renovation performed by himself, he would sell the finished picture to other clients. On 14 November 1833 Dr Bartholomeo Grech Delicata, on behalf of his brother Monsignor Lorenzo Grech Delicata, sold five paintings executed by the artist Giuseppe Cruffonara to Vincenzo

56. Ibid., MS. 49, ff. 8-8v.
57. Ibid., ff. 103-103v.

Casolani and Giuseppe Hyzler. They represented the following scenes:
1. The Transfiguration of Jesus, a copy of a similar painting executed by Raffaello, found in the Vatican Gallery;
2. The Communion of St Jerome, a copy of a depiction by Domenichino, also found in the Vatican Gallery;
3. The Deposition of Our Lord, a copy of the original painting executed by Raffaello, found in the Borghese Gallery;
4. another picture of The Deposition, a copy of the original one by Benvenuto da Garofalo, found in the Borghese Gallery; and
5. The Crowning of Our Lady, a copy of the painting of Raffaello, in the Vatican Gallery.

The agreement stipulated that Casolani would acquire the first three paintings for 1,200 scudi while Hyzler bought the other two for 750 scudi. These amounts were payable in two years' time and both clients could advance payments during this interval to minimize the amount of debt involved. Within less than a year, on 3 September 1834, Giuseppe Hyzler transferred to Casolani the two paintings which belonged to him from the deal and Casolani agreed to pay 696 scudi to Dr Giovanni Carlo Borg Oliver.

Acute discernment of artistic qualities made Hyzler eligible to compile inventories of deceased persons. Following the death of Count Saverio Marchese (1757-1833), a well-known connoisseur of art and a collector of paintings, prints and drawings, he was commissioned to appraise the collection found in Marchese's house situated at 153, Merchants Street, Valletta. On 13 February 1834 Hyzler, after visiting the rooms and enumerating all the items, presented his report. In the main hall, to quote an example, he listed 46 sacred and profane incisions, paintings and drawings.

58. For further details on Casolani, see A. E. Abela, The Order of St Michael and St George in Malta and Maltese Knights of the British Realm, Malta 1988, 24-5, 38, 42, 74-85 and 101.
60. On the day following this agreement, on 15 November, Dr Bartolomeo Grech Delicata authorized Vincenzo Casolani to pay 1,000 scudi from this amount to Francesco Enmanuel Gucci: ibid., ff. 232-232v. On 1 October 1834 Casolani and Gucci mutually settled their bills: ibid., MS. 47, ff. 235-235v.
61. On 4 December 1833 Dr Grech Delicata authorized Giuseppe Hyzler to transfer this amount still due to him to Dr Gio. Carlo Borg Oliver to which Hyzler agreed to comply: ibid., MS. 45, ff. 266-266v.
64. NAV, Not. D. Vella (Notary to Government), MS. 47, ff. 56-59, 19 February 1834.
It was a detailed inventory that referred to the title of each painting and, wherever possible, included also the name of the artist commissioned to execute it.65

Conclusion
Giuseppe Hyzler has survived in the annals of religious cultural art as the forerunner of the Nazarener Movement. In his life time, he strove earnestly to reform the Baroque prevailing at the moment. He believed that, in so doing, he could arouse in the faithful purely religious emotions and sentiments that could lead directly to God and to the Blessed Virgin of whom he produced so many works of art in the Maltese Islands.

Hyzler remained active in depicting pictures according to his heart-felt desires for almost thirty years and consequently, his artistic imprint prevailed well into the twentieth century, influencing other artists like Giuseppe Cali,66 Lazzaro Pisani,67 and Michele Bellanti amongst others.68 Hyzler deserves special mention and gratitude for his artistic qualities built on personal deeply-rooted religious conviction based on the spiritual rather than on the profane.

65. It would be interesting if an art critic were to compare the items of the inventory compiled by Hyzler to that of Marchese’s register of purchases: Azzopardi, 39-43.