

DIN L-ART HELWA

National Trust of Malta

VIGILO



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Din l-Art Helwa is a non-governmental organisation whose objective is to safeguard the cultural heritage and natural environment of the nation.

Din l-Art Helwa functions as the National Trust of Malta, restoring cultural heritage sites on behalf of the State, the Church, and private owners and managing and maintaining those sites for the benefit of the general public.

Din l-Art Helwa strives to awaken awareness of cultural heritage and environmental matters by a policy of public education and by highlighting development issues to ensure that the highest possible standards are maintained and that local legislation is strictly enforced.



Din l-Art Helwa



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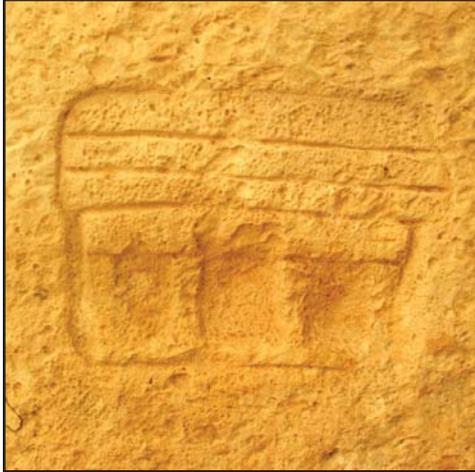
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Detail of the main portal,
Casa della Madonna
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BACK COVER

Detail of the boundary
wall of the
Verdala Palace estate



Problems at il-Majjistral Park

Martin Galea

Executive President of Din l-Art Helwa

Two years ago I had reported that an important step to preserve our countryside had been taken. The Government had announced that the area around Xaghra il-Hamra was to be turned into a National Park. This was after consistent lobbying for over three years by *Din l-Art Helwa*. Perhaps recognizing this, the Government decided that we would play an active part in running the park.

We have now been effectively on the board of management for two years and I can only report minimal progress so far. Much groundwork has been done and the detailed management plan (a considerable document) has been approved by Government and the Malta Environment and Planning Authority. We have initiated patrols and organized clean ups, removed a huge rubbish dump and planted trees. In truth we would have expected to do much more. However we are hamstrung by political issues which are beyond our control.

There was the issue of hunting of course but in this case we understood that this is a highly charged political hot potato and that the argument would take time to run its course. Indeed at the beginning of summer the board of management took a vote to allow restricted hunting in the park before 9.00 am. The NGOs on the board wanted a full ban and therefore voted against. In the circumstances this is an acceptable solution although the hunting lobby is up in arms at this restriction.

Another important issue is to have



vehicular access to the park restricted. One would have thought that this would be easily settled. You cannot have a nature and heritage park with uncontrolled access by cars. Yet to date we are still arguing for this to be implemented. This is a fundamental step which will allow us to restore the damaged garrigue areas, ensure that the area is kept clean and that the illegal structures are removed. No real work can start until access to the park by car is controlled. Yet we are still waiting.

Doubts were expressed about this approach and we have had an open and frank

“What has to be understood is that the NGOs are not a Government department and cannot accept a situation where a Government-appointed chairman takes all the decisions as instructed by the Government at that time. If this is what the Government wants, then it can do it with its resources and time.”



This page:

Dawn and dusk on il-Majjistral Park



Milky orchid
Photo: Alex Casha

meeting with the Minister responsible, George Pullicino to find the way forward. Progress has been made and it seems we are able to find a way, whereby the role of the Board of Management and the Managers (ie the NGOs managing the park) are better defined and indeed retain their independence. The NGOs will always feel very strongly about their independence and cannot be subject to the strictures of a management board for the day to day running of the park. They can have government employees for this.

NGOs are made up largely of volunteers and whilst we accept obligations as regards financial reporting or procedures (which we always have), we cannot be micro-managed on projects. This I would imagine is why we have been brought on board, to be given some responsibility on projects connected with our environment. I think this was understood and accepted and hopefully we can move on.

However the issue of access is now of critical importance and needs to be resolved immediately if we are not to remain stalled. At present much of the clean up work is for nothing as individuals with or without an ulterior motive dump mounds of rubbish as soon as we are able to clean up an area.

It is important to remember the vision we had when we started this project. We felt that this was the start of a bid to save what is left of the countryside in the north-west, from

Cirkezza running down past Dingli to Wied iz-Żurriq. This is an area which is largely unspoilt but which is rapidly deteriorating under the pressures of development.

The idea is to have a National Park which would manage the area and rehabilitate the damaged areas, rebuilding rubble walls, removing rubbish and illegal structures and planting trees and other endemic bushes. These would be controlled, some would be accessible by foot alone and other areas by car, principally where roads exist. Farmers would be encouraged to use organic methods and Maltese and tourists alike would be encouraged to visit and take walks among our most spectacular countryside.

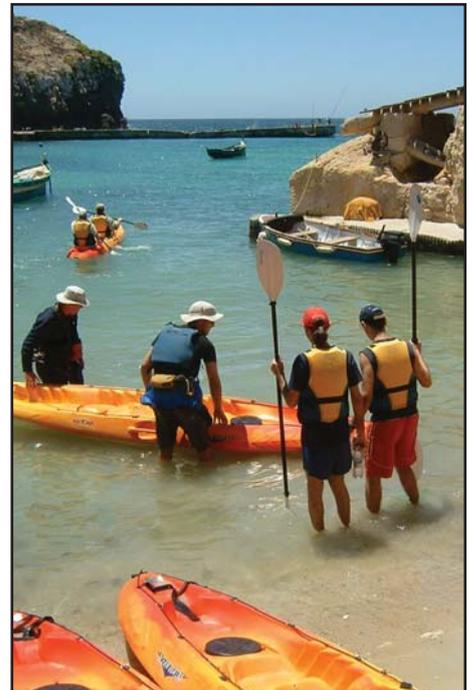
So far we are still stuck at port, perhaps only having loosened the guy ropes.

I recently travelled to Sicily and Croatia and saw how they look after their countryside and the extensive network of national parks they have. These have been built up over years of work, they contain cabins which are open to the public and can be used by anyone. I can't really see this happening in Malta for some years to come. Public property is something few understand here - perhaps more see it as something ripe to take over until the new Parliamentary Secretary for Lands (who is doing a great job reclaiming public land for all of us) finds out.

Malta has beautiful countryside - but it is fast disappearing. In the last 40 years we have lost much and we don't have much time to save the rest. The concept of the National Parks has been understood and even started - but we need to move fast and start implementing the project seriously.

Bottom:
PricewaterhouseCoopers employees carrying out rehabilitation work at il-Majjistral Park

Bottom right:
Kajak expeditions at il-Majjistral Park



Two Peninsulas: Valletta and Tigne

Martin Scicluna

Vice-President of Din l-Art Helwa



The “shocking” news that Valletta’s World Heritage status may be under threat should, in reality, have not been shocking at all. The Malta branch of ICOMOS, the International Council of Monuments and Sites, has been warning the government about the possibility that Valletta may lose its World Heritage status for several years. *Din l-Art Helwa* and others have also long warned of the impact of high-rise buildings on the centuries-old, integral sky-line of Valletta.

ICOMOS Malta had also, in the past, drawn attention to the fact that Valletta could be placed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in Danger if the Maltese government persisted in ignoring its obligation to declare clear boundaries for the city, together with a buffer zone around it and to set out clear policies for high-rise development in Valletta, as well as ensuring that “streetscapes” and “skyscapes” were protected.

Valletta is a city built on a peninsula. It has been there for over four hundred years. Malta has been privileged to inherit a city conceived and designed by men of vision; fashioned by architects of skill, imagination, flair and style who were able to marry the overwhelming and powerful military origins of the city with the needs of civilised and distinguished inhabitants. Valletta is a historic and architectural gem, a legacy in stone. It bears vivid testimony to the standards, ambitions and grandeur set by foreign leaders of Malta – people who have left us art and architecture that is irreplaceable, and endowed us with a history and culture that defines our European credentials.

The Valletta peninsula is unique. That uniqueness should be celebrated and conserved. When we build there and in its vicinity let us think – like the Sovereign Military Order – that we build forever. Valletta cannot afford egoistical mistakes. We want a capital city whose uniqueness is respected – a fortified, baroque city truly worthy of World Heritage status.

To the south-east of the Valletta peninsula lies the historic area of Cottonera, architecturally sympathetic, in harmony with Malta’s outstanding traditional architecture and unthreatening to the integrity of Valletta. But to the north-west of Valletta is the peninsula of Tigné, separated from Valletta by a thin strip of water less than five hundred metres wide. From the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, this peninsula consisted of elegant and handsome buildings – now replaced almost entirely by faceless, high-rise apartments.

The planned construction of Fort Cambridge and Tigné Point – the latter now nearing completion – dominate the peninsula. They represent, in the starkest possible way, all that is wrong with our built environment. They wilfully violate the organic texture of the town on that peninsula. They destroy the streetline, the skyline and every other consideration of visual harmony. They intrude with their piecemeal

development and create a ragged skyline. They are an affront to Malta's indigenous architecture. What we are getting with these monolithic, intrusive, high-density foot-print buildings – too massive in scale for their surroundings and imposing too much on the existing infrastructure and previously peaceful neighbourhoods – is an example of architecture that destroys its surroundings, rather than adapting its art to them.

The Tigné peninsula is an example of buildings that do not fit into the townscape and do not use an architectural language that puts a building into relation with its neighbours. It is a pale imitation of so many other foreign resorts – characterless, sterile, modish, meaningless glass and concrete canyons.

Does this matter in the context of Valletta's World Heritage status? Does the construction development which has already occurred and that is still to come on Tigné peninsula intrude to such an extent on the visual impact of Valletta and its own "space" as to detract from it? These are of course highly subjective judgements.

But UNESCO's World Heritage Committee, which has the final say in deciding the status of World Heritage sites, has asked the government to establish clear policies in relation to building heights within Valletta and "its environs" without defining exactly how far the environs stretch. It is reported that it has called for the establishment of a buffer zone around Valletta, with building height controls to protect "the skyline configuration of the City". It has also asked government to submit detailed information on the proposed large-scale development for Valletta's entrance.

The government has until February to respond to the World Heritage Committee. Action to produce an answer appears to be falling on the shoulders of the Ministry of Education and Culture. Yet, let us be clear, the harm that has been perpetrated in Valletta and its environs came about chiefly as the result of the misplaced policies of the last Administration, notably the then Minister for the Environment and



Valletta urban context around 1950

opposite:

The Tigne tower as originally proposed

Valletta urban context in 2002



the then "unreformed" Mepa, together with the then Minister for Infrastructure who had responsibility for Valletta. Today, all major projects in Valletta and the harbour areas fall mainly under the all-enveloping mantle of the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Communications.

The first step that needs to be taken, therefore, is to establish clearly where policy responsibility for the issues raised by the World Heritage Committee lies. Secondly, the policies for buffer zones and high-rise buildings, both on the intrusive (and ugly) Tigné peninsula and in Valletta itself have to be established. These need to take full, and over-riding, account of the consequences for Valletta's World Heritage status if the wrong policy decisions are reached.

Only once these two critical steps have been taken by policy-makers can a considered reply to the World Heritage Committee be made. It would clearly be insufficient to try to fob off the Committee, as may have been tried in the past, with fudged photographs and "insufficiently clear information to allow an understanding of the impact" of the buildings on the Tigné peninsula on Valletta.

We have been rumbled. This time we must come up with the right answers – answers that protect and ultimately enhance the city of Valletta. It may be that, as some urban planners have argued, the World Heritage Committee will consider the integrity of Valletta's architectural value has not been undermined either by what has happened in Valletta itself in recent years or what is happening in the near-by Tigné peninsula. But if so, we had better demonstrate it clearly by our actions and by the steps we take to protect the dignity and faded beauty of Valletta.

Valletta, as this latest episode so patently shows, is a city betrayed. Although the government belatedly seems to be prepared to invest in improving our capital city, it would indeed be the final betrayal if its status as a World Heritage City were to be withdrawn just at the point when we have an Administration prepared to try to redeem Valletta's former glory.

Talk About Quality

Petra Bianchi

Vice-President of Din l-Art Helwa



Plenty has been said and written about the massive amount of building development that has taken place in Malta over the last three or four decades. According to recent reports, the building frenzy may be easing off slightly, so now let us look around and see what has been achieved.

Apart from the unnecessary quantity of construction, a large part of the problem has been the quality of many buildings. Terrible designs and little consideration for context, let alone climate, are typical. Bad workmanship is widespread, and the pleasures of well-designed, attractive open spaces are simply ignored.

Countless developments have not paid sufficient attention to creating good quality living spaces. These buildings did not strive for excellence, to put it mildly, and were not designed to last or embellish their surroundings. Yet, unfortunately, we will have to live with them for some time to come. The basic approach to development is skewed, with little concern for the wider consequences of individual actions.

In the light of some recent projects, we may now be seeing a slight increase in the number of developments that pay more attention to detail. Quality buildings should not only look good from the outside, they must also feel good inside. Whether big or small, they should be appropriate to their context and add value to the lives of residents and other users.

If there is now a glut of unwanted apartments on the market, one can only hope that it will no longer be possible to construct an abysmal block of flats on the cheap and expect to sell it, and that future buyers will be offered better choices.

As things stand, planning staff at the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (Mepa) consider whether new plans conform to a set of policies and

Urban elegance
overshadowed

Unlikely neighbors

regulations which measure size, location and other details. They do not seem to be in a position to comment adequately on the overall quality of proposed buildings.

These policies and regulations are arguably also aspects of quality, but they are clearly not enough. We can see the dismal results all around us.

A history of bad decisions, with the ensuing controversies and a lack of confidence in the system, has also made it difficult to enable innovative and creative design ideas to deviate from the norm. One mediocre design follows another, with too few exceptions.

This issue has often been raised; for example, the Chamber of Architects is advocating an independent design review commission as well as a national policy on architecture. Where do the majority of our architects stand on the issue of designing quality buildings? Do they care enough? We are surrounded by ugly and low standard buildings.

There are no easy answers to raising standards, and the idea of improving the quality of our buildings and open spaces is not a focal point of the current proposals to reform Mepa. The question is essentially linked to education and values.

Instead the reform concentrates on procedural issues such as the levels of decision and policy-making, controls, appointment and composition of the boards, and other issues such as planning boundaries and enforcement. The four main pillars of the reform are described as: consistency, efficiency, accountability and enforcement.

These issues are a reaction to the disastrous decision-making and lack of accountability, efficiency and enforcement that we have witnessed for too long, and they are welcome efforts to address the situation.





Have we heard this before? In 1998, the former Director of the Planning Authority wrote about the reform of the authority in the newspapers.¹ He suggested that, among other things, the reform should focus on quality of service (including effectiveness, efficiency, transparency and accountability) in the customer interface, the decision-making process, the appeals procedure, general organisational proposals and a review of local plans and the structure plan.

Elsewhere, we read that, in 1999, the Ministry of Home Affairs organised four regional conferences and a national conference to discuss planning reform and that suggestions were received from the general public, the local councils, constituted bodies and so on. A report was commissioned from the Management Efficiency Unit to make proposals on improvements to the organisational set-up of the Planning Authority.²

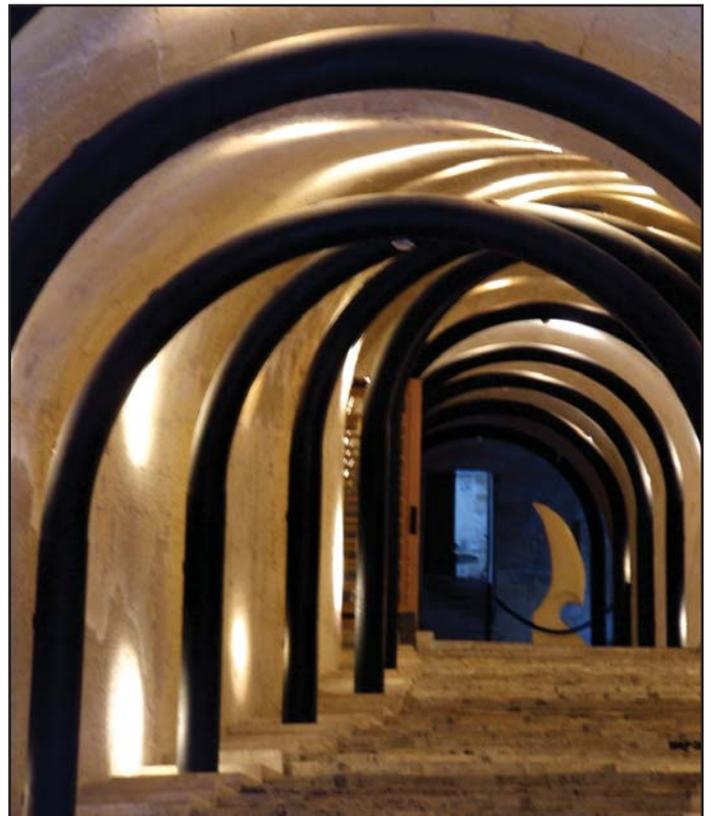
Was this 10 years ago, or is it the current reform of Mepa? Hearing the same tune being played over and over again is tedious. It is true that discussions and reviews should always be ongoing, but will real and lasting change be achieved this time?

Undoubtedly, the improvement of dialogue, internal processes and structures, regulation, client relationships, speed of service, checks and balances, and enforcement are all impressive and commendable objectives.

However, the deterioration of the quality of our urban environment, as well as the quality of our open spaces, is a key concern and should be included on centre stage. Otherwise we may have a lot of talk about administrative reform and building quantities, and move back to square one. Let's talk about quality for a change.

While we create new low quality buildings, old good quality ones are left to their fate

Mixing the old with the new.
Staircase of St James Cavalier
by Richard England



References

1 Godwin Cassar, 'Wheels of change at the Planning Authority', *Sunday Times of Malta* (13 December 1998)

2 Ibid., 'Planning Authority Reform' *Sunday Times of Malta* (29 June 1999)

Din l-Art Helwa Restorations

Maria Grazia Cassar

The past few months have been busy at *Din l-Art Helwa*. In May, conservation work on the Vilhena Lion statue in Valletta was carried out by competent conservators Ingrid Ross, James Licari, and Frank Chetcuti (the latter two being conservators with Heritage Malta).

The statue of the Lion itself was found to be in fairly good condition. It was soon cleaned of all the biological growth and dirt that had accumulated over the years. This brought out the warm golden patina of the stone statue that came through with excellent results. However, the pedestal had deteriorated to a much greater extent. It had undergone previous restoration, during the British period, when the back-weathered stone blocks had been "patched up" by filling in with a number of small stones amalgamated in a cement mix.

After pointing all the joints, and applying plastic repair where necessary, the whole pedestal was given a coating of lime-based plaster to protect it from further damage and to give it an aesthetically pleasing appearance. Our thanks go to the Central Bank of Malta for their sponsorship of this project, and also to the nuns who kindly provided us with clean well-water from their convent near the monument.

June saw the submission of management plans and proposals to Parliamentary Secretary for Lands and Revenue the Hon Jason Azzopardi as part of *Din l-Art Helwa*'s request for new properties under its care.



Ingrid Ross, James Licari, and Frank Chetcuti at work on the Valletta Lion

opposite

top:

Detail of Bir Miftuh frescos

centre:

Ingrid Ross and James Licari at work on the St Roque statue

bottom:

Close up of the St Roque statue during restoration

Photos: Stanley Farrugia Randon

Xlendi Tower has recently been devolved jointly to *Din l-Art Helwa* and Munxar Local Council, and Carolyn Clements and her team in Gozo are bracing themselves for the hard work ahead. Their dedication and commitment to our restoration projects is exemplary and will be fundamental to the successful outcome of this new undertaking.

Also in Gozo, *Din l-Art Helwa* will be restoring Ta' Gordan Lighthouse, with the help of the Malta Maritime Authority. Architect Ivana Farrugia prepared the plans and method statement for this project.

The current restoration of St. Anthony's Battery in Qala, Gozo is at an advanced stage, and the result is truly spectacular. It is best appreciated when viewed from the sea, where the beauty of this fort can be seen in its entirety. The project is being overseen by Lt. Col. Eric Parnis, whose unfailing visits to Gozo to oversee the work were vital.

An important new restoration project is that of the Bir Miftuh fresco cycle, which will commence in October. This project is sponsored by Malta International Airport plc and will be carried out by Giuseppe Mantella Restauro Opere d'Arte. It is a continuation of the restoration programme that started last December with the restoration of the altarpiece and the painted stone altar. This fresco, which is unique to Malta, was originally expertly restored by George Farrugia, a senior conservator with Heritage Malta, back in 1978-80. Since then, it has suffered some damage due to the ingress of rainwater, the



St. Anthony's Battery in Qala

Photo: Ian Camilleri

crystallisation of salts present in the stone wall and the normal accumulation of dirt deposits over the years. In 2006, a detailed report on its condition was commissioned from the Italian conservator Roberta de Angelis, and now her recommendations, together with those of the Giuseppe Mantella team, will be put into practice in what, I am sure, will prove to be a very exciting project.

Last, but not least, the final touches in the restoration of *Din l-Art Helwa*'s premises were carried out in time for the *Notte Bianca* event organised by the Malta Council for Culture and the Arts, when the Marine Photography Competition winner was announced and the entries put on display. The restoration sub-committee has worked hard on this project, but special mention must go to Council members Simone Mizzi and Stanley Farrugia Randon, who is really got it all together in time for the big night.



Restoration of the Statue of St Roque in Birkirkara

Stanley Farrugia Randon



Last May, Mr John Tonna, administrator of the St Roque chapel in Birkirkara, asked *Din l-Art Helwa* for help in restoring the statue of St Roque that is located in a niche on the eastern façade of the chapel.

The statue is attributed to Vincenzo Dimech (1768-1831), a leading architectural sculptor of the early 19th century in Malta who studied in Naples and who was, for some time, Professor of Architecture and Sculpture in the School of Design at the University of Malta. It depicts the saint dressed as a pilgrim revealing the wounds of the plague on his leg, together with a dog holding some bread in its mouth. When St Roque was ill with the plague, the dog used to give him bread that it had taken from its owner. Tradition holds that this statue was erected by the inhabitants of the area as a thanksgiving for being spared the plague.

Restoration work on the statue began at the end of August and is being conducted by Ingrid Ross and James Licari (the latter also working for Heritage Malta). The most laborious task involved the careful removal by mechanical methods of the thick layers of paint that covered the statue and were hiding many of its fine details. During this phase of restoration, it was immediately evident that the statue was polychromatic, a common feature of Dimech's

work. It is intended to repaint the statue in its original colours.

It appears that the left hand of the saint has been replaced at one point, because the stone is much lighter in colour than the rest and was covered by different layers of paint. This will need restoration, as most of the fingers are missing. There are also some fingers missing from the right hand. The front of the dog's left foreleg also requires restoration.

Close observation revealed that the stones at the lower part of the niche have badly deteriorated, allowing infiltration of rainwater. This could result in water seeping into the chapel and it was therefore decided to remove the statue from its niche until this has been restored, which will allow the laying of waterproofing material before the statue is put back. Appropriate lighting of the statue is also contemplated.

Humidity rising from the foundations of the chapel is also causing damage to the stonework of the niche and the stonework immediately below it. It was therefore decided to remove the skin of paint immediately adjacent to the niche. The stonework below the niche, to which a marble inscription is attached, has deteriorated and is not the original. This will be replaced. Ninu Fenech and Mario Fenech, both from Birkirkara, are assisting in this work.

The restoration work is being carried out by *Din l-Art Helwa* volunteers but is being funded by the local council and the community of Birkirkara that makes use of the services of the chapel.



Din I-Art Helwa News

Din I-Art Helwa and Munxar Local Council to Restore Xlendi Tower

In line with government policy for the devolution of public property to local government, Xlendi coastal tower was devolved to Munxar Local Council on 6 August, but this time with a difference: the devolution also included Din I-Art Helwa as joint partner. Following the collapse of Marsalforn Tower in 1716, and the demolition of Garzes Tower in Mġarr in 1848, the coastal tower of Xlendi became the oldest free-standing tower in Gozo.

The need for such a tower was proposed by Bailiff Baldassare de Demandolx in April 1649. The Università of Gozo, the then local government, paid 1,000 scudi for its construction and the tower was completed by 29 June 1650. On that day, Grand Master Lascaris ordered that two iron guns be sent over to Gozo to be mounted on the newly erected tower, the main purpose of which was to guard entrance to the secluded Xlendi Bay, which was frequented by smugglers and pirates.

The tower is 11 metres square at the base and has two floors, rising to a height of 30 courses. The front and rear walls are 3.4m thick, and the lateral walls 2.5m. The unique construction of an auxiliary platform to the seaward side of the tower gave the guards on duty an extensive view of the southwest approaches to the Comino Channel.

Exposure to the elements caused constant erosion to the site and an official inspection in May 1681 found the tower already in a bad condition and requiring immediate repairs. The 1693 earthquake also had a curious effect around Xlendi Bay. The sea was sucked out for about a mile and then gushed back with tremendous force, damaging the already corroded front platform of the tower.

The French invasion of 1798 had little impact on the peaceful life around Xlendi and ownership of the tower, and other fortifications in Gozo, was transferred to the British Army on 1 January 1829. The Royal Malta Fencible Regiment took over the military role of coastguard. As late as May 1871, this regiment was still applying for urgent repairs to be carried out on the tower, but within a few years this coastguard commitment was relinquished.

During World War II, the tower was used as a Coastal Observation Post, manned by the wartime corps of the Coast Police. However, once the coastal towers were no longer required by the Military, private individuals began leasing them for use as summer residences, on encroachment terms, for the payment of just £1 per annum. These leases included a commitment to repair the buildings during the first four years of the lease, and maintain them properly thereafter, but this was not an easy undertaking for the Hon. Dr Constance Strickland, who took out a 20-year lease on Xlendi Tower in June 1954.

By 1979, both the exterior and interior of the tower were in poor condition, partly dismantled and vandalised, but by 1981, it had been reasonably well repaired.

Needless to say, after 28 years of neglect, this landmark is in need of urgent restoration. With cruise-liners dropping anchor at the mouth of Xlendi Bay, the tower has now found its tourist niche and Din I-Art Helwa and Munxar Local Council will ensure that this important part of Gozo's heritage is restored to its former glory.



Xlendi Bay

Images by Malta Vista and Gozo-News.com

Parliamentary Secretary for Revenue and Lands Jason Azzopardi handing over responsibility for the watchtower in Xlendi jointly to *Din I-Art Helwa* and Munxar Local Council. Parliamentary Secretary for Public Consultation and Information Chris Said was also present at the signing.



***Din l-Art Helwa* Salutes Major Philip Zammit Briffa Martin Scicluna**

Major Philip Zammit Briffa, who died, aged 73 years, on 15th September after a brief battle with cancer, was a soldier in the Royal Malta Artillery and the Armed Forces of Malta, in charge of security at De La Rue and, in his retirement, the Secretary-General of *Din l-Art Helwa*.

Philip Zammit Briffa was one of the golden generation of young men who, in the 1950s and 1960s, went straight from school (in his case the excellent Lyceum) to the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, and thence into the Royal Malta Artillery. Later, he was one of the few RMA officers who won a place at the Army Staff College in Camberley and, had the unpalatable vagaries of political life in the 1970s not intruded, would surely have gone on to command the AFM.

Instead, in 1978, he changed course and joined De La Rue in Malta to run their security operations. He brought to that job the leadership, man-management and organisational skills which he had already so clearly displayed while in the RMA as Adjutant and on the Headquarters staff.

When he retired some two decades later, he joined *Din l-Art Helwa*, moved by the needless over-development that had afflicted Malta and the need to protect its ever-dwindling environment. He regarded this as a moral issue that had to be confronted. From 2001 to 2005 he served as probably *Din l-Art Helwa*'s most outstanding and formidable Secretary-General at a time when the association was undergoing a huge expansion both in its properties and its funding.

Philip was a man for whom commitment to public service was a given. He was, throughout his life, involved in areas where the imperative to give something back to society predominated, whether during his long involvement with the Rotary Club of Malta, of which he was a past President, the Malta Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise, or ultimately as Secretary-General, Council member and Vice-President of *Din l-Art Helwa*.

Whichever task or commitment he chose to undertake, Philip brought to it great verve, wit and humour combined with the most solid common-sense and independent-mindedness and a great ability to see the wood for the trees. He was intelligent, articulate and well-read, but also the most tremendous fun to be with. Who among his friends will ever forget the wonderful practical jokes that he played on them – never malicious, but always utterly original and bound to bring laughter to everybody who was a part of them, including the “victim”. He loved travelling, painting and art (he was one of the six Soldier Artists), music and opera, gardening and literature. Despite his gregariousness, however, Philip was also a deeply private and self-contained person who was guided by his own strong moral compass.

Whether in the sands of the Libyan Desert or the north-west German plains in the Army, in the counsels of the Rotary Club, the Chamber or *Din l-Art Helwa*, Philip could be relied upon not only to be calm under pressure and to bring sound judgment and intelligence to a problem, but also overwhelmingly an often needed spark of humour and laughter. He was lively and a joy to be with – to be with Philip was to confront life in all its seriousness and all its fun. To his loving, ever loyal and beloved wife, Carol, goes all our sympathy in the loss of her wonderful husband of 46 years, and a great man.



***Din l-Art Helwa* Architectural Heritage Award 2009**

Submissions date for the 2009 *Din l-Art Helwa* Award for Architectural Heritage is now closed and all entries are being considered by the adjudicating panel. The award is designed to encourage better architecture by rewarding any building project that has made an outstanding and significant contribution to architectural excellence in a Maltese context and that sends a clear message that old buildings can be successfully restored and converted to modern use, whilst retaining their character and intrinsic value.

Eligible projects include the restoration or conservation of buildings, the adaptation of buildings to new uses, building additions or alterations and, new building projects in conservation areas. The projects can relate either to a single building, a complex of buildings, or a historic urban environment or townscape. The project will be judged on the quality of the work executed, its historic, cultural, educational and social relevance, the preliminary research carried out and the aesthetic and visual merit. The project may be on a scale ranging from small to large, and should display a standard of work that would be outstanding in a Maltese context.

This award for Architectural Heritage is now established as a worthy and prestigious annual event that brings well-deserved recognition not only to the architects rewarded, but also to their parent firms and the architectural profession as a whole.

There has been a most encouraging increase in the conservation and restoration of old buildings and monuments in Malta during the last year – in both the private and public sector – and DLH feels that these greatly deserve encouragement and public recognition.



The Body Shop Foundation Award for Local Environmental Projects

The Body Shop Foundation, the charitable trust set up by The Body Shop International, has made a donation to *Din l-Art Helwa* for the landscaping of areas around the historic sites managed by the organisation. Areas around Delimara Lighthouse and Foresta 2000, below the Red Tower near Mellieha, amongst others, will be benefiting from this award. Together with Birdlife Malta and the Ministry for Resources and Rural Affairs, *Din l-Art Helwa* manages the vast project known as “Foresta 2000” that stretches from Mellieha Bay to the extreme promontory at Il-Cumnija and over the last five years, thousands of endemic trees and shrubs have been planted.

Simone Mizzi, local representative of The Body Shop, said: “This money from The Body Shop Foundation comes at a time when areas such as Foresta 2000 in Mellieha are at the stage in their development when visitors can enjoy a more visible interpretation, with maps of the area close to the coastal road, pathways and guided trails. The funds can help the site managers to continue to protect against vandalism and dumping, continue the planting schemes – the list is endless”.

Din l-Art Helwa also intends using the funds to support the farmers who work the fields within the area. The organisation will be harvesting the organic honey from the apiaries close by and selling it at the historic sites it looks after, together with local olive oil and other produce that is so abundant, thus enabling visitors to further enjoy local traditions as well as supporting the needs of the communities in which the properties are situated. Simone Mizzi, who is on the Council of *Din l-Art Helwa*, said: “Having its own branded goods will also help *Din l-Art Helwa* raise more funds with which to maintain its numerous historic sites”.

The Body Shop Foundation is a charitable trust established by The Body Shop International to support innovative projects across the world that are working for social and environmental change. A board of trustees – which includes Gordon Roddick, husband of the late Dame Anita Roddick, founder of The Body Shop – manages the fund, and each year it awards financial grants to deserving small charities, NGOs and groups all over the world that focus on human rights, social development and environmental and animal protection. NGOs in Malta and Gozo wishing to receive further information about the 2009/2010 Body Shop Foundation Grants programme are invited to email bodyshopfoundation@thebodyshop.com



Din l-Art Helwa Public Lectures

Din l-Art Helwa will be holding a new series of monthly public lectures, beginning in October. Each lecture will begin at 6pm in the DLH lecture hall, 133 Melita Street, Valletta. Those attending are requested to be seated by 5.45pm. The lectures are open to the public and free of charge, but donations to help with our restoration projects will be greatly appreciated.

Thursday, 8 October

'Subterranean Valletta' Architect Edward Said

Thursday, 12 November

'Malta's Greatest Treasure – the Polyptych of St Paul at the Mdina Cathedral Museum' Emanuel Vincent Borg

Thursday, 10 December

'The Statue-Menhirs of Prehistoric Sardinia' Krista Paris

Thursday, 14 January

'Medical Facilities for Seamen in the British Period, 1800-1979' Dr Charles Savona Ventura

Thursday, 11 February

'The Charm of an Island from an Artist's Perspective' John Martin Borg

Thursday, 11 March

'The EU's role in Heritage Protection' Dr Roberta Metsola

Thursday, 8 April

'Punic – Roma Melita, A Working Hypothesis' Fr. Eugene Theuma

Thursday, 13 May

'Malta's Heritage Future, 2010 – 2020' Dr. Luciano Mulè Stagno

Thursday, 10 June

'What Landscape Means to Me: Views of an Archaeologist' Dr Nicholas C. Vella

Hal Tarxien Booklet Published

To foster awareness of the need to preserve local culture and heritage, *Din l-Art Helwa*, in collaboration with Tarxien Local Council, has published a 48-page booklet entitled “Hal Tarxien – Four Walks in a Village of Culture”. The booklet is extensively illustrated, in full colour, and gives a detailed description of all the historical sites along the routes.

Printed by Best Print Co. Ltd of Qrendi, and sponsored by them, together with Il-Kastell Wine Bar of Tarxien, the booklet was officially launched on 12 May 2009.

The booklet’s authors, Joseph A. Farrugia and Alfred Massa – both natives of Tarxien – proudly introduce their village as neolithic. From excavations carried out over the last two centuries, it is known that this area has been inhabited for more than five thousand years. This is evidenced by the existence of the Megalithic Temples, the Hypogeum and the Kordin Temples – all found within the area that used to pertain to Tarxien’s boundaries. Tombs dating back to Phoenician and Roman times have also been found in the area.

The Militia List of 1419 includes the names of 18 males between the ages of 16 and 65 from Mitarxen (ie Tarxien), four of whom were rich enough to own a horse and to have it prepared in case of invasion by corsairs at the time.

In 1436, when Bishop De Mello divided Malta into 10 parishes, Tarxien was put under the matrix church of Bir Miftuh.

During the Great Siege of 1565, all the inhabitants of Tarxien were ordered to leave their homes and seek shelter behind the bastions of Senglea. Men between the ages of 16 and 65 who were enlisted in the militia were sent to the Mdina garrison and later to Senglea to strengthen the defending forces there. The Turks used the deserted houses of Tarxien to billet and provision their soldiers.

In a census compiled in 1575 by the Apostolic Delegate Mons. Pietro Dusina, it was stated that there were 100 houses in Tarxien. At that time, Tarxien was also known as “The Village of St John” (Casalis San Giovanni) after a small chapel within its boundaries. There were 10 more rural chapels in the area.

On 29th May 1592, Bishop Thomas Gargallo declared Tarxien an independent parish, with boundaries extending from Zejtun to Birgu and Marsa. By 1636, the new parish church was completed in the centre of the village, called the Market Place. The church was subsequently enlarged and was consecrated in 1782. It was dedicated to the Annunciation of Our Lady, in whose honour the people of Tarxien celebrate their festa every year in late May.

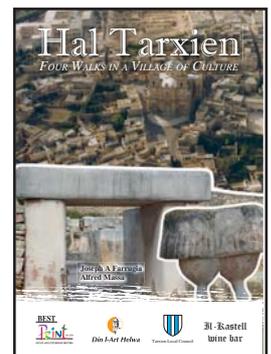
During the French Blockade in 1798, Tarxien had two batteries facing the French locked within the Cottonera Lines. The people of Tarxien had to provide food and pay the wages of all the soldiers in those two batteries. At one time the more prosperous villagers of Tarxien had to mortgage their land and their cotton crop to be able to import food from Sicily for the soldiers and the people of Tarxien.

Many houses in Tarxien were destroyed through enemy action in World War II and, according to the records, 63 residents were killed.

Hal Tarxien is practically all village core, and three of the four walks take the reader to the Tarxien Temples, passing the many palaces and chapels in the village. Many of these fine buildings are the residence of various personalities. Along the walks, all the corner statues, niches and other monuments are described in detail. It is a delight to roam through the very old village centre around the parish church, with its narrow streets, alleyways and elegant architecture.

The fourth walk takes the reader on a detailed tour of the parish church. The chapels in the church are adorned with paintings by prominent artists such as Francesco Zahra, Giuseppe Calì, Gian Nikola Buhagiar, Rafael Bonnici Calì, Pietro Gagliardi and Sassoferrato. The photographs in the booklet were provided by Mario Aquilina, Fotoforce and Tarxien Local Council.

The booklet, which costs €2.50, is available from the offices of Tarxien Local Council, *Din l-Art Helwa* and various bookshops.

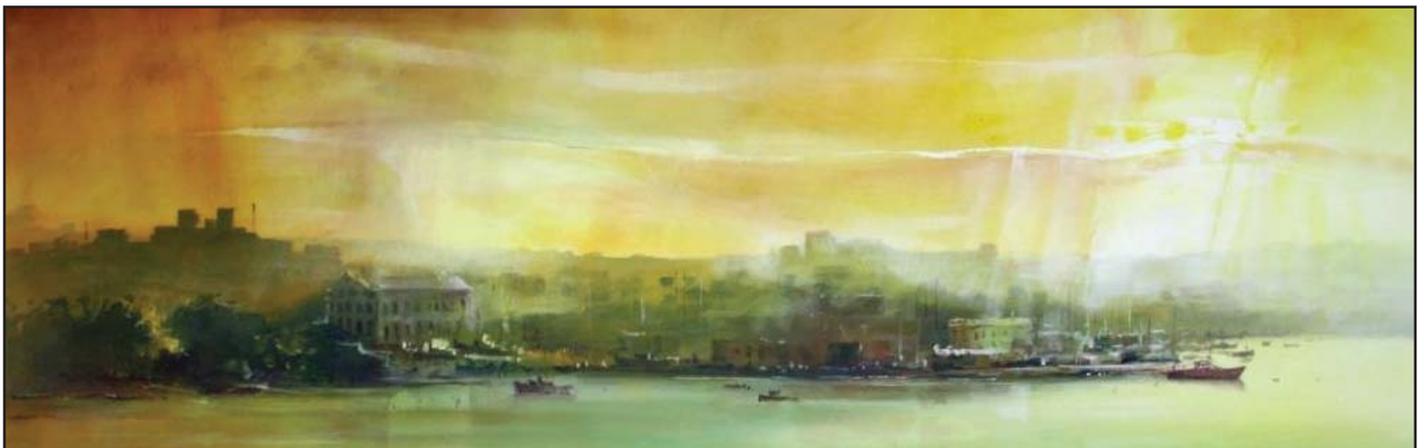


Din l-Art Helwa Thanks ‘GALLARIJA’

Din l-Art Helwa would like to thank *The Malta Independent on Sunday* and in particular Marie Benoit, for the long-standing support shown to our organisation in *Gallarija*, its weekly supplement.

By regularly covering our cultural activities, *Gallarija* has helped us to secure public participation in our events and consequently assisted with our educational and fund-raising programmes, which are so fundamental to the maintenance and restoration of the historic sites we hold for the nation.

A few signed copies of *Malte Tricolore* are still available for sale from the office of *Din l-Art Helwa*.



The yard at Manoel Island by John Martin Borg

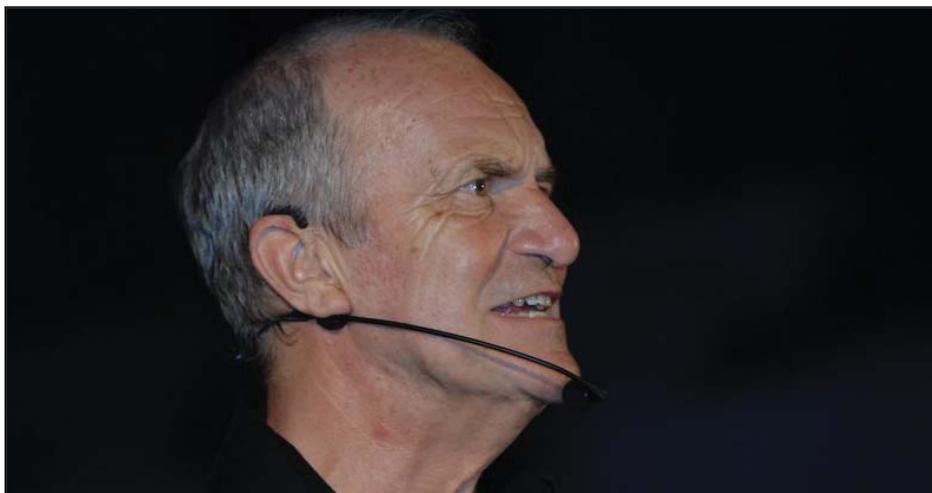
Din I-Art Helwa Gozo and Comino Events

Concert Drama – *Besieged*

The *Din I-Art Helwa* Gozo/Comino Committee organised a concert performance of the drama entitled *Besieged* on the St Michael Bastions of the Citadel in Victoria on Friday, 31st July. The concert, which was under the patronage of the President of Malta H.E. Dr George Abela (who, unfortunately, on the day was unable to attend), was a great success. It was attended by over 350 people, including Gozo Minister Mrs Giovanna Debono and other distinguished guests.

The concert was held in the same location where, in July 1551, the attack on Gozo by the Turks took place. It was a stunning setting for this anniversary concert and our gratitude goes to all those involved, including the director, Terry Shaw who, together with David Crewe, was responsible for writing the script and composing the musical score. All the cast, including Ludwig Galea, Georgina Gauci, Mary Rose Mallia, Paul Barnes and the choir, gave a truly first-class performance.

Our sincere thanks go also to the sponsors, without whose help the concert could not have taken place. These included the Ministry for Gozo, the Gozo Cultural Office, Arkadia, FPC Investments, Ta' Mene Wine Estate, Michael Grech Financial Services, Gozo Business Systems Ltd, Coca Cola and Flower Zone. Congratulations and thanks also go to the organising committee.



Din I-Art Helwa Gozo & Comino Sub-Committee Members

Carolyn Clements (coordinator /chairperson), John and Frances Barnes, Nigel Brittain, Jayne Clarke, Martin Portelli, Kate Nelson, Victoria Attard and Tony Buttigieg.

The Team of Volunteers

Tony Leneve Roff, Jolanda de Concilius, Fay Gussenhaven, Effie Brown, Nelleke Hemelaar, Roger Wiseman, Paul Camilleri, Chris and Steve McIntosh, David Gahan, Judith Wells, Margaret Joynes, Sheila Dunbar-Smythe, Annie Pye, Mary Field, Peter Edgson-Wright, Joanna Muscat, Maria Muscat, Jane Bower, Denise Falzon, Simon and Marianna Grech, Peter Llewellyn and Joe Muscat (who ferries the volunteers in his boat to open Comino Tower).

Our properties in Gozo and Comino

Dwejra (Il-Qawra) Tower (1652)

This has been opened jointly by *Din L-Art Helwa* and Nature Trust Malta, the latter being the NGO responsible for Dwejra Heritage Park, in which Dwejra Tower is located. There are fabulous views from the roof and Mario can be seen making chain-mail during the weekday openings.

Opening hours:

Monday to Friday: 9am to 3pm
Sundays and Public Holidays: 12noon to 3pm
The Tower is open when the flag is flying

Isopu Tower (1667), Nadur

Managed jointly by *Din L-Art Helwa* and Nadur Local Council, the tower is situated in a beautiful high location between Gebel Mistra, San Blas Bay and Dahlet Qorret in the north-east of Gozo. To reach the tower, follow the new blue signs from Nadur centre.

Opening hours:

From the beginning of October, the tower will be open to the public on three Sundays a month: by *Din l-Art Helwa* on the first and third Sundays, and by the local council on the second Sunday, from 9.30am to 1pm.

The Great Fountain (1698), Lunzjata Valley

The Great Fountain, located just below the church of St Gregory, is approached from the entrance arch into the valley, only a short distance from Rabat on the road to Kercem.

Opening hours:

Accessible at all times.

St Anthony Battery (1734), Qala

Din L-Art Helwa and Qala Local Council are jointly restoring this coastal fortified fortification. Visitors are invited to call in to see the progress of the beautiful work being undertaken by skilled craftsmen.

Opening hours:

Accessible at all times.

Comino

Santa Marija Tower (1618)

Standing strong and mighty, 230 feet above sea level, the tower offers stunning views of Comino's turquoise waters.

Opening hours:

From April to the end of October, the tower is open on Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from 10.30am to 3pm. During the winter season, it can be opened, weather permitting, on request. Contact Carolyn on 9905 1866 or carolync@maltanet.net

The Tower is open when the flag is flying.

Santa Marija Battery (1715)

Built on a clearing carved out of the cliff Santa Marija Battery, restored by *Din l-Art Helwa*, offers stunning views of the Gozo Channel.

Opening hours:

Accessible at all times.

Availability

Group bookings for all the properties are available for schools, organisations, or groups of friends by special arrangement. Bookings are also available for private functions. Contact Carolyn on 9905 1866 or carolync@maltanet.net



Presentation

Tuesday 24th November 2009;
Presentation by Architect Ivana Farrugia
at the Citadel, Victoria, Gozo

'An Assault upon the Cittadel - Interventions at the Cittadella under the EU funded Fortifications Restoration Project'.

Further details will be available from the Gozo Committee;
contact Carolyn on 9905 1866 / carolync@maltanet.net

Appeal

Din l-Art Helwa needs volunteers to help with activities in Gozo and Comino and to enable the organisation to extend the opening hours so that more visitors, both local and foreign, can enjoy these splendid heritage properties. If you can spare a few hours a month to be part of an enthusiastic team, this is a most enjoyable, interesting and rewarding experience. Please contact Carolyn Clements, as above.

The Dublin Declaration



Our Mission

“The International National Trusts’ biennial conference meeting in Dublin on 13 September signed this Declaration on Climate Change addressed to world leaders who will be meeting in Copenhagen in December.

Martin Scicluna, who represented *Din l-Art Helwa* at the conference and is a member of the International National Trusts Organisation (INTO) Executive Committee, signed the Declaration on our behalf”.

Aerial view of Mgarr ix-Xini

Photo:
Ryan Shane Barbara



1.1 The International National Trusts Organisation (INTO) is a Non-Governmental Organisation, founded in 2007, with the following object:

‘to promote the conservation and enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage of all nations for the benefit of the people of the world.’ INTO has close links with, inter alia, UNESCO, UNEP, ICOMOS, IUCN and Europa Nostra.

1.2 INTO currently represents about 5 million individual members, and countless millions of visitors to sites and properties, across more than 25 countries.

1.3 As such, INTO and its members are well placed to work with governments and agencies to:

- conserve and enhance existing built resources, most notably by the viable re-use of historic and older buildings, greening of existing building stock, and reinvestment in older and historic communities;
- manage land in a sustainable way;
- pilot and implement low carbon technologies;
- assist in the implementation of International Programmes and Conventions, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the UNEP Convention on Biological Diversity; and the UNESCO World Heritage Committee programme to protect the outstanding universal value, integrity and authenticity of World Heritage sites from the adverse effects of climate change; and
- reach citizens around the world with key messages about climate change mitigation and adaptation, including through education programmes at heritage sites.

1.4 We, the members of the International National Trusts Organisation (INTO) and affiliated and associated bodies, urge world leaders gathering at Copenhagen for the 15th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP15) to take immediate action to tackle global climate change and to protect the world’s natural and cultural heritage from its negative impacts.

The International National Trusts Organisation is a non-profit organisation registered as a limited company in England & Wales (06718966) and a registered charity (1 128224).

Our registered office is 32 Queen Anne’s Gate, London SW1H 9AB, UK.

The Facts

2.1 Our natural and cultural heritage is of fundamental significance to all humankind, irrespective of race, creed or nationality, for its inspirational, artistic, scientific, economic, spiritual and other values. This heritage is composed of both tangible assets and resources, such as landscapes, monuments, buildings, artwork and artifacts, as well as intangible assets ('living heritage'), such as languages, stories, music, dance, ceremonies, traditional medicine, and other traditional cultural practices.

2.2 Climate change is impacting on both natural and cultural heritage. Impacts include:

- destruction of or damage to natural ecosystems, including loss or movement of animal and plant species;
- destruction of or damage to heritage sites, historic buildings and monuments;
- damage to or destruction of sacred sites or the viability of traditional cultural practices, disproportionately affecting indigenous peoples;
- damage to historic landscapes;
- failure and loss of traditional agricultural practices; and
- changes to the lives of individuals and communities resulting in disruption to or loss of aspects of intangible cultural heritage, and potential displacement of entire communities.

2.3 Changing rainfall patterns are resulting in more frequent and severe floods, storms, droughts and wildfires. These extreme weather events are destroying or damaging natural and cultural heritage worldwide.

2.4 Rising global temperature threatens small island states, coastal settlements and historically significant and iconic coastal structures, especially those on river deltas, coastal barrier islands and coral atolls. These places are at risk from significant coastal erosion and inundation and will be increasingly vulnerable to major or catastrophic damage due to the combined effects of sea level rise and more intense and frequent storms. Thawing permafrost in many parts of the world also endanger traditional settlements.

2.5 Climate change poses a threat to the well-being of all peoples of the world, but its impacts will disproportionately affect the developing world. It threatens the viability of many traditional practices - indeed, entire cultures that have evolved in harmony with their natural surroundings.

Our Request to World Leaders

3.1 We therefore urge world leaders to take strong and decisive action to address climate change and its impacts on heritage through mitigation strategies that reduce climate change and adaptation strategies to cope with its unavoidable consequences. It is essential that these actions take into account the effect of climate change on global heritage.

3.2 Specifically, we request world leaders to:

- reach global agreement on greenhouse gas reduction targets (limiting global average temperature rise to less than 2 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels – 1) and the policy mechanisms and timescales for implementing these targets in order to stabilise the global climate (establishing a credible trajectory for reducing global emissions by at least 50% on 1990 levels by 2050);
- create policy frameworks, at international and national levels, that encourage investment in low-carbon technologies and promote energy efficiency; and
- ensure that any agreement or policy framework takes into account considerations of intergenerational and inter-regional equity.

3.3 In addition, we call on world leaders to promote and undertake mitigation and adaptation measures that specifically take advantage of the contribution heritage can make in mitigating climate change and that alleviate the effects that climate change has on global heritage.

3.3.1 GLOBAL HERITAGE AND CLIMATE CHANGE – MITIGATION

We call on governments and agencies worldwide to:

promote sustainable land use practices by:

- reducing deforestation and other harmful environmental practices through the development and promotion of sustainable agriculture that supports local communities, traditional cultural land use, and traditional food sources;
- creating incentives for ensuring more sustainable management of soils in the landscape, given their important role as carbon stores;
- promoting and supporting ecosystem restoration projects that use indigenous species and take into account traditional knowledge and expertise; and
- investing in existing urbanized areas in order to reduce the harmful environmental impacts of development on previously undeveloped land.

Aerial view of Marsascala

Photo:
Ryan Shane Barbara





promote investment in historic buildings by:

- promoting and supporting the re-use and re-investment in historic and older buildings in order to reduce the negative environmental impacts of new construction; and
- increasing the energy efficiency of historic and older buildings and communities.

3.3.2 GLOBAL HERITAGE AND CLIMATE CHANGE – ADAPTATION

We call on governments and agencies worldwide to:

increase recognition of impacts of climate change on heritage by:

- giving greater recognition to the effect that the impacts of climate change will have on heritage values, particularly intangible cultural heritage and heritage in developing nations.

Document heritage resources, conduct risk assessments and develop adaptation strategies through:

- researching and recording natural and cultural heritage assets and resources, which will preserve the knowledge to humanity, now and in perpetuity, of, for example, important archaeological and historical remains, or traditional cultures or ways of living, that are particularly at risk from the impact of climate change;
- completing risk assessments of the likely impact of climate change on natural and cultural heritage;
- incorporating considerations about heritage into disaster response programmes;
- developing appropriate strategies to alleviate and adapt to the impacts identified by:
- promoting the importance of maintenance and other measures to enable natural and cultural heritage to withstand climate change;
- promoting research on the impacts of climate

Abandoned buildings,
Dock No1

Autumn fields

Photo:
Ryan Shane Barbara

change on heritage, including the development of new technologies and techniques for the conservation sector; and

- providing financial and technical support to developing nations to help them undertake adaptation measure to protect heritage from climate change impacts.

3.3.3 GLOBAL HERITAGE AND CLIMATE CHANGE – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

We call on governments and agencies worldwide to:

- support educational programmes for visitors to heritage sites about the impact of climate change on these sites and what can be done to both prevent further climate change at a global level and to reduce impacts on that site;
- educate people, especially those in areas particularly at risk, about threats and about adaptation measures that they can take; and
- ensure that climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies relating to heritage engage, involve and have the ownership of local communities.

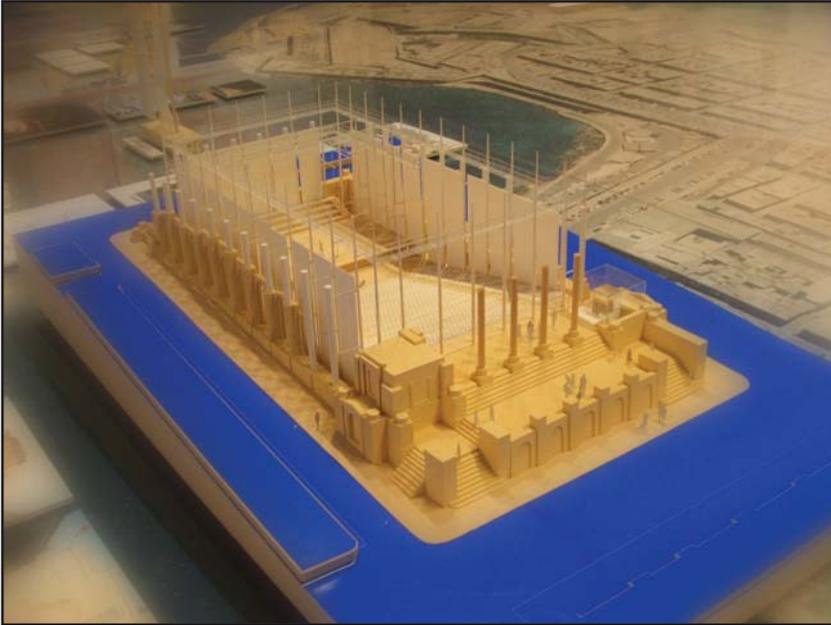


The Dublin Declaration on Climate Change was written and agreed by the members of the International National Trusts Organisation (INTO) many of whom were gathered in Dublin, Ireland from 13 to 17 September 2009 for the 13th International Conference of National Trusts, the theme of which was 'Heritage of the World in Trust: Conservation in a Changing Climate'.

INTO member organisations have pledged to work with governments and agencies worldwide to tackle climate change and thereby to protect the world's natural and cultural heritage now and for future generations. Conscious of their role as custodians and repositories of heritage, INTO member organisations have also pledged to take action to address their own organisation's carbon emissions and thereby to be exemplars of best practice in this regard.

Theatre Among the Ruins

Petra Bianchi



Details of the
Renzo Piano project
for the Opera House

In the 18th century, young men from the north of Europe frequently travelled on a “grand tour” to the south, to complete their education. They visited France and Italy, admiring old monuments and viewing famous cities, buildings and works of art. At the turn of 19th century, many of these travellers were taking a special interest in the ancient ruins of classical Greek buildings.

A love of ancient Greek architecture inspired a wave of neo-classical buildings constructed by British architects in the 19th century. One of these was the opera house in Valletta, surrounded by columns like a Greek temple and designed by London architect Edward M. Barry in the 1860s.

With an intriguing twist to the story, this theatre – that was inspired by the ruins of ancient civilisation – will now be preserved as a ruin. We are told: “after more than 60 years of controversy, the ruins of the demolished opera have undeniably reached the status of monument, irrevocable witness of history and the dignity of collective memory”.

Over half a century of passionate debate about this site since the Second World War has featured swarms of people and a thousand-and-one ideas. This passion has turned these remains into an extraordinary kind of national icon. The ruins have now been recognised as a historic monument; they are an attraction in themselves.

Some of the missing columns are to be reconstructed, using the original stones. The internal area will be used as a performance space reminiscent of the open-air theatres of ancient Greece. Wide steps will be created for seating some 1,000 spectators, with columns and panels all around like an enveloping sculpture.

In the words of architect Renzo Piano, the idea is “to dignify the ruins”, and to maintain the memory, or “soul”, of the building as a beloved cultural site. Its role will be reinvented as a 21st century performance space through state-of-the-art technology.



Admiring the beauty of ruins was typical of the Romantic era at the turn of the 19th century. The crumbling remains of old buildings in Rome and elsewhere were picturesque and full of atmosphere. They also evoked meditations about human mortality and the rise and fall of empires.

Byron described the grandeur of Rome in his poems as full of “steps of broken thrones and temples”, where “a world is at our feet as fragile as our clay”. John Keats, and so many other poets, painters and architects, also travelled to the Mediterranean and were fascinated by ancient remains.

Classical ruins were the initial inspiration for Barry’s opera house. Now it seems that we have come full circle 150 years later, with the memory of evocative ruins rising up again as the highlight of the piece.

Renzo Piano believes that this will be a magical space. Not everyone shares his vision and I can appreciate the wish for a more practical, roofed theatre. Yet all the same, our open-air theatre within the old city walls promises to be an exceptionally beautiful and special place – and, yes, quite magical.

A Shelter for Haġar Qim and Mnajdra

Joe Azzopardi



Graphic representation of Haġar Qim before excavation by J Houel 1787

The temple complex of Haġar Qim and Mnajdra lies some 2km south-west of the village of Qrendi. Some antique graphic illustrations show that, before excavation, Haġar Qim was an anonymous hillock of arable land with clusters of huge stones jutting out of the terrain. As a number of these large standing megaliths were visible, this might be the origin of the name of the area which, in old Maltese, translates as “standing stones”. Excavations in the area were first carried out in 1839 by an officer of the Royal Engineers, Colonel J.C. Vance. A report, with accompanying illustrations, was published in 1842 and various excavations were later carried out between 1885 and 1954.

The temple of Haġar Qim dates from the Ġgantija phase (c. 3600-3200BC) and stands on a hilltop overlooking the sea and the islet of Filfla. Most of the standing megaliths were found *in situ*, while the façade, as evident from some 19th century photographs, was largely reconstructed by the re-integration of megaliths found on the ground at the turn of the 20th century. Considerable reconstitution of individual megaliths with the use of cement mortar is also evident. A number of modern stone pillars supporting the flat table-structures within Haġar Qim are visible in the illustrations of the 1842 report, indicating that the large horizontal megaliths that form these features were already broken at the time of discovery. The same supporting pillars, probably with additions and replacement of individual blocks, are still performing the same function today. Mnajdra lies in a hollow in the cliffs a little closer to the sea than Haġar Qim. It is a complex site consisting of three temples, often referred to as the Upper (East), the Middle, and the Lower (South) temples, overlooking an oval forecourt. The Upper temple is considered the oldest and is a simple three-apse structure dating to the Ġgantija phase (3600-3200BC). The central temple is thought to have been the last addition to the complex and dates from the late Tarxien phase (3150-2500BC).

The most impressive of the Mnajdra temples is the Lower, constructed in the Ġgantija phase and modified during the Tarxien phase. This temple retains most of the original façade. There is marked difference in the building materials used for Haġar Qim and Mnajdra. The former is built entirely of globigerina limestone, while at Mnajdra this was used only for the interior, with the external walls built of the harder coralline limestone.



The reconstructed façade of Haġar Qim 1960s



Protective masonry wall enclosing Hagar Qim in the late 1960s

This temple is also a three-month interval marker, constructed in such a way that on the first day of every season the sun's rays are concentrated on a particular spot. The central altar, at the end of the main axis, is bathed in light during the equinoxes of 21 March and 23 September – the first day of spring and autumn respectively. The first day of winter (22 December) is marked by a narrow slit of light projecting on to a vertical stone slab that stands on the left-hand side of the central altar, and the same happens on the opposite side on the first day of summer (21 June).

Mnajdra was excavated in 1840 and the most extensive restoration of the temple complex was carried out between 1948 and 1954. During this work, some external walls were re-built. The rubble walls we see today were, to a large extent, reconstructed during this period but the uprights, many of which have pitted decoration, are all original and were excavated *in situ*.

In 1992, Hagar Qim and Mnajdra were inscribed in the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites. Thus Malta became committed, in terms of the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention, to protect and preserve these sites, now recognised as being “of outstanding universal value”, lying within its territory. Six years later, Mnajdra was included in the 1998-1999 list of most endangered sites compiled by the World Monuments Fund.

A first manifestation of this protective urge was already present in the shape of a masonry wall with iron rails built to enclose Hagar Qim in the late 1960s. This was soon the object of controversy because of claims by many, including *Din l-Art Helwa*, that it severed the temple from its surroundings, adulterating its intrinsic value. This wall was replaced by the current fence in the late 1990s. The present fence is less physically obtrusive and occupies a perimeter much larger than its predecessor. In 2001, a similar fence was constructed around Mnajdra. Resent them as we may, these fences probably played a considerable part in saving Hagar Qim from succumbing to attacks similar to those perpetrated on Mnajdra a few years later.

In 1999, a timber walkway was installed in order to restrict visitor access to the external circuit of the main temple complexes, and the principal axis through the temples, in order to minimise the problem of visitor impact being caused by large groups roaming through the site.

Temples Under Siege

The megaliths composing these prehistoric temples are fragile giants and the need for protection was justified far beyond the perception of those who first sought to provide it. Unfortunately, the present compromised state of some of the megaliths is partly the result of early restoration, which made ample use of cement. This was later discovered to have a devastating effect on limestone. Being much harder than the stone, cement tends to create micro cracks which, over time, end up dislodging fragments of the same cement and portions of the stone surface, to which it becomes tenaciously attached. In addition, the surface lacunae left by cement become heavily compromised. Cement also introduces considerable amounts of salts to the stone.

The primary agent in stone deterioration cycles across the whole of the Maltese Islands is water – the conveyor of a number of deteriorating agents, the most damaging of which is sodium chloride (marine salt). Water can enter the stone in various forms such as rain, dew, sea spray, or condensation. It can also insinuate itself through capillary action, as in the case of rising damp. Water can carry particles of salt and also interact with salt already present within the stone. Once the water has evaporated, the salt particles re-crystallise and expand, causing mechanical fractures in the stone at a microscopic level. What is worse is that such fractures tend to further exacerbate the problem by allowing water to enter in larger quantities and evaporate at a faster rate, leaving a greater amount of extraneous material within the stone. Over time, these progressive microscopic processes lead to major and traumatic damage.

The susceptibility of salt-induced deterioration is determined by the physical characteristics of the stone. For example, while globigerina limestone, from which most of the elements of the temples are made, can have a porosity as high as 40 per cent, coralline limestone is much less porous, with an

Heavily deteriorated megaliths in a south-facing apse of Hagar Qim



average 25 per cent. In addition, globigerina limestone has an absorption coefficient of around 16.5 per cent, with values for coralline limestone standing at much lower levels. These characteristics make coralline limestone much more resistant to water-induced deterioration cycles, even if they are both composed of calcium carbonate (calcite) with small quantities of clay and quartz. Furthermore, laboratory experiments have shown that when a block of globigerina limestone is left immersed in water for a number of months, it absorbs more water during the first 10 minutes than it does during the months that follow. This means that even a short rainstorm can contribute considerably to the decay of the stone.

The rhythm of the process of salt dissolution and re-crystallisation is governed by the rate of water evaporation which, in turn, is directly linked to exposure to the sun. This is the reason why far greater deterioration is noticeable on the south facing sections of the temples. The sophisticated structural systems of the temples depend on contact between the stone blocks. The integrity of the structures becomes endangered when individual elements are eroded, thus diminishing this contact and culminating in structural failure that can lead to dramatic collapse.

Apart from its role in the salt-induced deterioration cycle, water can, and has, become a physical menace to the temples. On 5th April 1994, after an exceptionally stormy night combining strong winds and heavy rainfall, it was discovered that a portion of the Middle Mnajdra temple, at the intersection with the Lower temple, had collapsed. The collapse happened at a point that was particularly weak because, even when the site was still in use, the fill between the two temples had been cleared out to gain an extra chamber. Prehistoric "table-structures" or buttresses had been used here to support the walls in place of the more reliable fill.

Fingers were soon pointed at the coralline limestone quarries that operated, through systematic blasting, barely 150 metres away from the site. Although it was subsequently ascertained that this was unlikely to be the cause of the collapse, it was pointed out that the quarrying operations very probably contributed to small displacements and to the development of micro-cracks within the stone fabric of the temples. Water saturation in the soil in-fill of a wall of the Middle temple, as a result of the fact that the rubble fill forming the floor of this temple did not drain rapidly enough, was identified as the main cause of the collapse.

The collapse affected elements within both structures and the restoration

process was begun in earnest. All collapsed stones were laid out in the forecourt in front of the temples, measured and photographed. An isolated retaining wall, covered in plastic sheets, was created in order to buttress the infill and prevent future pressure from the megaliths before these were re-positioned.

Within the Middle temple, all the stones were re-positioned, as far as possible, in exactly the same position. The nature of the structure itself left little scope for error, as it would have been difficult to recreate the apse unless all the stones were in their correct location. In the Lower temple, however, a boulder previously leaning inwards had to be set vertically because its sustaining structure had been lost. Another boulder originally, but incongruously, lay on top of a small wall. This was interpreted as an early example of mistaken relocation and was thus rectified. Some upper corbels in this temple, which had been hit and displaced in the collapse, were also pushed back into place.

As a temporary measure meant to avoid future rain-induced incidents, a discreet rainwater catchment and drainage system was installed within the crest of the fill of the walls of the Middle temple. A permeable layer immediately below the floor of this temple was also installed to aid drainage. Uphill from the site, water traps were created with the intention of diverting the watercourses of rain away from the temples.

Unfortunately, at the end of November 1998 a similar collapse involving a stretch of megalithic masonry occurred at Haġar Qim. The World Heritage Committee, which was in session when this last collapse occurred, immediately approved a request for emergency assistance submitted by the Maltese Government.

opposite top:

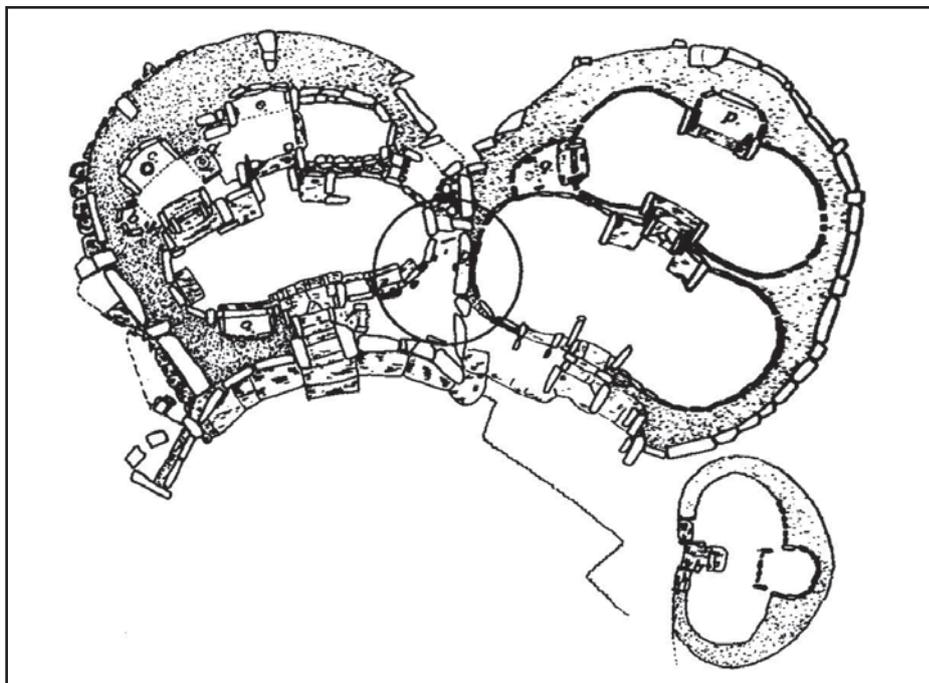
A section of Mnajdra following the 2001 attack

opposite bottom:

Restoration work underway

Both images by Dr Alex Torpiano

Plane of Mnajdra Temple Complex showing the area of the 1994 collapse





Of Human Wickedness

Other threats to the preservation of the temples manifested themselves over time. Nature may cause slow, inexorable decay, but it is the foolishness of man that first mutilated the temples and then caused the most devastating crises that ever affected them.

During the night of 26th October 1996, some person, or persons, sprayed graffiti all over Mnajdra. The tenacity of the spray used in this senseless gesture, combined with the fragility of the stone surface, made their complete removal an impossibility. However, during the years that have elapsed since the incident, weathering has gradually erased most of the graffiti.

But what seemed at the time the worst act that could be perpetrated against the temples paled almost into insignificance compared to what happened on the fateful night of 13th April 2001. During this night, the Mnajdra Temple complex suffered a brutal attack that caused severe damage to the Lower and Middle temples. The attack generated an indignant and angry reaction, abroad as well as locally.

The damage to the Lower temple was mostly limited to the first chamber. Three megaliths of the corbelling courses had been pushed over, hitting some upright megaliths on their way down. On the right-hand side of the chamber, one of these megaliths had fallen directly on to a small flight of steps that led to the chamber immediately to the right of the entrance, causing extensive fracturing. Inside this chamber, which had been the site of the 1994 collapse, a tall free-standing upright megalith, that had escaped damage on that occasion, was also toppled, and had broken into a number of pieces as a result.

Unfortunately, the damage in the Middle temple was much more extensive. Practically all the apses were involved and a number of uprights had been pushed over or severely dislodged. In the right-hand apse of the first chamber, the dismantling of the two extant corbelling courses was complete. The apse on the other side of this chamber had also been involved in the 1994 collapse but a significant number of the two corbelling courses had not been damaged in that collapse, but were now toppled over. Some coralline limestone megaliths that formed part of the outer wall of this chamber of the Middle temple were also pushed off towards the outside of the temple during this assault.

The inner chamber was also particularly affected. On the left-hand side, the attackers successfully dislodged an upright that formed the side to the porthole opening into the side-chamber. The megalith with the porthole opening was also damaged during the attack and a number of megaliths were damaged as a result of impact with the ground or other megaliths.

A total of about 76 megaliths and some 25 stones from the rubble walling to the west of the Middle temple were affected by the attack. The serious state of deterioration of some of the megaliths involved was of great concern, as their precarious condition would make them difficult to handle without risking further damage. Restoration work was promptly taken in hand by the Department of

Museums, which commissioned Professor Alex Torpiano to plan and supervise the works.

The set of rectified photographs that had been taken immediately after the 1994 collapse, and the systematic photographic survey that had been carried out by the same department as from 2000, were very useful in the reconstruction.

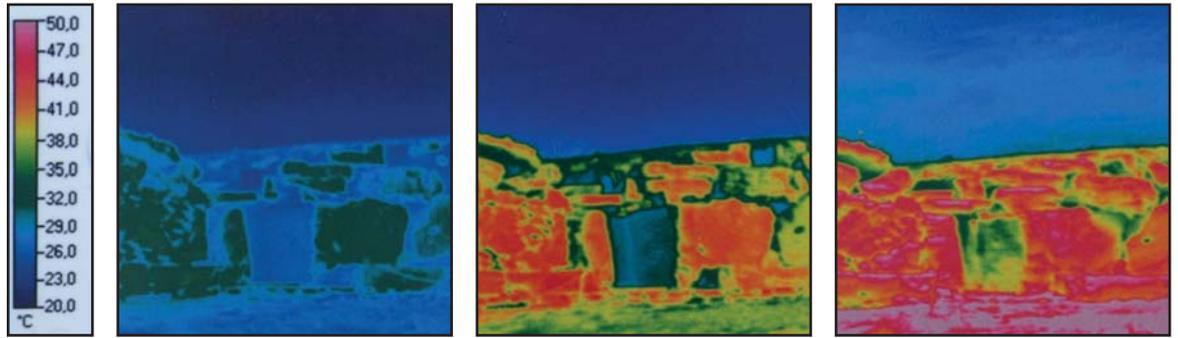
A report prepared by Dr Torpiano proposed a number of ideas, including the installation of a crane to facilitate the handling of the stones; the removal of some of the top layers of infill between the inner and outer walls of the Middle temple to facilitate the re-location process; the use of nylon fabric slings to lift each megalith from its collapsed position; the structural gluing of such fragments of the collapsed megaliths as were considered necessary for the recovery of the structural integrity of the whole; the re-assembly of the collapsed megaliths to their original positions; and the re-placing of the infill material at the top of the space between the inner and outer skins of the temple walls.

It has never been clear whether the original megaliths were laid in a bedding mortar or whether they were worked smooth so that no bedding layer was necessary. In any case, any existing bedding mortar had long disappeared. This was the cause of severe distress in the stones, since the uneven contact points in the interfaces give rise to high local stresses and thus to micro-cracking and accelerated deterioration. It was therefore proposed that the reconstruction of the displaced megaliths be carried out with the use of a bedding mortar, using a hydraulic lime-sand.

The photographs available did not indicate the correct orientation of the various megaliths with any degree of accuracy. In some instances, water was poured into a surface depression in order



Graphic rendering
of thermal changes
at Mnajdra during
the day



to check that the levelling of the megalith was the same as the original – if this was the case, the pool of water would cover exactly the depressed area that had discoloured as a result of years of water ponding.

The success of the restoration work depended greatly on the skilful handling of the megaliths by the two masons: Wenzu and Ġorġ. Wenzu had previously worked on the 1996 reconstruction of the Mnajdra temple and therefore was very aware of how to handle the massive, but at the same time, delicate stones.

This work also presented the opportunity to repair and re-assemble another four megaliths that had collapsed and been damaged in 1994. Finally, the area in the Haġar Qim temple that had collapsed in 1998 was also dismantled and reconstructed, so that the steel that had been used as support could be removed.

One positive aspect emerging from the attack on Mnajdra was that it allowed experts to study the hitherto hidden components of the construction system of the temples. The Museums Department took the opportunity to carry out archaeological investigations, particularly into the

wall construction at the rear of the Middle temple. The reconstruction process was successful, but the long-term risk to the survival of the temples posed by nature in the form of rain and sun, were not diminished and the serious concern over the deterioration of the megaliths remained.

As if the deleterious action of the elements and the appalling behaviour of some sections of society were not enough, the temples also came under threat from officialdom. In 2003, the idea of an interim engineered landfill in the coralline limestone quarries adjacent to the temples was being considered by the government. Thankfully, the public outcry, the risks involved and the incompatibility of the project considering the tourism aspect of the site brought the powers-that-be to their senses.

The Current Project

The current project has realised recommendations made by the Scientific Committee for the Conservation of Megalithic Temples, an interdisciplinary committee established in May 2000. Basically, the committee's conclusions from numerous preliminary studies were that some form of shelter from the elements was required in order to slow the rate of deterioration. This had to be temporary, lightweight, and fully ventilated.

The recently erected shelters consist of a tensile membrane structure supported by two arches and are mainly intended to protect the sites in two ways. Firstly, they will divert direct rainfall, thus avoiding both groundwater accumulation and rain contact with the stones leading to the water-related problems detailed above. Secondly, they will provide shade, thus sparing the stones the extreme temperature changes caused by exposure to the sun which trigger salt-induced deterioration mechanisms and jeopardise the stability of these delicate prehistoric structures.

That the preservation of the site was the top priority in every decision taken becomes evident by discussing the project with Reuben Grima, Senior Curator of Prehistoric Sites, Heritage Malta. Although it is impossible to prevent this sort of solution from affecting the visual perception of the temples, much attention has been dedicated to minimising this interference. At no point do the shelters come into contact with the structures over which they are set. In addition, the Mnajdra shelter is open to the front so that it will not interfere with the celestial alignments referred to above. Furthermore,

Haġar Qim
megaliths under
the new shelter



the shelters deserve appreciation in their own right, being a considerable feat of engineering and spectacular structures which, however, in no way divert the focus of attention from the temples themselves.

Every point affected by the shelters' foundations has been meticulously excavated by a team of professional archaeologists under the supervision of the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage. These excavations led to the discovery of some rock-cut features, including a concentration of cylindrical holes drilled into the rock to the south-west of Haġar Qim and a large cavity to the north-west of the same temple. At Mnajdra, a wall was found buried below the large terrace in front of the temples that may represent the limit of this terrace at an early stage of its existence.



The shelters seen in their rural context

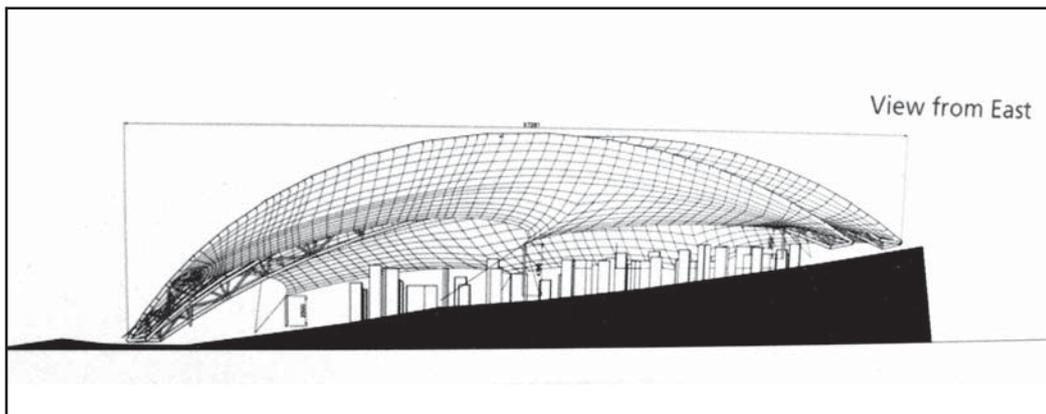
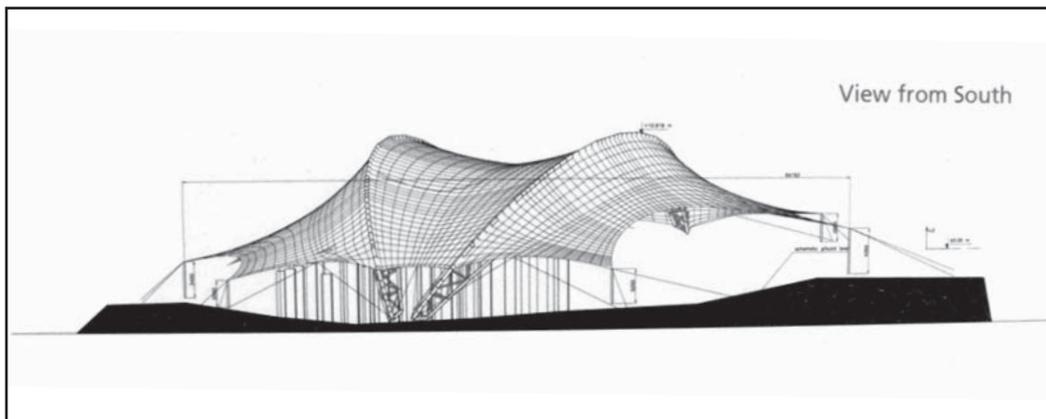
Photo:
Judy falzon

Intensive environmental monitoring, that formed part of the preliminary studies, was in place before the work began and this will continue in order to collect further data and permit a comparison between conditions affecting the temples before and after the provision of the shelters. This, in turn, will allow an objective assessment of the improvement, or lack thereof, resulting from the shelters.

While achieving the protection envisaged for the temples in the most sensitive way possible, the shelters have also resulted in other benefits for the site. Perhaps the most evident of these is that, together with the temples, they also offer protection to visitors, who can comfortably experience the site at leisure. They also make the temples accessible in various weather conditions, while the balanced diffusion of light highlights the nuances of colour of the stone surfaces.

It is not surprising – indeed it is encouraging – that such a prominent physical intervention on two of our most important national monuments should be the object of some controversy. There is no denying the fact that the shelters have considerably altered the way in which the temples are perceived. It is also a fact that, in order to objectively judge something, one must have a first-hand experience of it. Quite simply, it is necessary to stand underneath a tent in order to judge it, and once the temples are experienced in their new presentation, the benefits become self-evident.

The paramount justification for the shelters is their preservation capabilities and their ability to greatly reduce the wet and dry process and, by extension, the extensive damage that this was causing. The temples now have a much better chance of being preserved integrally until new and better solutions to the endemic deterioration problems that effect them can be conceived and put into practice.



Drawings of the shelters over Haġar Qim and Mnajdra

How important do you feel national heritage is in the formation of a national identity?

Long before Malta became a state, the Maltese were a nation. A nation is a group of people who identify themselves as sharing a common heritage, a common history, a common culture, usually a common language, common folklore, very often a common religion and common aspirations. You notice that I did not include ethnic origin, because a nation may be composed of individuals with different ethnicities as long as those individuals identify themselves as belonging to that nation. Furthermore, the people composing a nation usually inhabit the same geographical territory, although the concept of nation may include those who may live in a different geographical location but still identify themselves as belonging to that nation and share its heritage – those Australians or Canadians, for example, who still consider themselves Maltese, also belong to the Maltese nation as much as those who live in Malta.

National heritage includes the national culture composed of language and literature, art, music and folklore, history and archaeology, cuisine, the natural habitat and geological heritage and even law and methods of government. All of this and, perhaps, more compose the heritage of a nation and are the badges which identify that nation. It is this heritage which distinguishes us from neighbouring Peoples and gives us our identity as Maltese. Already in the Middle Ages, the Maltese felt themselves distinct from neighbouring Peoples and called themselves Maltese and not, for instance, Sicilians even though Malta was for a time governed from Palermo and there was continuous interaction with that land.

Malta may now be described as a nation-state because the State of Malta is the home of the Maltese Nation. Our own heritage identifies us as Maltese.

Do you think the Maltese in general are committed enough towards the protection of their heritage and environment?

I believe that today there is more awareness among the Maltese of their cultural heritage and natural environment. Nevertheless, one should not cease fostering and promoting more awareness of our heritage and the importance of preserving and protecting it for present and future generations. We must remain vigilant at all times to prevent our heritage from being dissipated.



Interview with HE President of



What role does national heritage and environmental protection occupy in your list of official responsibilities?

As Head of State, I feel duty bound to encourage the widest possible protection of all that which makes up our heritage, be it cultural, historical or natural. Malta, though small in size, has a vast cultural heritage which goes back to prehistoric times. Although this heritage is situated within the Maltese islands, it is part of world heritage, the heritage of mankind, and we are only its custodians. In representing the State of Malta, I am also representing this heritage.

As regards those places which fall directly under my jurisdiction, I do my best to ensure that proper maintenance and cleaning is carried out within the limits of the resources at my disposal.

You live and work in some of Malta's most beautiful palaces. How do you interact with such historically rich buildings?

There are three Presidential Palaces: in Valletta, San Anton and Verdala. They all have a long history, going back to the 16th century in the case of the Valletta Palace and Verdala, and the 17th century in the case of San Anton. Working and living in these palaces is like walking through our history. By the 18th century, the Knights had transformed Malta into a principality, a small European State, and the Magisterial Palace in Valletta has an unmistakable aura of a state palace from where sovereign authority was exercised. The Council and Grand Council Chambers (later used as the Throne Room) and the Ambassadors' Hall, used today for receiving ambassadors as it was at the time of the Order, reflect this period of our history. When ambassadors of many countries come to present their letters of credence to me, I cannot help wondering whether I have the same sensations which the Grandmasters had in their time when foreign envoys were received by them in the same room.

Dr George Abela

the Republic



left:

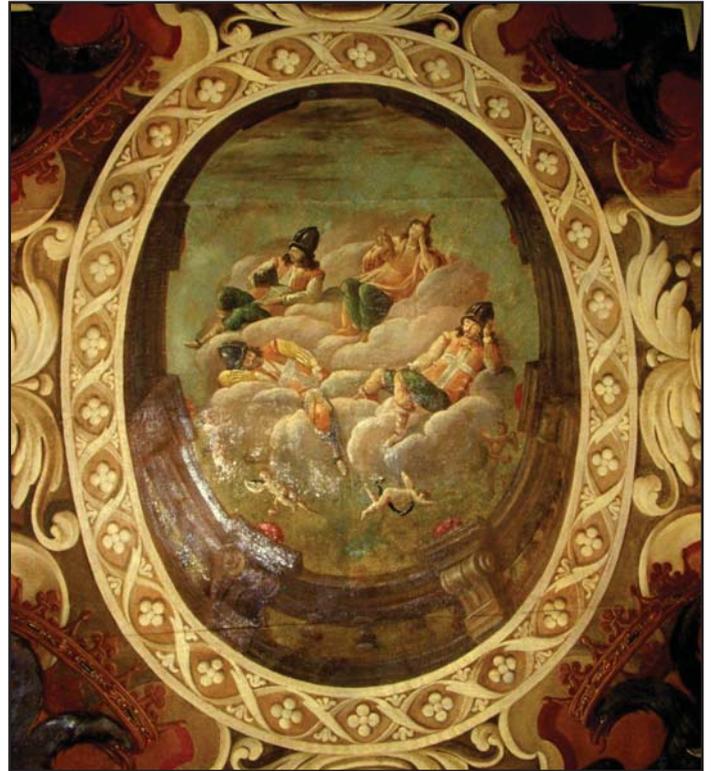
President George Abela
with Founder President
Judge Maurice Caruana Curran
and *Din l-Art Helwa* officials

right:

Somnolent Knights.
Detail of soffit decoration,
Presidential Palace, Valletta

bottom:

Detail of corridor vault decoration,
Presidential Palace, Valletta



You have frequented Valletta for many years. How has the capital changed, in your personal experience, over the last 10 years?

I am reminded of our constitutional history because it was from here that British Governors governed the country with the aid of a Council of Government until Malta had its own elected Legislative composed of a Senate and a Legislative Assembly when self-government was granted in 1921. It was a time when the powers of government were shared with the British Crown because certain matters were reserved to the British. It was also here that the first Parliament of an independent Malta met in the Tapestry Chamber in 1964. It was also in this building that Malta was proclaimed a Republic in 1974 and the first Maltese Head of State was elected. Working around these historic locations makes me proud that Malta has made so much progress and is today a fully independent state which enjoys the respect of all nations.

My official residence at San Anton is equally historic and many remarkable persons have lived or been hosted there throughout its history. My wife, Margaret, and I do all we can to make San Anton feel like a home, a Maltese household.

There are various portraits of Grand Masters, British and other European Royals and other notable personages. Looking so often at them, sometimes I feel I have come to know them a little, even though they are long dead. I am glad that the beautiful garden of the Palace is open, in part, to the public for its enjoyment. On occasions we even open for public viewing the private gardens to be enjoyed by everyone.

Verdala Palace is sometimes used for functions in aid of the Community Chest Fund and this is a purpose which is very close to my heart and that of my wife. This castle, built for the delectation of the powerful, is today used to raise funds for those most in need. At Verdala Palace, official functions like meetings with the Social Partners are also held.

I feel honoured and privileged to work and live in these magnificent buildings, which house cultural treasures by artists like Matteo Perez d'Aleccio, Mattia Preti, Filippo Paladini, Giuseppe Cali and others.

Valletta is the administrative centre of Malta and I have worked much in this Capital – particularly in the Law Courts and in the General Workers' Union building. It is today as busy as it was a decade ago. The appearance of the city has improved considerably in recent years. Streets and squares have been paved and the façades of many important buildings, such as the Auberge de Castille, the Bibliotheca, St James Church and others, have been cleaned and restored to their original splendour. The upper Barracca has been given an attractive face-lift and has become more pleasant than before. The restoration of the Pinto Stores at the Valletta wharf has greatly improved the Grand Harbour side of the Capital too.

What are the most pressing problems of Valletta today?

Valletta is included in the World Heritage List which includes properties forming part of the cultural and natural heritage which the World Heritage Committee considers as having outstanding universal value. We must ensure that our Capital will continue to merit such a distinction.

There is still much to be done as regards the restoration and upkeep – some buildings, many of which are private property, are in need of attention and the fortifications require extensive restoration. I hope that in time, when resources are available, the city built by gentlemen for gentlemen will improve further. The city is still rather lifeless in the evenings, especially in winter. Activities such as *Notte Bianca* have improved the situation considerably, but more needs to be done to give more life to this city which, up to the 1960s, was the centre of entertainment which has now moved out of town. The regulation of traffic and parking are other problems which need to be addressed. Indiscipline by the public is a problem because it is frustrating to see so much money being spent to upgrade the city while some irresponsible persons continue to harm the city and its treasures by their actions.



What do you think could be done in the future to mitigate these problems?

I believe that we need to be more disciplined and reduce the shabbiness of some parts of our Capital. When funds are available, more restoration of public buildings, as well as private ones, must be undertaken. The fortifications are, in places, in a poor state of repair.

What are your views about the Valletta Entrance Project?

The project is a rather radical departure from what the old *Putirjal* looked like, but I think a city is not a museum and has a life of its own. It cannot remain static. If this project will give more dignity to our Capital, then I believe it has a lot of merit.

Do you agree with the transfer of Parliament from the Palace?

The Palace has a four hundred-year-old history and, as a building, it grew organically and not along a pre-designed plan. It was never meant to house such an important and busy institution as a House of Representatives. Today, the House includes a number of Committees and these need space to work properly. I consider that it is appropriate that a more functional and spacious building designed for the purpose be constructed.

What do you consider the biggest threat to the national heritage and the national environment at present? What should be done to deal with these challenges?

Lack of funds and, perhaps, a shortage of qualified personnel may be one threat, and indifference on the part of a section of the population is another. Certainly, pollution by heavy traffic and other agents causes harm to important buildings. This problem is being

addressed in some measure at Haġar Qim. The Hypogeum is now under an efficient regime to control the influx of visitors and reduce harm to the monument. Some measures have also been taken at St John's Cathedral. There remains much to be done.

The biggest source of pollution of the environment is the power station. Perhaps more efficient and less harmful ways of producing energy, such as solar panels, may enter into more widespread use and some incentives could be introduced to achieve this goal.

There is the problem of over-development. I believe we have developed too many areas which were formerly of scenic beauty. Too much of the coastline has been developed. We must decide when and where to stop: Malta must not become a concrete jungle.

What particular restoration project would you most like to see undertaken?

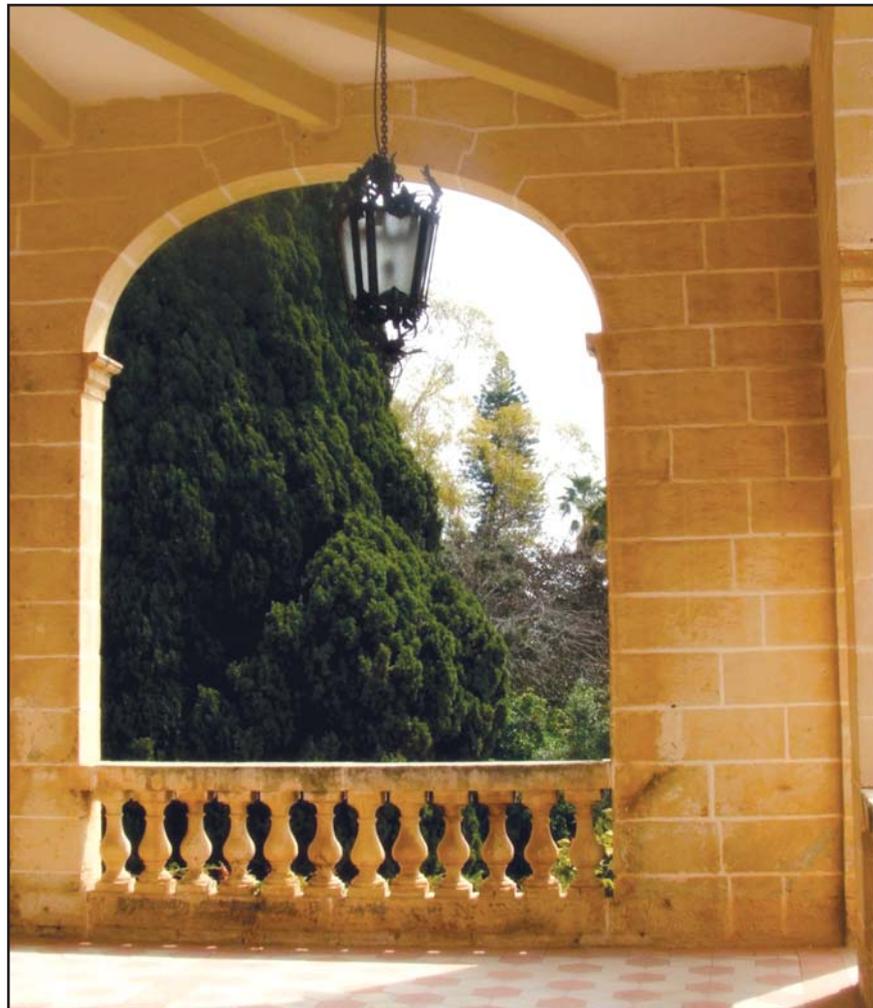
We have some 60 kms of fortification walls in Malta, including Valletta and the outer fortifications around Floriana, and it is expensive and time-consuming to bring them to the state they deserve to be in. Possibly, this is the most extensive restoration project that is waiting to be carried out before we lose these military engineering treasures for ever. I hope that, little by little, this goal may be achieved.

top:

A secluded corner of the gardens of San Anton Palace

bottom:

Arcaded veranda at San Anton Palace





Hall on the *piano nobile*, Verdala Palace

What is your view of the involvement of non-governmental organisations in heritage and environment protection?

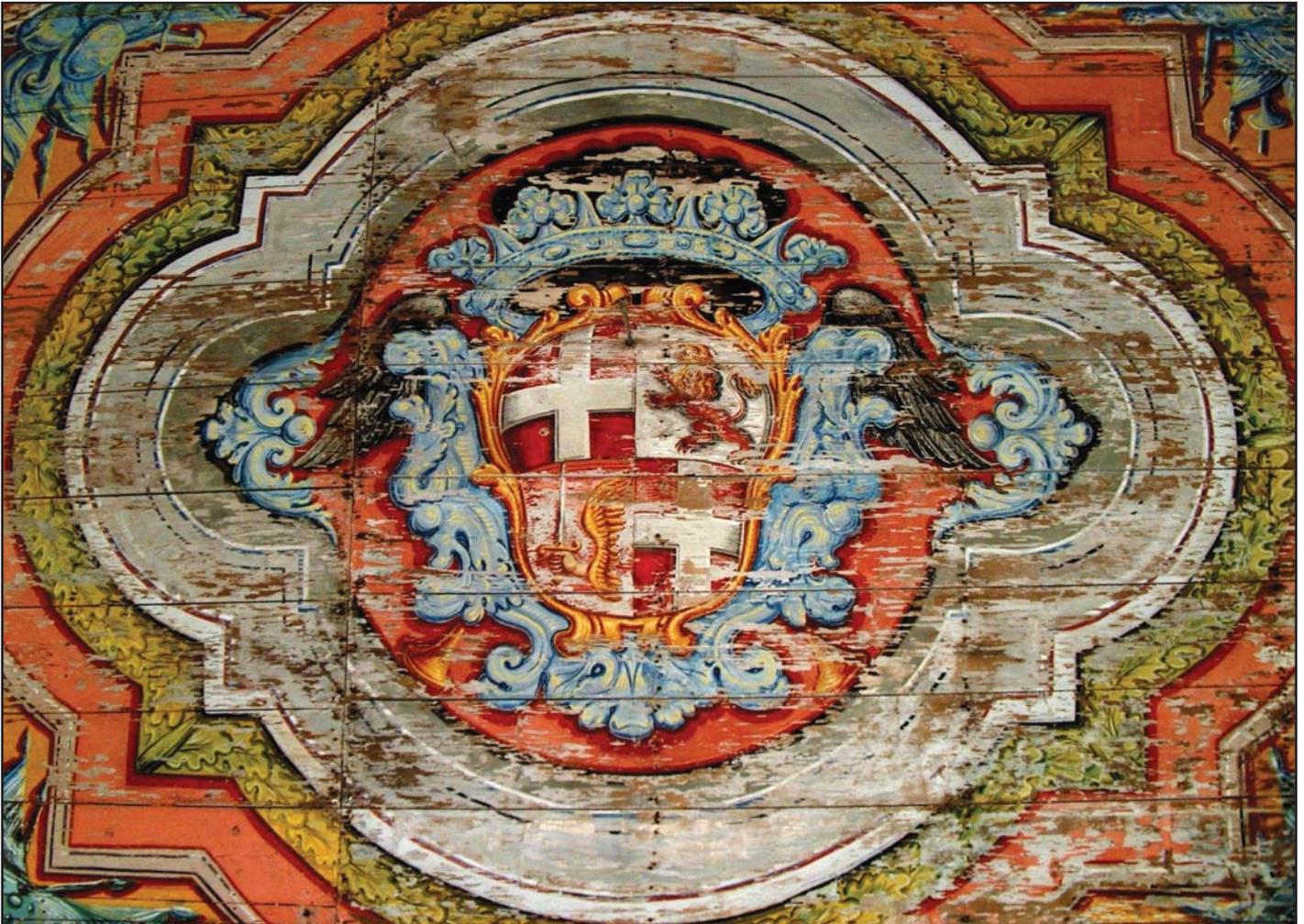
I consider voluntary work in all spheres as extremely important, not least where it concerns this matter. Some NGO's have done sterling work and I hope that more people seriously interested in working for this purpose will make this their mission.

How do you see your role as Patron of Din l-Art Helwa?

As I stated earlier, I consider the Head of State to be not only the guardian of the Constitution and of democratic values but also the guardian of our national heritage because this identifies us as Maltese.

Din l-Art Helwa is one of the oldest NGOs to have been created in Malta, having been founded in 1965 to safeguard Malta's cultural heritage and natural environment. Since its foundation, *Din l-Art Helwa* has been very active and has restored numerous cultural sites of great historic and environmental importance. My role as its Patron is to continue to encourage it to work more towards its stated mission and to present it as an example to be followed by other organisations interested in working for the common good.

Detail of wooden soffit decoration, Verdala Palace



St George's Square Rehabilitation and Restoration

Joe Azzopardi

St George's Square, also known popularly as Palace Square, has always been both the geographical and social heart of Valletta. The geographic role is self evident. In designing the city, Laparelli himself intended that "... le strade... anderanno tutte a linea con una piazza che si fara' fare in mezzo bellissima" ("the streets will run parallel to each other and a beautiful square will be created in the centre"). One side of the Square is traversed by Republic Street, the main street of the city, formerly known as *Kingsway* or *Strada Reale* and during the rule of the Order of St John as *Strada San Giorgio*. At right angles to this, and forming the lateral boundaries of the Square, are Old Theatre Street, and Archbishop Street.

The social role of the Square is manifest primarily in two elements. The first comprises the important buildings forming its physical parameters, principal among which is the Palace (originally of the Grand Masters, formerly of the British Governors and currently of the President of the Republic, and also housing Parliament). The second is its designation as a venue for both official and popular functions, and for state military parades.

These circumstances resulted in the Square being the silent witness of many historical events. It was here that water flowed in Valletta for the first time, here that the newly-elected Grand Masters were presented to their subjects and here that the French erected their pole of Liberty commemorating Bastille Day on 14 July 1798.

In this Square on Sunday, 13 September 1942, among the neatly piled debris, the newly appointed Governor of Malta, Lord Gort, representing King George VI, presented the George Cross to Chief Justice George Borg, representing the Maltese people, together with the citation: "To honour her brave people I award the George Cross to the Island Fortress of Malta to bear witness to a heroism and devotion that will long be famous in history".

It is here, finally, that political protagonists of our times, such as the President and the Prime Minister, are officially presented to the people. In this way, the Square has always represented a link between the people and the country's administration.

An annual event that brought hundreds of people to the Square during the rule of the Knights of St John was the *Kukkanja* – the peak of the carnival festivities

that was held on the Monday or Tuesday immediately preceding Ash Wednesday. For this occasion, a huge contraption – consisting of long wooden beams placed upright, with rope ladders fixed between them – was erected in the middle of the Square. The whole construction was covered with branches and adorned with baskets full of eggs, fowls, puddings, rabbits, hams and sausages. At its summit was a globe, made of hoops and covered with linen cloth, on which stood an allegorical figure of fame holding a flag bearing the arms of the Grand Master. Young men climbed up this contraption, competing to grab the gifts, and the one who took the flag at the top was awarded a cash prize. The flag was returned to the Grand Master, at which point the globe burst, liberating some pigeons. Recent excavations on site, have probably unearthed the foundations of this wooden pole.

The Buildings Surrounding St George's Square

A square is an empty space defined by the buildings that surround it. This description is possibly truer of St George's Square than of any other square in Malta. In fact, it is these buildings that confer upon it both beauty and prestige. The Square gained unexpected lustre when, deviating from the original Laparelli plan, the Magisterial Palace that was to be built on the site of the present Auberge de

The author would like to thank architect Claude Borg for providing information and photographic material

Chief Justice George Borg during the presentation ceremony of the George Cross

photo: DOI



Castile was relocated to where it stands today. The new palace occupied sites that had originally been allocated to Eustachio del Monte, two Knights of the Order and the Langue of Italy, and its frontage occupied the whole length of one side of the square.

Facing the Palace across the Square is the *Reggimento di Guardia*, later known as the Main Guard. During the rule of the Order, this served as the quarters for the Grand Master's personal guard. Under British rule this role persisted, with the building accommodating the armed guards of the British Governors. More recently it has functioned as a Libyan Cultural Institute. Its neo-classical Doric portico dates back to the British period, being built in 1812 by the Royal Engineers. There is some debate as to whether it was designed by Giorgio Pullicino or Sir George Whitmore. The portico is surmounted by the British Royal coat-of-arms and an inscription in Latin that reads:

MAGNAE ET INVICTAE BRITANNIAE
MELITENSIVM AMOR ET EUROPA
VOX
HAS INSULAS CONFIRMAT AD 1814

which translates as:

TO GREAT AND UNCONQUERED
BRITAIN
THE LOVE OF THE MALTESE AND
THE VOICE OF EUROPE
CONFIRM THESE ISLANDS AD 1814

The inscription is an important indication of the political climate at the time that Malta was annexed to the British Empire as a result of the Treaty of Paris, signed in 1814.

The projecting portico of the Main Guard brought with it several innovations. The space was redefined, since with this addition neo-classicism came to the fore and baroque receded into the background. The Square was rededicated to St George. The portico was primarily a political proclamation supporting the armorial shield of Great Britain and the inscription of the new governing power (pp35. *British Colonial Architecture*, Malcolm Borg).

To the right of the portico was the Garrison Library, now housing the Italian Cultural Institute which, together with the building on the left, once housed the Knights' Chancellery. Under the French, this building housed the printing press of Malta's first newspaper the *Journal de Malte*.

The side elevation of the Treasury of the Order, today Caffè Cordina and Casino Maltese, stands to the left of the Square on Old Theatre Street. The premises of the Casino

Maltese also once housed Malta's post office. It was here, in fact, that the first Commissioner of Posts – appointed by Grand Master Emanuel de Rohan-Polduc (1775-1797) – had his office. Facing the Square from this street was the *Casa Dei Paggi*, or Pages' House, the residence of the Grand Masters' pages of honour.

Across the Square, overlooking Archbishop Street, the space is monopolised by the ornate façade of the Hôtel de Verdelin also known as the *Casa delle Colombe* (House of the doves), commissioned by Grand Commander Jean Jacques de Verdelin.

Monuments in St George's Square

A detail from an engraving by Francesco Villamena, published in 1602 as an illustration to Giacomo Bosio's *History of the Order of St John* shows the Palace and the Square as they still appear today. Also apparent in this engraving is Verdala's *Colonna della Fama*.

This free-standing column was erected by Grand Master Hugues Loubenx de Verdala (1582-1595) to commemorate his appointment as a Cardinal by Pope Sixtus V in 1587. At the top of the column was set a statue of a she-wolf, the heraldic symbol of Verdala.

“What later become known as the Verdala Column also passed down in popular history as the *Colonna Della Fama* (the Column of Fame). This leaves little doubt as to how it was perceived by the general public it was intended to impress. The Column bore the onerous, if physically ephemeral, load of the ego of this most proud of Grand Masters”. (Joe Azzopardi Vigilo No.29)

So keen was Verdala that the memory of his illustrious designation should never fade, that he even stipulated in his will



Detail from an engraving by Francesco Villamena, published in 1602 in Giacomo Bosio's *History of the Order of St John*

Inscription over the Main Guard Portico





St George's Square between 1770 and 1772
Private collection

that part of his estate should go towards the future maintenance of the column. In 1672, Grand Commander Jean Jacques de Verdalin, nephew of Verdala, affixed an inscription to the base of the column recording that it had been repaired by him. Notwithstanding all the efforts employed to preserve it, the column was removed by Grand Master Francisco Ximenes de Texada (1773-1775) during his brief two-year reign.

A few years after the Villamena engraving was published, the Square obtained yet another outstanding feature. One of the shortcomings of the new city of Valletta was the lack of fresh water springs and it was only during the reign of Grand Master Alof De Wignacourt (1610-1622) that this issue was resolved. In 1615, at the conclusion of a five-year project, water was finally brought to the city by an aqueduct – partly underground and partly over a series of arches – from the natural springs that rose in Rabat and Dingli. This event was marked by a ceremony that took place in the Square on the 21 April 1615. A stand adorned with tapestries, trophies, emblems, wreaths of greenery, carvings and paintings was erected for the occasion and the climax of the ceremony was reached when water gushed forcefully from the fountain built in the centre of the Square and was blessed by the Grand Prior of the Order of St John, Fra Pedro Urrea Camarasa, attired in pontifical robes. The success of this important project was marked by an artillery salute and the festivities continued late into the night, when bonfires and lanterns were set alight and the Square was the venue for a dazzling fireworks display.

The enduring testimonial of these events was the fountain, probably designed by the Bolognese Architect Bontadino de Bntadini. It was indeed an impressive structure, with three tiers of basins and crowned by a large five-jet water spout in the

shape of a fleur-de-lys – the heraldic device of Alof De Wignacourt – made of lead and painted crimson.

The original fountain eventually deteriorated to the point where it was either restored or replaced under Grand Master Emanuel Pinto de Fonseca (1741-1773). The diarist Reboul writes that on 2 January 1745, work began to demolish the fountain, which would be rebuilt to a better design. However, there is a body of opinion that it may have been simply dismantled and restored. According to Hannibal P Scicluna, the fountain was removed from the Square by the British “in the early 19th century, to convert the square into a parade ground”. This fountain is identified as the one currently located in St Philip's Garden, Floriana.

During the reign of Emanuel de Rohan Polduc (1775-1797) the Square was adorned by a further two fountains. Known as the eagle fountains, these were set at either end of the Chancellery. The twin fountains are impressive architectural structures, with columns and an entablature and crowned by the coat-of-arms of de Rohan. From each of the fountains water gushes out into basins from both a carved mask and the beak of an eagle. During their recent restoration, it was discovered that the eagles were not, as thought, made of stone but crafted in lead, making them unique in the local context.

The most recent addition to the Square was the *Sette Giugno* monument that commemorates the events of 7 June 1919.

The Wignacourt Fountain formerly
in St George's Square



On this day, four Maltese citizens – Ġużeppi Bajjada, Manwel Attard, Wenzu Dyer and Karmenu Abela – who were participating in protests and riots following the increase in the price of bread, were shot dead by the British military. Bajjada and Attard were shot in Old Bakery Street, but Wenzu Dyer was killed in front of the Main Guard building. On the same day, a National Assembly was created and requests for self-government were advanced. This day is seen by many as the moment of emergence of the Maltese national identity.

All the buildings, monuments and features surrounding the square have been listed as Grade 1, classifying them as being of national/universal significance, in terms of Article 46 of the Development Planning Act. The Square itself has not yet been proposed for scheduling due to the automatic protection inferred as a setting defined by the significant buildings and features mentioned above.

The Current Project

International charters on heritage management and conservation to which Malta is a signatory state recommend the restoration of areas such as St George's Square as closely as possible to their original concept. This was the design brief for the Valletta Rehabilitation Project (VRP) when plans for the restoration of St George's Square were being drawn up. For a number of years, the Square has been used as a car park, occasionally being cleared for state events so that it could once more become a parade ground. On such occasions the historical context of the surrounding buildings became very evident. Unfortunately these were short lived periods, and far too soon the Square reverted to being used as a car park. The current project will release the Square from the cumbersome and invasive presence of motor vehicles and give it back to the people.

When any work is undertaken in such historically rich areas, care must be taken not to jeopardise any remains that there may be. This being an open space, the greatest concern was about what lies beneath the Square.

Testing for underground tunnels or foundations with ground-penetrating radar survey machinery was carried out way back in 1995 by Harrison & Company (WD1226/90/3 red 54). Following this, further investigation was sought to establish more precisely the exact levels of materials and rock present in the site. Five strategic locations were identified to test the underlying terrain. These five sample areas from which core samples were lifted were located on the nodes of a cross shape.



One of the de Rohan fountains with the Hôtel de Verdélin in the background

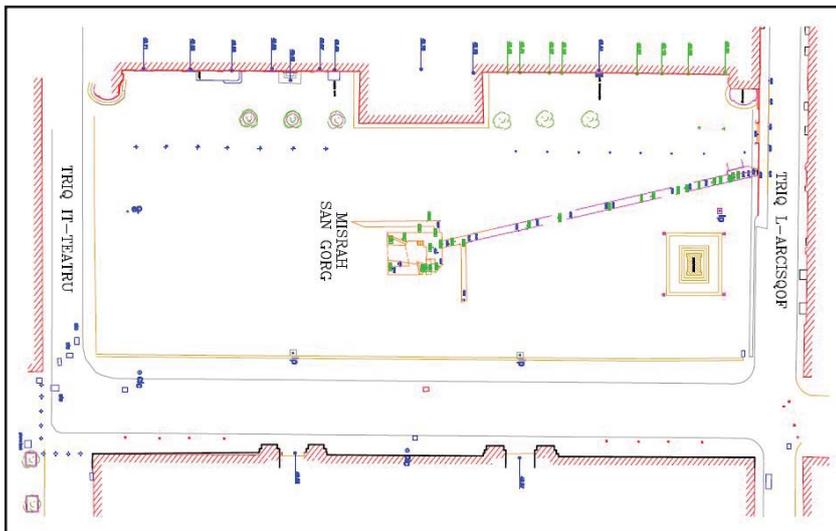
The samples, going to a maximum depth of five metres, were analysed by Terracore Geo Services Ltd in July 2008 and the following results emerged:

The depth of fill material varied between a minimum of 1.4m to a maximum of 4.2m in the central part of the Square. In general, the fill material on the side of the Main Guard is of an average depth of 2.7m, while the material on the side of the palace is around 1.5m in depth. (WD60/08/24 Red 5).

The information already available, although vital for the decision-making process, did not pre-empt the importance of archaeological monitoring during the current work – particularly for two particular areas of the Square. Here, all work was monitored by an archaeologist approved by the Superintendent of Cultural Heritage who was constantly present during all the operations that might uncover or impact upon cultural heritage features. The excavation of these areas was carried out exclusively by hand tools. The two sites were selected

St George's Square prior to the commencement of work





Plan of the newly discovered tunnels

to ascertain if there were any remains of the original water system that supplied the central fountain. These were considered to be extremely important, as they would represent industrial archaeological remains from the Wignacourt period. Excavation work proceeds according to what has been discovered.

When such features were in fact discovered, the role of the archaeological monitor became essential. The monitor informed itself about cultural heritage considerations applicable in the area, and communicated directly with the Superintendence. The monitor also kept a digital photographic record of works that will illustrate a textual report to be submitted at the end of works. None of the features with cultural heritage significance that were exposed in the course of the work were disturbed.

Underground Tunnels Discovered

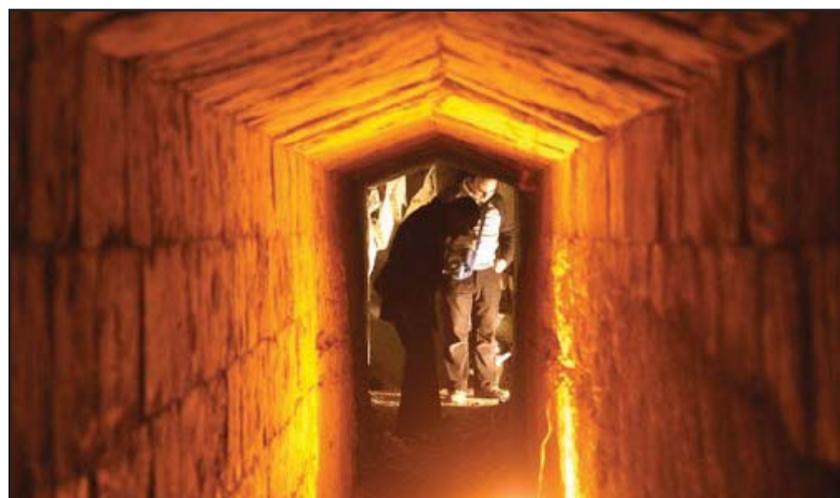
On 27 February 2009, local newspapers carried the news that preliminary archaeological studies in St George’s Square had uncovered an undocumented network of underground tunnels. The tunnels were discovered when employees of the Works Division, under the direction of architect Claude Borg, executive coordinator of the Valletta Rehabilitation Project, dug through a wall in a small room in Archbishop Street previously used by the Water Services Corporation. After clearing debris and other material, they discovered tunnels that led towards the centre of the Square.

Remains of the water supply system of the central fountain discovered during the work



Architect Claude Borg in the newly discovered tunnels

Photo: timesofmalta.com



Further excavation work revealed that the central tunnel branched out into a number of corridors that led in different directions. One such corridor, at a right angle to the central passageway and which seems to be blocked, runs in the direction of the Palace.

Mr Borg said that neither archival research nor previous studies of the site had revealed the existence of these underground passageways. “All the archives and documents fail to indicate any shelters or significant structures underneath the Square, although a number of historians and residents of Valletta have recalled members of their family entering shelters from one of the corners of the Square. Obviously, we had to verify the claims and, on Monday (23 February), I gave instructions for the wall blocking a small room underneath the square to be removed”.

It seems probable that the tunnels used to form part of a drainage system built by the Knights. “A number of interesting features and mason marks can be seen in this tunnel, which also has two openings branching out but whose access remains blocked. Work is still under way to open all the blocked passages and clean the tunnels as much as possible to plot out what might be a network system that was previously undocumented”, Mr Borg explained. Further investigation will try to establish the extent of the underground network and verify whether it is connected to the Palace.”

The Design Concept

The design concept took into consideration the historic developments of the site and the requirements of the users of the Square today. The proposal sought to address these various – and at times seemingly conflicting – needs in an innovative and imaginative way, while preserving the authentic spirit of the Square.

Initially, the main issue centred on the removal of all the present parking facilities and other activities that were considered to be derogatory. The discovery of the tunnels also put an end to the project for the construction of an underground car park beneath the Square. Once consensus was achieved on these issues, other matters could be addressed.

One strongly debated issue involved the decision as to whether or not the area should read as a street (Republic Street) and a smaller square, or if the street should lead onto the Square, which would thus extend to the palace façade. Unfortunately, there is a misconception about the relationship between the Grand Master’s Palace and the Square in front of it.

A historical study carried out by architect Claude Borg clearly identifies the concept of Valletta as having a grid pattern with a few open spaces, most of which being squares opening in front of, or directly adjacent to, the main façades of important buildings such as the palatial *auberges*. It was felt that this fundamental urban architectural concept should be maintained and the street should not appear to separate the Square from the palace. It was to be perceived as one space, complimenting the palace, and the resulting drawings addressed this issue.

Apart from this decision, which has been justified through historical documentation, the restoration of St George’s Square focuses on paving and the re-interpretation of historical features. The original hard-stone paving in front of the Main Guard, as well as the hard-stone steps which form part of the De Rohan Fountains, have been retained and restored. In addition, all the original paving uncovered during the work has been preserved and restored. The new paving is to be a harmonious mix of lava, porphyry, and hard-stone.

The fact that, today, the Square is a multi-use space also strongly influenced the final designs. However, the concept of the Square as a recreational area, to be enjoyed and appreciated in an interactive way, was to be the dominant feature. This aspect is most evidently embodied by the fountain. The importance of water, and a fountain, in the square cannot be over-emphasised. This site is where the first fountain to celebrate the success in supplying water to the capital city was constructed. It was felt that this essential event on this particular site should be remembered and celebrated. Seating provided around the fountain aims to gather people at this focal point, transforming the Square into a place for the interaction of people, rather than the parking of cars.

On the other hand the importance of the historic character of the square as parade ground could not be ignored. This fact influenced the design of the fountain, which is flush with the square, retaining the legibility of the site as an open space. In this way, rather than doing away with the fountain, as the British had done, and thus depriving the square of its main focal point of humane interaction, these designs sought a satisfactory compromise allowing the square to continue fulfilling its varying historical roles.

The location of the *Sette Giugno* monument was also the object of some discussion. While its historical significance could not be overlooked, it was felt that the link between the events commemorated by it and its present location was too tenuous to justify what was considered to be an aesthetically wrongly sited monument. Part of the proposal included the moving of the monument to a suitable alternative site and possibly the provision of a modest inscription, in lieu of the overwhelming monument, which should suffice to record this event in the Square.

In parallel with the design of the paving, which is the part of the current project that has the most visible impact, a series of recessed floor lights, together with steel bollards to limit access into the Square, will be installed to better define the Square’s boundaries. The original lava paving that exists in the upper part of Old Theatre Street is to be replicated in the lower part, while it is planned that all the buildings surrounding the Square will be treated to present a cohesive appearance. The Ministry for Resources and Rural Affairs will be contacting all those involved in the hope that this can be achieved. The Bank of Valletta branch in the Square, in particular, has a number of additions, including a ramp, bollards and an additional structure at roof level. The painted façade of this property is also aesthetically unpleasing, as is the wide, white pointing of the façade of a building on Old Theatre Street. These matters will need to be addressed.

Over the years, the VRP has set an example by taking great interest in upgrading the Square. The projects undertaken include the restoration of the Main Guard coat-of-arms in 1997 and the restoration of the two De Rohan fountains (with the technical assistance of the Restoration Unit and the Malta Centre for Restoration) in 2001. The two portals on the façade of the Palace were also recently restored by the Restoration Unit and a project to treat the entire façade is being finalised.

This should bring to a satisfactory conclusion this complex example of spatial restoration. The project is ample demonstration of the fact that we have reached the next level in terms of restoration. The country can now not only conceive and bring to conclusion restoration projects on individual heritage features but is able to make a coherent effort to restore the urban context in which these heritage features are located.



Graphic renderings of the Square upon completion of the current project

The Main Guard in the mid 19th century by Horatio Agius



The Casa della Madonna di Manresa

Stanley Cauchi

This article is an abstract of a long essay submitted in partial fulfilment of the Diploma in Baroque Architecture. The course is organised by the International Institute for Baroque Studies, University of Malta, and funded by the Works Division of the Ministry for Resources and Rural Affairs.

This page

top:

Lateral entrance of the
Casa della Madonna di Manresa

bottom:

Fig.1
Drawing of the façade
by the author

opposite:

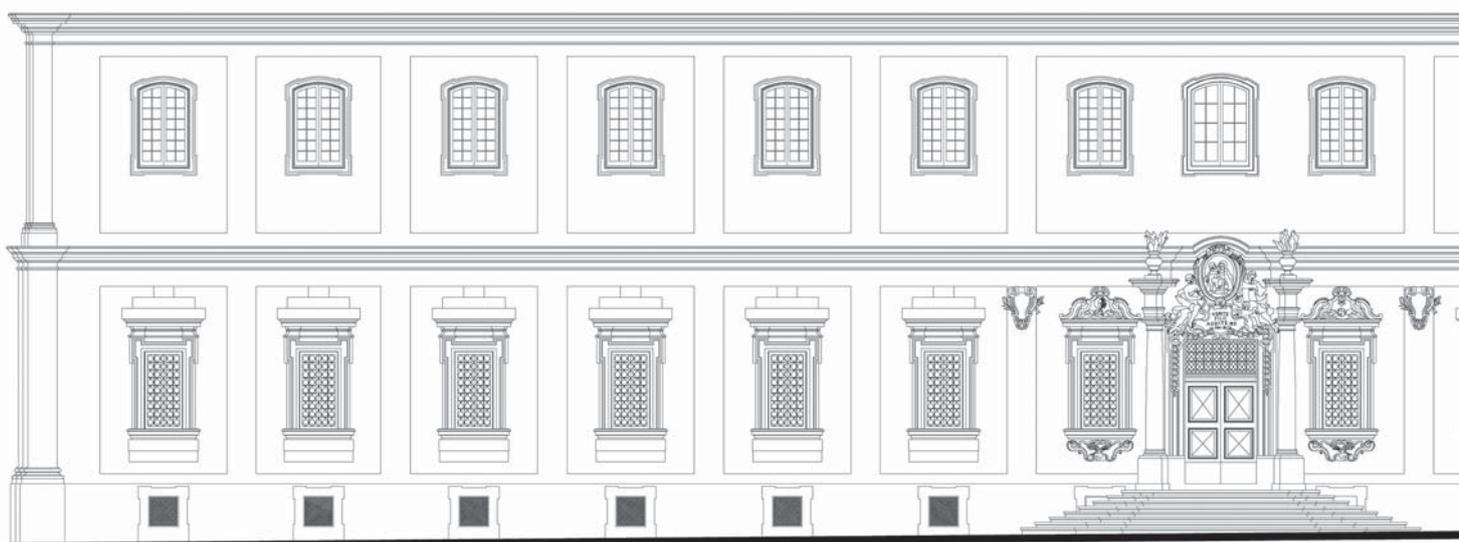
Detail of the façade



The relationship between the Jesuit Order and the Maltese Islands is a historically troubled one. The Company of Jesus was founded in 1534 by Ignatius of Loyola. The first Jesuit known to have come to Malta was Fr Gianbattista Carminata in 1577, yet following this auspicious beginning, the Jesuits subsequently had to leave the Island on two occasions. In 1639 they were made to leave Malta following a quarrel with Grand Master Jean Baptiste Lascaris de Castellar but they returned soon afterwards, following

the intervention of Pope Urban VIII. Then in 1768, Pope Clement XIII was forced to ban the Jesuit Order because they were obstructing the rise of absolute monarchies.

Against his will, Grand Master Emanuel Pinto de Fonseca, who appreciated the work of the Jesuits, banished the Order from Malta and confiscated all their property. Among the important buildings belonging to the Jesuits in Malta were their college and church in Valletta and a retreat house in Floriana dedicated to the



Madonna di Manresa, also known as the *Casa Santa*.

The foundation stone of this house of retreat was laid in 1743¹ and it took 10 years to be built, at a cost of 40,000 *scudi*. In the words of the Jesuit Pier Francesco Rosigoli, written in 1753: “*Il Signore la principio’ diec’ anni sono, ed in questo il medesimo Signore si e compiaciuto di terminarla*”.² (“By the Lord’s will it was started 10 years ago, and by his same will it was finished this year.”) Yet records of accounts dated January 1739 show that the college of the Jesuits was already maintaining a house for retreats.³ The house was opened for the first time to the general public on 16 March 1751 and was solemnly blessed that morning by Mons. Paolo Alpheran de Bussan. In the afternoon it was visited by Grand Master Pinto during a thanksgiving ceremony held to mark the completion of the house.⁴

The original *Casa della Madonna di Manresa* was a sprawling one-storey structure, as the Order had limited its height to 24 *palmi* in a decree issued on 19 March 1744.⁵ This restriction was probably dictated by the fact that the retreat house was constructed very close to the fortifications of Floriana. There exists further evidence which indicates that the *Casa della Madonna di Manresa* was originally a one-storey building. Presently, at the ground floor level, there is a painting depicting *Padre Rosignoli* holding the plan of the house in his right hand. With his left hand he is pointing at the façade of the *Casa Santa*, which at that time was still only one storey high.

A major structural intervention to the building was the addition of the first



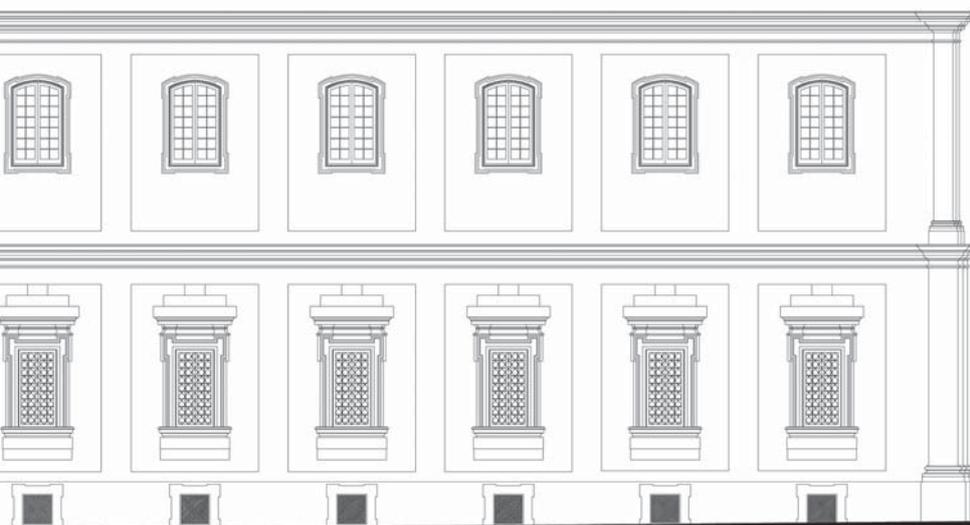
floor in the 1860s. On 4 June 1860 Rev. D Giorgio Caruana, Rector of the Archbishop’s Seminary, forwarded a petition to the Government requesting the construction of a first floor on the building known as the *Casa Santa* or *Casa di San Calcidonio* in Floriana, to create additional accommodation for the superior classes of that Seminary.⁶ In a reply to the Vicar-General Canon Filippo Amato

on 18 July 1860, through correspondence signed by the Chief Secretary to Government Sir Victor Houlton, Bishop Gaetanus Pace Forno was informed that the Governor had “no objection to the additional construction proposed in that petition” (of 4 June 1860).⁷

Geometrical proportions of the *Casa Santa*

The components that make up the original façade of the *Casa Santa* are constructed with a geometrical background and also contain geometrical proportions in relation to themselves and, in some of them, to each other. This applies to the openings of the main portal, the windows at ground-floor level, the windows at basement level and the bays containing the ground-floor and first-floor windows. It should be noted, however, that the modulation of the whole design is ill-proportioned.

Architectural forms and arrangements which give enduring pleasure depend upon the good disposition of the various parts of the composition in their appropriate places, in relation to one another and to the whole. Architectural proportions were mainly based on three systems, although during the Baroque age they became more mathematically complicated: a system based on the square (*ad quadratum*), a system based on musical ratios and a system based on the golden ratio.





top:

Fig.2
Window at basement level

bottom:

Fig.4
Drawing of the
main portal

Both images by the author

The *ad quadratum* is a proportion determined by the square. The square can then be further developed and its three main developments are the square plus one half, the square plus one third and the square doubled. At the *Casa della Madonna di Manresa*, the windows of the openings of the basement level were intended to be constructed as a square, since the height of the window was not kept to an exact height of three courses (as was customary) but was constructed with the lintel placed in between the second and third courses to form a

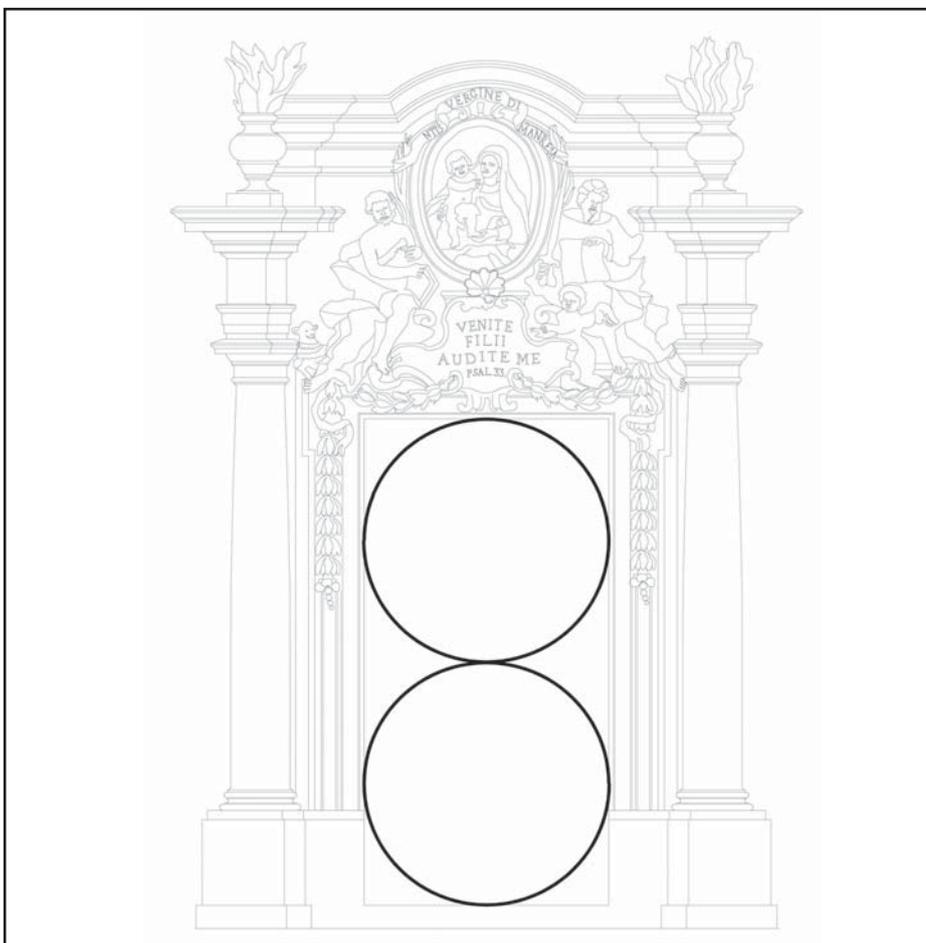
square. The windows at ground-floor level are also generated from the development of the square and contain a double square.

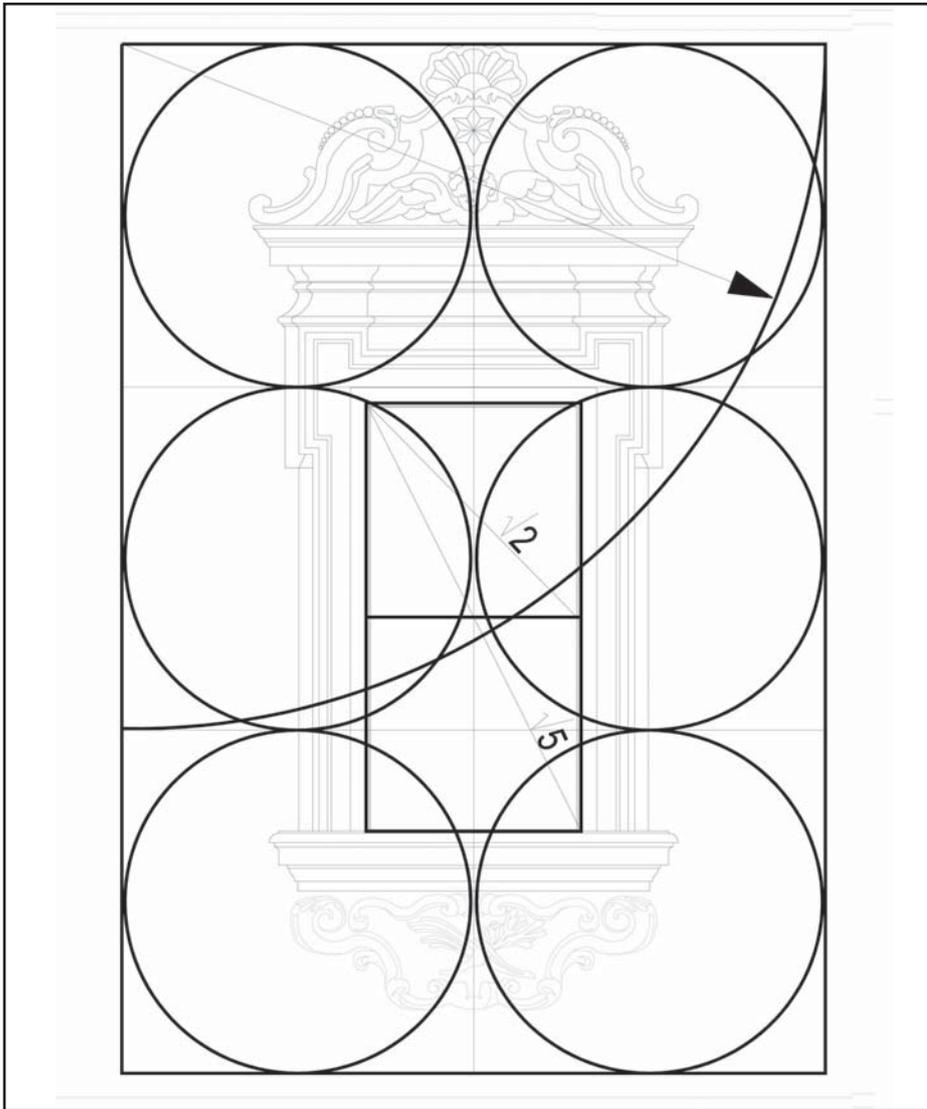
The recessed bays containing the ground-floor windows also present a geometrical construction developed from the square-based proportion. This includes a square plus one half, referred to in the Baroque age as *sesquialter*. The main portal opening has the same geometrical construction as the ground-floor window openings. It is based on a double square and all the geometrical constructions that form the windows apply to the main portal. When building the first floor, the grouping of the windows at the ground floor level was adhered to, and the design was also based on the square.

Other important elements in the composition of the building are the columns, the entablature, the pedestal, the window sills and the pediment. These elements are also subject to rules of proportions and are assembled into their proper divisions according to particular elements within the classical style of architecture and to treatise to which they pertain. The most frequently referred to treatise for the erection of buildings in the classical style by local architects and master masons, both in the Baroque era and afterwards, was that of Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola. The system of proportions elaborated upon in this treatise is very easy to divide and practical to apply, which is why it was commonly used.

The formation of the façade of the *Casa Santa* is based on the Doric order. It lacks a proper composition of the parts and modules of this order, therefore no decent proportions can be deduced in the composition of the modulation. The module should apply to all the separate members, even the smallest detail, and to the building as a whole. Only by placing all these parts and modules together in an organised manner can an excellent building, in the classical sense of the term, be developed. Although the first floor was built about 120 years after the original building, the individual who designed it repeated the same mistakes regarding the composition of the classical orders of architecture within the façade that are found on the ground floor, ie the original building.

Before it was altered in the 1860s, the plan of *Casa della Madonna di Manresa* was based on a variety of geometrical constructions. These are not symmetrically-oriented and were designed separately and individually. They were not related to each other, as was generally the case in the buildings erected in Europe at the time. The original first-floor plan was more or less





the same as that of the ground-floor level, thereby repeating and retaining the same geometrical constructions and ratios.

Rhythm and Symmetry

Music and architecture have a common boundary which links them – that of geometry. Like those dealing with architecture, early treatises on music involved graphic images such as rectangles, circles and other geometrical shapes, often concentrated on ratios. There are several constructions contained within the plan and the elevation of the *Casa Santa* that can be assigned to a musical interval, although these may not have been intentional.

Symmetry is achieved through a balance and fitting correspondence of parts that maintain the same arrangements and positions. In classical style buildings, symmetry rules the plan as well as the elevation. Symmetry in buildings is most manifest in a tendency to opt for centrally-placed main entrance arrangements to generate an elevation with an odd number of bays, and hence an even number of columns or pilasters in a bilateral composition.

top:

Fig.3
Façade window and bay
image by the author

right:

Detail of the main portal

The formation of the façade of the *Casa della Madonna di Manresa* may be considered a bilateral reflection. The main portal, which also incorporates the stairs and the main sculptural feature above it, serves as the fulcrum for the series of seven windows and bays on the ground floor that are repeated on both wings of the house and so form a mirror symmetry.

The only part of the plan that was constructed in a symmetrical composition is the front part that reflects the façade. This includes the main door with a group of rooms on the left-hand side, which were then mirrored on the right-hand side. This was altered by changes that were required for the exigencies of the Seminary school and later for the Curia's administrative offices.

Conclusion

Proportion signifies a sense of order, which is the proper arrangement of all the parts and divisions that form any compilation, whether artistic, musical or architectural. With respect to geometrical proportions, one can conclude that both the plans and the elevations of the *Casa Santa* contain a good variation of geometrical constructions.



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Holding on to the view in Misieb



Assimilation, integration, or humiliation?



Good intention, bad idea

Manifest
incompetence



Requiem to
heritage sensibility



Fading urban
heritage

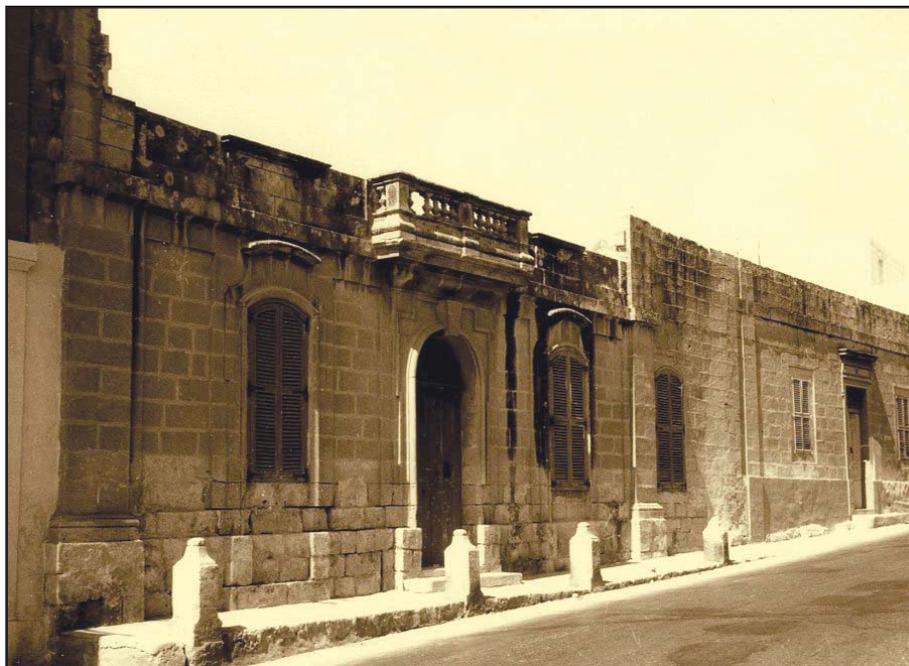


Ditch without dignity

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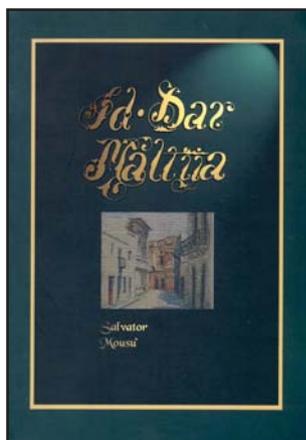
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Produced by - Ilaria A Lanfranco

Mousu

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Reviewed by Joe Azzopardi



“Traditional Maltese house” is a collective term under which many sub-types can be identified. However, like any other house in the world, a Maltese house is basically a collection of rooms. So what makes a house intrinsically Maltese, apart from its location?

First and foremost is the limestone. What could make a house more Maltese than being built out of the same material as that of which the Island is composed? Another determining factor is represented by some common design aspects. Although all houses vary according to their particular circumstances, there are some elements of the design that have evolved over a number of centuries in order to adapt to, and take full advantage of, the peculiarities of the local context. Finally, there is the familiarity of builders with the local stone and its characteristics, which are reflected in the end product of their trade.

In this book, Salvatore Mousu takes his reader through the various historical, cultural and sociological circumstances that marked the development of what can now be justifiably termed as “a Maltese house”. This is followed by the definition of different sub-types according to context (urban or rural) and use (habitation, work, holiday, status symbol). The author then goes on to dissect the anatomy of Maltese houses with short and extremely informative chapters dedicated to the multitude of elements that make up a traditional house.

In conclusion, the author expounds the threats to the integrity of this rich heritage. Very high on this list is the way in which many such houses have been adulterated by the insertion of alien elements or incompatible materials. Following closely on the list is neglect. It is calculated that more than 30,000 old dwellings, many of which are concentrated in the harbour area, are vacant. Many of these are well-built traditional houses that have been enriched by the essence of time but now lie empty and abandoned, becoming dead.

The genesis of the current situation is traced back to the shock – both physical and emotional – caused by WWII and the cultural revolution caused by the development of global communication. With the spread of the global village culture, local characteristics have made way for global trends. One may feel at home in every place but not belong anywhere.

At a time when most of what is being built is of low quality, ill-proportioned, out of context and, in most cases, frankly ugly, this book provides a precious opportunity for reevaluation. It is ridiculous that, while the construction industry is considered a pillar of the economy, so many buildings are left empty. Good policies in this regard are urgently needed. The building stock could and must be used in order to stop the urban sprawl that is suffocating Malta.

This book is a celebration of the sometimes humble, sometimes grand, Maltese house and the way in which these buildings have collectively contributed to create an unmistakably Maltese landscape. It is also intended to be an eye-opener to the threats to the integrity of such buildings and the risks involved, if such a heritage is lost. Salvatore Mousu has dedicated his life to history and heritage, mainly through his work and his voluntary involvement with both *Din l-Art Helwa* and the Malta Historical Society. In this interesting volume he concentrates the research and observations of a lifetime and offers a fresh perspective on the Maltese house.

Nostalgias of Malta Images by Horatio Agius from the 1860s to the 1900s

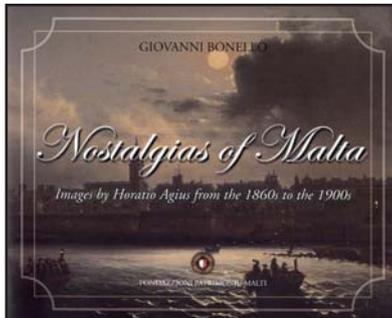
Author - Giovanni Bonello

Published by - Fondazzjoni

Patrimonju Malti

ISBN – 978-99932-7-257-1

Reviewed by Joe Azzopardi



top: Horatio Agius

bottom: A country Man

bottom right:

The newly laid out Addolorata Cemeter



Since a very early stage of its existence, humanity has tried to capture fragments of its being and consign them to a form more lasting than itself, thus committing them to history. Most art forms evolved from this instinctive need: man painted, sculpted, etched, engraved, wrote and developed all sorts of ways of perpetuating his world as he saw it. As humanity became more sophisticated and introspective, some of those basic skills grew to become art, others languished as crafts and others still became tools of administration.

However, it was in photography, and its derivative of cinematography, that the perfect medium to capture moments in time was found. Quite apart from killing the arts, the function of which it was meant to emulate and even ameliorate, in the hands of devoted craftsmen it became itself the medium of art.

With this volume dedicated to the life's work of Horatio Agius, active in the second half of the 19th century, Giovanni Bonello continues his campaign to salvage from the neglect of many decades, and the obscurantism of some who feel that photographic material is merely a graphic record, elements that will serve as the base for a comprehensive understanding of early photography in Malta. By doing this, Bonello puts the spotlight on those who, shortly after the invention of photography, used light to capture and record events and locations that would in time become intrinsic parts of the national historical consciousness.

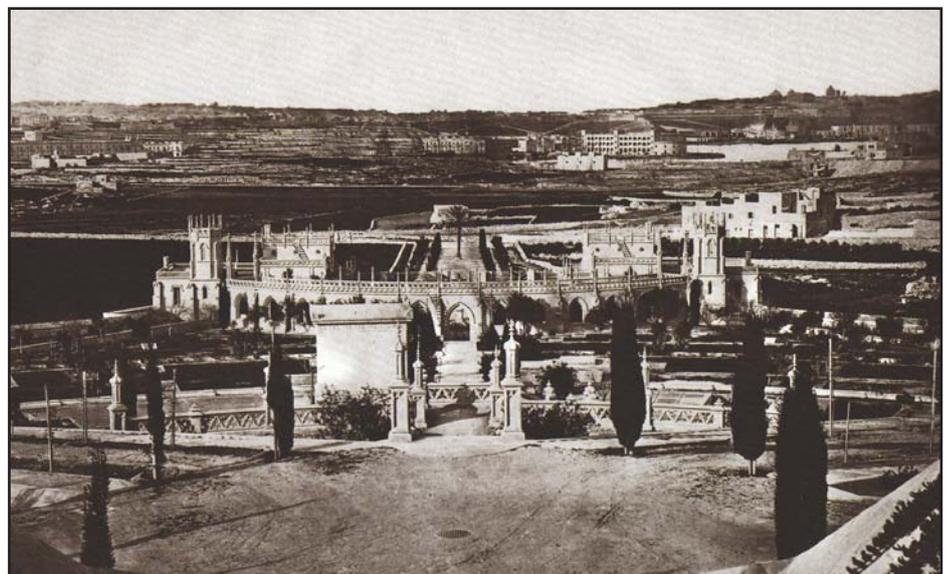
These are images that are still relevant to this very day. Some of them illustrate how deserving Valletta is of its accolade of World Heritage Site, with the uniqueness of its streetscape and the harmonious relationship with its physical territory. In others, it becomes obvious why the city stands to lose this designation, following the rape of this wider territorial context.

Another image illustrates a newly laid out Addolorata Cemetery with the still young *Cupressus sempervirens* seen as short shafts of green, as opposed to the towering trees of today, within the wondrous Neo-Gothic masonry devised by Galizia. Unfortunately, the trees have not been the only thing to grow. So too has the urban sprawl, rendering unrecognisable the once mainly agricultural landscape. Yet another photograph epitomises the lost character of most villages, with the church and windmill as predominant features and the veritable embodiment of a lost scale of life. Such prominent architectural features are today being suffocated in the race for taller and uglier buildings.

The author points out the “notable social and iconographic relevance” of the uncommon series of personages photographed in their respective folk or traditional costume. In all of these can be seen the marked façade propriety of late-Victorian Malta but they also open a window on the insurmountable social boundaries of the period. Looking at these images is equivalent to reading social history off the surface of a picture.

However, the great majority of the images reproduced in this volume depict views – as this makes up the bulk of Agius' work. Strangely for a photographer with such an inclination, he did not jump on the bandwagon of postcards producers which would have seemed to be a natural outlet for his work.

On the cover is a detail of Girolamo Gianni's Marsamusetto Harbour by Night which seems incongruous at first. With so many images by the subject of his book at his disposal why would the author chose this work by someone else? The answer is provided by the author himself in whose view “He (Horatio Agius) enriches the vein of Victorian *vedutismo* and remains the counterpart in photography of his contemporary Girolamo Gianni in painting”.



Every issue of *Treasures of Malta* is like a new leaf making its appearance on an evergreen tree. Shooting out of the trunk of culture, and tended by loving gardeners, these leaves continually enrich the tree, feeding into it new material. Every time one looks, one discovers a new colourful blossom – a meaningful new element in the variegated garden of history.

This issue, like the ones that preceded it and the many more that, hopefully, will follow, presents a collection of enlightened articles on a variety of themes. Different people will be attracted by different items but I think few will be able to resist reading Catherine Tabone's article about the collection of 121 clay figurines crafted by Pawlu Scicluna (1855-1933) now at the Inquisitor's Palace in Victoria. This amateur modeller unusually used this medium in his endeavours to record some of the characters that roamed around Valletta during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Scicluna, a spice merchant with a shop, aptly located in Merchants Street, was inclined towards reproducing various characters such as craftsmen with their tools, street-vendors, common folk and the bourgeoisie. A group to whom he seems to have been particularly drawn was the ecclesiastics, models of whom make up a third of the collection. He was also occasionally inspired to immortalise specific people such as Giuseppe Cali and Bishop Pietro Pace. In every case, the statuettes have the immediacy and freshness typical of clay models and *bozzetti*. The collection was donated to the nation in 1939 by the artist's brother, Mons. Giorgio Scicluna.

Few will also fail to see parallels between the present state of the local architectural milieu and its equivalent in the pre-WWII period. In 1936, feeling the need to encourage excellence of design in street architecture, the colonial government established an Architecture Award. George E. Camilleri recounts the vicissitudes pertaining to this unfortunately short-lived award scheme.

In 1936, the award went to Muscat Garage, Gżira, identified as an attempt to uphold the modernist architectural concept of "form following function". The building was deemed to be original, well built and relevant to its times and proposed function. The 1937 award went to Villa Macedonia in Balzan (now the residence of the Spanish ambassador). On this occasion, the jury felt the need to point out "it noted with concern that buildings which are at present being erected in many parts of the Island are marred by indifferent design and rough construction". One wonders what would be said today, as many more such buildings are being erected. The 1938 award went to Brighton Flats, Tower Road, Sliema. It was not awarded in 1939, the jury lamenting the low quality and small number



of entries submitted. At this point, the scheme was interrupted by the onset of WWII.

Another article that will not fail to attract attention is the one by Giovanni Bonello. Bonello believes he has identified yet another unknown drawing by Mattia Preti. This discovery follows the one made by him in 2001 of two Preti drawings among the National Library collections and styled the "Cenni Bozzetti".

The drawing in question is a *tondo* and looks much like a finished *bozzetto*. The assumption made by Bonello that the drawing was to serve as the model for an engraving seems to me very plausible. Represented



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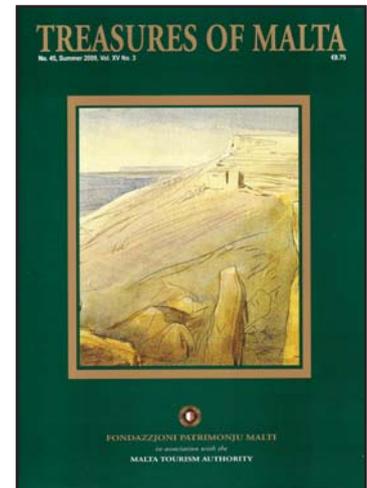
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Published by - Fondazzjoni

Patrimonju Malti

ISBN – 1028-3013

Reviewed by Joe Azzopardi



this page:

Two details for the "Blazon Drawing"

opposite

top:

The two Cenni Bozzetti

bottom:

Dr Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici aka "Il-Gross",
figurine by Pawlu Scicluna

in the drawing is an ensemble with allegorical personifications of fame, time and honour, surrounding a nine-quartered heraldic device. At the top are two *puttini* referred to in the manuscript description underneath the *tondo* as being spirits of prosperity (*Genios dela prosperidad*). Bonello has tentatively entitled it the “Blazon Drawing”, a name that may well stick.

The attribution to Preti is justified by the author exclusively on stylistic ground. “Once you are immersed in the energies of Pretism, his work not only knocks you down but its inner voice hails you from afar”. However, an attribution, without sound documented support remains just that – no matter how tantalising the prospect might be.

With these, and many other articles, this issue of *Treasures* strengthens the position of this publication as a showcase of Maltese cultural identity.



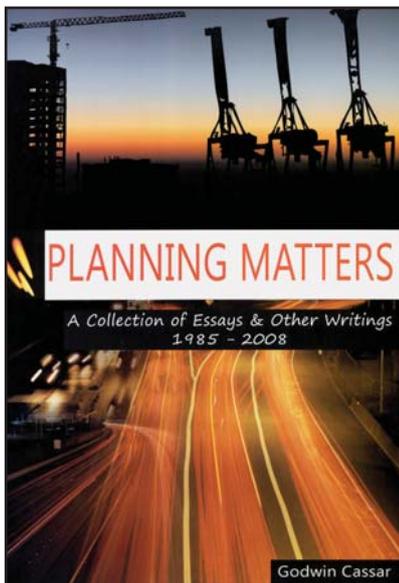
Planning Matters: a Collection of Essays & Other Writings 1985-2008.

Author - Godwin Cassar

Published by - PEG

ISBN – 978-99932-0-695-8

Reviewed by Petra Bianchi



This volume contains a collection of around 70 informative essays by Dr Godwin Cassar, who retired from his post as director-general of the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (Mepa) earlier this year. They were written over a period of 20 years and provide an in-depth background to the history of planning legislation and related topics in Malta, as seen by a major and long-standing player in this field.

Wide-reaching changes to Malta's planning legislation began to be introduced in the late 1980s, laying the foundations for the planning system that we have today. A Structure Plan was proposed and enacted by Parliament in 1992, at the same time as the Development Planning Act which established the Malta Environment and Planning Authority.

The Structure Plan provided policies that set a strategic direction for Malta's development, projected over a period of around 20 years. This Plan is currently being updated and revised to bring it in line with today's needs, and one can only hope that the various loopholes that have been ignored or exploited over the years will eventually be closed. Taken together, the essays form an absorbing record of a series of changing expectations, plans, hopes and disappointments related to planning issues in Malta, ranging over the full lifespan of the Authority to date.

A number of the essays reiterate similar and evolving thoughts from different angles, as perceived at various points in time. The author puts forward the view that planning in Malta should not be seen as something negative, only imposing restrictions and controls. Instead, this negative approach should "be replaced by the idea that planning is positive with a major role in promoting acceptable development within a proper framework of safeguards for the fragile environment. Essentially this is an education process, creating new values which place the interests of the community at large, rather than individual interests, at the centre of endeavours to improve the quality of life." (29)

All the articles have been previously published in newspapers or journals, or presented at conferences. They cover diverse topics, including an urban regeneration strategy for Valletta and Cottonera, the manner in which NGOs and the public take stands against developments in their areas, the role of the media and public criticism, building regulations, waste management strategies and climate change.

Other subjects include traffic regulation, social housing, camping sites, access to environmental information, hazardous substances and biodiversity. Comparisons are drawn with the planning systems of other countries, particularly the UK.

A favourite subject is the need for reform of the planning system and the improved functioning of the Authority. The author states that ultimately planners face a "no win situation" (97), labouring under the Herculean task of pleasing diverse and conflicting lobbies including developers, the government, NGOs and private citizens, at the same time attempting to implement and update planning legislation and protect the environment.

Some of the articles strike a somewhat defensive tone, presenting the Authority as misunderstood and unfairly judged by the public. For example, in 1998 the author wrote: "unfortunately not all public exposure which the Authority gets is well meant. Many a time sectorial interests override the general public interest which the Authority is bound to uphold." (91)

An article from 2007 is entitled: "Malta Environment and Planning Authority – love me or hate me!" – a title that speaks for itself. It is one of the author's numerous attempts, made over the years, to explain why the Authority exists in its present structure, how it works, how it takes decisions and how it should be improved. The article ends with the following lines, which reflect an underlying theme of the book: "MEPA's mission is to

walk a tightrope of different expectations, performing a constant balancing act. In this quest, it is relentlessly evolving in an interminable effort of continuous improvement." (283)

Before the 2008 general election, the Prime Minister promised yet another reform of Mepa and this year the process has been set in motion. A number of the ideas and plans currently under discussion sound dishearteningly similar to statements and plans described in these essays, that were made years ago and which seem to have come to nothing.

This book is essential reading for anyone who wishes to place the latest reform in its rightful perspective, viewed alongside all the previous planning reforms that have been put forward, discussed, and occasionally implemented, over the last 20 years.



Letters to Vigilo

These pages are meant to be your voice for your heritage.

Please mark your letters for the attention of The Editor, Vigilo, and send them to:

Din l-Art Helwa
133 Melita Street
Valletta

Or email the editor on:
joe.mnajdra@gmail.com

Dear Editor,

Some recent issues of national importance have brought to light the great work carried out by, and the absolute need for, environmental and heritage NGOs. I do not feel the need to enter into the specifics of any particular case. Suffice it to say that the selfless interest of such people was the only positive element to emerge in many of these otherwise shady affairs. While Government, Mepa, and individuals were cast in shadows, NGOs emerged as a brilliant ray of hope that this country can be termed civilised and democratic.

What is sad is that some people think it is their right to slander these NGOs and accuse them of abusing a power that they do not even have. A high-level politician even had the nerve to call some protesting environmentalists “a mob” for interfering with his plans – which turned out to be illegal anyway. Fortunately, the great majority of members of the public saw through this and expressed their support. This expression of support might seem a little thing but, speaking from experience, I know for a fact that it is the life-line of all NGOs’ work.

Another positive trend that emerged as a result of some recent issues regarding unsuitable development plans is that groups of citizens have stood up and crossed arms to protect the heritage in their area, often opposing insensitive development which they realised would diminish the quality of their – and future – generations’ urban, rural and natural environment. The Maltese are finally managing to shake off the inertia and narrow-mindedness of the recent past and have come to realise that our beloved island, with its immensely rich artistic heritage and breathtaking environment, must be preserved for future generations.

Many NGOs realised this years ago and have lobbied, worked and fought to preserve a better Malta. For this they deserve the gratitude of present and future generations.

James Buhagiar
Floriana

Dear Joe,

I have been away from Malta for the past 18 years and, as you can imagine, I was much looking forward to coming back to my island and its charms. When I left, some first timid steps were being taken in the direction of territorial management, following the savage development of the 60s, 70s, and 80s.

I was hoping to return to a place where a decent balance between economic activity, urban development, environment, and quality of life had been achieved. Instead, I found myself in a nationwide building site. Very few of the streets I have passed through don’t have a building project going on. To my dismay, not only has the urban sprawl persisted but even well-established urban areas are being constantly changed and redeveloped. At first this struck me as an unparalleled case of a booming economy but then I came to see the innumerable half-finished empty dwellings and the decaying urban fabric of historical centres, and it was obvious that any attempt at territorial management has failed miserably.

When will we realise that, by the same principle by which the restricted supply of available land pushes up the price of real estate, the ever-diminishing size of uncommitted areas gives them an ever-increasing value, making them worthy of protection? If Malta fails to find the right balance, all will be lost.

Jane Baldacchino
Rabat





Dear Editor,

I read with great interest the interview with architect Marie Louise Musumeci of the Valletta Rehabilitation Committee in the last issue of Vigilo. I noted, however, that at no point is there mention of any plans for when Valletta will be European Cultural Capital in 2018. Although not comparable with events such as the Olympic Games or the FIFA World Cup which, in any case, Malta is very unlikely to host at any time, this event brings with it considerable international attention.

The eyes of Europe, if not the world, will be on us and we should not present the usual half-baked thing if we are to be taken seriously as a European country. Hopefully, by then Renzo Piano's Valletta Entrance project will have been fully completed and the current momentum of urban rehabilitation of the capital will be kept up. But this will only provide the setting. A whole programme of activities offering the best of our heritage and culture will have to be devised. The events, if well-marketed, should attract a considerable number of foreign visitors. This fact should spur Government to solve once and for all the endemic shortcomings of public transport, something which would benefit all Maltese in the long term.

If we are to make some significant impression, work must start soon.

Sue Demanuele
Qormi



Dear Sir,

I have lived in Malta for the past nine years and, having a great passion for history combined with a passion for walking and exploring, I have been all over the place. Yet I am still astonished how, notwithstanding the minuscule size of this archipelago (I come from Australia), on every walk I discover new exciting sites. What's more, these are often to be found in the most unlikely locations.

My latest discovery was Dock No.1 in Bormla. At first, many of the people I know could not understand why a visit to this unlikely source of fascination could be so interesting, but for most it took only one visit for them to be swept off their feet by the scale, human ingenuity, romantic decay and potential of the place. Recent news that the dock might contain remains of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, added even more to the magic of this place.

Opening Dock No.1 to the public is a great idea and I sincerely hope that the place will receive the attention of urban planners and restorers without undergoing too much transformation. It is splendid, even in its current neglected state.

John Bar
Dingli



Martin Scicluna (Vigilo No 35, April 2009) makes what appears to be a careful and balanced assessment of the outcome of the St John's Cathedral project. He chooses most of his words carefully and is careful, too, to make his attacks on the various actors in a very gentlemanly manner. He does not do himself or his case justice, however, by using words like "hysterical" and "emotional" to describe those who opposed the excavation of the Cathedral – not unlike a husband who realises that his wife's argument is rational and therefore resorts to this kind of language to discredit it.

The article states, unequivocally, that the PM's decision to scrap the project had nothing to do with either environmental or cultural heritage concerns yet, later in the article, Mr Scicluna calls this a matter of "such prominence". This was so, precisely because of those very environmental and cultural concerns. He does, however, concede the Foundation's failure to present this case to the public until it was too late. Some readers might be forgiven for thinking that the decision to withhold the plans was deliberate rather than that the members of the Foundation had a collective memory lapse.

The chief thrust of the Mr Scicluna's argument is that NGOs and other organisations should allow for the due process of planning law to be followed and that they should have waited for the findings of an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) before raising their objections. All this would be quite correct in "the best of all possible worlds", which is not what exists in Malta. Indeed, a "strong EIA process" is precisely what FAA called for – one that is balanced, objective, professional and impartial – just as DLH would also insist upon. One cannot forget that the MEPA Director of Planning had clearly stated: "The project is a non-starter as no amount of mitigation measures [recommended in an EIA] can completely eliminate the risk to the stability of the foundations of St John's Cathedral".

Martin Scicluna seems to have an unwavering trust in the honesty and objectivity of EIAs in spite of the fact that DLH's own experience has shown that EIAs have failed on a number of occasions to adhere to ethical criteria. As he must know in the light of the Xemxija Towers case, which Din l-Art Helwa fought tooth and nail, a DLH official had pointed out that the photomontages presented in the EIA were manipulated. In spite of such proof, these photomontages presented by the developers' consultant were not challenged and were accepted by MEPA as evidence that the project would not constitute a major impact on the landscape impact. The project was approved in the face of opposition from environment NGOs and in spite of the fact that it infringed the provisions of the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) policy which states that high-rise building cannot be constructed on ridges.

Furthermore, Mr Scicluna does not inform his readers that the Foundation undermined its own EIA by declaring that it would not be prepared to consider alternatives – an essential part of

the EIA process. EIAs are still paid for by the developers who, consequently, call the shots. FAA's argument has always been that EIAs should be carried out but that they must be properly and professionally managed by MEPA – not by the commissioning developers. Hitherto, they have been used to legitimise irregular and abusive applications.

One must bear in mind that an EIA is not every developer's automatic right; a similar project for a car park in Mosta was not allowed to go to EIA stage due to the potential risk to the Mosta Dome – a much more recent and sturdier structure than the Cathedral.

However, in spite of the fact that certain columnists have had an interest in making out that the EIA was the only issue at play in the St John's case, the reality is very different. The overriding issue concerning FAA was the fact that €16 million was being made available for a non-essential project for which alternative possibilities exist, when not even €2.5 million was allocated for the restoration of St Elmo and St Angelo, which are in an advanced state of deterioration. Furthermore, the Foundation's project was approved for EU funding before MEPA approval, violating normal procedure for such EU projects.

Another prime concern was the impact on the heart of Valletta of years of construction, with residents, businesses and visitors subjected to years of disruption caused by heavy vehicles, dust, noise and vibration. The ripping up of the freshly-laid Merchants' Street paving, costing hundreds of thousands of euros, was also a prime consideration.

Our final objection echoed the concern of the MEPA Director of Planning and of the experts we consulted, ie the risk to the stability of the Cathedral's foundations.

I am sure that Martin Scicluna is aware that the digging of a shop basement in Merchants' Street caused extensive damage to an adjacent historical building and that the excavation of a safe within St John's precincts caused irreparable damage to the Crypt. This is the same bedrock as that of the Co-Cathedral, therefore the experts' concern that a quarry dug in front of St John's Cathedral would cause cracks to snake up to the Mattia Preti wall-paintings is perfectly reasonable. We also add that the techniques being proposed for a deep geological survey of cracks under St John's Square were the same as those that failed to reveal the existence of passages a metre under St George's Square.

FAA's concerns were ultimately borne out by the collapse of the Cologne underground project, just a week after the cancellation of the St John's Cathedral museum project. The Cologne tunnel had already damaged a nearby church, and its collapse swallowed up three buildings, including the Cologne archives dating back to the Middle Ages.

FAA's reaction was neither emotional nor hysterical. We were not ready to politely watch this unique monument be put in peril.

Unlike Nero, we were not ready to sit back and watch Rome burn.

*Paul L. Cardona
Chairman, Flimkien Ambjent Ahjar
and life member of Din L-Art Helwa*

Dear Editor,

The presentation of the Renzo Piano master plan for the entrance to Valletta has made it clear what the various spaces will be used for. For many years I have harboured the dream that the empty space of Freedom Square could be filled with a state-of-the-art public library. The need for such a building, which could provide research facilities together with all sorts of technological aids, has long been felt. The current library in Floriana, although staffed by a group of committed professionals, is certainly inadequate by modern standards. Libraries nowadays are so much more than places where books can be found and consulted. Apart from this fundamental basic function, modern national libraries also collect and make available a nation's literature, music, theatrical and cinematographic repertoire, and media material. A visit to a national library should be a profound sensorial experience.

Although I am one of the many who think that Malta has a far greater share of building activity than it needs and deserves, it is my firm conviction that to achieve all of this a new building to house the national library is a must. Apart from anything else, it would give the opportunity for the public commission of a contemporary architectural statement which has long been lacking. Churches are the only modern public buildings worthy of any note and apart from these, Malta's contemporary architecture just seems to consist of largely anonymous, or downright ugly, blocks of flats. Is this the legacy we want to leave to our children? Will this be the architectural sum of our achievements?

Architecture has immense power. It shapes and impacts on the landscape, enhancing or degrading it. It can provide a fulcrum around which a society's culture and ambitions can become physically manifest. The Renzo Piano master plan will put Malta on the map of contemporary architecture, but this project must only be a start.

Every year, new architects graduate from the University of Malta and I am a firm believer in the talents of this new breed of architects. A number of them have become specialised in the rehabilitation and restoration of our architectural heritage and are doing great things in this field. It is time that as many new architects become the standard bearers of a contemporary Maltese architectural idiom. They must start designing buildings that we will not want to knock down at the first opportunity – buildings that will be their, and our, contribution to the Maltese architectural heritage. Malta does not need more buildings, it needs better ones!

John Aquilina
Hamrun

The innovative eco-compatible design
of the parliament façade devised by
Renzo Piano



Dear Sir,

The British government has spent the past 20 years considering over 50 proposals, and was willing to budget £223 million in order to move the A303 road that passes close to Stonehenge. The scheme also aimed to remove the visitors' centre car park that lies some distance from the site. The project has never been finalised, as many feared that the intervention might cause damage to the monument and its archaeological surroundings.

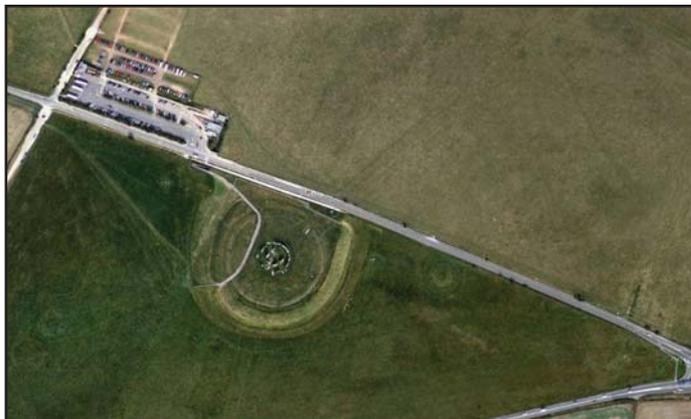
In the same period here in Malta, we have created an oversized car park, which I personally have never seen filled to more than 60 per cent capacity, right on the door step of the temple complex of Haġar Qim and Mnajdra. Not content with this, we have now taken up even more of the archaeological and historic landscape in the immediate vicinity of the temples to create a visitors' centre which is more prominent than the temples themselves. I will not enter into the merits of whether this building or, for that matter, the protective tents, were a necessity or not. In principal, I happen to agree with both.

I am painfully aware that the change of temperature caused by exposure to the sun can trigger nasty salt-induced decay mechanisms on stone surfaces. But on the other hand, there are ethical considerations as to how much one should impact on such an important landscape. As to the visitors' centre, however, two things are very clear:

1. This could and should have been considerably less obtrusive
2. It should have been built right off the road so as to extend close to the already committed area and be as far away as possible from the temples.

As it is, the location of the centre represents the exact opposite of what it was intended to achieve. Instead of enhancing the visitor's experience, it has irremediably marred it.

Joe Baldacchino
Gudja



Above Top: Stonehenge

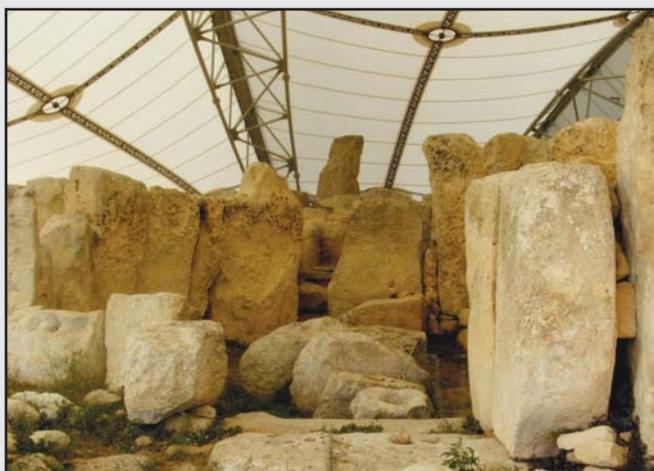
Above: Haġar Qim

Images: Google Earth

Dear Editor

I must say that, had I written this letter a few weeks ago, it would have had a much different tone. At that time I was angry, frustrated and shocked by the new shelters that have been erected over Haġar Qim and Mnajdra. I first went to have a look at them after being encouraged to do so by a friend. I set off with in negative frame of mind and a glimpse of the huge white aliens that had settled over the temples was enough to get me into a rage. I left determined to commit my feelings to paper and send them off to you.

A few days later, however, the same friend told me that he had actually been under the shelters and that his negative opinion had completely changed. So I decided to visit them for myself before writing to you. I am pleased to say that I am very glad I did. I realised that my reaction was based on the initial shock caused by the view of the tents and that I had not considered for one minute that there were good – indeed inescapable – reasons that made these shelters a necessity. I think that, like myself, anybody who is familiar with this site will have the same initial reaction, but



everybody must understand that these shelters will extend the life of these magnificent temples by many decades. The best way to reach an informed opinion is to visit the site and see them for yourself.

Joe Sultana
Paola

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GO plc
Ignazio Anastasi Ltd
Island Hotels Group Ltd

Malta International Airport
Malta Maritime Authority
Malta Tourism Authority
Marsovin Ltd
Megabyte Ltd
M Demajo Group
Middlesea Insurance Company Ltd
Mizzi Holdings Ltd
P Cutajar & Company Ltd
Playmobil (Malta) Ltd
PricewaterhouseCoopers
Rotary Club (Malta)
Round Table Malta (One)
Salvo Grima Group Ltd
Shireburn Software Ltd
Simonds Farsons Cisk Ltd
Toly Products Ltd
Tug Malta Ltd.
Union Haddiema Maghqudin
Vassallo Builders Ltd
Vodafone Malta Ltd



Din I-Art Helwa



