

CONRAD THAKE

Giuseppe Bonavia (1821-1885): a Maltese architect with the Royal Engineers

A FORMAL GROUP PHOTOGRAPH of the Royal Engineers (Civil Division) dating to the year 1863 reveals amongst its sitters the figure of architect Giuseppe Bonavia.¹ Standing right in the middle of the back row he exudes a commanding presence with his well-built physique, bushy dark beard and penetrating eyes, and black coat swinging open around the top button to reveal the underlying white waistcoat. He had joined the corps of Royal Engineers in 1847 as a twenty-six-year old apprentice, worked his way through the ranks from an architectural draughtsman, to clerk of works and later as an architect. Bonavia would spend most of his adult life and architectural career within the employment of the Royal Engineers. He was born in Valletta in 1821, the second son of Calcedonio Bonavia and Mary Bonavia née Hobson.² Giuseppe was the brother of George Bonavia, a distinguished portrait painter, and a younger brother Emanuel who served as a Brigade-Surgeon in the Indian Medical service and was also a keen botanist and horticulturalist.³ In 1851 Giuseppe married Anne Gatt in Valletta.

- 1 Other identified sitters in the group photo are as follows: Charles Beck served as Clerk of Works, Royal Engineers Department, died on 29 July 1865 aged 49; Hilary Beck was a Master Artificer, Royal Engineers; Richard Lucius Louch (1828-1886) was an Irish Civil Engineer, posted in Malta and served with the Royal Engineers Department during the period 1862-1865. He was later promoted as Clerk of Works, he emigrated to Canada and later to New South Wales, Australia, died in Sydney in February 1886; Captain T.W.J. Connolly (1815-1885), Quartermaster of the Royal Engineers and author of the book *The History of the Corps of Royal Sappers and Miners*.
- 2 For concise biographical entries on Giuseppe Bonavia refer to Ellul 2009, p. 20; Schiavone 2009, pp. 220-21.
- 3 Emanuel Bonavia was born on 15 July 1829, third son of Calcedonio and Mary Bonavia. On 4 August 1857 he was commissioned as assistant surgeon in the Indian Medical Service. He retired from the army on 26 April 1888 when he held the rank of Brigade Surgeon. He died in Worthing, Sussex on 14 November 1908. Refer to website.lineone.net/~aldosliema/rb.htm

Bonavia was particularly active in the 1850s and 1860s designing several buildings in the Neo-Classical and Gothic Revival styles. Bonavia's contribution to the development of Maltese architecture in the mid-nineteenth century has not been given the recognition it deserves, at times manifestly overshadowed by the more familiar names of William Scamp, Edward Middleton Barry and Emanuele Luigi Galizia. A partial explanation for this rather subdued (and one may add long-overdue) appreciation of Bonavia was that he was one of the pioneering figures in the introduction of Neo-Classical architecture to Valletta after the earlier interventions of Grecian neo-Doric monuments at the Lower and Upper Barracca gardens and the Main Guard. Bonavia's espousal of the new emerging movements of Gothic revival and Neo-Classicism were rather anathema to the deeply engrained Baroque architectural sensibilities that permeated Maltese society at the time. Bonavia's *magnum opus* was undoubtedly the Borsa (Exchange) building which constituted a marked departure from the previous Baroque-era public buildings. Another factor that contributed to Bonavia's relative obscurity was that the passage of time was not kind to him as several of his buildings were entirely demolished or remodelled beyond recognition. His façade for the Carmelite church in Valletta and his Neo-Gothic church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel at St Julians were entirely demolished and replaced by buildings to other designs whilst his façade of the Stella Maris church in Sliema was extensively remodelled. Other projects wide-ranging in scope from a design for the Royal Opera House in Valletta, to an open-canal system that would have connected the Grand Harbour to Marsamxett Harbour across the Pietà headland and an ambitious project for the establishment of a new fortified city on Corradino Heights were never realised and remained bold ideas on paper. In spite of these shortcomings a brief appraisal of Bonavia's architectural career would shed light on the evolution of Maltese architecture during the mid-nineteenth century. This contribution seeks to provide an overview of Bonavia's main architectural works.

The Presbyterian St Andrew's Scots church, Valletta (1856-1857)

St Andrews' Scots church was founded on the initiative of Rev. Dr George Wisely (1828-1917) who having arrived in Malta on 25 May 1854 embarked

on the project of building a new Presbyterian church to cater for the spiritual needs of its members mainly garrison soldiers belonging to the Scottish Free Church.⁴ Dr Wisely had obtained permission from the colonial government to construct the new church on a plot of land at the corner of Strada Mezzodi (South Street) and Strada Forni (Old Bakery Street). Adjoining it at no. 210, Strada Forni was the manse which served as the residence of the Presbyterian minister.⁵ The choice of Giuseppe Bonavia, a Maltese Catholic architect, is a curious one particularly when one considers that all other non-Catholic churches built in Malta during the nineteenth century were built exclusively by British architects. The fact that Bonavia was in the employment of the Royal Engineers and that his mother was a British national would have been determining factors in giving him this politically-delicate commission. The Neo-Gothic church design is unprecedented for Valletta and contrasted sharply with the surrounding architecture and urban context. The church dominated by the imposing tower with its crenellated parapet wall and pinnacles at each corner, is flanked on either side by symmetrical gables with projecting stone buttresses. The design is highly reminiscent of traditional Aberdeenshire village churches specifically that of Udney parish church, Udney Green (1821) and Bervie church, Inverbervie (1836). One can reasonably assume that Dr Wisely was keen on reproducing a church design that would be architecturally representative of a typical Presbyterian Scottish church and a building that could never be mistaken for a Roman Catholic church. The architectural and decorative features are derived from the vocabulary of the English Gothic perpendicular style.

In the context of the sensitive political and religious state of affairs the laying of the foundation stone of the church which took place on the 27 June 1856 was a low-key affair with no public ceremony taking place and with the laying of the foundation stone taking place after the workmen had gone home from work. Construction works proceeded at a brisk pace and the church dedicated to St Andrew was completed by

4 Rev. George Wisely was resident in Malta for fifty years during which time he served as the minister of the Presbyterian church. He was very energetic in raising funds for the construction of the church. One of the more generous benefactors was Simon Rose (1797-1879), a wealthy British merchant born in Dornoch, near Inverness, Scotland who settled in Malta in the 1820s. In 1855, Mr Rose made a personal donation of £125, heading the list of subscribers for the new church. A staunch Presbyterian he married a Maltese woman Giovanna Zimelli and was later involved in an acrimonious and widely publicised legal case with his wife. Refer to Bonello 2012.

5 Said 2014, pp. 66-67.

December 1857. A short announcement in *The Malta Times* in December 1857 stated:

SCOTCH FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH. On Sunday last this handsome and commodious edifice was opened for the celebration of public worship. The services of the day were conducted by the Minister of the church, Reverend George Wisely M.A, in the morning and his assistant Reverend John Coventry in the evening. Notwithstanding the inclemency of the morning, the ability and popularity of Dr Wisely drew a large concourse of strangers, who by their attendance evinced the interest with which they regarded so an important an event as the opening of a new Protestant place of worship in Malta. The Reverend gentleman chose for the subject of his discourses the narrative of the building of the Second Jewish temple, and delivered therefrom an address full of earnest appeal and highest Christian benevolence, which was listened to throughout with the deepest attention. We congratulate the Minister and congregation on the success of their efforts to establish so suitable a church in this Island.

Bonavia's name was inscribed in one of the documents laid in the foundation stone although this was kept (and buried) a well-guarded secret. The fact that no mention whatsoever was made of the Maltese architect's name in the local press was a conscious omission so as not to potentially embarrass Bonavia with the local Catholic ecclesiastical authorities.⁶ One has to place this in the context that the Maltese Catholic church during the nineteenth century had a real fear of Protestant proselytisation. The requirement to spatially segregate the new Presbyterian church by means of wrought iron palisades is a tangible manifestation of this diffidence and intolerance towards any Protestant place of worship in Valletta. Bonavia's collaboration with Dr Wisely had proved to be the architect's baptism of fire in terms of pioneering Gothic Revival style buildings in Malta. Following on this experience, Bonavia bravely sought to attempt to convince the local church authorities to undertake to build a Catholic church in the Neo-Gothic style.

6 Mario Buhagiar 1982.

Church of 'Our Lady of Mount Carmel' Balluta, St Julians (1858-1859, demolished in 1875, replaced by a second church by E.L. Galizia)

The Carmelites had been one of the first local religious orders to build a church in a pseudo-Gothic style. Following his foray with the Scots church, Bonavia was commissioned to design the first Carmine church dedicated to 'Our Lady of Carmel' overlooking the quaint Balluta Bay in St Julians. The foundation stone was laid on the 14 November 1858⁷ and it was completed within less than a year on the 18 September 1859 when it was inaugurated by the Bishop Mons. G. Pace Forno.⁸ Bonavia's final result was rather unwieldy and cumbersome ultimately reflecting his lack of familiarity with the Neo-Gothic style. The restricted frontage made the task even more challenging as the façade was crammed-in within a row of terraced row houses. The solitary central tower and spire stood awkwardly over the hipped-roof and the façade was framed by unwieldy projecting pier-buttresses at either end. Mario Buhagiar described Bonavia's church façade in the following terms:

The design showed an unfamiliarity with genuine Gothic architecture and consisted really of a typical Maltese country chapel with low pitched diaphragm arches on the inside, and on the outside a gabled west front whose innate Maltese character is attenuated by decorative elements that include sham corner buttresses, crocketed pinnacles, a rose window and an out of scale portal which are imposed on an architecture to which they are really alien. There was certainly no honesty to structure and function in this case though the tall slender steeple was not devoid of a measure of graceful elegance.⁹

Bonavia's church was not destined to last for long as within sixteen years the Carmelites decided to demolish it and replace it with a new and larger church. This time they did not re-engage Bonavia although he was still active, and instead they commissioned Emanuele Luigi Galizia who had made a name for himself with the design of the Addolorata church and cemetery.

7 *Il Filantropo Maltese*, 30 November 1858.

8 Sammut 1952, p. 261.

9 Mario Buhagiar 1990, pp. 41-42.

The Borsa (Exchange) building, Valletta, 1857

In 1853 the British colonial authorities transferred the rights of ownership of a house in Strada Reale, Valletta that originally belonged to the Priory of Castille, specifically the Bali Zarzana, to the local institution of the Chamber of Commerce with the objective of constructing a Commercial Exchange building where merchants, bankers, entrepreneurs and traders could convene.¹⁰ The proposal for the project of building an Exchange building or *La Borsa* was submitted to the Malta Chamber of Commerce which was established in 1848. Bonavia was selected after a formal call for submission of design proposals for the new building. The Exchange building was inaugurated on 11 April 1857 in the presence of the British Governor Sir William Reid. The local newspaper *Il Portafoglio Maltese*, a few days before the official inauguration, made the following announcement:

La solenne inaugurazione dell'edificio della Nuova Borsa avrà luogo sabato prossimo [11 April 1857] alle ore 11.30 coll'intervento di sua eccellenza il governatore. Il completo successo che ebbe questo grandioso e magnifico edificio nella sua costruzione è un segno sicuro del futuro progresso che arride all società dei commercianti in Malta, ed all'armonia e commune fratellanza di tutti le classi che formano il corpo mercantile.¹¹

During the inauguration ceremony Bonavia was formally presented with a gold medal by the president of the Chamber of Commerce in recognition for services rendered.¹² The new premises initially served as the quarters of the *Banco Anglo Maltese*, the *Banco di Malta* and as “a casino or club open to all respectable classes of Maltese society”.¹³ It is Bonavia's most outstanding architectural statement and is a significant milestone in Maltese architecture as it is the first major public building in Valletta to be designed in a Neo-Classical style.¹⁴ It represents a radical stylistic

10 AOM, Stati Beni Urbani, vol. II, Treasury B, 90, f. 57, Psaila Manche 1947.

11 *Il Portafoglio Maltese*, 8 April 1857, p. 3.

12 “Il segretario della Camera lesse la risoluzione della stessa Camera, con cui veniva votata una medaglia d'oro in premiazione all'architetto. Il Signor Giuseppe Bonavia allora si avanzò e ricevette dalle mani del president la medaglia con un complimento, a cui il Signor Bonavia ringraziò con brevi parole. Il governatore compiacque di esaminare la medaglia, di complimentare l'architetto.” in *Il Portafoglio Maltese*, 11 April 1857, p. 3.

13 Zammit 1929, p. 372; Vassallo 1998, pp. 163-65.

14 Felice 2013, pp. 42-53.

departure from the Mannerist and Baroque architecture that prevailed in the capital city adopting instead a restrained and simplified Neo-Classical style that is not dissimilar to the works of Robert Adam (1728-1792).¹⁵ The three-storey building is divided into three basic components, the central block being recessed at the upper levels from the building street alignment. The planning regulations of the Order had stipulated that all buildings in Valletta were to strictly adhere to the building alignment along the street and no setbacks were permitted. These restrictions were motivated by defence military considerations and also on aesthetic grounds. Bonavia's design solution does not infringe completely this planning consideration for he incorporated a portico of freestanding Ionic columns that physically linked the two end blocks. The external treatment of the Borsa is restrained in terms of decoration with sculpture being contained within the spandrels of the arched doorways at ground level and to the circular medallions set above the Serliana windows at first floor levels. The architect adopted motifs inspired from classical antiquity and Italianate Renaissance architectural elements, that are synthesised in a simplified geometric composition.¹⁶

The colonnaded portico and entrance vestibule lead to the central atrium with its open internal balconies and the slender tower set within it. It represents a new typological model for a public building in Valletta. From the original plan and section drawing submitted by Bonavia it is evident that he perceived the open atrium as the architectural core of the building and as a means to draw in the maximum amount of natural light to all the the internal floor levels within.¹⁷ The interior spaces as planned and designed by Bonavia and executed by the master mason Michelangelo Azzopardi are spacious, well-lit and conducive for members of the Borsa to conduct their business meetings. In his design Bonavia integrated sculptural elements in the design of the facade, specifically the full-length sculpture of Mercury atop a globe resting on two winged horses and flanked on both sides at the extreme ends by female figures holding cornucopias. Subsequently in 1912, the sculptor Vincenzo

15 Thake - Hughes 2005, p. 84.

16 Ibid.

17 The ink and wash drawing on paper submitted by Bonavia is entitled *Elevato e Sezione della Nuova Borsa*, and is signed by the architect, with the date 1857 - the year the building was completed. The drawing is displayed within the board-room of the Malta Chamber of Commerce.

Cardona further embellished the building with his decorative sculptural ensemble of allegorical figures representing Mercury, Navigation and Mercantile Progress.¹⁸ Bonavia's Borsa building is recognised as a significant milestone in infusing a dose of Neo-Classicism within the capital city.

Buttigieg-Francia Palace, Valletta, 1875-1876

The last major project undertaken by Bonavia when he was in his mid-fifties was the Buttigieg-Francia palace that was built on the site previously occupied by the Order's Foundry building known as the Ferreria in Valletta.¹⁹ Bonavia conceived the design of the palace as an ornate four-storey-high box façade that wrapped around the three sides of the block with its main façade onto Strada Reale facing directly onto Barry's Royal Opera House. Bonavia's architectural design had a Venetian quality to it incorporating a mix of pseudo-medieval and Classical Renaissance architectural elements including panelled and rusticated pilasters, banded columns to the entrance portals at ground level and bifora windows interspersed with orientalisised timber balconies with curved roofs and decorative finials.²⁰ The exotic and eclectic palace façade provided a joyous and light counterfoil to Barry's overpowering and ponderous Opera House. Architect Leonard Mahoney described it in the following terms:

As the façade stood in the 1880s the combination of Venetian, Classical and Maltese motifs produced a façade which was exotic, alien and yet curiously familiar and satisfying – fitting in with the Valletta scene infinitely better than Barry's Opera House opposite. The influence of this building was immediate and motifs from its façade continued to appear in smaller town houses for many decades.²¹

18 Theresa Vella 2013, pp. 56-59.

19 Giuseppe Buttigieg and Giovanna Camilleri purchased the Ferreria from the British colonial authorities. The Buttigieg and Camilleri family coat-of-arms are displayed on the façade facing Republic Street. Their daughter Teresa married Col. John Louis Francia, a Spanish citizen from Gibraltar. The palace was severely damaged during the Second World War and required extensive restoration works.

20 Mahoney lamented the fact that Bonavia's original curvilinear-roofed timber balconies were following their destruction during the Second World War replaced by simplified rectilinear versions thus in his opinion compromising one of the principal architectural motifs of the façade. Mahoney 1996, pp. 233-34.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 234.

Bonavia's ornate Renaissance-revival palace design seemed to have endeared itself well particularly with an emerging affluent class of merchants and retail traders residing in Valletta and the Three Cities. As Mahoney observed, the Buttigieg-Francia palace façade was copied and emulated on a more domestic scale in the façades of several townhouses, being perceived as the architectural embodiment of social well-being and affluence. Highly reminiscent of Bonavia's palazzo is a townhouse in Victory Square, Birgu, which today serves the St Lawrence band club. This building with its ornate architectural detailing and intricate wrought iron railings is attributed to Bonavia and was probably constructed during the 1870s.

Other projects

One of Bonavia's more unusual structures was the Gourgion belvedere tower in Lija conceived in 1857 as an architectural *capriccio* taking the form of a recreational look-out tower set in the midst of orange groves and gardens that originally formed part of the Villa Depiro Gourgion in Lija. In 1956 the government expropriated extensive parts of the villa's gardens to make way for a wide avenue that carved up the historic urban core of Lija, regretfully one of the various *sventramenti* that marred the traditional approach to several of our local towns and villages. The belvedere tower today stands as a landmark traffic-roundabout physically isolated from its original setting of the eighteenth-century villa grounds belonging to the Marquis Depiro. In his design Bonavia was inspired on a conceptual level by Donato Bramante's Tempietto in the convent of San Pietro Montorio, Rome. However, Bonavia's intention was to create a decorative multi-tiered architectural landmark with its lower part composed of a freestanding screen of Ionic columns around a circular cella, an open circular terrace embellished with fine decorative tableaux set within the solid parapet wall, and a second higher balcony enclosed by wrought iron railings. Bonavia architectural *capriccio* effuses an aura of nostalgia for Classical Antiquity expressed with elegance and decorative restraint.

Bonavia was also actively involved in plans to establish a new town, plans which were ultimately destined to remain on paper.²² The poor

22 The plans for the new town in Corradino Heights are in the drawings archives of the Chief Draughtsman (C.D.), Works Division, Floriana.

sanitary conditions of tenements in the various residential enclaves within the Grand Harbour urban conurbation was further aggravated by demographic pressures. The British governor William Reid was keen to establish a new city on Corradino Heights that would serve to alleviate demographic pressures from the densely populated harbour area. In 1856 Bonavia was engaged to prepare plans for a new fortified residential city. The town plan was composed of a compact grid-iron layout composed of a series of square and rectangular blocks planned around a large circular square with a fountain placed at the centre and with main avenues aligned along the cardinal axes.²³ Two blocks were specifically designated as the location for a market and a church. A specifically-appointed building committee set out the new streets and their levels on Corradino Heights in accordance with the town plan as laid out by Bonavia.²⁴ Although there were several notices in the local press offering to the general public building plots within certain designated blocks there was a major impediment to the implementation of the project.²⁵ The British naval and military authorities had consistently objected to plans to establish a new city on Corradino Heights. In 1859, the Commanding Royal Engineers recommended that the project for a new town on Corradino be “permanently abandoned” as it was considered to have an adverse effect on the military defences.²⁶ The building of the Naval Prison (1862-1867) on Corradino and the need to have a security buffer zone around it coupled with the disappointing response from the public to purchase building sites, ultimately spelled the death knell for this project.

Bonavia was also involved in drafting another highly-ambitious project that sought to create a combined open canal-tunnel that would have cut through the land-mass near Pietà and that would have connected the Grand Harbour to Marsamxett, thus permitting easy and safe passage of boats and other sea-craft to traverse across. The eminent British civil engineer Robert Stephenson, during a brief in-transit visit to

23 NAM, *Dispatches to Secretary of State*, no. 23 (May 1850 - November 1855), 19 August 1854, pp. 56-58; *Dispatches to Secretary of State*, no. 28 (May 1865 - November 1868), 27 March 1866, pp. 158-59. Cited in Malcolm Borg 2001, pp. 109-11.

24 NAM, *Dispatches to Secretary of State*, no. 82 (May 1855 - November 1860), 25 August 1856, pp. 71-72.

25 *Avvizi – Città in Corradino, Vendita di Siti, Ufficio della Rendita Territoriale, Valletta*, 16 Ottobre 1857 in *Il Portafoglio Maltese*, 21 October 1857, p. 4.

26 NAV, *Chief Secretary Government*, CSG 04/30 2084, 23 April 1859.

Malta, had expressed his opinion on the proposal.²⁷ Although the project was favourably endorsed by the local Chamber of Commerce as it was perceived to facilitate trade and commerce, the stark reality was that the local colonial government never had the financial means to undertake such a major capital project. The project was keenly debated in the local press but realistically it was always destined to remain a bold visionary idea on paper.²⁸

One of Bonavia's disappointments must have been the rejection of his proposal for the Royal Opera House. In 1859, Bonavia had submitted a design for the Royal Opera House for the considerations of the Council of Government.²⁹ It was a rather restrained and bland Neo-Classical design with the proposed three-storey building being accessed through a portico with five arched openings at ground level. The Council of Government did not avail themselves of Bonavia's design and instead engaged the British architect Edward Middleton Barry (1830-1880) to design the new Opera House. The Council had reasoned that given the high-profile and prestigious nature of the project it was better to commission a British architect with a proven track record. Edward Barry, the third son of architect Sir Charles Barry (1795-1860) (best known for his role in the rebuilding of the Palace of Westminster), had just completed the reconstruction of the theatre at Covent Garden in London.³⁰ That was probably a determining factor in the final decision to engage Barry instead of Bonavia.

The vast majority of projects undertaken by Bonavia date to the 1850s, when the architect would have been in his thirties. With the notable exception of the Palazzo Buttigieg Francia constructed in 1875-76, and within the context of current research findings it appears that major commissions dried up and that he was far less prolific in the later stages of his career. Although Bonavia had earned a reputation as one of the island's leading architects in mid-nineteenth century his star started to fade by the 1860s with the emergence of the highly-talented and politically well-connected architect Emanuele Luigi Galizia (1830-1906). Galizia was entrusted with some of the most prestigious architectural projects of the time. His Neo-Gothic Addolorata Cemetery

27 "Stephenson, il quale chiesto del suo parere, essendo di passaggio dalla nostra isola, aveva suggerito un piano intermedio, consistente in un canale aperto dalla Marsa alla Pietà, con poco profondità d'acqua ed interrotto nel mezzo da un breve tunnel che facesse le vici di ponte onde evitare l'assoluto isolamento della campagna dalla Floriana." in *Il Portafoglio Maltese*, 4 March 1857, p. 3.

28 *Il Portafoglio Maltese*, issues dated 3 January 1857, 18 February 1857, 4 March 1857.

29 Bonnici - Cassar 1990, p. 11.

30 Burnet 2004.

(1867) was testimony to his confident handling of the Gothic Revival styles that made inroads within the Maltese architectural scene during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Bonavia practiced at a time when Malta's economy was undergoing major transformations. The exponential increase in commerce and trade in the mid-nineteenth century had ushered in more affluence, prosperity and substantial demographic growth. Rapid advances in technology in the aftermath of the Industrial revolution and the influx of new building materials had brought Malta in closer contact with the European continent.³¹ It is within this context that one should assess Bonavia's place in local architectural history. His contribution is primarily that of a pioneer who rather than seeking continuity with the culturally-engrained Baroque style sought to experiment with various styles ranging from Gothic Revivalism to Neo-Classicism. These alternative styles would have been perceived as anathema and alien to the conservative artistic culture prevalent on the island. Although his oeuvre of works are stylistically eclectic and vary in terms of quality, Bonavia laid the foundations for the advent of new architectural discourses that were consonant with those on the continent. His employment with the Royal Engineers had afforded him work opportunities that would normally not have been available to local architects in private practice. Beyond his connections with the Royal Engineers, the prestigious commissions of the Borsa / Exchange building and that of Palazzo Buttigieg-Francia are testimony to the fact that Bonavia managed to secure the patronage of influential personalities in the local commerce. Ultimately, he was an eminently practical architect who in his designs consistently exercised a keen sense of proportion and expressed a preference for classicism in favour of the baroque. Giuseppe Bonavia died on 2 September 1885 at the age of 64.³²

31 Felice 2013, p. 41.

32 Obituary notices in *Il Portafoglio Maltese*, 12 October 1885 and *The Malta Times*, 10 October 1885.

APPENDIX

LIST OF ARCHITECTURAL PROJECTS BY GIUSEPPE BONAVIA (1821-1885)

Bell tower of Augustinian church, Old Bakery Street, Valletta, 1844.
New façade for old Carmelite church, Valletta, 1852 (demolished).
Our Lady of Stella Maris church, Sliema, 1853 (extensively remodeled).
Series of storerooms / magazines at Pietà Creek, 1856.
Presbyterian Church of St Andrews, (Scots church), South Street, Valletta, 1856-1857.
Repair works on the dome of the Mdina Cathedral following 1856 earthquake, 1856-1857.
La Borsa (Exchange) building, Valletta, 1857.
Belvedere tower of Villa Depiro Gourgion, Lija, 1857.
'Our Lady of Mount Carmel' church, Balluta Bay, St Julians, 1858-1859, (demolished in 1875).
Palazzo Buttigieg-Francia, Valletta, 1875-1876.
San Lawrence band club, Great Siege Victory Square, Vittoriosa, 1870s* (attributed to Bonavia).

Unrealized projects

Proposal for a new fortified city on Corradino Heights, 1856-1862.
Plans for open canal connecting Grand Harbour to Marsamxett as proposed by the English engineer Robert Stephenson, 1857.
Proposal for the design of the Royal Opera House, Valletta, 1859.

CONRAD THAKE

GIUSEPPE BONAVIA (1821-1885): A MALTESE ARCHITECT WITH THE ROYAL ENGINEERS



Fig. 1: Group photograph of the Royal Engineers (Civil Division), 1863. Standing left to right: Charles Beck, Captain T.W.J. Connolly, Giuseppe Bonavia, Nicolle [sic Nikol] Bonello, Dudley; seated: H. Beck, Richard Louch, Farranti [sic Ferrante?]



Fig. 2: St Andrew's Scots church, South Street, Valletta, 1856-1857 (Photo credit: Daniel Cilia)



Fig. 3: Udny parish church, Udny Green, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, 1821



Fig. 4: First church of 'Our Lady of Mount Carmel', Balluta, St Julians 1858-1859 (demolished in 1875)



Fig. 5: The Borsa, Exchange building, Republic Street, Valletta 1857 (Photo credit: Daniel Cilia)



Fig. 6: Drawing signed by Bonavia and bearing the date 1857, entitled *Elevato e Sezione della Nuova Borsa* (Photo credit: Patrick Fenech. Courtesy of the Malta Chamber of Commerce)



Fig. 7: Internal court of The Borsa, Exchange Building (Photo credit: Daniel Cilia)



Fig. 8: Buttigieg-Francia Palace, Republic Street, Valletta, 1875-1876



Fig. 9: Buttigieg-Francia Palace, Republic Street, Valletta (Photo credit: Daniel Cilia)



Fig. 10: Buttigieg-Francia Palace, Republic Street, Valletta (Photo credit: Daniel Cilia)

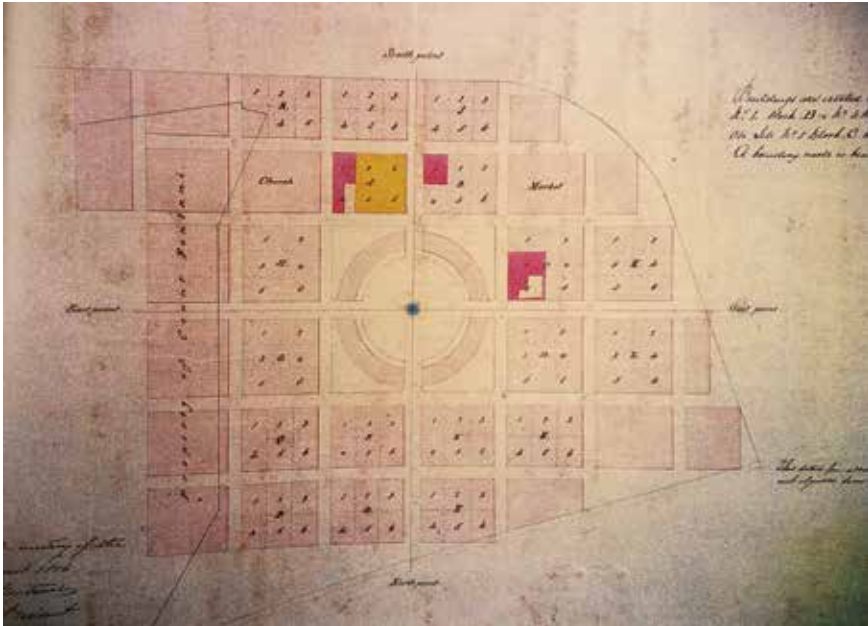


Fig. 11: Plan of proposed new city to be built on Corradino Heights (Photo credit: Chief Draughtsman's drawings collection, Works Department, Floriana)



Fig. 12: Gourgion belvedere tower, Lija (Photo credit: author)