

Charles Dalli

Behind the walls, beyond the shores: the urbanization of Malta

[A stampa in *Il Mediterraneo delle città*, a cura di Enrico Iachello, Paolo Militello, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2011, pp. 75-88; anche in <http://malta.academia.edu/CharlesDalli/Papers> © dell'autore - Distribuito in formato digitale da "Reti Medievali", www.biblioteca.retimedievali.it].

*Behind the walls, beyond the shores:
the urbanization of Malta*

di *Charles Dalli*

The story of Malta's pre-modern urban development is inextricably linked to the island's gradual transformation from a Sicilian dependency in the Crown of Aragon with a mainly rural population of about 20.000 around 1500, into an island principality with approximately half of its total population of about 100.000 in 1800 living in a heavily fortified and urbanized harbour area¹. Governed by the Hospitaller Grand Masters (1530-1798), the Maltese islands evolved into a Catholic theocratic principality enjoying de facto autonomy from the kingdom of Sicily². Malta's location at the crossroads of the Mediterranean world defined the course of its history. Following the British blockade of the French forces left by Napoleon to hold the islands in 1798, Malta became a British possession. The fortress colony served strategic British interests in the Mediterranean, and enjoyed periods of prosperity in times of war. The centripetal movement which had developed under the Order was further encouraged by the harbour-centred economy under British rule. The population, which doubled in the nineteenth century despite substantial migration, was heavily concentrated in the harbour area, where the early modern metropolitan port-town formed by Valletta and its suburb Floriana, together with the Three Cities of Birgu (Vittoriosa), Bormla (Cospicua) and Isla (Senglea) expanded especially after the opening of Suez in 1869 through suburban growth outside the lines of fortifications built by the Hospitallers. The Maltese harbour area came under substantial attack in the Second World War, causing a substantial population outflow. The modern urbanization of Malta since 1950 has taken place largely outside

1. For population estimates for the medieval period: A. Luttrell (ed), *Medieval Malta. Studies on Malta before the knights*, London 1975. For population growth in the Hospitaller period: V. Mallia-Milanes (ed), *Hospitaller Malta. Studies on Early Modern Malta and the Order of St John of Jerusalem*, Malta 1993.

2. V. Mallia-Milanes (ed), *Hospitaller Malta...*, cit.

the walls of the eighteenth century Hospitaller metropolitan port town, which provided the original nucleus for the process. The independent island republic of 320 km², which today counts a population of approximately 400.000, includes in its official emblem a golden mural crown with turrets, symbolizing its status as a fortress city state. More than 90% of the population is urbanized, somewhat supporting the concept of Malta, an EU member state, as an island city state.

There was nothing in the ancient and medieval background to Hospitaller Malta to suggest the metropolitan development which would take place under Hospitaller and British rule. In Antiquity the population of the archipelago, which comprised the two inhabited islands of Malta and Gozo, was mainly concentrated in two walled settlements with their suburbs, supported by a network of anchorages which supplied the islanders with their needs, and exported their produce³. The location of Malta and Gozo sixty miles south of Capo Passero in Sicily was one major factor conditioning their development for much of their history as a satellite of Sicily. The concentration of Gozo's small population (about 5.000 around 1500), organized into four parishes in the castle and suburb of the island (the madina or castle of Gozo and its Rabat, present day Victoria), remained a characteristic of that island until the seventeenth century⁴. On Malta, the late medieval population geography was characterized by a network of villages organized into twelve parishes with the market town of Mdina⁵. The town was the political and social centre of Malta down to 1530, and was home to the island's principal families, including those fiefholders who were not absentees. The royal officials together with the councillors forming the municipal body or *universitas* based there administered the town as well as the island's village communities, managed the upkeep of the fortifications and regulated the manning of the watch posts, ran a small public hospital, appointed the school master, supervised the markets, issued regulations and even appointed consuls to represent the Maltese in the chief Sicilian towns⁶. The seat of a bishopric documented in the Byzantine period, later held from the mid-twelfth century to 1530 by mainly absentee bishops who also enjoyed estates near Lentini, Mdina was the ecclesiastical centre of the archipelago. In the 1400s Mdina and Rabat witnessed the establishment of

3. For an overview of Phoenician to Roman Malta see A. Bonanno, *Malta Phoenician Punic and Roman*, Malta 2005.

4. Essay by G. Wettinger in C. Cini (ed), *Gozo The roots of an island*, Malta 1990.

5. For an overview of the medieval period see C. Dalli, *Malta. The Medieval Millennium*, Malta 2006.

6. G. Wettinger (ed), *Acta iuratorum et consilii civitatis et insulae Maltae*, Palermo 1993.

Augustinian, Carmelite, Dominican, and Franciscan friaries, as well as two Benedictine nunneries⁷.

«The Town and Island of Malta»

The hill top had a long history of human settlement, according to recent archaeological excavations extending back to c.1000 BCE. Phoenicians colonized the islands from c.800 BCE, and their Carthaginian descendants held the towns and islands until the start of the Second Punic War⁸. The ancient walled town of Melite where the island's population resided in the Roman centuries (c.218 BCE- CE 440; Byzantine reconquest in 535) was succeeded possibly in the late Byzantine era (c.700-870) by a smaller walled town, the madina of the Arab period (870-1091)⁹. Malita and Gawdi? were recorded laconically in Arab geographical compilations, while more detailed accounts of the Muslim conquest were entered in the later works of al-Qazwīnī and al-Himyarī. The latter author stated in his opus *Kitāb ar-Rawd al-Mi'tār* [The book of the fragrant garden] that the island was depopulated by the Muslim conquerors in 870, and that the town of Malta was refounded around the year AH440 [1048-1049]. In 1091 the town was forced to come to terms with the Norman leader Roger of Hauteville, entering into tributary obligations and surrendering to the ruler of Sicily a large number of Christian captives, as well as beasts, weapons and money¹⁰. In an undated process which may stretch back to the twelfth century, the transformation of the islands into a dependency under Latin Christian lordship, and the subjection of the Muslim population, were reflected in the proliferation of more than one hundred *rahl* (Maltese *rahal*) type establishments across the Maltese countryside¹¹. By c.1400, the settlement pattern on Malta was predominantly rural, with c.three-quarters of the population dispersed in villages¹².

The establishment of the Hospitaller Order of St John in Malta in 1530 underlined the limitations of the island's urban and defensive infrastructure, which proved to be largely inadequate to meet the logistical and material requirements in accommodating the religious and military organi-

7. M. Buhagiar Mario & S. Fiorini, *Mdina: the Cathedral City of Malta*, 2 voll., Malta 1996.

8. The period is discussed in A. Bonanno, *Malta Phoenician Punic and Roman...*, cit.

9. The medieval transition is studied in C. Dalli, *Malta...*, cit.

10. The text of Geoffrey Malaterra is discussed in *ivi*.

11. G. Wettinger, *Place-names of the Maltese islands, c.1300-1800*, Malta 2000, pp. 271-292.

12. See essay by G Wettinger in A. Luttrell (ed), *Medieval Malta...*, cit.

zation. The ancient town of Malta, the *civitas* or medieval madina with its suburb (modern day Mdina and Rabat) could never satisfy the social, military and naval requirements of the Hospitaller administrators and their maritime squadron. Quite similarly to the castello which defended the terra of Gozo, with a settlement history extending back to the first millennium BCE, Mdina was a hilltop walled town commanding a strategic point in central Malta, located about six miles from the main harbour, which could respond to the challenges of sixteenth century warfare in a very limited way. Local militiamen patrolled the countryside and kept permanent watch posts to give sign of regular sightings of raiding ships and enemy landings. The defence of Malta hinged on the ability of much of the population to seek timely shelter behind the crumbling walls of Mdina, and in the *castrum maris* which stood at least from c1200. A garrison under the command of a castellan normally defended this stronghold. The sea castle offered protection to the small seafaring community residing in the Borgo (present day Birgu) which developed outside its walls, across one of the southern lateral promontories indenting the Maltese port. This anchorage was still called Marsachibir in the fifteenth century *Chompasso de tuta la starea della marina* (Vat. Lat. 5300) (Marsa Kabir, modern day Grand Harbour). In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the islands were located perilously *in frontiera de Barbaria*, and Aragonese rulers were hardly inclined to invest sparse resources in their urban and defensive infrastructure¹³.

Civitas and Terra: Archipelagic Diversity

The urban landscape of the Maltese islands up to 1530 was limited to the *terra* of Gozo, the *civitas* of Malta – a walled town defended by a *castrum civitatis* until c.1450, together with the suburb of Rabat which survives to this day – and the *castrum maris* with its borgo, guarding the harbour. It was an arrangement which possibly came into being around 1200, in an era of political transition between direct royal government, and feudal lordship under comital governors holding the archipelago. The three garrisoned castles, key fortifications of the archipelago were recorded under the administration of Frederick II's financial governor in Malta, Giliberto Abate, around 1240. It is plausible that the defensive network guaranteeing the Latin Christian control in the islands, which still had a substantial Muslim community in 1240, had been established or at any rate consolidated under the Counts of Malta. The latter included admiral

13. C. Dalli, *Malta...*, cit.

Margaritus of Brindisi, and his Genoese successors in the Sicilian admiralty after 1194 – William Grasso and his son in law Henry Pescatore, an ambitious privateer who for some time lured Genoa into his ambitious project to take control of the island of Crete. The set up changed very little in the later Middle Ages. Fifteenth century attempts by the municipal authorities in town, frequently backed by Crown appointed officials, to force wealthier villagers to move to permanent residence within the walls Mdina generally failed. There seemed to be much villager resistance at these blatant attempts at compulsory urbanization. There must have been clear social and economic advantages attached to continued residence in the undefended open settlements of the Maltese countryside, despite the fact that the island bore its share of enemy attacks, as did Gozo. From a register of over 100 rahal toponyms across the Maltese countryside, a substantial number referred to uninhabited estates by 1400. Nevertheless, it is difficult to translate toponymic evidence into a broader geographic frame – for one thing, it remains unclear how many of the rahal placenames denoted anything beyond simple farmsteads, to start off with.

A clear difference between the two islands remains evident. Somewhat enigmatically, contrary to the Maltese network of villages, on the sister island of Gozo, human settlement seems to have been agglomerated from the 1300s to the 1600s at the terra – the castle and its Rabat. The odd reference to rahl type toponyms on Gozo cannot be confirmed. It must be added that the island of Pantelleria too retained its villages in this period, despite its repeated targeting by raiders. There may have been other causes, besides the quotient of enemy attacks per island, guiding the emergence, survival or disappearance of open undefended villages, including social ones. At the risk of speculating on the back of an already hotly debated document, one might suggest that the large number of Christian serf families documented on Gozo in 1240 created a different set of conditions when compared to the much larger Muslim serf populations on Malta – and also perhaps Pantelleria. Villages in the islands were certainly targeted in a punitive attack carried out by James II's admiral Bernat de Sarria against the insular subjects of Frederick III of Sicily. Evidence for parish organization outside the castrum maris and its borgo comes to light at the end of the fourteenth century. The survival of toponyms long after the transformation of social or cultural realities underpinning them is a proven trend. Around 1394, the pilgrim notary Nicola de Martoni reported the prosperity of Gozo and Malta under count Artale de Alagona. His figures of 400 households on Gozo, and 4000 on Malta seem a bit inflated, but they do convey the general positive perception of the Italian visitor.

Militia rosters and watch lists from 1417 and 1419 respectively studied by Godfrey Wettinger, suggest an adult male population on Malta of about

2000 individuals, producing a plausible figure of 10.000. Considering the fact that the population of c.5000 people on Gozo was concentrated at the castle and Rabat, the Gozitan town was the largest urban centre in the Maltese islands up to 1530. By 1530 some of the major villages may have had a population over 1000, in a total population which perhaps had reached 20.000. Following open rebellion against the governor of the island Gonsalvo de Monroy in 1425-1428, the citizens were allowed by Alfonso the Magnanimous to pawn their islands for 30.000 Aragonese florins. Mdina was styled in a royal charter as «Notabile». The successful negotiations by town leaders with the Crown were to be the cornerstone of a century of municipal rule ending with the establishment of the Order of St John in Malta in 1530. Centuries later, in the quest for improving Malta's constitutional status under British colonial rule, frequent reference would be made to a purported late medieval chapter of municipal autonomy under a «Consiglio Popolare». Mdina Notabile, or Città Vecchia, was to be after 1530 the antithesis of Hospitaller Malta, the cathedral city where the Order's presence was relatively limited until 1700. The catastrophic earthquake of 1693 created the opportunity for the total rebuilding of the cathedral church, as well as the erection of a magistral palace in the Baroque style, adding new layers to the historic urban palimpsest of Mdina and Rabat.

«The Jews of these islands»

Mdina, Birgu and the citadel on Gozo were characterized by lively Jewish communities, which formed an intrinsic element in the social fabric of the islands until their expulsion in 1492¹⁴. Jewish communities were a dominant characteristic of most towns in the kingdom of Sicily. Municipal plans in 1458 to enclose the Jewish community at Mdina in a ghetto were approved by the Crown, but did not materialize. The lack of reliable statistical records has not deterred historians from attempting to estimate the size of the Jewish population. It has been suggested that at the moment of expulsion, the Jewish community of Mdina may have numbered around 500 individuals, making it a substantial community in a town whose total population could have not exceeded 2.500 by far. In other words, a quarter of the townspeople in late medieval Malta may have been Jewish. To these one must add the small community at Birgu, which must have been much more modest, considering that Birgu's total population is not estimated to have exceeded 250 in the late 1400s. A

14. G. Wettinger, *The Jews of Malta in the late Middle Ages*, Malta 1985.

separate Jewish community resided at the Gozo castle. In all, the Jewish communities may have totalled c.600 individuals. They were subjected respectively to the jurisdictional control of the chief royal officials in the islands, namely the Captains of Malta and Gozo and, in the case of the Jews at Birgu, the castellan. Needless to say, Jews had their own separate institutions, and conducted their own affairs, paying their taxes separately and dispatching envoys to the Crown on behalf of their communities. Considering the relatively large proportion of Jews to the total population of Mdina, the documented cases of religious tension or strife are remarkably few. The Jews of the islands included wealthy owners of real estate, as well as humble craftsmen, learned elders as well as numerous petty traders who were repeatedly forbidden from peddling their wares from village to village thus bypassing the control of the market supervisors at Mdina.

«Bulwark of Christendom»

The urban development to take place in Malta after 1530, including the building of a new capital city, was intrinsically related to the archipelago's defence needs, and constituted a main element in the strategy adopted to deflect the Ottoman threat. The Hospitaller base earned the epithet of a regional *propugnaculum Europae*, immortalized in Megiser's work¹⁵. The Order's bellicose vocation and Malta's role on the foreground of the Habsburg-Ottoman conflict in the Mediterranean, especially in the period 1551-1571, found their natural expression in the complex process of fortification building, which went on until the very last decade of Hospitaller government in the islands. Nevertheless, the strategies devised to respond to Malta's defensive needs were also intertwined with the archipelago's social and economic development¹⁶. The waves of fortress- and town-building were also linked to Malta's changing social and economic texture, and represented substantial infrastructural investment whilst drawing on local and foreign manpower¹⁷. The defensive «stone curtain» encircling the harbour area was considered to be practically impregnable by late eighteenth century standards, and reflected the Order's

15. T. Freller & A. Friggieri, *Malta The Bulwark of Europe: Hieronymus Megiser's Propugnaculum Europae. The first comprehensive German description of sixteenth century Malta*, Malta 1998.

16. A. Hoppen Alison, *The Fortification of Malta by the Order of St John, 1530-1798*, Edinburgh 1979.

17. Q. Hughes, *The Building of Malta during the period of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem, 1530-1795*, Revised Edition, London 1967.

successful strategy of deterrence as well as the essential anxiety of survival. Averting the pitfalls of historical hindsight, one should hasten to add that none of this was a foregone conclusion.

The eight knights commissioned by the Order in 1524 to report on the proposed establishment of the Convent at Malta, were not oblivious to the strategic potential of the island's fine natural harbour, noting the defensive value of the predominant tongue of land which divided the port into two halves – the promontory called Sceberras where, in the months which followed the Ottoman siege of Malta of 1565, the foundation stone of the new fortress capital city of Valletta would be laid. Notwithstanding the strategic value of the Maltese haven, which could provide the Catholic organization with a vital base from which to fulfil its mission as a frontier fighting force, the disadvantages in the Habsburg offer of Malta and Gozo with Tripoli seemed to outweigh decisively any perceivable benefit. The commissioners, who represented the Order's eight different langues, presented the Master L'Isle Adam and his Convent with an overall negative report, underlining the archipelago's severe material limitations and defensive vulnerability¹⁸.

The *Castrum Maris* (modern Fort St Angelo) and its medieval Borgo or suburbium maris (present day Birgu) became the new seat of the Hospitaller government. The establishment of the Convent at Birgu led to its rapid transformation as a «New Town». During their forty-year stay at Birgu, the Order rebuilt substantial parts of the suburb, adopting the parish church of St Lawrence as their main ecclesiastical centre, and delimiting exclusive quarters which were to serve the brethren as a collachium. The knights built a network of auberges along Birgu's narrow streets, opened an Infirmary, and embarked on a series of works to defend their «New Town»¹⁹. In 1551, the Order lost Tripoli. Following a devastating Muslim attack led by Dragut on the Maltese islands in late July 1551, which led to the capture and deportation of thousands of inhabitants from the poorly defended smaller island of Gozo, the Muslim forces attacked Tripoli and took it on 14 August after a short siege. In the 1550s the Hospitaller government redoubled its efforts to fortify the Maltese base, strengthening the harbour defences – central Fort St Elmo, which would be incorporated from 1566 as the seaward bulwark of the new fortress capital, as well as the two fortresses protecting access to two main creeks in the lower part of the Maltese port, namely Fort St Angelo with Birgu, and Fort St Michael defending the new town of Senglea which emerged across the Isola di San

18. G. Bosio, *Dell'Istoria della sacra religione ed illustrissima militia di S.Giovanni Gierosolimitano*, 3 voll., II ed., Roma e Napoli 1621 (vol. 3, pp. 30-31).

19. On Birgu see the contributions in L. Bugeja, M. Buhagiar & S. Fiorini, *Birgu A Maltese Maritime City*, 2 voll., Malta 1993.

Michele. It also took formal steps to embark on the project of a new Convent City. A decade after Cosimo I built Cosmopolis, present day Portoferraio, and fortified it on the island of Elba, Jean de Valette and his Council took the decision to give the Order and Malta a new Renaissance city.

«Give me time and I will give you life»²⁰

The Ottoman siege of Hospitaller Malta in May-September 1565 underlined the shortcomings of the island's defences, and dispelled any remaining doubts about the vital necessity of a new fortified city. Shelved because of the siege, the project would now consume the island's depleted resources and energies for the next few years. Moreover the building of Valletta was the best sign the Order could give that it was determined to stay in Malta. With the help of Pius V, as well as France and Spain, the Order embraced the designs of Francesco Laparelli of Cortona for a new fortified Convent City laid out in the form of an orthogonal grid with the magistral palace and conventual church at its centre. «Give me time and I will give you life», reads an often-quoted verse in the Codex Laparelli. The foundation stone of the *Humilissima Civitas Valettae* was laid on 28 March 1566, and within five years the knights were able to formally transfer the Convent from Birgu to the new city. Laparelli as well as the Maltese architect Gerolamo Cassar master-minded Valletta's transformation into a habitable city with the auberges and other palaces which could accommodate the Order's government and house the knights of each langue²¹. Cassar drew the plans for the Order's Conventual Church of St John, whose construction started in 1572, while the rectilinear streets of the new town were gradually populated thanks to a steady influx of people from Malta's villages, as well as foreign settlers²². The Holy Infirmary where the knights would continue to fulfil their vocation as Hospitallers, was also founded in 1574²³. Valletta stimulated a major demographic shift

20. Q. Hughes, *Give me time and I will give you life. Francesco Laparelli and the building of Valletta, Malta, 1565-1569*, in «The Town Planning Review», vol. 49, n. 1, 1978, pp. 61-74.

21. S. Paulin, *Die Bauten des Malteser Architekten Gerolamo Cassar und deren architekturgeschichtliche Voraussetzungen*, Unpublished dissertation, Institut für Kunstgeschichte der Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität 1999; M. Ellul, *In search of Girolamo Cassar: an unpublished manuscript at the State Archives of Lucca*, in «Melita Historica», vol. 14 n. 1, 2004, pp. 29-51.

22. V. Denaro, *The Houses of Valletta*, Malta 1967.

23. Q. Hughes, *The Building of Malta during the period of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem...*, cit.

as people flocked to settle behind the ramparts of the new, state of the art capital. Two Roman Catholic parishes, as well as a Greek Catholic parish, were established, while the religious congregations took the necessary steps to open new houses there. The cathedral city of Malta remained Mdina, but by 1622 the bishop had also taken the necessary steps to construct an episcopal palace in the city of the knights, leading to a open political conflict with the Hospitallers and compelling Rome to intervene.

With the migration of the Convent to the new city, the institutions of state soon started to function there²⁴. The Magistral Palace (1572) was built at the heart of Valletta, after planners reportedly rejected an earlier idea of a magistral stronghold which could be defended autonomously from the main town during a siege. The definite shift to Valletta as the archipelago's chief governmental, economic and cultural centre became virtually inevitable given the substantial resources invested in the project. Plans for a walled *collachio* in the new city, having the effect of detaching the Hospitaller brethren from the lay population, as was developed at Birgu in 1532-39, were dropped²⁵. Valletta may have been famously described as «a city built by gentlemen for gentlemen», but it was also cosmopolitan city marked by its diversities. The Order and its people were concentrated there, but Valletta was not allowed to become a Hospitaller oasis. The success of the market town was soon reflected in numbers. In the late 1570s it was already reported, perhaps with some exaggeration, that the population of Valletta was close to 8.000 residents, half of whom were civilians, and the other half were professed members and the Order's retinue. The town population distributed in 701 households was realistically numbered at 3.397 in 1590, again representing almost half the total population²⁶.

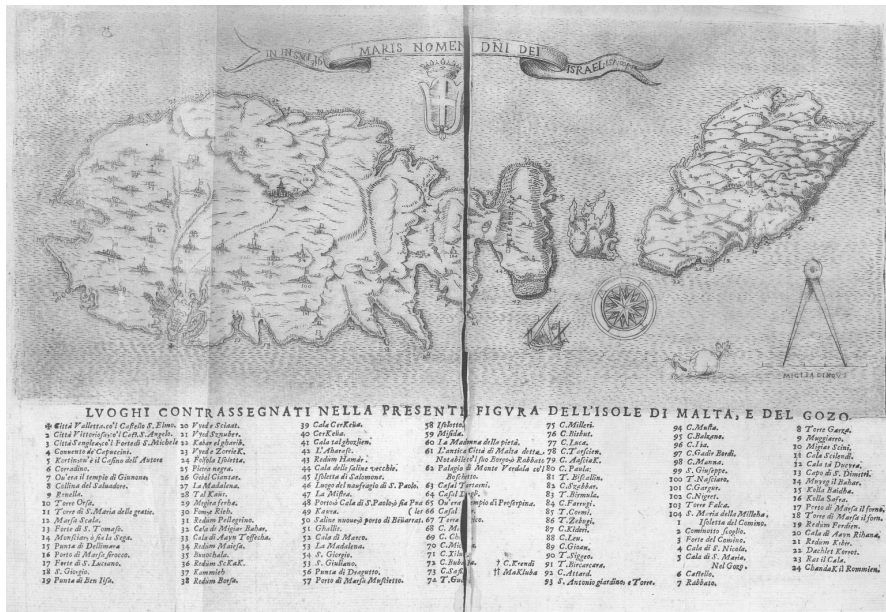
Under the Hospitaller government Valletta would become the centre-piece of a metropolitan area defended by about twenty-seven kilometres of fortifications. The urbanization of Malta's growing population was remarkable. In the last decade of the sixteenth century, about one-third of a population close to 30.000 lived in Valletta and the Three Cities. At the Order's expulsion from Malta in 1798, the percentage had grown to encompass an even larger share of the total population of about 100.000

24. Q. Hughes Quentin, *Documents on the building of Valletta*, in «Melita Historica», vol. 7 n. 1, 1976, pp. 1-16.

25. V. Mallia-Milanes, *Valletta 1566-1798: An Epitome of Europe*, in «Bank of Valletta Annual Report and Financial Statements», Malta 1988.

26. C. Cassar, *Society, Culture and Identity in Early Modern Malta*, Malta 2000; G. Aquilina George & S. Fiorini (eds), *Documentary Sources of Maltese History. Part IV Documents at the Vatican. No1 Archivio Segreto Vaticano Congregazione Vescovi e Regolari. Malta: Visita Apostolica no.51 Mgr Petrus Dusina 1575*, Malta 2001.

people. Around 1807 one estimate of the population of Valletta and its suburb of Floriana was 24.546, while Cospicua, Vittoriosa and Senglea (collectively known as the Cottonera from the defenceworks built under Grand Master Nicolas Cotoner) had an estimated combined population of 13.676 (6.224, 3.300 and 4.152 respectively). The harbour population of 38.222 therefore represented almost half total population for the island of Malta of 80.225²⁷.



[Arcipelago maltese], in G.F. Abela, *Malta illustrata. Della descrizione di Malta, isola nel Mare Siciliano, con le sue antichità, ed altre notizie*, Malta 1647

«An Epitome of All Europe»

Patrick Brydone's description of Hospitaller Malta as «an epitome of all Europe» and «one of the best academies for politeness in this part of the globe» echoed the cosmopolitan environment of the harbour metropolis built by the Order as experienced by numerous travellers²⁸. In his *Giro del*

27. Figures compiled in R. Montgomery Martin, *History of the Colonies of the British Empire*, London 1843.

28. P. Brydone, *A Tour through Sicily and Malta*, Dublin 1777.

Mondo, Gio. Francesco Gemelli Careri made up for his misadventure with a Maltese tartana when entering the port of Malta and witnessing the transformation that human art had made to the barren rocky island²⁹. Riedesel expressed his particular astonishment at seeing the harbour and its fortifications³⁰. The importance of the Hospitaller fortified harbour metropolis as Malta's political, economic and social centre continued to grow under British rule. The walled conurbation formed by Valletta, Floriana, and the Cottonera was an extended memory theatre of palatial buildings, warehouses, marketplaces, public works and defence structures which functioned as a Hospitaller capital until 1798, and then was to provide the basic physical infrastructure for the British colonial presence until the twentieth century.

The promontory which hosted St Elmo and Valletta was further developed in the early seventeenth century with the foundation of Floriana named after its designer, the engineer Pietro Paolo Floriani from Macerata. New fortifications for Cospicua, called the Santa Margherita lines, were designed by Vincenzo Maculano da Firenzuola, who was also responsible for Forte Urbano in Rome. Under the magistracy of Nicolas Cotoner in 1670 a massive project was initiated to encircle Vittoriosa, Cospicua and Senglea with a new line of fortifications drawn up by Antonio Maurizio Valperga, later called the Cottonera lines, extending for more than eight kilometres. Fortresses to defend the key points of the harbour area, including Fort Ricasoli designed by Valperga in 1670, and Fort Manoel founded by Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena on the small island in Marsamxett harbour, designed in 1723 by Charles François de Mondion³¹. A major project was commenced on Gozo in 1749 with the construction of Fort Chambray overlooking the main port of that island. Shortly before the Order's expulsion from Malta at the hands of Napoleon, the final fortification project was launched – Fort Tigne, designed by Stefano de Tousard in 1792³².

The Hospitaller «epitome of Europe» contrasted sharply with the dwellings resembling African huts reported at Birgu by Quintinus in 1533, and with the troglodytic practices which had survived among Maltese rural

29. G.F. Gemelli Careri, *Giro del Mondo*, 6 voll., Napoli 1699-1700.

30. T. Freller, *A classical traveller in eighteenth-century Malta: Johann Hermann von Riedesel*, Malta 1997.

31. D. De Lucca, *Mondion: The achievement of a French military engineer working in Malta in the early eighteenth century*, Malta 2003.

32. Q. Hughes, *The Building of Malta during the period of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem...*, cit.; Q. Hughes, *Fortress: Architecture and Military History in Malta*, Malta 2001; S. Spiteri, *Fortresses of the Knights*, Malta 2001; S. Spiteri, *The art of fortress building in Hospitaller Malta*, Malta 2008.

communities³³. There was also the polarity Valletta and Mdina, a dichotomy between the old capital city and the new, but also between the maritime convent city of the Hospitallers, and the ancient rural stronghold and cathedral city which represented Malta's past. Nevertheless, the extent of enclavization of the Hospitaller harbour metropolis is difficult to measure, as Malta's smallness placed a whole network of villages within walking distance of the bustling harbour communities and the commercial hubs of the port³⁴. Under the paternalistic and relatively benevolent government of the Order, there was a substantial degree of cultural assimilation³⁵. The physical process of urbanization reflected in the harbour area was culturally embedded in official titles. Together with Valletta, the walled towns of Birgu (called Città Vittoriosa in commemoration of the victory against the Ottomans in 1565), Bormla (named Città Cospicua with reference to its strong walls in 1722) and Isla (Città Senglea, in honour of its found the Grand Master Claude La Sengle, formally Città Invicta), represented an «epitome» which other communities down the settlement hierarchy wanted to emulate. Several Grand Masters in the age of the Enlightenment³⁶ were willing to comply, no doubt perceiving the political benefits of this harmless type of populism. Floriana was formally designed as Borgo Vilhena. Under the magistracy of Antoine de Paule, a new non-fortified village was designed called Casal Paola reproducing the street planimetry of Valletta, with a parish church dedicated to one of the Order's female patrons, St Ubaldesca. Moreover, three eighteenth century Grand Masters (Pinto de Fonseca, Rohan Polduc, and Hompesch) extended their patronage to some of the principal villages, raising them to the status of towns: Qormi (Città Pinto, 1743), Zebbug (Città Rohan, 1777), Siggiewi (Città Ferdinand, 1797), Zabbar (Città Hompesch, 1797) and Zejtun (Città Beland, 1797). The urban promotion of these agrotowns may reflect deeper underlying symptoms of cultural assimilation. The process was resumed under British rule, when Rabat on Gozo was renamed Victoria in celebration of the Queen's jubilee (1887), while a new port town at Marsa was founded named after Albert.

The Order's relative absence from ancient Melite was broken in 1619-1621 under Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt with the establishment at Rabat outside the cathedral city of Mdina, at the ancient shrine of St Paul's Grotto, of a Hospitaller collegiate church and community of chaplains of

33. H.J. Quintinus, *Insulae Melitae descriptio*, Lyons 1536.

34. For a discussion of the regional relevance of Malta's port see G. Simoncini Giorgio, a cura di, *Sopra i porti di mare. Vol 3: Sicilia e Malta*, Firenze 1997.

35. V. Mallia-Milanes (ed), *Hospitaller Malta...*, cit.

36. For a discussion of the effects of the Enlightenment in Hospitaller Malta see F. Ciappara, *Enlightenment and reform in Malta 1740-1798*, Malta 2006.

obedience³⁷. The Order also participated in Mdina's baroque transformation after 1693³⁸. As in the Val di Noto, the catastrophe at Mdina led to substantial rebuilding. This included the erection of a new episcopal complex which included the cathedral church designed by Lorenzo Gafà, as well as an episcopal palace and Malta's first seminary. Grand Master Vilhena commissioned the building of a magistral palace, designed in 1725 by Mondion, physically anchoring the Hospitaller presence next to the main entrance of the ancient town³⁹.

Already in 1647 Gian Francesco Abela attempted the symbolic reconciliation between the two sides of the urban dichotomy, the old city of Malta and the new city of the Order⁴⁰:

L'Insegna, e Arme della nostra Città Notabile, è un corpo di scudo dal sù all'in giù bipartito in color bianco, e vermiglio; presagio indubitato, e infallibile della futura Insegna, e Vessillo, che si doveva alberare, e campeggiare perpetuamente sovra le sue mura, e bastioni, poiche permise il Signore saggio e prudentissimo Governatore dell'Universo, che doppo la felicissima venuta dell'Apostolo S. Paolo in Malta, il quale vi piantò l'albero della fede Christiana, indi havebbe per gloria de' nostri paesani à trasferirvisi l'Eminentissima Republica della Sagra Religione Gerosolimitana nostra Padrona, per piantarvi il gloriosissimo segno della Santa Croce bianca in campo vermiglio, acciò dovesse esser quest'Isola il Propugnacolo, e Baluardo di tutta la Christianità, la Corona del mare, la Reggia di Nettunno, l'Academia dell'armi, l'Hospitio de' naviganti, Terrore all'Africa, e Asia, Asilo, e sicurezza dell'Europa tutta.

Behind the walls, beyond the shores: Hospitaller Malta's urbanization placed a considerable part of the population behind the walls of a heavily fortified metropolis, but it was an urbanization which, whilst consuming the island's preciously limited resources and energies, was mainly rooted in a regional role much larger than the island which was to play it, the role of a frontier bulwark of Catholic Christianity. It was a role which stimulated its growth and nourished its expansion into a fortified Hospitaller city-state.

37. See essay by J. Azzopardi in J. Azzopardi, a cura di, *Il culto di San Paolo nelle chiese cristiane e nella tradizione maltese*, Malta 2006.

38. See for instance D. De Lucca, *Carapecchia: Master of baroque architecture in early eighteenth century Malta*, Malta 1999, on the work of Romano Carapecchia.

39. D. De Lucca, *Mdina: A history of its urban space and architecture*, Malta 1995; C. Thake, *Mdina: Citadel of Memory*, Malta 1995.

40. G.F. Abela, *Della Descrittione di Malta isola nel mare siciliano*, Malta 1647, p. 56.