

ANTON ATTARD

BIRGU

Città Vittoriosa



Dín l-Art Helwa



*Birgu
Local Council*

*Four Walks
in a
Historical City*

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Aerial view of Birgu promontory

Introduction

Being experienced seafarers, the early settlers of these Islands became immediately aware that the coast on the Western side of the promontory on which the city of Birgu was later built, offered shelter and security. They realized that at the same time, if they were to be attacked by newcomers, they could defend themselves from the top of the hill at the edge of the promontory, facing the entrance of the harbour. Before the dawn of civilization, this security was the main reason why so many newcomers chose to settle in this part of the Island.

All through the centuries and under the influence of various rulers, Birgu became the centre of religious cults, technology and commerce. In prehistoric times, the first settlers built temples in honour of their gods and goddesses in which they performed their religious rites. Beneath the hill of the promontory, close to the site where later a castle was built, a Temple in honour of Goddess Hammuna was erected. Later, it was re-dedicated to Astarte and Gunone. This temple was so richly decorated, that it drew the attention of contemporary writers. These writers praised the beauty and prestige which this temple enjoyed. Its popularity spread beyond our shores. Most probably, it was destroyed during the Arab occupation. Its remains could still be seen when the Order of St. John came to Malta in 1530. A few months before, the well-known Quintinus prepared a report about the Island. In it he stated that he saw the remains of an old temple

spread along the coast and some of them could also be seen reaching out into the sea. From the places of worship built in this area, one may conclude that Christians, both of the Byzantine and Roman rites, Hebrews and, even Muslims, although no tangible proof of any mosque exists, all practiced their beliefs in this area.

The shores beneath the Castle are the cradle of the technology and craftsmanship of the Island. As early as 1374, in the vicinity of Fort St. Angelo, there was already a well-established dockyard where galleys were built or repaired. In 1501, a bigger dockyard was built. Later, the Order built another one which was considered as the best in the Mediterranean. Eventually, many craftsmen and tradesmen passed on their knowledge and experience to successive generations of workers. So this city has always been renowned for its craftsmen and tradesmen.

Those who lacked skills earned their living as sailors on the various vessels which berthed alongside Birgu Wharf, later known as Galley Creek, where ships of all kind loaded or unloaded their wares to be sold or bought along the shores of the Marina. This activity reached its climax in 1127 when Malta was annexed to the Kingdom of Sicily.

The importance which this part of the coast enjoyed was confirmed when a castle was built at the end of the promontory. At first this castle was referred to as *Castrum Maris*. The poor villagers of the neighbourhood felt



View of Fort St. Angelo from Valletta.

more sheltered and secure by building hovels not far away from the walls of the castle. Richer citizens built their houses closer or inside its walls, for security in case of danger. Slowly the scattered village underneath the castle was taking shape and being referred to as *Il Borgo del Castello*, and hence its derivative - *Il-Birgu*.

With the coming of the Order of St. John, Birgu was chosen to be their city. So it was greatly improved and restored and to meet the Knights' requirements, auberges for the various languages of the Knights, a hospital, new law courts and other palaces sprung everywhere. It was almost built anew so much so that it was being referred to as *La Città Nuova*. (The new city)

Fortifications were built in the most vulnerable parts to strengthen the defense of the new city. These were of great benefit during the Great Siege of 1565. Behind them, the Knights and the inhabitants, although outnumbered, fought bravely to prevent the forces of Suleiman the Magnificent from capturing the city. Their efforts finally lead to the final victory. For this feat, the city deservedly was awarded the prestigious title of *Città Vittoriosa*: the victorious city, a title that its citizens still have very much at heart.

To Birgu from Valletta Bus Terminus – Bus No. 1, 2, 4 or 6.
Journey takes about half an hour.

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The author

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Walk No. 1 (Approx. duration 2 hrs)

To the Collacchio along the Fortifications

Arriving at the Bus Terminus, cross the main road into *Triq 8 ta' Dicembru* on your left and proceed downhill on the right side, along a small garden below the bastions and stop at an open area, facing Dockyard Creek. The entrance to Birgu is through a baroque sculptured gate on the right. This is the starting point of your walk for to-day. This area is known by the locals as **Fejn Sabu s-Sinjur** (where Our Lord was found). This is the result of an unhappy event which happened here nearly two centuries



Advance Gate with Couvre Port in the background

ago.

During the night of the 18th and 19th October 1837, a ciborium with consecrated hosts was stolen from the Church of St. Theresa, situated a few meters down the road. Catholic Malta was appalled by this sacrilegious act. Prayers of reparation were invoked in all churches.



Fejn Sabu s-Sinjur (Chapel and Garden)



Two days later, the ciborium was found in a crevice in the fortifications below the gate by a group of children playing nearby. Only the golden cross on top of the ciborium's lid was missing. Some days later, the perpetrator was apprehended and sentenced to life imprisonment. While serving sentence, he was murdered by a fellow prisoner.

As a thanksgiving for the find without any hosts missing, the Theresian Friars built a small chapel at the spot where the ciborium was found. This could be seen in the small garden below the gate.

Now let us start our walk along the fortifications. Soon after the Knights of St. John settled in Malta, they were determined to fortify Birgu by surrounding its strategic and vulnerable posts by defensive walls. These were erected according to plans by the Italian military engineer Antonio Ferramolino, on whose suggestions, extensive modifications were also carried out to Fort St. Angelo. Since these works were carried out expeditiously, they were not as strong and efficient as they were supposed to be. But during the Great Siege of 1565, they proved to be a powerful deterrent, preventing the Turks in seizing the city.

As years went by, military experts became aware that strategic parts of the fortifications were still not strong enough. Damages caused during the siege and others due to ravages of time and neglect were worrying. So it was decided that works to restore the old bastions and strengthen the defence of the city should start immediately. In 1588, some restoration works began and two towers were added; one facing the Santa Margherita Hill land front in Cospicua and the other facing San Salvatore Hill in Kalkara. Works dragged on due to lack of funds, which were being spent on the new fortifications being built simultaneously around Valletta.

In 1715, Grand Master Ramon Perellos commissioned military engineers Louis Francois de Tigne' and Charles Francois de Mondion to assess and report on the present defence system of Birgu. They observed various faults and recommended several recommendations. Most of these were carried out and finalized during the magistracy of Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena. These included the construction of new bastions and the excavation of a kilometre long ditch, from the main entrance of the city to the Post of Castille. These were completed in twelve years time. The date of completion was engraved on each of the gates constructed in each line of fortifications. You are going to walk through each one of these gates in a few minutes time.

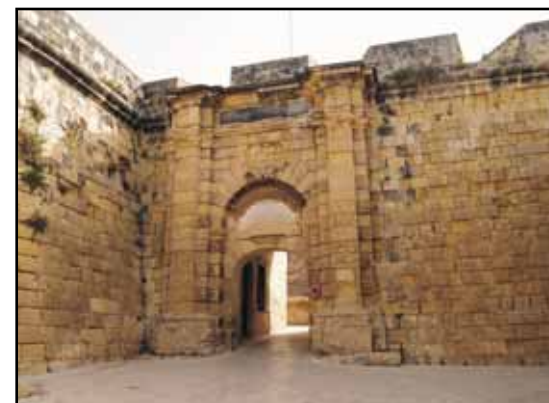
The first gate you are going to walk through is the one in front of you. It is known as **Advance Gate**. Being in the part of the fortifications, whose defense was assigned to the Knights of Aragon, is also known as **Gate of Aragon**. As inscribed in Roman numerals curved on it, this gate, together with the adjoining walls, were completed in 1722.

As you walk through, you come near the Local Council Offices and the **Malta at War Museum**. This Museum, together with the adjoining war shelters is administered by the NGO *Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna* and guided tours are held at the hour.



Couvre Port

Another Gate known as **Couvre Port** is across the bridge crossing the previously mentioned **Ditch**, or as known by the locals – **Il-Foss**. Together with its adjoining bastions, it was completed by 1723. As you proceed, you can notice a flight of steps leading to the rampart which was guarded by the French Knights.



Main Gate

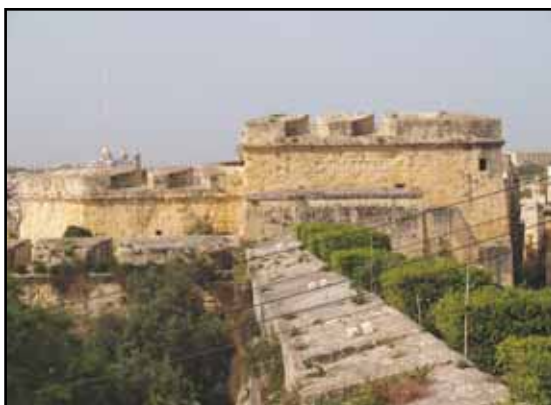
On the right there is the **Main Gate** of the city. Being in the section of the fortifications under the responsibility of the knights of the Langue of Provence, it is also known as **Gate of Provence**.

A marble tablet in Latin commemorates the erection of these new fortifications and the repairs of the old ones, which were battered by the infidels in the Great Siege of 1565. At the same time it confirms the title of *Città Vittoriosa* conferred to Birgu for the heroic contribution

of these new fortifications and the repairs of the old ones, which were battered by the infidels in the Great Siege of 1565. At the same time it confirms the title of *Città Vittoriosa* conferred to Birgu for the heroic contribution

of its inhabitants in the victory over the infidels in the mentioned siege.

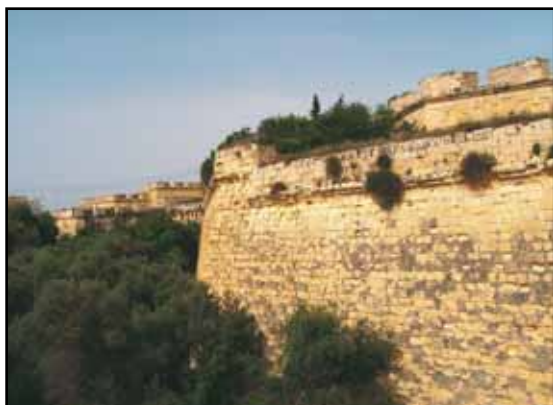
Passing through the Main Gate and walking up to the main street, you will face the high walls of **St. John's Tower**. This tower was completed between 1723 and 1727. The defensive system of cannon emplacement on two levels was used only



St. John's Tower and the French Curtain

in this tower by the Order in Malta. The efficiency of this tower was never tested against the enemy. Ironically enough, it was used occasionally against the Maltese insurgents during the French occupation in 1798.

Turning right, around the tower, you come to a wide and moderately long road. This is called **The French Curtain**, a section in the Birgu fortifications defended by the Knights from France. Years back, being long and straight, this street was used by the abundant rope makers of the city, who supplied



St. James Cavalier

the rigging for the galleys of the Order. Hence its local name - *Is-Sur tal-Kurdari*.

Straight ahead, you will face a gate leading to **St. James's Cavalier**. Climb up the stairs to the ramparts overlooking the sections of the fortifications defended by the Knights of the Langue of Auvergne and the Knights from Genoa.

You will also have a good view of *Xewkija Bay*, *San Salvatore Hill* in Kalkara, and a small section of the *Santa Margherita* and the *Cottonera Lines* in Cospicua far on the right. During the Second World War, in one of the stores underneath this Cavalier, Birgu had its first war victims. A

mother and her three children lost their lives when a bomb penetrated the massive roof. Residents of Birgu chose to find shelter in these stores and in a tunnel underneath this Cavalier, close to Capuchins Gate, under the Post of Auvergne, which you will soon encounter as you proceed with your walk.

It is interesting to note that in *Triq l-Arcisqof Mikiel Gonzi*, a few meters down away from the gate of the Cavalier, there is the house where **Archbishop Michael Gonzi** was born and in which he lived some of his childhood years. It is indicated by a small marble tablet on the façade. Gonzi became one of the most influential and controversial Maltese personalities of the Twentieth Century. He was consecrated Bishop of Gozo in



The Order's Armoury

1934 and nine years later he was appointed Archbishop of Malta. He occupied this prestigious position for 33 years and died 99 years of age in 1984.

The whole block opposite Gonzi's house, was the **Order's Armoury**. It is one of the earliest buildings erected by the Order in Birgu. Its architectural style is similar to that of others erected during the magistracy of Grand Master La Sengle, between 1533



Bishop Palace Street

and 1537.

Originally, it was only a ground floor with a wide door in each of its four sides to facilitate a quicker distribution of armaments and supplies in an emergency. The top floor was added later, perhaps around 1636, thus becoming a plain two-storied structure with a plain horizontal string course between the ground floor and the new floor, with a simple cornice crowning the façade.

During the Great Siege of 1565, it also served as a hospital for the wounded. During the British occupation, initially it was used as a hospital for Services personnel and later as an Army Barracks. After the Second World War, it was converted into an Elementary School for the children of Birgu and of the neighbouring cities.

A short detour to the side street on the left, the one opposite the door of the **Knights Hall**, will lead you to the **Bishops' Palace**, indicated by a marble tablet on the façade. It is situated about 10 meters down on the left. The architectural style of the façade is in a Sixteenth Century style. It is held that, in 1542, Bishop Cubelles bought this palace from the relatives of one who later was to become a member of the Order and be remembered as the father of Maltese history; namely Gian Francesco Abela, who was born in this city in 1605. Between 1615 and 1633, on the initiative of Bishop Cagliares, extensive restorations were carried out. But it is believed that the façade is still the original one.

Annexed to the palace there was a prison. In it were detained those awaiting trial and others serving sentences meted out by the Bishop's Court. It is to be noted that before the establishment of the Roman Inquisition in Malta, offenders were tried by the Bishop.

One of the events associated with this prison was doubtlessly the



Bishop's Palace

unusual case known as the *Case of the Monsignori of the Cathedral*. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, Bishop Gargallo was not on good terms with the Pope. He disagreed with the Pope's decision to provide the Inquisitor with a pension contributed from his own personal income. Consequently, the Pope authorized the Dean of the Cathedral, Monsignor Bartoli, to suspend Mgr. Gargallo from his Episcopal duties. Mgr. Gargallo reacted by ordering the arrest of Bartoli, and his guards went also to the cathedral to tear up the proclamation of suspension, which was fixed to the cathedral's main door. Regardless of this action, the *monsignori* of the cathedral still announced that they do not recognize Gargallo as their bishop any more. When the bishop was informed of this, he ordered the arrest of all of them. So they were tied behind horses and dragged to the prisons of this palace. Two of them died and the others, after being detained for twelve days became extremely weak and unwell. At the same time, they were derogated of all their duties and privileges and new monsignors were appointed.

When the Pope was informed of what happened, he called Gargallo to Rome. He was disciplined by being suspended from his duties for six months and exiled from Malta for another three months. Moreover, he was compelled to compensate the heirs of the dead *monsignori*. Additionally, he also had to pay for the construction of some chapels in particular churches. One of these was in the Mdina Cathedral and two in St. Lawrence Church in Birgu. He was also constrained to pay for the construction of the Jesuit Church in Valletta. Eventually, after his death, he was buried in this church.

Bishop Cagliares was the last bishop to reside in this palace. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, he went to live in Valletta. After some time, the palace was rented as a common tenement. Later, it was retaken by the Curia and after being refurbished, it was used by the bishops during their Pastoral Visits to the neighbouring parishes. Up to some years ago, it was being used as an Infants School. After the school's closure, no proper use for it had been found. It is a shame that such an important historical building had been left to fall into such an undesirable state.

Turning back to *Triq l-Arcisqof Mikiel Gonzi* and proceeding to walk around the Armoury block through *Triq P. Scicluna* and *Triq il-Kwartier*, you come to an open area with **St. James's Cavalier** on the right, the **Post of Genoa** and that of **Auvergene** in front of you and below these you will



notice an opening, which is **Capuchins Gate**. This area is called *Il-Foss tas-Sur*. Continue your way close to the buildings on the left. After five metres down, you arrive where the fortifications defended by the Language of Castille begin. This particular spot is known as **Il-Breccia**



The Breach

(the breach). This is so called because it was from this spot that, during the Great Siege, the Turks succeeded to penetrate through a breach that their artillery opened in the bastion. It was here that Grand Master La Valette was wounded after he joined the outnumbered Spaniards to fight back and expel the invaders.

Walking along the fortifications in *Telghet il-Foss* and turning right into *Triq il-Foss*, the remainder of the Post of Castille can only be viewed from



Post of Castille

a distance. Unfortunately, the area was leased to private individuals.

Walking through *Triq Id-Dejqa*, the narrow street opposite the old landing to the bastion, now closed behind an iron gate, you come straight into *Triq Hilda Tabone* and in the middle of what was known as **The Collacchio**. This is the area where the Knights

had their most important buildings. In the Collacchio there was the Infirmary or hospital, the Armoury, the Castellania or Courts of Justice and the Università. There were also the Conventual Chaplains' Residence and six of the Auberges or hostels of the Languages or nationalities within the Order. The Auberge of Italy, which was destroyed during the Second World War, was close to the Marina. Those of Castille and Allemagne



Typical Street in The Collacchio

was composed mainly of knights coming from the Province of Castille and from Portugal. The Head or *Plier*, (as known at the time) of this Language was the Order's Grand Chancellor whose duties included the signing of documents and affixing the seal on decrees issued by the Order's Council.

A few paces down, at Nos. 28/30, stand what is held to have been the **Auberge of Aragon**, with its façade reconstructed after being passed into private hands. The *Plier* of this Language was the Grand Conservator of the Order. His duties were the purchase and

were also destroyed. With the exception of the Auberges of England and France, whose original features have been maintained, all the others, to some extent, passed through several changes after becoming private residences. The Collacchio area was out of bounds to lay people, especially during the night.

Proceeding forward along *Triq Hilda Tabone*, corner with *Triq Ġlormu Cassar*, you can see the remnants of the **Auberge of Castille and Portugal**. – A giant paneled column and two windows with Renaissance mouldings. The Language of Castille and Portugal



The Norman House

storage of the supplies. In this Auberge, together with the knights from the Spanish Province of Aragon, lived also those coming from the Italian State of Novara.

In *Triq it-Tramuntana*, a narrow street opposite this Auberge, on the left hand side, there is one of the oldest (if not the oldest) house in this city. With Siculo-Norman features, it is reputed to have been built in the 13th century. It has a very fine double-light window with the string course supported by beautiful Gothic arcading and complimented with Norman style friezing across the façade. The interior of the house, with several pointed archways is also very interesting. Some of these indicate that it was larger and that along the years, several renovations and changes have been made.

Back in *Triq Hilda Tabone*, you may notice that of all the auberges



Auberge of France

in Birgu, the largest and most beautiful is the **Auberge of France**, situated in Nos. 24/26. The French Knights were in large number here and were responsible for the running and supervision of the *Sacra Infermeria* or hospital of the Order. The Auberge of France, whose design is attributed to either Bartolomeo Genga or Niccolo Bellavante, both renowned Italian architects, has a palatial façade with, what was to be known later, as *melitan moulding*. The French Knights vacated this auberge in 1586 and was later leased for private use. In 1830, it became a school and much later a carpentry factory.

This is the only French Auberge still extant in Malta, as the one in Valletta was destroyed during the Second World War.

Next to the Auberge of France, we find that of the **Langues of Auvergne and Provence**. After being sold to private owners, this



Auberge of England

auberge was divided into several residences and many alterations were made to the original features. The members of these two Languages were housed together in this palace, although they had different duties to perform within the Order. The Head or *Plier* of the *Langue of Provence* was responsible for the *Polverista* and other ammunition stores. The *Plier* of the *Langue of Auvergne* was the Order's Treasurer, who carried his duties from one of the palaces in the Birgu Marina, next to the Arsenal.

Opposite this auberge, in a granite paved street named *Triq il-Majjistral*, there is the **Auberge**

of England. It was built or bought at the request of Sir Clement West in 1534. It is situated next to a house acquired earlier and which, later on, served as the residence of Sir Oliver Starkey, the Head of the *Langue*. His duties were those of Commander of the Infantry and Latin Secretary of Grand Master La Valette.

After the *Reformation* in England, the few British knights in Malta had to face several financial problems because their property there was confiscated. There was a time when they had to rely on the Order's Treasury. This lack of finances excluded the possibility for the *Langue of England* in building its own auberge in the new city of Valletta. So, the only *auberge* that the English knights had in Malta is the one in this city.

Back in *Triq Hilda Tabone*, and turning right into *Triq Santa Skolastika*, appears in front of you a small church. It is annexed to one of the earliest and largest buildings of the Order in Birgu – **The Sacra Infermeria**. Looking after the sick and wounded was of utmost importance to the Order and this building was constructed before most of the *auberges*. Although only male patients were admitted, it was one of the most renowned hospitals in Europe for its efficiency. Most of its original early renaissance style was

lost after considerable restructuring took place, most probably, by architect Lorenzo Gafà. Still, some of its interior architecture offers interesting attention. After the Order's departure to Valletta, this hospital remained vacant for some time. It was used again as an isolation hospital during a plague epidemic in 1592. Later on, it became a monastery of the Benedictine Nuns, as it is still to-day.



The Sacra Infermeria

The annexed church that we have initially noticed, although known as the **Church of St. Scholastica**, is dedicated to St. Anne. The titular painting, depicting this saint and others, is considered to be among the best works of the famous Italian knight painter Mattia Preti. It was built on the design of Lorenzo Gafà, after the hospital became a nunnery. This renowned architect was born, has grown up and continued to live in this city until his death.



Church of St. Scholastica

Walking down *Triq il-Miratur*, the street by the church, you come to the fortifications facing Kalkara Creek and defended by the Knights of Allemagne. On the right there was the **Manderaggio**, an inlet where vessels were berthed for maintenance. It served its purpose until it was closed by the curtain built after the arrival of the Order. A number

of the poorer workers of the city, together with their families, used to live in shoddy rooms built later in the area. Some years ago most of them were demolished and replaced by modern apartments.

Further up, along the very narrow street below the Infirmary building facing the creek, you arrive at that part of the fortifications stretching from here to Fort St. Angelo. This section was presumed to be defended by the English Knights. But during the Siege of 1565, only one or two of them were in Malta and consequently that duty was assigned to Maltese soldiers and Greek sailors. On your way, besides the magnificent view of the entrance to the Grand Harbour, you may have noticed the two tunnels opened in the fortifications to allow an easy passage to the seashore known by the locals as **It-Toqob** (the holes).



St. Anne and other saints by Mattia Preti

Proceeding forward, turn to the left where the Bocci Pitch is situated and then turn left again into a narrow street named *Triq il-Palazz tal-Gvernatur* and turn again to the right. Now you come opposite a new building erected on the site where the old **Magisterial Palace** once stood. Two marble tablets recount briefly some of its past. An old palace was re-designed and enlarged on plans drawn by the Italian architect Bartolomeo Genga. This was done because Grand Master La Valette chose to transfer his residence from Fort St. Angelo to this palace. That was done so that he would be able to supervise the works being carried out on the defensive walls of the city and, at the same time, be closer to the inhabitants of the city.

When the Order moved to Valletta, the palace became the residence of the City's Governor. Later, Grand Master Verdalle offered the building to the feminine wing of the Order, to-day known as the nuns of

St. Ursula. When these nuns moved to Valletta, it was given to the nuns of St. Benedict. After being vacated again, it was sold to be used as a private residence.

Descending a flight of steps a few metres down from the Palace, appears in front of you a small church dedicated to **Our Lady of Montserrat and the Holy Trinity**. This church stands on the site of a much older one which was destroyed during WW II. Its origin goes back to 1462, since the times of the noble family De Guevara's sojourn in this city, with whose donations it was built. It was rebuilt in 1727, with an addition of two more altars. It served several functions notably that in the nineteenth century, when a kind priest used to hold religious functions for those who, because of poverty, were unable to afford a decent attire to be among the congregation in the parish church.

Another flight of steps near the church lead you into *Triq San Lawrenz*. Turning right and walking to the far end of the street you arrive at the spot where the **Auberge of Italy** stood. Now only a marble tablet on a dilapidated part of the façade and two of the windows remain to tell its story. It was built away from the *auberges* of the other languages because the Italians were responsible for the fleet of the Order. Their *Plier* was the General of the Galleys and obviously he and the other officers had to be as close as possible to the creek, where their galleys were moored when in harbour.

Next to the *auberge*, the Italians had their own hospital and a chapel dedicated to St. Catherine of Alexandria, the patron saint of the *Langue*. It is also held that the Italian knights introduced Carnival revelries in Malta. A nearby platform was still referred to by the locals as *Il-Ballet*. Unfortunately, all of these were destroyed during the last war.

Here ends to-day's walk. Walking back along the street you will arrive to the spot from where you started this walk; the *Bus Terminus*. At the same time, as you walk along, enjoy the view of *Dockyard* or *Galley Creek*.

* Visits to the Museums are not included in the duration of the walks.

Walk No. 2 (Approx. duration 2 hrs 15 min) *

The City's Waterfront

From the *Bus Terminus*, cross the busy main road on the left hand side of the roundabout and proceed downhill towards the creek. Straight down past the beautiful gate in the fortifications on the right, continue down towards the weather battered arch just in front of you. This is called **Admiralty Gate**. It was opened in 1860 by the Admiralty in the then still standing fortifications to facilitate transport towards the Birgu Marina and Fort St. Angelo.



Site of The Polverista

On the right hand side beneath this gate, once stood a *Polverista* or gunpowder magazines. In July 1806, these magazines blew up demolishing most of the buildings in the neighbourhood and damaging many others throughout the city. About 160 lost their lives and others were seriously injured. This area is still

referred to by the locals as *L-Imġarraf* - the demolished area.

At this same site, the Admiralty projected the building of the first naval dock. After some years, work was interrupted when insurmountable obstacles were encountered. It is said that due to this failure, the engineer in charge of the project committed suicide.

Going further down the road, the **Freedom Monument** comes into view. This was erected on the same spot where on the 31 of March 1979, the Union Jack was lowered and replaced by the Maltese flag symbolizing the end of the British Rule in these Islands. The bronze figures at the



Freedom Monument in front of Parish Church

end of the pathway to the top are the work of artist Anton Agius.

Entrance to what was known as the *Marina Grande* is through an arch which was erected during the British period. It was built high enough to allow the processions with statues carried shoulder high to pass through.

Centuries ago, especially during the

times of the Order of St. John, this shoreline was the landing place for most of those who visited Malta. So it had to be beautiful and impressive. Therefore, it was lined with majestic buildings, designed by the best architects available at the time, like Lorenzo Gafà, Francesco Buonamici, and many years later, William Scamp. After



The Marina in early 19th Century

being occupied by the British Navy, the ground floors of the palaces were used as stores and warehouses to furnish the ships of the Mediterranean Fleet with provisions and supplies. The upper floors were used as offices and residences for the Naval Dockyard's officials.

The first imposing building on the right now houses the **Maritime Museum**. If you have an hour to spare, it is worth a visit. This building was constructed to be used as a naval bakery on the designs by the famous British architect William Scamp, in 1842. When it started to function, it was described as the most splendid bakery in existence. This building replaced



The Maritime Museum with the Order's Treasury and Bakery

an arsenal constructed in 1501 and later expanded by the Order of St. John. It had three intercommunicating compartments, so that three galley hulks could be built simultaneously. It was an imposing building with barrel vaulted ceilings and three arches on the façade.

Next to the Maritime Museum there is a two storey granite building,

erected in 1545. The ground floor was the **Order's Bakery**, popularly known as the *Fran tas-Sinjuriija*. Now it is occupied by commercial outlets. On the top floor stood the **Order's Treasury** where the Order's Treasurer kept his accounts. When the Knights moved to Valletta, this building was used for manufacturing sails and rigging for the fleet.

Looking up after a few paces forward, you see the **Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel** which was built in 1611 by the funds contributed by the crews of the Order's galleys. Religious services for the



The Order's Treasury and Bakery

mentioned crews were held regularly in this church. A slipway bequeathed to the church provided a fee of four *tari* from each of the galleys making use of it. These fees went for its maintenance and other requirements.

For some years, it was under the care of the Carmelite Fathers, whose convent was annexed to the church. Insufficient funds were the reason that the friars were compelled to leave and settle again in their Order's other convents in Mdina and Valletta.



Palace of the General of the Galleys

Next to this church there is the **Palace of the General of the Galleys**, which now houses a casino. This is the most artistic of the palaces in the Marina. It was designed by local architect Lorenzo Gafà. Its main reception room, overlooking the bay, is the largest and the most beautiful room in any of the other palaces. The lower storey was mainly

used as a warehouse. The upper floor was the residence of the General of the Galleys. In the façade, on top of the balcony, you notice two defaced escutcheons. One was that of Grand Master Cottoner and the other of the Order, although some historians, who hold that the palace was built in 1680, believe that the latter was that of Grand Master Wignacourt. In the middle of the nineteenth century some modifications were carried out by architect William Scamp. Since then, it was undeservedly called Scamp Palace.

Further up once stood the **Palace of the Superintendent of the Order's Arsenal**. Built in 1721, it had its entrance in what was then – Strait Street, now *Triq San Lawrenz*. It was totally destroyed during the Second World War. Later, it was replaced by a mediocre and inferior building called *The White House*. Recently it was demolished and the site is intended for the building of a luxurious hotel.

Further up you come to the **Palaces of the Captains of the Galleys**. These two palaces were built between 1659 and 1667 on plans drawn in Doric Order by Francesco Buonamici, by Mederico Blondel, who succeeded him as resident engineer, or by their assistants, namely Lorenzo Gafà or Francesco Sammut. Each one of the palaces is a two storey building with the ground floor devoted almost entirely to stores and warehouses for the Order's galleys. That is why architectural decorations were concentrated on the first floor, where the captains resided, although the mouldings and other ornaments on the façade of the first palace

disappeared entirely. This was used as a resting place for the captains of the vessels moored in the harbour. The adjoining one, where the architectural decorations had not been defaced served as residence of the Order's Squadron captains.

The building at the extreme end of the Marina was completed during Grand Master Carafa's magistracy in 1689 and consequently known as **Carafa Stores**. Its building necessitated the demolition of a church dedicated to St. Andrew. As a memento of this church, on the façade of the building a niche with a Crucifix adorned with some frescos was erected and could still be traced although it is kept covered to be protected from the elements.

Before reaching Fort St. Angelo, on the right hand side one can see what remains of the moat that was hewn in the rocks between the castle and



The Captains' Palace

its suburb. It served also as a *manderaggio*, where some of the vessels were berthed during rough seas or for minor repairs. It was deepened on the recommendations of military engineer Antonio Ferramolino in 1535. It was in this ditch that the Order's Captains berthed some of the vessels during the Siege of 1565.



The Manderaggio or Moat



Aerial view of Fort St. Angelo

Fort St. Angelo, previously referred to as *Castrum Maris*, is perched on the hill at the tip of the promontory. Most probably, it was built during the Arab occupation, around 870 A.D to protect the harbour area and their vessels berthed therein.

Since the time of Count Roger the Norman (1091), the castle was the residence of the feudal lords who governed these Islands. The Castellans, as these lords were known, enjoyed complete autonomy from the *Università* of Malta seated at the capital city - Mdina. Most prominent among the Castellans who resided in this castle were the de Guevara and the de Nava families. One cannot forget Gonsalvo Monroi, whose wife was imprisoned in the castle during the uprising of the Maltese in 1427.

When in 1530, the Order of St. John established its convent on the Birgu peninsula, Grand Master L'Isle Adam took up residence in the Castle, which became also the Headquarters of the Order. A church dedicated to St. Anne was enlarged to meet the needs of a larger congregation. An amount of innovations and additions were also made to the Castellans' Palace, which became the residence of the Grand Master. Consecutive Grand Masters continued to live in the Castle until Jean de La Valette moved to a palace in Birgu.



Fort St. Angelo - The Grunenburgh Battery

From time to time, the Order strived to strengthen the castle and make it impregnable as possible. It was during the Order's tenure that the Castle was almost rebuilt anew. By 1536, on the recommendations of the military engineer Antonio Ferramolino, a cavalier or tower was erected to control the entrance to the Grand Harbour and, to a certain extent, even Marsamxetto Harbour. At the same time, the ditch between the castle and Birgu, its suburb, was replaced by a moat. This renovation process continued on a regular basis for many years. But those carried out between 1676 and 1690, by another well-known military engineer, namely Carlos de Grunenburgh, were the most important. These included the formation of four parallel batteries at different levels facing the harbour. These modifications rendered the Castle an impregnable stronghold, and at the same time, contributed to the graceful appearance so admired to-day.

During the British occupation, in the period between 1800 and 1906, it was manned by the Army. During the following years, it was taken over by the Navy and renamed, first as HMS Egmont and later, up to the withdrawal of the British Forces from Malta, as HMS St. Angelo. Some

years ago, the upper part of the Castle was granted to the Order of St. John, which funded extensive restorations.

A visit to the Castle (which might require a fee) is highly recommended. Among the interesting spots one finds the old church, cut in the rocks, dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Just opposite, there is the *Oubliette* or *La Guva*, which was one of the prisons in the Castle. Graffiti made by some of the knights imprisoned there are still visible. A few meters away, there is the Castle's Cemetery, where some of the knights killed during the Great

Siege were buried, together with others who died during a plague epidemic in 1676. The upper part of the Castle now is occupied by the resident knight of the Order. In this part, among the interesting places, one finds the Magisterial Palace, the Church of St. Anne, and a Nymphaeum, in the Grand Master's garden.

Retrace your walk to the bridge above the moat beneath the Castle, and enter through the second door of the Caraffa Stores. Below the newly built mansions hewn in the rocks, there is what remained of the **Slaves' Prison**. During the night, the slaves were locked up inside the underground cells. After an uprising by most of the slaves in Malta in 1749, Grand Master Pinto commissioned the expansion of this prison.

After the already mentioned explosion of the Birgu Gunpowder Magazines in 1806, these prisons were converted into living quarters for those who became homeless. After a few years, it was found that



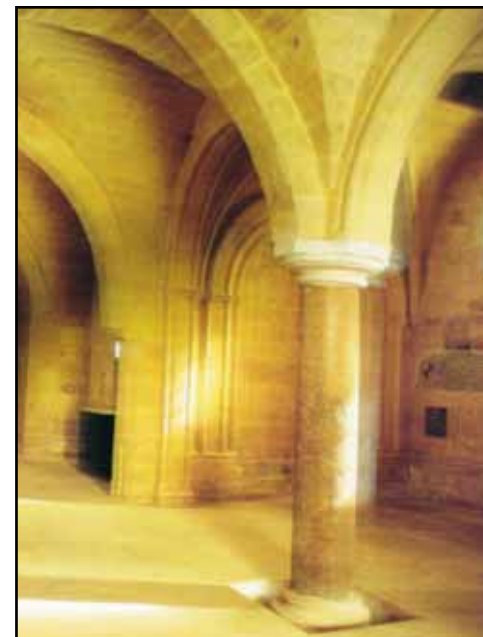
Graffiti in the Oubliette



Magisterial Palace

more than 400 poor people were living there free of charge. But in 1842, they were compelled to find subsidized alternative accommodation, as the prison was needed by the British Navy to be converted into a number of workshops.

Cross over to the Eastern shores of Birgu by walking along the pathway between the ditch and the recently built mansions. You will emerge in Kalkara Creek previously known as *Cala degli Ebrei*. This is because these shores were used by the Jewish merchants living in Birgu until their expulsion in the middle of the



Interior of St. Anne's Church - A detail



The Slaves' Prison

fifteenth century. Along these shores they used to load and unload their wares on and off their commissioned vessels.

Years later, when the Infirmary of the Knights was built nearby, this creek became to be known as *Porto dell' Infermeria*.

Just as you leave the quay occupied by the apartments, you will notice what remains of a small cave beneath the bastions. When the area was still in its natural state, this cave was the favorite spot for swimming of the pages serving the Knights and the Grand Masters. Since then, it remained to be known as **L-Ghar**

Walk N° 1

Triq 8 ta' Dicembru
Couvre Port
Triq tal-Mina l-Kbira
Triq it-Torri ta' San Ġwann
(fuq il-lemin)
Triq P. Arcisqof Gonzi
Triq il-Palazz ta' l-Isqof
Triq l-Arcisqof Gonzi
Triq Paçifiku Scicluna
(fuq il-lemin)
Triq il-Kwartieri
(fuq il-lemin)
Il-Foss tas-Sur
Telgħet il-Foss
Triq id-Dejqa
Triq Hilda
Triq it-Tramuntana u
lura fir Triq Hilda
Triq il-Majjistral u
lura fi Triq Hilda
Triq Santa Skolastika
Triq il-Miratur
Triq il-Palazz tal-Gvernatur
Steps of Mauserat
downsteps to Triq San Lawrenz
Triq San Lawrenz to Bus Terminus

Walk N° 2

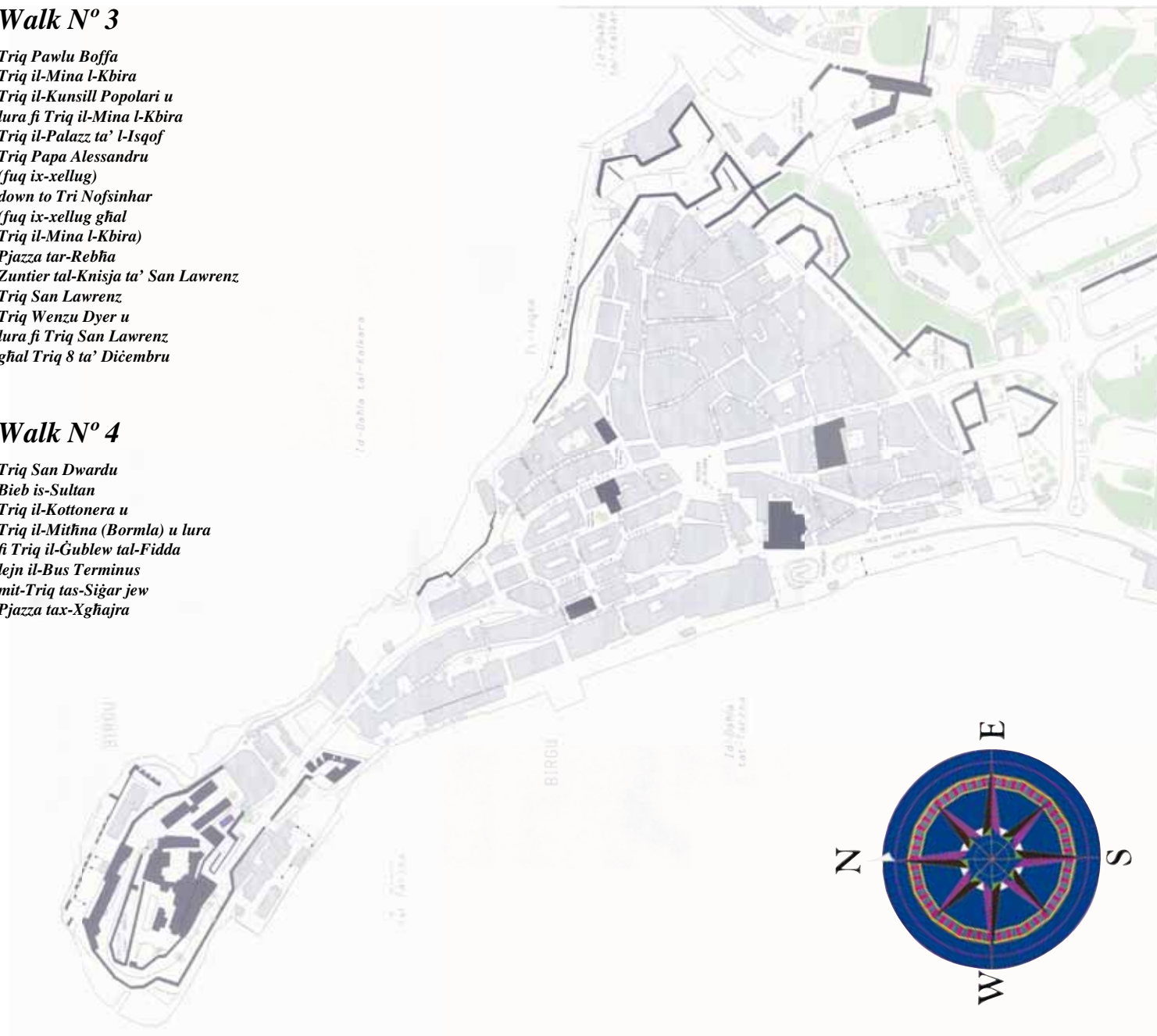
Triq 8 ta' Dicembru
Triq San Lawrenz
Water Front on the right
Through Apartments Car Park
alond Kalkara Creek
Xewkija Bay to
Coronation Garden
Couvre Port
Triq 8 ta' Dicembru
Bus Terminus

Walk N° 3

Triq Pawlu Boffa
Triq il-Mina l-Kbira
Triq il-Kunsill Popolari u
lura fi Triq il-Mina l-Kbira
Triq il-Palazz ta' l-Isqof
Triq Papa Alessandru
(fuq ix-xellug)
down to Tri Nofsinhar
(fuq ix-xellug għal
Triq il-Mina l-Kbira)
Pjazza tar-Rebħa
Zuntier tal-Knisja ta' San Lawrenz
Triq San Lawrenz
Triq Wenzu Dyer u
lura fi Triq San Lawrenz
għal Triq 8 ta' Dicembru

Walk N° 4

Triq San Dwardu
Bieb is-Sultan
Triq il-Kottonera u
Triq il-Miħna (Bormla) u lura
fi Triq il-Ġublew tal-Fidda
lejn il-Bus Terminus
mit-Triq tas-Siġar jew
Pjazza tax-Xgħajra





Cala Degli Ebrei - Kalkara Creek

tal-Pagġi (the pages' cave). On top of this cave there is a section in the Birgu fortifications whose defense fell under the responsibility of the Knights of the English Langue.

Further on, you arrive at the small area known by the Locals as ***It-Toqba l-Ġdida*** (the new hole). This description derived from the small gate, compared to a hole, dug out in the fortifications to allow a short and easy passage to the seashore. Its proper name is **Jews Sally Port**.

About a hundred metres ahead you will notice a larger gate that, together with this area, is called **Infirmery Sally Port**, and by the locals: ***It-Toqba l-Qadima*** – (the old hole). The Gate is one of five in the city's fortifications. It was dug out to facilitate the transport of the sick and the injured to the Infirmary, built by the Order, situated further up the stairs. This area is also below the short span of fortifications guarded by the German Knights.

Further ahead is the commencement of the fortifications which came under the responsibility of the Castillians and Portuguese Knights. This is quite a long stretch of fortifications built anew between 1636 and 1646

on plans by the French engineers Blaise Francois, Nicolas de Clerville and Louis Viscount of Arpajon. They start close to the shore with a low battery for three guns and ending up at the small section guarded by the Genoese Knights, below St. James Cavalier.

Walking along the quay, hugging the fortifications you come to the Kalkara Boċċi Club. Go up a few narrow steps on the right hand side of the pitch and, walk through a low door with an iron gate which is the entrance to the ditch separating Birgu from its outer confines. This ditch, was named *Coronation Garden*, to commemorate the coronation of King George V, in 1910. It was dug between 1717 and 1727 as proposed by military engineers de Mondion and de Tigne. Walking along the olive groves you will notice shelters dug out in the rocks used by those who, during the last war, preferred to remain close to the city, rather than moving to far away safer villages. Prominent among these wartime shelters are the ones now forming part of the Malta at War Museum.

This walk ends here. The stairs below the bridge end up near the Local Council's Offices. Walking out of Advanced Gate, on the right and



Infirmery Sally Port, Post of Alemagne Castille



Coronation Garden and Shelters

proceeding up the main road on the left, you arrive at the Bus Terminus, where this walk commenced.

* Visits to Museums etc.excluded.

Walk No. 3 (Approx. duration 1 hr 30 min) *

In the Centre of the City

To-day's walk starting point is *Triq Pawlu Boffa* opposite the Bus Terminus. On the left, there is the **Post of Aragon** and on the right side, where the **Santa Margerita Lines of Fortifications**, planned by the Italian engineer Fra Vincenzo Firenzuola, begin. These lines encircled the then suburb of Cospicua. Their completion took 98 years and being outworks to the Birgu land front, this city's defense system was further strengthened. We encounter more of these lines in our walk along Birgu's outskirts.

At the end of *Triq Pawlu Boffa*, on our left we see the city's Main Gate and just opposite, a large niche dedicated to St. Dominic. The statue



Aerial view of Birgu

is a replica of the one in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican. It was sculptured in stone by Anton Busuttill in 1877. Busuttill was a prolific artist, whose sculptures are to be found almost in every town or village in Malta

Further up *Triq il-Minall-Kbira*, on the left, there is the **Prince of Wales Own Band Club**. This palace was extensively damaged during the war and was rebuilt in the Fifties. The cellars of this palace have been converted into a popular Wine Bar, aptly named *Del Borgo*. It can be reached through the street on the left.

The Band was founded in 1891 under the name of *Filarmonica La Vittoriosa*. It was renamed *Duke of York's Own Band* in 1895 and then, six years later, *Prince of Wales Own Band*. This band performed on several special occasions, namely in the festivities held during the Royal Visits to Malta of the Duke and Duchess of York in 1901 and King Edward VII



Prince of Wales Own Band Club



Alley to Del Borgo

two years later. The band is invited to perform in several local feasts. It has a prestigious role in the feast of St. Dominic celebrated in this city during the last week-end of August.

Further down *Triq il-Mina l-Kbira*, on the right side, a marble tablet indicates the site where once stood the **Church of St. George**. About 500 Rhodiots followed the Order of St. John to Malta and most of them took up residence in Birgu. Being Catholics of the Byzantine Rite, they were assigned three parish churches. One of these was this church. Just at its doorstep the cover of one of the granaries belonging to the *Università* of this city could still be seen. Others were covered when the street was resurfaced some years ago.

The Birgu **Università** had its Palace a few meters away, at the end of a nearby street which bears its proper name: *Triq il-Kunsill Popolari*. The Università or Council of Jurors was mainly responsible for the provision of essential commodities, mainly grain, for the population of the area. It was established in this city in 1538 after Grand Master D'Homedes did not see eye to eye with the Mdina Jurors. In 1813, Governor Maitland repealed the Università and the palace passed into private ownership.

Eventually, it became the first High School for children from the Cottonera area. Some years later, it became a college of arts and technology. Afterwards it became a private residence.

When we return to *Triq il-Mina l-Kbira*, we come in front of the **Dominican Priory and the Church of the Annunciation**. In October 1527, a group of Birgu prominent inhabitants, members of the Confraternity of St. Mary, eager to see the Dominicans establish a priory in Birgu, offered the church to the Dominican Community of Rabat. The Friars accepted the invitation and they took



The Università



Annunciation Church and Priory

possession of the church in February of the following year. Later a priory was built and it was annexed to the church.

Two years later, the Order of St. John arrived in Malta. The Knights established their seat in Birgu, took over the Parish Church of St. Lawrence and established it as their Conventual Church. Consequently, the Parish priest of Birgu, till 1572, had to perform his duties in the Church of the Annunciation.

During the following years, after consolidating their foothold, the Dominicans had to make continuous modifications,



Courtyard of The Priory

both to the church and even more to the priory. There was so much work to be done that the priory was completed in 1908. These extensions and alterations were necessary to meet the requirements of the community. There was a steady increase in the number of novices, friars and students after the setting up of a *Studium Generale* or University at the priory for the teaching of Philosophy and Theology. The teaching of these subjects was second to none when considering the number of erudite masters and lecturers that the Birgu Community enjoyed. After its completion, it was considered to



Annunciation Priory - The Cloister

be one of the finest priories in these Islands. Unfortunately, it was destroyed during W.W.II.

The old church passed through several phases of structural modifications rendering its architectural style lacking in interrelated artistic value. Therefore, it was decided to demolish it and build a new one which was completed by June 1638. The foundation stone was laid by Mgr. Fabio Chigi, who was the Inquisitor for Malta. Later he became the successor of St. Peter as Pope Alexander VII. After its completion, the new church was embellished with several masterpieces by renowned artists such as, il Guercino, Preti and Spagnuolo. In the nineteenth century, paintings by Maltese artists Giuseppe Cali and Lazzaro Pisani decorated the ceiling. Other paintings on the new dome by Gian Battista Conti were still to be uncovered when in January 1941 the church was destroyed after a Luftwaffe attack. Its historical sixteenth century *campanile* survived. Some believe that it had inspired Girolamo Cassar in designing the ones in St. John's Cathedral. Later, it was demolished so that the street could be unnecessarily widened by a meter or two.



The lost Old Campanile

The present church was inaugurated in 1960. The titular painting and that in the chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary are classified to be among the best works of Emvin Cremona. Others were accomplished by Rafel Bonnici Cali and Ganni Vella. One can also admire the statue of St. Dominic. It stands on a silver pedestal and an exquisite pradella. The former designed by Giuseppe Decelis and the latter the work of several local craftsmen on the design of the same artist. In this church one can also admire the beauty of the statue of Our Lady of the Rosary which was curved

in wood by Vincenzo Bonnici in 1864. During an exhibition held that year, the artist won first place and a gold medal for this artistic achievement.

The whole block on the opposite side of the church is the **Inquisitors' Palace**. It was built in 1530 on plans by Niccolo' Flavari to house the *Castellania* or Law Courts of the Order. It became vacant when the Order moved to Valletta. In 1574 this palace was offered to the Apostolic Delegate Mgr. Pietro Dusina, who was the first appointee of the Roman Inquisition in Malta. He replaced the Bishop as head of the Tribunal. The aim for his



The Annunciation by Emvin Cremona

appointment was to put an end to the quarrels between the Bishops and the Grand Masters arising out of the problem of who was eligible to judge misdeeds by the knights and the laymen respectively.

Successive Inquisitors found the palace far inferior to what they were accustomed to. So they made several structural changes and enlargements to upgrade it. These included a garden by Fabio Chigi (1634-39). Inquisitor Gori Pannellini (1639-45) commissioned master mason Domenico Farrugia to enlarge the prison. Graffiti made by prisoners can still be seen in some of the cells. Casanate (1658-



The Inquisitors' Palace

63) ordered the alteration of the façade, Ruffo (1694-98) commissioned new apartments and Stoppani, between 1731 and 1735, commissioned the enhancement of the entrance and the beautiful staircase.

The people of Birgu were the first to fall under the constant vigilance of the Inquisitors. Their infringements were the first to be noted. Therefore the number of those from this city who appeared before the Tribunal of the Inquisition was relatively higher than that from other localities. The sentences by the tribunal were mainly executed in public places, mostly in the city's square. Others, for trivial offences, were ordered to show their contrition in any one of the churches of the city.

The Inquisition was abolished during the French occupation in 1898 and the Palace became the residence of the French Commander of the Cottonera District. Afterwards, it was converted into a hospital by the British Army and later used as an Officers' Mess. At the end of WW II, it housed the Dominican Friars after their priory and church were destroyed. They converted the three main halls into a chapel and smaller rooms as living quarters.

Proceeding along *Triq il-Palazz ta' l-Isqof*, house No.42 catches our attention. Well known doctor and politician Pawlu Boffa was born and lived his younger years in this modest house. Boffa was the leader of the Malta Labour Party and eventually became Prime Minister between 1947 and 1950. After a split in the Party, he founded the Malta Workers Party and occupied ministries in successive coalition governments with the Nationalist Party. He died aged 72 in 1962.

Turning left into *Triq il-Papa Alessandru*, we notice the **House of the Conventual Chaplains**. This was the residence of the chaplains of the eight Langues of the Order of St. John. It is built in an early Renaissance



Pawlu Boffa's house

style, most probably during the magistracy of Grand Master La Sengle (1553-57). Adorning the upper floor, there are three rectangular windows with triple-roll mouldings, so prominent in buildings of that period.

Further down the street, corner with *Triq Paçifiku Scicluna*, there is what used to be the **Order's Executioners House**. The executioners and their family lived here free of charge. Their symbol – two crossed axes, are engraved on the lintel of one of the windows in the upper floor.

Proceeding down *Triq il-Papa Alessandru* and turning left into *Triq il-Mina l-Kbira*, further down



House of the Conventual Chaplains

on the right, the visitor comes into the city's main spot – *Il-Pjazza tar-Rebħa*. Most of the streets of this city converge to this square.

What strikes the visitor most here is the beauty of the façade of the **St. Lawrence Band Club**. It is one of the most outstanding palaces in the Cottonera Area. The most striking features of the façade are the three arched windows in the second floor. The vague-Gothic and Oriental design reminds the onlooker of some of the palaces on the Venice Grand Canal. Also, the design and intricate iron and carpentry works of the balconies, are a fine example of the craftsmanship of the Maltese



St. Lawrence Band Club

worker of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

This palace houses the *Banda Vittoriosana San Lawrenz*, established in mid-nineteenth century as *Banda La Vittoriosa*. This Band had to overcome many difficulties after many of its members had to emigrate in search of work. It was reassembled under the name of *La Palma* in 1883, and renamed *L'Unione* some months later. It was named *Duke of Edinburgh Band* in 1891 after the Duke acceded to the request of the committee to become Patron of the band.

At the beginning of the last century, under the baton of several renowned conductors, it was considered to be one of the best local bands. Its performances were well received both in Malta and abroad, for example in Catania in 1902, Palermo in 1904, in Messina three years later and in Tunis in 1927. Nowadays, it performs in several Maltese feasts, prominent of which is the feast of St. Lawrence, which falls on the 10th of August.

On the right side of the band club, opposite the site where the Auberge of Allemagne once stood, there is a granite bollard which withstood the ravages of time. It was one of the many bollards marking the boundary of the Collacchio, the area where the quarters of the knights stood.

In pre-war years, a few meters down, stood one of the city's prominent landmarks, namely the **Watch Tower**. It was built during the magistracy of Grand Master D'Homedes between 1536 and 1553. In 1629, a clock was fitted in the upper storey and consequently it became to be known as **The Clock Tower**. During the Great Siege of 1565, Grand Master La Valette was able to observe the movements of the invaders from its top to counteract accordingly. It was destroyed by enemy action during the last war and there are prospects of being re-erected.



The old Clock Tower



Medieval Crucifix

High up on the façade of the opposite block, corner with La Valette Street, there is a **Holy Crucifix** enclosed in a small niche. It was in front of this effigy that the condemned prisoners used to recite their last prayers before being executed in this square in medieval times.

An execution that comes to mind is that of the French priest Francesco Gesualdo, who was accused of falling under the influence of Martin Luther's teachings. After being imprisoned in Fort St. Angelo, he appeared before an Inquisitorial Court, presided by Bishop Cubelles. He was found guilty of heresy and handed over to the Civil Authority to be burnt at the stake in this square.

In the square there are two monuments, one opposite the other. Opposite the Band Club there is the one dedicated to St. Lawrence, the patron saint of the city since the Aragonese occupation of these Islands. It was erected in 1880. The statue was carved in stone by Anton Busuttill, a well known Maltese artist whose many statues adorn many streets and churches of several localities. Its column was designed by Richard Poulson, an English architect.

The other monument on the other side of the square presents an effigy of Malta dressed in a knight's armour. It is known as **The Victory Monument**. It



Victory Monument

was erected in 1705 during the magistracy of Grand Master Perellos to commemorate the Order's and Malta's victory in the 1565 siege. In 1755, Grand Master Pinto approved a petition for its restoration and embellishment. This led to an almost complete renovation. Its history is inscribed on a marble tablet in the middle of the granite column. It is the centre of attraction during ceremonies held in this square to commemorate Victory and Birgu Day on the 7th of September of each year.

St. Lawrence Church Close, at the far end of the square on the left, is full of interesting sites.



St. Lawrence Church Close



Hat and Sword of La Valette

The first one is **St. Joseph's Oratory**. This Oratory was built in 1832 by the Confraternity of Woodworkers, one of the oldest confraternities founded in Malta. It now houses various exhibits dating back hundreds of years. Most important of all are the hat and sword of Grand Master La Valette, donated as a thanksgiving to the Blessed Virgin of Damascus, after he defeated the Turks in the Great Siege of 1565. The chapel inside the Oratory was one of the parish churches of the Greek Rite established for the Rhodiots who followed the Order to Malta

and resided in this city. Replacing the old icon of the Blessed Virgin of Damascus, which is now venerated in the Greek Church in Valletta, is an old icon known as *La Madonna dei Greci*.

Further down in the church close, there is the **Oratory of the Holy Crucifix**. It was built in 1720 on the graveyard of those who fell during the Siege of 1565. During the year, statues are housed in this Oratory and in its annex. For this reason these two oratories are known by the locals as *Il-Genna*. (Paradise)

The new building opposite the Oratory is the Sacristy of St. Lawrence Church. It was built on the site of an older one which on the 16th of January 1941 was completely destroyed during a Luftwaffe raid. Besides the loss of priceless historical and artistic treasures, more than 33 people, who sought shelter inside the building, lost their lives. It was the highest WW II tragedy on record in Malta.

Now we come to the **Church of St. Lawrence**. Together with the Mdina Cathedral this church is held to be the seat of one of the two



Church of St. Lawrence

oldest parishes in Malta, when Pope Urbanus II in 1091 divided Malta into two parishes. The first parish church was presumably built during the Aragonese period (1283-1410). It was demolished and replaced in 1508 by a new one built in Siculo-Norman style. On the arrival of the Order, this church was chosen as the Knights' Conventual Church. It was completely destroyed by fire in 1532 and replaced by another one in Renaissance style. On the Order's departure to the new city of Valletta, it was re-established as the parish church of the city



The Martyrdom of St. Lawrence by Mattia Preti

and became also the seat of the Apostolic Delegates. That church was replaced by the present one, built on designs by the famous architect from this city Lorenzo Gafà. It was built between 1681 and 1696 under the supervision of master mason Domenico Farrugia. Originally, it was built with a 3-bay tower less façade with two storied centerpiece, concave Vignola-type links and terminals anchoring pilasters. The western tower was added later based on a design by Romano Carapecchia. The other one was added in 1913.

Among the interesting features inside the church are the painting by Mattia Preti, representing the martyrdom of St. Lawrence, situated beyond the high altar, and another by Filippo Paladini representing Our Lady and other saints, situated in the chapel dedicated to St. Catherine. One is not to miss the statue of St. Lawrence on a silver pedestal. Note how the statue is clad in a real richly decorated dalmatic, which is a tradition of this city. Among the exquisite carpentry works by local craftsmen are the statue's pradella, the pulpit and the organ loft, which were executed at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. During the morning, church wardens are readily available to visitors with more detailed information about this historical church.

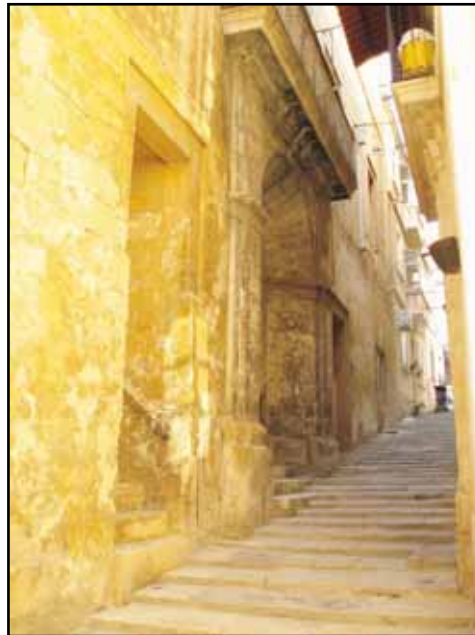
Out of the church through the main door, and up the steps of *Triq Wenzu Dyer*, which is the street on the left, it is worth having a look

at an old edifice which appears around the corner in *Triq San Ġorġ*. This is known as **Bettina Palace**. It was the residence of Lady Bettina Testaferrata Dorell, a member of one of the Island's noble families. In this palace, in 1842, St.Emilia de Vialar lived for a while after a ship she was traveling on was shipwrecked close to our Island.

During her stay she established here the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition, who later, opened the first school for girls in Malta. It is also held that Cardinal Fabrizio Sceberras was born here. This palace was reputed to be haunted, as traditional rumours circulated that an abbot was once murdered in its cellar.

Here comes to an end today's walk in the centre of this city. Going back to where our stroll commenced is up along *Triq San Lawrenz*, past Admiralty Gate and Advanced Gate and up along the garden below the Post of Aragon to the Bus Terminus.

* Visits to Museums excluded



Bettina Palace

Walk No. 4 (Approx. duration 1 hr 45 min)

Along the City's Outskirts

Similar to previous walks, today's stroll starts near the Birgu *Bus Terminus*, opposite the playing field, in *Triq San Dwardu*. Down the street on the left, there are the ex-Royal Engineers' Regiment Offices and the football pitch, which in Colonial times was the parade ground of the British Regiments stationed in this area. On the other side of the road there is the school which replaced an old cemetery dedicated to St. Rocco. This was the burial place for those who died during plague



Aerial view of Birgu fortifications

epidemics. The first to be buried here were those who died during the epidemic of 1676.

Further down the street we encounter once more the **Cottonera Fortifications** whose starting point near the Post of Castille was already mentioned during our walk from *Admiralty Gate* to *Coronation Garden*.

After the Great Siege of 1565, the Three Cities, namely Vittoriosa, Senglea and Cospicua expanded considerably. They were considered of utmost importance in the defence of Malta against a new sudden attack that the Ottoman Forces might decide to stage again to expel the Order from these Islands. The galleys of the Order were a commanding influence in the Mediterranean Sea

During the siege of Candia in 1666, Grand Master Raphael Cotoner sent a contingent of 70 knights and 400 Maltese soldiers to assist the Venetians in the defense of that Island against the Turks. When Candia fell, it was now feared that the Moslems, encouraged by this success, and angry at the Knights of St. John for the assistance given to the Venetians, would be tempted once more to attack Malta. This fear led Grandmaster Nicholas Cotoner to try to make the Three Cities impregnable. In addition to the existing fortifications in the defence of Birgu and Senglea respectively, and the *Santa Margherita Lines* enclosing Cospicua and Birgu behind a solid line of fortifications, he decided to build an additional defensive line starting from the Post of Castille in Birgu and ending below Fort St. Michael in Senglea. Five kilometres of long massive bastions designed by the well-known Italian engineer Antonio Maurizio Valperga, who was sent to Malta from Rome.

The first stone was laid on the 28 of August 1670 at St. Nicholas Bastion in Cospicua. Due to lack of funds and epidemics which hit the Island, works proceeded slowly and up to the end of the Eighteenth Century some were still not yet complete. These fortifications, which consist of eight bastions and two demi-bastions were expected to provide shelter for forty thousand people together with their belongings including their cattle. Access to these walls was provided through seven gates of considerable architectural beauty designed by the French engineer, Menderico Blondel, who, after some months, took over from Valperga.

Continue walking up the road past Kalkara Gate, opened some years ago in the Cottonera Fortifications. The gate you come to is **San Salvatore**



Fort San Salvatore

Gate. Have a look outside this gate and admire the massive walls of the fortifications which come into view, as a walk along a considerable part of the remaining fortifications, up to the time of writing, is being denied to the public. A large section from the land front had been unceremoniously taken over, without anyone batting an eyelid. This Gate is the first among the mentioned seven gates in the fortifications. It took its name from the adjoining **Fort San Salvatore**. This fort was integrated into the Cottonera Lines in 1724 on recommendations by military engineers Mondion and Tigne. With its twenty-two gun battery, it was meant to strengthen the defence of San Salvatore Hill in Kalkara and its environs. About a century ago, the soldiers and family quarters were used as a reformatory institution for boys. The Fort was in the news at the beginning of the last war. In the afore-mentioned quarters, those suspected to be Italian sympathizers were temporarily interned prior to their deportation to Uganda. After the war, the fort was leased to a private enterprise to be used as a concrete blocks factory. Consequently, since then, access to the public had been regrettably denied.

A few meters away from the fort, still stands the fort's **Gunpowder Magazine**, which had been left to fall into a nearly dilapidated state.

From this magazine onwards starts the section of the fortifications named **St. Louis Curtain**, which ends further up behind St. Edward's College. Up to the time of writing, access to the public is regrettably denied. It is known by the locals as *is-Sur ta' Pażan*. A harbinger, nicknamed Pażan earned his living by walking along the curtain, stopping now and then to spy far out at the sea with his binoculars for the arrival of a galley or some other craft. As most of the galleys left the Island with a crew from the Three Cities, on identifying the returning vessel, he would quickly give the good news to the crew's relatives. For conveying the news he was fairly compensated.

St. Lawrence Cemetery, which is one of the oldest cemeteries in Malta, is below this curtain. Early in the morning of 18th of July 1806, a gunpowder magazine situated below Birgu's main gate, exploded. The surrounding area was completely blasted and there were more than 160 casualties.



St. Lawrence Cemetery

At that time, burials took place in the crypt beneath the churches. As no more graves were available in the city's churches,

an alternative had to be found to bury the large number of victims of this tragedy. Bishop Labini, then, authorized the parish priest of Birgu to consecrate this land and 45 of the victims had been laid to rest in the newly constructed graves.

Afterwards, British Catholic servicemen were also buried in this cemetery. One of these was the noteworthy Irish seaman Thomas Mac Sweeney, who was executed in 1837 on board HMS Rodney. He was Court Marshaled for causing the death of Corporal James Allen. His grave, which is near the side door of the cemetery, is still being visited by persons

who believe that they had received graces through his intercession.

Further up the road there is the **St. Edward's College Complex**, formerly a British Military Hospital, built inside **St. James's Bastion**. For many years, most of the British Garrison in Malta was stationed in Valletta, Floriana and Cottonera.



Mc. Sweeney's Tomb

The Old Armoury at Birgu was converted into a military hospital. By the middle of the nineteenth century, it was considered inadequate for the ever growing garrison's needs. In 1873, this military hospital was built. Later on, early in the twentieth century, the Army began constructing barracks away from the Harbour area. The new locations chosen were between St. Julians and Bahar iċ-Ċaghak together with those at Tigne and Mtarfa. In 1920, this hospital at Birgu was vacated after a new one was built nearer to these sites, at Mtarfa.



St. Edward's College

Although at that time the British had been in Malta for a hundred years, Italian culture, at least among the elite, was still predominant on the Island. A considerable section of the population believed that, in the circumstances, English culture had to prevail.

Between 1888 and 1908, the English Province of the Jesuits was providing an ‘English’ education in a college in Sliema. When this closed down, those who preferred the use of English were eager to see another school run on the same lines as the previous one run by the English Jesuits.

Lady Strickland, an influential lady offered financial help if a suitable site could be found for a school to meet their aspirations. With the intervention of Governor Ducane, the War Office offered this, then vacant, military hospital. In October 1929, with the assistance of Lady Strickland, St. Edward’s College received its first students. Since then, many prominent Maltese personalities received their education at this college.

Close to the College complex there is the main gate in the Cottonera Fortifications named **Notre Dame Gate**. It was built in 1675, on the design of Romano Carapecchia. It had three openings, a drawbridge and spacious guardrooms located at ground level. It was intended to provide a controlled passage into the fortifications. It was the only gate in the Cottonera Fortifications with an outer work, designed in 1715 by engineer Louis de Tigne and his French colleagues. This formed a massive solid tenaille high enough to shield the entrance to the gate. It was demolished early in the 20th century. A bronze bust of Grand Master



Notre Dame Gate

Nicolas Cotoner was placed high up on the façade together with a marble tablet. The latter commemorates his initiatives and contributions in the erection of these formidable fortifications for the defence of the Three Cities. For this reason it is popularly known as **Bieb is-Sultan**. The Gate served as an important outlook post during the French occupation. When the French surrendered, the Grand Master’s bust was discovered in time, ready to be whisked away, on board the French galley *Atheniene*.

Lately, the gate has been passed on to the NGO *Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna*. This Organization has established its headquarters there and is conducting extensive restorations. It is being kept open from 10.00 to 16.00 hrs and guided tours are available.

Continuing our walk along *Triq il-Kottonera*, where an open air market is held every Tuesday morning, on the left hand side, in the precincts of Cospicua, there is the recently built **Cottonera Sports Complex** inaugurated in March 2003 in time for the Games of the Small States of Europe held in Malta that year.

Further down, on the right hand side, there is **De La Salle College**, run by the Brothers of the Christian Schools. It was in 1903 that five Brothers, expelled from France, landed in Malta via Tunis on the liner *Ville d’Alger*. On the recommendations of Canon Carmelo Bugelli they opened a school in a large house at 96, *Strada Buongiorno*, Cospicua. The school was named after the founder of the Congregation – St. John Baptist de La Salle. Students from this new school had immediate success in local examinations. The number of students kept growing considerably. In the



De La Salle College

late thirties life became difficult at the house at Cospicua and the Brothers started looking for a site where they could build a modern college. With the help of the late eminent lawyer and politician Dr. Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici LLD, they acquired this site at Tal-Hawli Valley and in March 1937 the Foundation Stone was laid. By January 1939 the premises were functional and 370 students were able to resume their studies at the new college.

During the war, the Brothers were compelled to move to their other college in Gżira. Between August 1940 and April 1944, they took up teaching in the Oratory of the Society of St. Paul at B’Kara. After their return to Birgu, a Secondary Course was started, although students in the Dockyard Classes were the most numerous, owing to the success achieved by the college students in the yearly entrance examinations. Later, with the contributions of these successful students, a monument to St. John Baptist de La Salle, was unveiled at the entrance of the college. It was designed by the prominent Maltese artist Emvin Cremona.

In the beginning of the Sixties, a Boarding Department was introduced



Verdala Barracks

and in 1968, what probably was the first Parent and Teachers Association in Malta was formed in the college.

During the years, the college was enlarged by the extension of a Language Laboratory. The Boarders Block was used for other purposes, after this department was closed in 1990, and a multi-purpose Sports Hall and a spacious Gymnasium were built. All of these contributed to the extension of the college curriculum which includes religious, academic, cultural and sport activities for about 1600 students.

On the way down the road, a look at **Verdala Barracks cum Citadel** in Cospicua is worthwhile. Before turning right into *Triq il-Ġublew tal-Fidda*, continue walking straight on to *Triq il-Mithna* in Cospicua and turn to the left. You cannot miss the Gate of the ex-barracks a few metres on the left. These barracks were designed and incorporated within the **Santa Margherita Lines** in 1853 by the English military engineer Munrow, during the time of Governor William Reid, who was also an engineer. The façade is 300 meters long with 384 musketry openings at the ready for the defence of the citadel. It was built to accommodate two regiments including their families. At the back, facing St. Clement Bastion there is a second gate. This is adorned with fine and interesting sculptures whose environs were guarded with a ten gun battery.

Besides British Regiments, prisoners of both World Wars were also confined in these barracks. Some years ago, Verdala Barracks were modified to accommodate several families, mostly from Cottonera.

Back to *Triq il-Ġublew tal-Fidda*, this walk comes to an end by proceeding down along the **Santa Margherita Lines** on the left hand side, turning right into a tree lined street and at its end to the left there is the **Bus Terminus**, exactly where you set off.



BIRGU
Città Vittoriosa
Malta