

Two portraits allegedly depicting two members of the Bosio family

Abstract

Two portraits of two Hospitaller knights of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem are often reported as illustrating two members of the Bosio family from Piedmont, Italy. Many Bosios have been knights of this Order indeed and these portraits are today at a palace which was the house of Giacomo and Antonio Bosio in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. However, no study about these portraits has been carried out so far. A careful examination of the technique, of the style of the painters, of some dress details and the dating of the two paintings, along with biographical data of the Bosios members of the Hospitaller Order, reveals that these portraits cannot depict knights from this family. It is neither the first nor the last time that paintings are erroneously identified. Progress in research makes anonymous portraits earning an identity, while unidentified portraits will never get rid of anonymity; nevertheless they deserve credit. Making clear why the two knights on these portraits are not members of the Bosio family is fairly important for the history of art and for the iconographical database.

Volume 3 Issue 4 - 2018

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Received: January 09, 2018 | **Published:** July 26, 2018

Introduction

As part of the rich collection of paintings at the magistral palace, via dei Condotti in Rome (Figure 1), there are two portraits, referred as illustrating two members of the Bosio family. Rolando Serra-Tencajoli called a portrait of a knight of Malta wearing a fur (Figure 2) as that of the archaeologist Antonio Bosio, without any explanation for this assertion.¹ Diego Angeli, on the contrary, claimed that after the death of the archaeologist, his portrait left the collection for an unknown destination and is now lost.² He did not make clear, however, to what portrait he was referring to and whether this portrait depicted Antonio Bosio with a knight's habit or not. Guglielmo Beretta, in an article on the bishop of Malta Tommaso Bosio, Antonio's great-uncle, inserted a photograph of this painting (Figure 2), entitled by this author as the bishop's portrait, without any grounds given for this identification.³ The magistral palace was the house of the archaeologist Antonio Bosio and his uncle, the historian Giacomo Bosio, where they both died. It was bought by Giacomo after he went back to Rome in 1587 and dedicated himself in reading and writing, until his death on 2 February 1627.⁴ After Antonio's death on 6 September 1629, his fortune passed to the Order of Malta which was appointed heir according to his will. The executor, Frà Carlo Aldobrandini, ambassador of the Order at the Holy See, took good care of fulfilling the will and the Bosio's house became the property of the Order in 1631 as the residence of the agents of the Hospitallers in Rome. When the knights lost Malta in 1798 and left the island in 1799, this Bosio residence became from 1834 the magistral palace of the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta and the seat of its government with extraterritorial status.



Figure 1 The Bosio palace, via dei Condotti in Rome. Sixteenth and seventeenth century. From 1834 it is the magistral palace of the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta and the seat of its government with extraterritorial status (photo Patrice Foutakis).

The inventory of Antonio Bosio's belongings after his death was drawn up from 9 to 14 September 1629. Among other items, were inventoried the paintings found at his house, via dei Condotti. On September 10 the following portraits were described in his desk room (Figure 3): One oval-shaped painting of Cleopatra with its gilded frame. One painting of Herodias circa five hands [106.2 cm]⁵ high and circa six hands [127.2 cm] wide with its frame painted in black. One [portrait of] grand master de Wignacourt without a frame. Another portrait of a grand master with its frame, five hands [106.2 cm] high and four hands [84.8 cm] wide approximately. One portrait of Sir Bailiff Bosio of Malta with its gilded frame on a blue background and another portrait of Sir Giacomo Bosio with its gilded frame on a black background, six hands [127.2 cm] high and four hands [84.8 cm] wide approximately. The other portrait of [Giovanni] Ottone

⁵One hand, as a metric unit of measurement of length for small scales, had different values according to the era and to the region. In Rome one hand measured 21.204 cm. Collectif. *Tavole di ragguglio fra le misure e pesi dello Stato Pontificio colle misure e pesi del sistema metrico* (Roma: Tipografia della Rev. Cam. Apostolica, 1857), v. I, p. 25.

¹Rolando Serra Tencajoli. *Ricordi dell'Ordine di S. Giovanni di Gerusalemme di Rodi e di Malta in Roma* (Roma: Desclée, 1936), p. 60, 108-09.

²Diego Angeli. "I palazzi dell'Ordine di Malta a Roma". *L'Illustrazione Italiana* LXI/10, 1934, p. 347-49 at p. 348

³Guglielmo Beretta. Fra Tomaso Bosio. *Rivista Mensile Illustrata del Sovrano Militare Ordine di Malta*. III/12 1939. p. 5-10 at p. 9

⁴Antonio Valeri. *Cenni biografici di Antonio Bosio* (Roma: Unione Cooperativa Editrice, 1900), p. 36,45.

Bosio with its white frame, another portrait of Antonio Bosio with a similar frame, another portrait of the bishop Tommaso Bosio. One small painting of Samson, three hands [63.6 cm] high and two hands and a half [53 cm] wide, with its gilded frame. One portrait of the Most Serene actual grand master without a frame, another portrait of the cardinal Verdalle, already grand master, with its brown frame. Another portrait of another knight with the Grand-Cross, three hands [63.6 cm] high and two hands and a half [53 cm] wide with its smooth frame. One painting of Madeleine, three hands [63.6 cm] wide and three hands high approximately. One [portrait of] saint Jerome circa six hands [127.2 cm] high and circa five hands [106.2 cm] wide, with its brown frame. One portrait of the cardinal d'Este, protodeacon of Ferrara. One portrait of saint Hugo, clerk of Malta, circa eight hands [169.6 cm] high, circa four hands [84.8 cm] wide, with its black frame. Fifty one paintings, in other words the heads of grand masters of the Religion of Malta, all of them unframed [...].⁶



Figure 2 Unknown painter, *The Knight with the fur*, 1580-1610, oil on canvas, 72.5 by 57 cm, 94 by 79 cm framed. (photo courtesy of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. Photo credit Nicusor Floroica)

⁶Un quadro ovato con una Cleopatra con sue cornice indorata attorno. Un quadro d'una Erodiade alto palmi cinque in circa, largo palmi sei in circa con sue cornice tinte di nero. Un Gran Maestro di Vigna Curte senza cornice. Un altro ritratto di Gran Maestro con sue cornice alto palmi cinque, largo palmi quattro in circa. Un ritratto del S. Balio Bossio di Malta con sue cornice cinque in circa. Un ritratto del S. Jacomo Bosio con sue cornice tocca d'oro in campo azzurro. Un altro ritratto del S. Jacomo Bosio con sue cornice tocca d'oro in campo nero, alto palmi sei, & largo palmi quattro in circa. Un altro ritratto di Ottone Bosio con sue cornice bianche. Un altro ritratto d'Antonio Bosio di cornice simile. Un altro ritratto del Vescovo Thomasso Bosio. Un quadretto di una Sansone alto palmi tre et largo due e mezzo con cornice tocca d'oro. Un ritratto del Serenissimo Gran Maestro Vivente senza cornice. Un altro ritratto del cardinale Verdala gran Maestro già con sue cornice negre. Un altro ritratto d'un altro cavaliere gran Croce alto palmi tre largo due & mezzo con sue cornice lisce. Un quadro d'una Madalena largo palmi tre alto palmi tre in circa. Un San Girolamo alto palmi sei in circa largo palmi cinque in circa con sua cornice negra. Un ritratto del cardinale d'Este Protodiacono di Ferrara. Un ritratto di S. Ugo Religioso di Malta alto palmi otto in circa largo palmi 4 in circa con sue cornice nere. Cinquanta uno quadro, cioè teste di Gran Maestri della Religione di Malta tutti senza cornice [...]. The orthograph is that of the manuscript. Archivio di Stato di Roma (hereafter ASR), *Fondo notai AC*, notaio Domenico Fontia, 3107, 110v-111r, inventory of Antonio Bosio's belongings after his death, 9 to 14 September 1629.

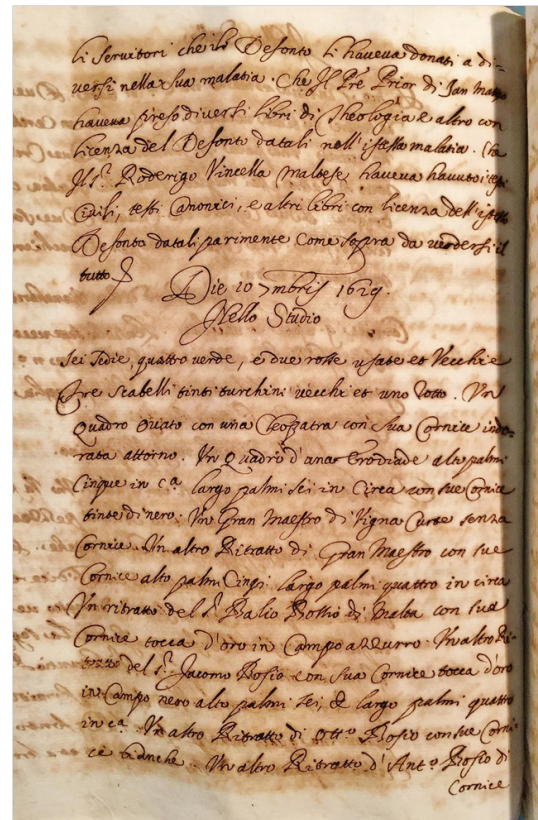


Figure 3 Inventory of Antonio Bosio's belongings after his death. 9 to 14 September 1629, paper, 27.5 by 20 cm. Archivio di Stato di Roma, ASR, Fondo notai AC, notaio Domenico Fontia, vol. 3107, fol. 110v. (photo Patrice Foutakis)

There were many paintings found in the Bosio palace, mostly with religious and mythological themes. The portraits were hanging in different places of the house. For instance, in the big dining room there was 'the portrait of Clement VII, as a Hospitaller knight and prior of Capua, with his fur and his hat, circa four hands [84.8 cm] high and circa three hands [63.6 cm] wide, with its frame completely gilded, [portrait] made by Raphael from Urbino'.⁷ Nevertheless, the portraits of the Bosio family were all found in the desk room and, most important, were not part of the numerous paintings sold on 25 September 1629.⁸ Therefore, although lack of evidence does not allow claiming whether the two portraits to be discussed here belonged to the Bosio collection in his house via dei Condotti, it is likely that they were part of his collection, if they depict indeed members of the Bosio family.

The two portraits

The Knight with the fur (Figure 2) is painted in oil on canvas, measuring 72.5 by 57 cm, 94 by 79 cm framed. It was truncated on the left side, indicating that the panel was cut down at some time in the past. This mutilation made the coat of arms of the knight of the Order of Malta disappear, as well as the inscription below the arms. The letters left on the canvas can hardly help for restoring the whole text. What remains is *SPATA* on the upper line, which could be "... spat a[liqui]s", ... someone or, in a case of a single word, "spathas", long swords. On the lower line stays the end of the last word *VS*. The colours of the portrait were partly repainted and the whole canvas

⁷*Ibid.*, 100v.

⁸*Ibid.*, 454r-457v, inventory of sold paintings on 25 September 1629.

was varnished, probably when the painting was cut down, because the canvas, turning back on the wood where it is nailed on, has the same varnish. Behind the truncated coat of arms there is the Malta cross, with small circles between its parts which are repainted or added in a surprisingly clumsy way. The black dress with white octagonal cross which was the common habit for Hospitaller knights of Saint John of Jerusalem, has a silk-and-lace collar along with a fur as additional apparel. Ostentation in clothing was prohibited for the knights-monks of this Order. From the beginning, when they were located in the Holy Land, their Rule had stated that they should not wear brightly coloured cloth, fur or fustian.⁹ Despite the injunctions against expensive clothing, fur became almost an unofficial rule, at least for portraying grand masters, priors and bailiffs, as many portraits depict them.

A view under ultraviolet light. (photo Patrice Foutakis) reveals a vertical fold all along the length of the portrait, passing from the sitter's left shoulder, brushstrokes near the white cross of the habit (Figure 4) and much more brushstrokes at the lower left corner of the painting (Figure 5). A label on the back of the panel, indicating 'E/2 – Saletto g. Cancellieri– 131', does not give any information about the identity of the portrayed knight, except the place it was hung once, the room of the grand chancellors at the magistral palace. The face and the barely visible moustache of the young knight of Malta can give an estimation of his age, between 18 and 25 years old. His inflamed eyelids could be a symptom of hyperthyroidism. The painting style follows a light direction coming from above and slightly from the left side of the sitter, because the knight is slightly turning his right side backwards so that the big white cross on his habit becomes prominent. Although some parts of the canvas are repainted, it is obvious that shadow lines are not exaggerated. The details of the silk-and-lace collar, including the light spots at the edge of the silk, along with the choice of few, yet well balanced colours, indicate a rather good painter, however less talented in face expression. The style of the artist and the characteristic collar give a precise date: the last two decades of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century.

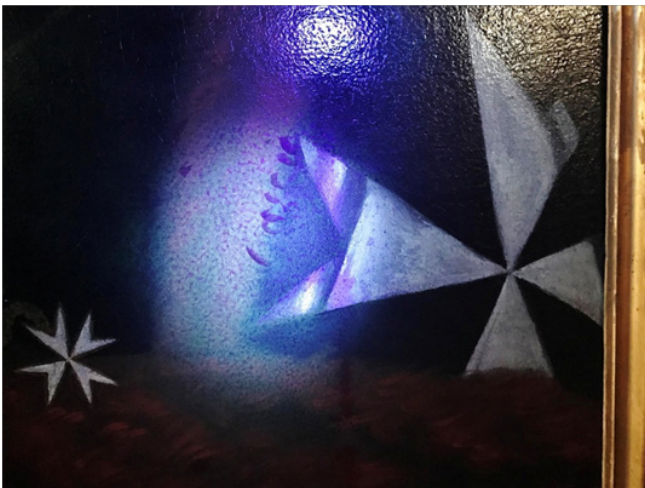


Figure 4 *The Knight with the fur*. Detail of the central part under ultraviolet light. (photo Patrice Foutakis)

The Knight with the clerical collar (Figure 6) is painted in oil on canvas, measuring 72.5 by 59.5 cm, 91 by 78 cm framed. Oral literature claims that this portrait is also depicting a member of the Bosio family. This panel seems to be cut out also, because the oval shape of the painting meant to fit with an originally oval frame, is

⁹Emanuel Buttigieg. *Nobility, Faith and Masculinity. The Hospitaller Knights of Malta, c.1580-c.1700* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), p. 134.

diminished in its dimensions. There are no major repaints on the canvas, which was not drastically varnished like the other portrait. A damage caused by a liquid on the lower left corner of the painting (Figure 7) and some peculiar signs on the upper central part of the canvas (Figure 8) made by hitting the surface against a sharp item, can be seen under ultraviolet light. These damages are not seen under normal light for they were covered by repainting. The artist worked with an extremely restricted palette of colours and with very soft light, indicating three chromatic elements: the habit, the face and the background. By reducing his colour palette and the shadow lines, the painter is focusing on the face expression of the sitter; he turns to be a much more skilful portraitist than the previous artist of the knight with the silk-and-lace collar. He painted a character with expressive eyes reflecting an interior world. The style and the clerical collar indicate a portrait from the middle of the eighteenth century, depicting a professed Hospitaller knight of the Order of Malta, aged between 30 and 40 years old. Given that both frames have almost the same size and the same aspect, both portraits were truncated at the same time. Had their mutilation taken place separately, it would have been highly unlikely for two panels painted in different periods and certainly at different workshops, to have the same dimensions today: the purpose of cutting them out was to make them fit with two uniform frames.

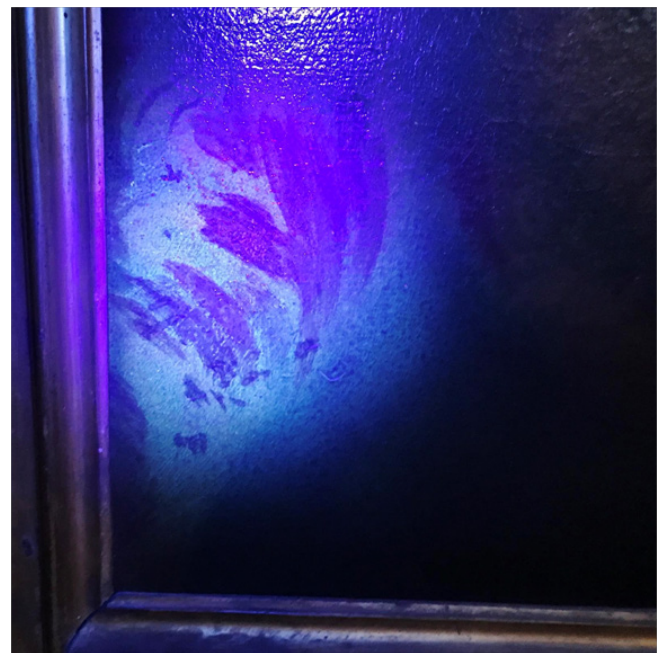


Figure 5 *The Knight with the fur*. Detail of the lower left corner under ultraviolet light. (photo Patrice Foutakis)

The family

Biographical data is significant in order to identify the two portraits, if they really depict members of the Bosio family. The Bosios involved into the affairs of the Order of Malta during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century in Rome was Antonio, Tommaso, Giannotto, Giovanni Ottone, Giacomo and another Antonio (Figure 9). Frà Antonio Bosio was born in Chivasso, near Turin in Piedmont, Italy, circa 1495. His first mission as a knight of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem was on 20 December 1520 to go from Rhodes to Rome to propose to the pope Leon X to organize a Crusade. The death of the grand master Fabrizio del Carretto, of the pope Leon X, along with the execution of Canberdi Ghazali, governor of Syria and ally of

Europe against the sultan, put an end to the idea of a Crusade.¹⁰ After the fall of Rhodes in December 1522, the knights left the island to the Turks and for the eight years to follow Antonio Bosio had the leading role in three missions: the project to take back Rhodes, uncovered by the Turks in 1529,¹¹ the plan of conquering the Modon castle in the Peloponnese, southern Greece, which failed because the assault took place in a hasty way after Antonio Bosio's death,¹² and the negotiations for the island of Malta. He was a stubborn, direct person who did not hesitate to express his opinion, even regarding the most powerful person of his time, Charles V (Figure 10). After many meetings with the emperor Charles V from 1523 until 1530, Antonio Bosio, whom the pope Clement VII appointed as his private chamberlain and bailiff of Santo Stefano, succeeded, on 23 March 1530, in obtaining the imperial donation of Malta, Gozo and Tripoli to the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem. On his way to the grand master to give him the parchment of the donation, his carriage was overturned and he died in Bologna on 24 March 1530.¹³

Frà Tommaso Bosio, Antonio's younger brother, was born in 1499 in Chivasso. After his studies in Paris, he obtained in 1517 the degree of doctor of law. He was admitted as a Hospitaller knight the same year and from 1526 to 1538 was the vice-chancellor of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem.¹⁴ The pope Clement VII decided that Tommaso Bosio would be the first bishop of Malta under the Hospitallers' rule, as a reward for his services, but above all for the memory of Antonio Bosio whose sudden death did not let the pope thank him for his skills. The opposition of the cardinal Ghenucci delayed the official appointment of Tommaso Bosio, who was finally consecrated bishop of Malta on 20 December 1538.¹⁵ He died in Mdina, Malta, on 13 August 1539. The doctors said it was because of the unhealthy climate, yet, he was rather poisoned, for a few days later died with the same symptoms his cousin and some of his close associates.¹⁶ His tomb was removed from the choir of the Saint Paul's cathedral in Mdina and put in the crypt by the clergy of Malta who did not appreciate the way the bishop wanted to reorganize the clerical life. The earthquake of 1693 destroyed what was highlighted at the best places of the cathedral, while the Tommaso Bosio's gravestone remained safe underground, today displayed in the Eucharist room (Figure 11).

Frà Giannotto Bosio, Antonio's and under ultraviolet light. (photo Patrice Foutakis) born in 1508 in Chivasso. As member of the Order of Malta he was the agent of the Hospitallers at the Holy See and participated, from 1553 until 1570, in different missions for finding soldiers, arms and ammunition for the defence of Malta and for interfering between the grand master and the pope for the benefit of

the Order's affairs.¹⁷ The emperor Charles V recognized Giannotto's skills and on 17 October 1555 he approved the coat of arms presented by the knight (Figure 12) and appointed him as Count Palatine of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation with all the facilities, concessions, privileges, immunities and exemptions arising from this title.¹⁸ Giannotto Bosio died on 14 May 1571 in Rome.¹⁹

Frà Giovanni Ottone Bosio, born circa 1540 in Chivasso, had the most sordid life among the Bosio knights of Malta. He was ordained priest on 17 March 1560,²⁰ accepted as member of the Hospitallers in 1563,²¹ and succeeded his uncle Giannotto as agent of the Order of Malta at the Vatican. During the Great Siege of Malta in 1565 he initiated a plan for a bridge between the fortified town of Birgu, at that time seat of the Hospitallers in Malta, and the castle of Saint Michael; this construction turned out to be of great help for the defence during the siege,²² when he lost an eye and remained one-eyed from the age of 25.²³ Although it was forbidden for a knight-monk member of a religious order to be married and have children, Giovanni Ottone had a son in 1575 with a North African servant.²⁴ On 30 July 1581 he murdered the knight Frà Francesco de Guevara at the Saint Peter's square in the Vatican.²⁵ He was condemned to be hung, however he succeeded in running away and was later relaxed owing to his good relations with the Holy See and to the papal bull on concessions to the knights of Malta.²⁶ Moreover, he was appointed bailiff of Pavia in 1617 and died in 1629 in Valletta, Malta.

Frà Giacomo Bosio, Giovanni Ottone's younger brother, was born in 1544 in Chivasso. Agent of the Order of Malta at the Vatican, he was with his brother when the latter murdered in 1581 the knight Frà Francesco de Guevara at the Saint Peter's square. During the 1580s he was member of the communal government of Chivasso,²⁷ and from 1587 he decided to go back to Rome. He adopted his twelve years old nephew Antonio and dedicated himself to writing the History of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, published in three volumes in 1594 and 1602. He died in 1627. A portrait by El Greco (Figure 13) was considered to depict the canon Bosio because on the edge of the opened book there are the words 'BOSIUS CANONICI'.²⁸ A more affirmative identification suggested the historian Giacomo Bosio to be the sitter of this portrait.²⁹ Nevertheless, more recent

¹⁰Giacomo Bosio. *Dell'Istoria della Sacra Religione et Ill^{ma} Militia di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano*. (Roma: Guglielmo Facciotti, revised edition; 1629/1630), p. 622–23.

¹¹Patrice Foutakis. 'Sanctissima Expeditio: le projet de recouvrer Rhodes et son protagoniste, le fr. Antonio Bosio', *Société de l'Histoire et du Patrimoine de l'Ordre de Malte*. 2017. 36:44–69.

¹²Patrice Foutakis. "De l'aube à minuit: les Hospitaliers au château de Modon". *Société de l'Histoire et du Patrimoine de l'Ordre de Malte*. 2015. 33:17–55 at p. 44–52

¹³Archivio Segreto Vaticano (hereafter ASV), *Arm. XLIV*, 8, 191r-v. Apostolic brief dated 25 March 1530 from the pope Clement VII to the grand master Philippe de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam.

¹⁴Archives of the Order of Malta (Valletta, hereafter AOM), 6384, *Miscellanea generale*, fol.143r.

¹⁵Konrad Eubel, *Hierarchia Catholica Medii et Recentioris Aevi* (Regensberg: s.e., 1923), v. III, p. 244, 320, 334.

¹⁶Bosio, *Dell'Istoria*, v. III, p. 101–02, 187.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 771, 796, 806–07, 809–12.

¹⁸Archivio Sovrano Militare Ordine di Malta (Rome, hereafter ASMOM) = ASMOM, *Fondo pergamene* 127, ennoblement by Charles V dated 17 October 1555.

¹⁹Valeri, *Cenni*, p. 10.

²⁰ASMOM, *Fondo pergamene* 165, ordination dated 17 March 1560.

²¹ASV, *Arm. XLII*, 38, 388r–390r, letter dated 13 June 1579 from the pope Gregory XIII to the grand master Jean L'Evêque de La Cassière.

²²Bosio, *Dell'Istoria*, v. III, p. 597–98.

²³ASV, *Arm. XLII*, 38, 388r–390r, letter dated dated 13 June 1579 from the pope Gregory XIII to the grand master Jean L'Evêque de La Cassière.

²⁴Gian Vittorio Rossi, *Pinacotheca imaginum illustrium doctrinae vel ingenii laude virorum* (Wolfenbüttel: Joh. Christoph. Meisner, 1729), p. 233.

²⁵Charles Hirschauer, 'Recherches sur la déposition de la mort de Jean Levesque de La Cassière, Grand Maître de l'Ordre de Malte', *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire*, 31/1(1911), p. 75–141, at p.87–88.

²⁶ASV, *Sec. Brev.*122, 652r–656v, apostolic bull dated 20 September 1586 from the pope Sixtus V.

²⁷Archivio Storico Comunale di Chivasso, ASCC, *Sezione prima*, classe 16, fald.70, fasc.73, Diverse scritture, deposition dated 31 March 1586.

²⁸Harold Wethey. *El Greco and his School*. (Princeton-New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 88

²⁹William Jordan. *El Greco of Toledo*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982), p. 223,263.

research by Balbina Martínez Caviro³⁰ and Keith Christiansen³¹ identified this painting with Francisco de Pisa, professor at Toledo University, author of a major history of Toledo and a prominent figure in the ecclesiastical affairs of the city at the time El Greco was living there. The main argument for identifying the sitter with de Pisa is the resemblance between this portrait and the documented miniature of de Pisa made by El Greco, whereas the name Bosio on the edge of the book is attributed to Francesco Bossi or Bosio, author of texts on Catholic orthodoxy, a work that Francisco de Pisa could be interested in. Yet, although both the portrait and the miniature are undoubtedly painted by El Greco, some questions remain about whether they depict the same person because the resemblance between the two faces can also be seen on other portraits painted by El Greco.³²

Antonio Bosio, Giovanni Ottone's illegitimate son, was born in 1575 in Vittoriosa, as Birgu was called after the Great Siege of Malta in 1565. At the age of twelve he left his mother in Malta and went to Rome under the protection of his uncle Giacomo who adopted him. His legitimating took place in two stages: on 12 September 1596 the pope Clement VIII allowed Antonio Bosio to take benefits on ecclesiastical funds,³³ and on 14 July 1604 the same pope declared Antonio as the legitimate child of a Hospitaller knight, without naming him, and a widow (*ex equite et ex vidua*).³⁴ During the last three years of his life he was an agent of the Order of Malta at the Vatican,³⁵ but he was never a Hospitaller knight because of the condition of his birth. His precocious interest in the tombs of first Christians in Rome was the passion of his life: long archaeological research in Roman catacombs made out of him the first archaeologist in Christian Rome. His work *Roma Sotterranea* was published in 1632, three years after his death. Should the two portraits at the magistral palace depict members of the Bosio family, they must be two of the above six Bosios being involved into the Order of Malta affairs during the sixteenth and seventeenth century in Rome. The Bosios in Licata, Sicily (Figure 9), had a local activity during the seventeenth and eighteenth century and a portrait of theirs had no reason to be transferred from Licata to Rome. Furthermore, when *The Knight with the clerical collar* was painted in the middle of the eighteenth century, they were far younger than the sitter. The three brothers Antonio, Tommaso and Giannotto are excluded from being the portrayed knights because they died before the two panels were made. Giovanni Ottone was more than 40 years old when *The Knight with the fur* was painted, depicting an 18 to 25 years old knight and died before the portrait of *The Knight with the clerical collar*. The same restrictions are applied to Giacomo who was more than 35 years old at the time of the first portrait and died before the second one was painted. Antonio the archaeologist was 20 years old in 1595, a very likely year *The Knight with the fur* was created, since the painting style and the collar indicate a date between 1580 and 1610. However, unlike the sitter, Antonio had the dark-coloured lips of her North African mother, (*maternum fusco oris colore*),³⁶ he had never been a knight and became agent of the Order of Malta in

1527, at the age of 52. Even if he put a knight habit on for the portrait as an agent of the Order, he cannot be the knight with the fur because of his age when he was appointed agent.

It is neither the first nor the last time that portraits are erroneously identified. Progress in research makes anonymous portraits earning an identity, whereas unidentified portraits will never get rid of anonymity; nevertheless they deserve credit. Making clear why *The Knight with the fur* and *The Knight with the clerical collar* are not members of the Bosio family is fairly important for the history of art and for the iconographic database.



Figure 6 Unknown painter, *The Knight with the clerical collar*, c.1750, oil on canvas, 72.5 by 59.5 cm, 91 by 78 cm framed. (photo courtesy of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. Photo credit Nicusor Floroica)



Figure 7 *The Knight with the clerical collar*. Detail of the lower left corner under ultraviolet light. (photo Patrice Foutakis)

³⁰Balbina Martínez Caviro. "El convento toledano de las Benitas, Don Francisco de Pisa y El Greco". *Archivo Espanol de Arte*. 1988. 242:115–30.

³¹David Davies et al., *El Greco*. (London: National Gallery Company, 2003), p. 288–89.

³²Nikos Hadjinicolaou. *Friends and Patrons of El Greco in Toledo*. (Athens: Benaki Museum, 2014), p. 24,97–102.

³³ASMOM. *Fondo pergamene* 208, apostolic brief dated 12 September 1596 from Clement VIII.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 216, apostolic legitimization dated 14 July 1604 from Clement VIII.

³⁵Valeri, *Cenni*, p. 44, 54–5.

³⁶Rossi, *Pinacoteca*, p. 233.

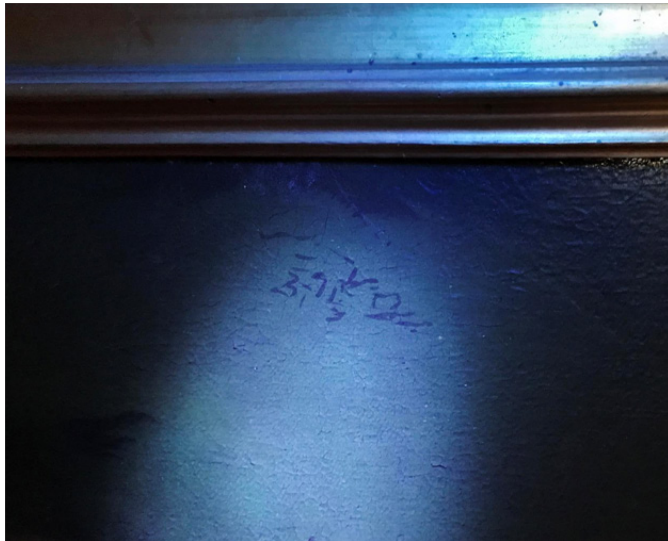


Figure 8 The Knight with the clerical collar. Detail of the upper central part under ultraviolet light. (photo Patrice Foutakis).

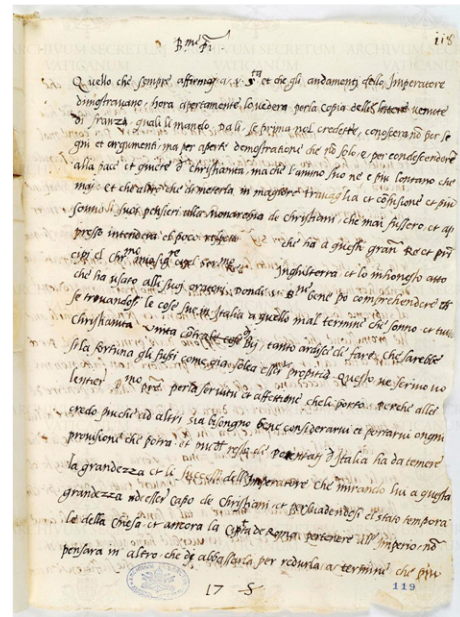


Figure 10 The first page of the autograph letter by Antonio Bosio to the pope Clement VII. Chieti, 23 February 1528. Paper, 29,5 by 21 cm. It is a fiery philippic against the emperor Charles V. Archivio Segreto Vaticano, ASV, Segr. Stato, Principi 5, folio 119 r. (photo courtesy of the Archivio Segreto Vaticano)

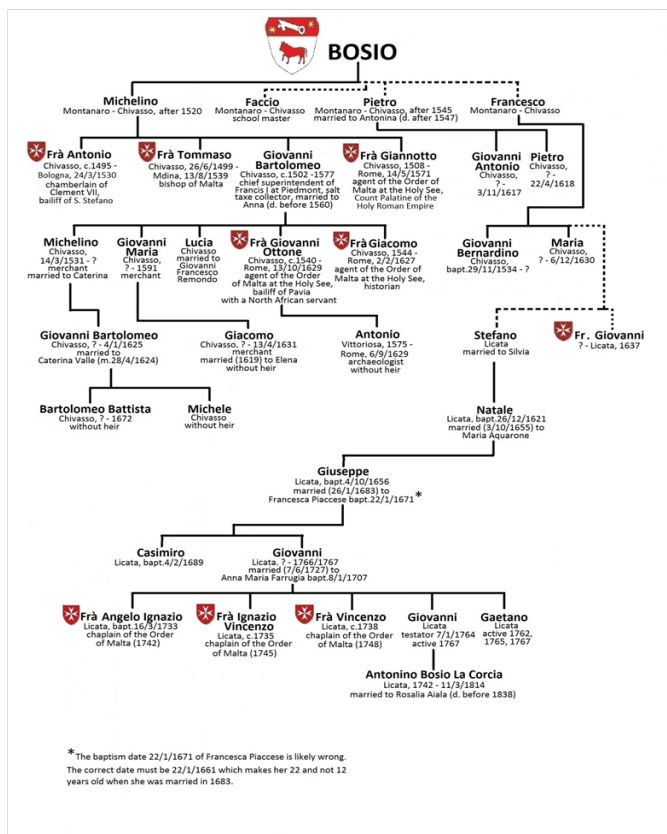


Figure 9 Genealogy of the Bosio branches bearing the same coat of arms. It was established by the author through manuscripts located at the Archives of the Vatican, Chivasso, Turin, Malta and Licata. The dotted lines indicate hypothetical relationship. (table by Patrice Foutakis)



Figure 11 The gravestone of the bishop Frà Tommaso Bosio, 1539. Marble, 187 by 83 cm. Eucharist room at the cathedral of Saint Paul, Mdina, Malta. (photo Patrice Foutakis)



Figure 12 The coat of arms of Frà Giannotto Bosio, agent of the Order of Malta at the Holy See. Brussels, 17 October 1555. Parchment, 13 by 11.5 cm (the coat of arms), 58 by 82 cm (overall). Act of ennoblement signed by the Emperor Charles V. Archivi Sovrano Militare Ordine di Malta (Rome), ASMOM, Fondo pergamene, 127. (photo courtesy of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. Photo credit Nicusor Floroica)



Figure 13 El Greco (DomenikosTheotokopoulos), *Portrait of Dr. Francisco de Pisa*, c.1610-14, oil on canvas, 107 by 90 cm. It was erroneously identified in the past as the portrait of the historian Giacomo Bosio, because of the words 'BOSIUS CANONICI' on the edge of the book. (photo courtesy of the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas)

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to H.E. the Ven. Bailiff Frà John Edward Critien, Curator of the Art Collections of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, for putting at my disposal the two portraits for a detailed examination. I thank Dr. Valeria Maria Leonardi, Valeria Vanesio and Laura Ricci for their help at the Archives of the magistral palace and Vincent Delievin, chief Curator of the Italian paintings at the Louvre museum, with whom I discussed the dating of the two portraits. I would also like to thank the staff at different archives where I located unpublished manuscripts about the Bosio family: Archivio SegretoVaticano, Archivio di Stato di Roma, Archives of the Order of Malta (Valletta), Archivio di Stato di Torino, Archivio Comunale di Chivasso, Archivio Parrocchiale di Chivasso, Archivio di Stato di Milano, Archivio di Stato di Bologna.

Conflict of interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.