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DIN L-ART HELWA

National Trust of Malta

VIGILO



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Din l-Art Helwa is a non-profit 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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Dwejra Tower
Photograph – Peter Mohr



Are We Ready for High Rise Buildings?

Maria Grazia Cassar

Executive President of Din l-Art Helwa

In the wake of the approval of the Townsquare and the Mrieħel Towers applications, *Din l-Art Helwa* launched the Skyscraper Campaign to raise the funds necessary to make appeal cases against these two permits. The first hearings took place in November, and the process will resume in January.

The response from the public was extremely encouraging, and goes to show that many have taken this issue very much to heart, that it is not just a concern for those who live in the neighbourhood, but rather, of nation-wide interest. Many arguments have ensued, both in the media and in private. Are we against all high rise buildings? Do we need them, and what will the effects of this kind of development be on our country?

We felt that we had to rope in the knowledge of an expert in the field, and invited Dr Michael Short from the Barlett School of Planning, University College London, to come over to Malta and give us his advice. Dr Short's expertise is specifically in the field of tall buildings and heritage. We took him all around the island, and organised meetings and discussions with various architects and Din l-Art Helwa Council members over three intensive days. He studied the *Floor Area Ratio Policy*, which gives the parameters within which tall buildings may be approved, the two approved projects of Townsquare and Mrieħel, the Paceville Masterplan, and gave us a report with his recommendations, which I shall highlight here.

The first significant comment which he makes is that although the Floor Area Ratio Policy, is a "useful, comprehensive and strategic document", the spirit in which it was drafted is being ignored in its implementation. Moreover, the status of the document is being questioned, as has been pointed out by *Din l-Art Helwa*, seeing as it was never subjected to a *Strategic Environmental Assessment*, and that the site of Mrieħel was never open to public consultation. He also notes that "characterisation studies", are lacking, and should have been carried out on various areas, to understand what to protect, and how to go about further development.

Characterisation studies are a method of examining and understanding the fabric, form, topography and design within a particular geographic area, thereby establishing its character and what makes the place special and unique.¹ It can underpin the development of specific design guidance in providing baseline information about the character of the area or city in question.

He states that he is very concerned about the impact that the towers proposed on the Tigné Peninsula will have on the character and significance of the World Heritage Site of Valletta. Regarding the Paceville Masterplan, Dr Short says:

There is, no doubt, potential in Paceville to absorb some development but the amount, extent and density of development can only be outlined based on a robust examination and understanding of infrastructure capacity in the area. The masterplan does not do this.

He goes on to make several recommendations, based on his discussion, which are reproduced below:

1 Infrastructure-led national spatial strategy

Malta should implement an *infrastructure-led national spatial strategy*. This should examine the capacity of the country to absorb development, identify growth poles where higher density (including potentially taller buildings) might be appropriate, protect the character, significance and value of the country's built heritage, and protect greenspace and the non-built up areas of the island. This strategy should be coherent, nationwide and react to the particular circumstances of Malta. In addition, the role of strategic environmental assessment in assessing major development proposals should be outlined including how the cumulative impacts of development might impact at the strategic level.

2 View management framework

A Malta-wide *view management framework*² – following on from the national spatial strategy – should be developed which seeks to designate two different elements: firstly Malta-wide panoramas (such as from Mdina to Valletta) which are strategic in nature and which are vulnerable to major development at the national level; and secondly, views of the urban townscape (townscape views, such as from various points in the Grand Harbour into the built up area surrounding Valletta) which might be from a number of fixed points but which also might be experienced moving through particular areas as a pedestrian (or from one of the many ferries as a passenger). Each view has specific characteristics that contribute to an appreciation of the character of the country at different spatial scales.

3 Tall buildings policy and FAR

The FAR policy as it stands should be robust. It is clear however that this is not being implemented in the spirit that it was developed. As such, the status of the FAR should be clarified, particularly through the appeals process for both the Sliema and Mrieħel towers. This is a priority. The future implementation of the FAR can only be augmented through the adoption of the other recommendations in this report. In any future review of the FAR policy there should be two priorities: firstly to make sure that the implementation of FAR augments and enhances the protected views established as part of the view management framework; and secondly, to promote more tangible and useful public benefits through the planning process. It should additionally be augmented by a clearer design quality element which refers to the elements of tall buildings and how they should be approached from a design perspective.



*Photomontage of the Mriehel Towers as seen from the Upper Barracca.
Image Daniel Cilia and a team of architects for Din l-Art Helwa*

4 Characterisation study and the World Heritage Site

In relation to the Valletta World Heritage Site, UNESCO and ICOMOS should be approached as a matter of urgency to explain two things: firstly, the approval of the two applications in Sliema and Mriehel and the impact of these proposals on the character of Malta as a whole, and the towns themselves; secondly, it should promote a number of characterisations studies which seek to understand the fabric, form, topography and design within a particular geographic area, thereby establishing its character and what makes the place special and unique. The priority areas for these studies are Valletta, Sliema and Paceville.

5 Paceville Masterplan

Based on the national spatial strategy, protected views and an appropriate characterisation study, a new masterplan should be developed which seeks to understand the capacity of Paceville to absorb development and thereby promote realistic development strategy. The current draft masterplan does not take into account the infrastructural capacity of this part of Malta in seeking to promote major and significant development. It should therefore not be adopted in its current state.

6 Design Advisory Committee

The role and status of the DAC should be reviewed at the national level. Design review is an administrative mechanism to control the visual quality of proposed additions and alterations to the built environment.³ In southern Europe, the aesthetic review of new building proposals has a long history of assessment by learned architects, historians and artists for example whilst in North America most large cities have formal design review processes that legally involve key actors such as planners, conservationists, public agencies and the public itself. For a design review body to carry out its function effectively, probity and transparency is key. The UK House of Commons,⁴ for example, suggests that design review bodies should be publicly accountable and publicise how design review decisions are undertaken and reached, and who was involved in that decision. This should mean that the process of design review becomes more transparent and open to question specifically about how decisions are reached and by whom.

Din l-Art Helwa endorses Dr Short's report, and will be using it as the basis for its recommendations.

1 Thomas, R. M. (2004) Urban characterisation: improving methodologies, *English Heritage Conservation Bulletin* (47) 11-17.

2 The London View Management Framework, for example, establishes four different types of views worthy of protection.

3 Kumar, S. (2003) Information in design review, *Planning, Practice & Research* 18 (4) 243-263.

4 House Of Commons (2005) *Government response to the ODPM Housing, Planning and Local Government and the Regions Committee Report on the Role and Effectiveness of CABE*, London: April 2005.

Din l-Art Helwa Launches the 'Stop the Greed' Skyscraper Campaign

The restructured Planning Authority recently approved two controversial skyscraper proposals. One of them is in Sliema (Town Square) by Townsquare Sliema Ltd, owned by the Gasan family, and the other is in Mriehel (Mriehel Towers) by TumasGasand Holdings Ltd, owned by the Gasan and Tumas Groups.

These massive structures will have a devastating effect on our landscape and on the daily lives of many people. They will change the face of Malta forever. *Din l-Art Helwa* is challenging these decisions through the process of an appeal and other legal steps.

The Planning Authority has disregarded legal procedures and is ignoring the concerns of the public. This is unacceptable, especially for such massive projects with huge and permanent damage to us all.

The 'Town Square' skyscraper in Sliema will be a giant 38 storeys, sandwiched between existing homes and shops. People who live or work in the area and those who visit it, will face terrible traffic and parking problems and existing properties will be deprived of sunlight. This over-sized project is driven by greed to maximise profits for the developers. Its promoters are also blatantly ignoring the difficulties and inconvenience the project will cause to the entire Sliema community.

The infrastructure of these areas cannot handle the additional burden. Roads, sewerage and other services will all need to be upgraded, at great cost. The profits will go to the developers while the government will apparently generously donate taxpayers' money to pay for all the additional costs related to the required upgrading or redevelopment of roads, the sewerage system and water and electricity supplies.

This high-rise development will also negatively affect the value of everyone else's property.

Before allowing any high-rise projects to continue, the government should provide a holistic Master Plan. It should listen to the whole community and not just the demands of developers.

Din l-Art Helwa is working with others to stop this destruction of our landscape. We have raised money from the public through a crowd-funding campaign on Facebook and the internet, and are using this to cover costs related to the appeals process and other steps to challenge these decisions that are to alter Malta forever. We are very grateful for the great show of support that we have received.



Artist James Vella Clark with Executive President Maria Grazia Cassar

"Cranes over Valletta" by James Vella Clark



"All this construction in Malta is actually deconstructing our values and the very character that makes our country, so unique. I am delighted to have pledged the painting "Cranes over Valletta" for Din l-Art Helwa's 'Stop the Greed' campaign. This painting was sold on the day it was pledged. Glad to see so many people passionate about our environment but very annoyed with certain people who chose their own personal gain for the price of silence. That is the real greed that needs to be fought".

James Vella Clark (Artist)

Heritage and Environment Protection Report

Din l-Art Helwa urges the government to reinstate public space at Jerma site

Now that the Jerma Hotel in Marsascala is finally due to be demolished, and the land put up for sale, *Din l-Art Helwa* has urged the government to seize this opportunity and turn the area back into a open public open space. Malta is over-built and the government should strive to create more open spaces for the public to enjoy, rather than developing every inch for commercial gain.

Coastal areas should be left free and unencumbered. Calls for the reinstatement of the Jerma site as a public open space have already been made by some members of Marsascala Local Council, and *Din l-Art Helwa* fully supports this stand.

The site also includes the historic St Thomas Tower, built in 1614 by the Knights of St John to defend St Thomas' Bay and Marsascala from attacks. *Din l-Art Helwa* urges the government to intervene, not only to ensure that this coastal fort is restored, but also, as far as possible, to reinstate its original open coastal context by removing the modern structures that were built around it in the 1970s and which are now derelict.

This is another opportunity for the government to show it cares for the environment and for the country to regain a small part of its coast so it can be enjoyed by everyone and not just by the few.

Concerns about changes to the Sacra Infermeria

As proposed changes to the *Sacra Infermeria* (PA 02781/15) are contemplated, both internally and externally, *Din l-Art Helwa* pointed out that heritage law concerning Grade 1 listed monuments states that 'alterations which impair the setting or change the external or internal appearance, including anything contained within the curtilage of the building, will not be allowed'.

The installation of two lifts situated in an important historical junction where the long ward meets the short ward, will irreversibly change the original layout of this important building. The triviality of making this permanent change to the historical interior of the hospital of the Knights, for the sake of taking up tourists to its roof, makes a mockery of the *Sacra Infermeria*. Views over the Grand Harbour are abundant in Valletta, and there is no need to mutilate a historical building in order to provide yet another venue. Moreover, roofing the structure with concrete slabs in order to take the load of future crowds, and the installation of a glass railing all around, will externally altar the lines of this building, and preclude the reinstating of its unique gabled roof, which was damaged some time ago and remains only partly standing.

Din l-Art Helwa has appealed to the decision-makers to uphold the important values of heritage buildings. One has only to go to Mater Dei Hospital and look at the Crucifix that hung in the *Sacra Infermeria*, to understand the significance of this building in the context of medical care and practice in Malta. These values should be passed on to future generations, and not forgotten under the paraphernalia of short-sighted 'improvements'.

Threat to historic Turkish cemetery at Marsa

A recent planning application that has been submitted to the Planning Authority seeks to replace a disused factory with a fuel station and car-wash facility on a site immediately adjoining the Turkish Muslim cemetery at Marsa.

The Muslim cemetery is a fine oriental-style architectural complex built in 1873-4, designed by the eminent Maltese architect Emanuele Luigi Galizia and financed entirely by the Ottoman Sultan Abdülaziz (r. 1861-76). It is one of Galizia's finest architectural works in the 19th century and one of three cemeteries that he designed – the others being Ta' Braxia and Addolorata.

If approved, the proposed development will not only have a very adverse and negative visual impact on the cemetery but also, given the nature of the facility, will through emissions have a severe impact on the elaborate stonework of the cemetery complex. Apart from these issues, such a development would be totally incompatible with the historic character of the complex. It would lead to the diminishment of our architectural heritage and the proposed use on such a site is even disrespectful to the sensibilities of the local Muslim community and all those striving to restore the Turkish cemetery to its former glory.

The Muslim cemetery is a scheduled Grade I building and should be afforded the maximum degree of protection possible. It is currently undergoing an extensive restoration programme, financed by the Turkish government. It certainly deserves to be better known and appreciated by locals and visitors alike. *Din l-Art Helwa* has appealed to the Planning Authority and the other authorities involved to reject the application and relocate the proposed facility to a different site.



Historic postcard showing the Turkish Cemetery

The Paceville Wish List

Petra Caruana Dingli

The call for a master plan for tall buildings in the Paceville area may have been well-intentioned, but it has backfired.

Essentially, this plan has attracted nine large proposals from property developers and laid them out in 3-D format. The outcome is that these mega-construction projects will now be pre-endorsed before they even reach the Planning Board for a decision.

The Portomaso land-reclamation proposal, unexpectedly included in this plan – which was intended to focus on high-rise development – exemplifies this perfectly. In 2013, the government requested expressions of interest in land reclamation. Twenty-one proposals were submitted, and these were to be presented in a public exhibition and evaluated by a committee.

The exhibition and committee never materialised, and the submissions are still under wraps. In its Strategic Plan (SPED) of 2015, the government then stated that a coastal and marine spatial framework would consider land reclamation in Malta in general. In other words, the problems, impacts and potential for land reclamation were to be studied holistically.

One of these proposals has, however, now drifted away from the group and surfaced in the draft Paceville Master Plan. This renegade proposal is for a large land reclamation project at Portomaso. Planning Authority officers have confirmed to the Parliamentary Committee that this was indeed one of the 21 submissions of 2013.

Through the Paceville Master Plan, the Portomaso developers will have their land reclamation proposal endorsed. They will thereby surely be granted a permit when they apply. This private project has no social purpose and is entirely unnecessary for the country as a whole, especially with the exaggerated amount of construction now earmarked for St George's Bay.

The rest of the 2013 submissions have not been so fortunate – or at least, not yet. Perhaps others will eventually also get the red carpet treatment. Now that the government has revealed one of them, it should also be transparent about the rest, or will it just randomly pull its favourite projects out of a hat?

Not that I want to promote land reclamation, but it seems unfair for just one project to be given this fast-track entry point through the Paceville Master Plan. The 2013 submissions should be presented to the public and studied as a whole, as was expected.

The Portomaso project will presumably now also be granted its projected 230,000 square metres of developable floor space from the seabed, to destroy

and develop. Thanks to recent legislation, however, the seabed is now part of the public domain, so this area may have to be declassified by Parliament for this purpose. The Planning Authority's promotion of public domain spaces for the construction of yet more hotels, apartments and shops, is shocking. It is an indicator of the mind-set of our planners, as if one were needed.

The Master Plan does not study the environmental or economic implications of the property feeding-frenzy being promoted. Its apparent intention is to endorse an existing construction magnate wish list, enabling preferential treatment for certain big projects in the pipeline, with some traffic management pipe dreams thrown in.

Portomaso Tower





Proposed Towers on the ITS site

It is certainly not a wish list for many residents, whose desires for the area are likely to be very different. A master plan should factor in the needs and vision of the entire community, not just property investors and speculators.

But the Planning Authority has not even included photomontages from the nearby viewpoints that are most affected. Instead, they have happily announced that future tall buildings in Paceville will not be visible from Fort Ricasoli. This is interesting, but obviously has less immediate relevance than the projected views as seen from Swieqi, St Andrew's, Madliena, St Julian's, Mensija, Balluta or Sliema.

At the parliamentary meeting, the Planning Authority was asked by a Member of Parliament whether land reclamation at Portomaso might encourage speculation. The supposedly expert planners replied by asking for the meaning of 'speculation'.

Well, let's help out and define it then. Property speculation means the buying or selling of property in the hope of making capital gains. Escalating prices encourage speculation. Excessive speculation, or accelerated price rises, can fuel a property price bubble. Using public assets, or protected areas, for private speculation also has other serious implications.

A leading estate agent recently expressed his concern, in an interview with the *Times of Malta*, saying that the property market is growing too quickly. He rightly said that a bubble is being created by investors, such as "developers falling over each other to put up tower blocks in a number of locations".

The Planning Authority does not seem particularly worried about this. Its senior officials even told the Parliamentary Committee that the Paceville Master Plan is a great idea because it will cause property prices in the area to escalate. In the context of a property market that is growing too quickly, how is this a good thing? Frankly, they sounded more like short-sighted speculators than serious planners.

This misguided Master Plan aims to increase the population of the congested Paceville area from 2,000 to 9,000 within a few years. Imagine the additional cars, vans and buses. As Transport Minister Joe Mizzi has already implied, we will probably need a miracle to sort out the traffic.

petracdingli@gmail.com

St Julian's Bay as shown in an old postcard



"Through the Paceville Master Plan, the Portomaso developers will have their land reclamation proposal endorsed. They will thereby surely be granted a permit when they apply. This private project has no social purpose and is entirely unnecessary for the country as a whole, especially with the exaggerated amount of construction now earmarked for St George's Bay."

Planning Authority's graphic rendition of the proposed "new look" for St George's Bay





*Townsquare
from the
Valletta ring road*



*Townsquare
from Esplora in Bigli*



*Townsquare
from Fort St Angelo*



Mrieħel high rise from St Joseph High Road, Hamrun

Photomontages showing what “Malta’s Future Landscapes” might look like

Images Daniel Cilia and a team of architects for Din l-Art Helwa

Valletta from Mdina with Mrieħel high rise financial centre



AN APPEAL FOR VOLUNTEERS

Dear Members and Friends of *Din l-Art Helwa*. We now look after 19 historic sites in guardianship or trust and we very much need more hands to work. We are looking for volunteers to help us in several areas:

- 1) We always need to bolster our Gozo and Comino team with new recruits. For logistical reasons, this would be particularly practical for those living in Gozo or in the north of Malta. Both Maltese and English speakers are needed and anybody interested in helping is requested to talk to Carolyn Clements on 9905 1866.
- 2) Because of an increase in the workload, our offices in Valletta need volunteers to help Rosanne Zerafa and Anne Marie Navarro with clerical work, answering the telephone, various odd jobs and errands.
- 3) Other volunteers are needed everywhere, so do please get in touch if you are willing to help.

Please email info@dinlartelwa.org or telephone 2122 0358 or 2122 5952 and speak to Rosanne.



Din l-Art Helwa News

Patricia Salomone

A tour of Clapham Junction cart ruts

The tours organised by our volunteer and ex-council member, Ian Camilleri, continue to gain popularity among *aficionados* of Maltese culture, the built heritage and our environment.

This was very evident from the number of enthusiastic participants, accompanied by volunteer Susan Mompalao Depiro, who joined the excursion entitled 'Clapham Junction Cart Rut Experience', conducted by author Gordon E. Weston on 22 October.

The tour, which lasted approximately two hours, began with a minute's silence in memory of world-renowned archaeologist David Trump, who had studied Malta's cart ruts in detail and had recently passed away. He was a sincere friend of *Din l-Art Helwa*.

Mr Weston, author of *The Maltese Cart-Ruts; Unravelling an Enigma 2010, and Clapham Junction; 3000 Years of Maltese Heritage, 2015*, pointed out particular features of the Clapham Junction site in an effort to answer the many questions raised by the Maltese cart-rut phenomenon: questions such as, "are the 'ruts' actually cart-ruts", "how did they come to form in the bedrock", "when did they first begin to form" and "what is their cultural significance?" Examples of local flora were also observed, while the participants walked around the cart-rut site, viewing Punic tombs and visiting a cave.

The aim of these tours is to encourage interest in Malta's environment and also to raise funds necessary for *Din l-Art Helwa* to maintain its sites. A donation of €10 is requested, which covers transport by mini-bus and light refreshments, served at the Msida Bastion garden at the conclusion of the tour.



*Images of the
Clapham Junction
Cart Rut Experience*



Perit Louis A. Naudi (1925-2016)

The Council of *Din l-Art Helwa* was saddened by the news of the passing away of Architect Louis Naudi, a longstanding dedicated Council member for several years and the modest and hardworking perit for many of DLH's projects. His varied career took him from his successful practice in Malta to the Middle East, and also included work on the extension of the Marsa Power Station. Soon after graduation in the 1950s he was instrumental in the encouragement of the use of prestressed concrete, a far-sighted idea taken up by local manufacturers. Showcasing the use of this technology is what is probably his most important work, built in collaboration with Prof. Giorgio Pacini, the innovative Sanctuary of St Theresa of the Child Jesus in Birkirkara, inaugurated in 1982.

Louis Naudi was also a horticultural expert who collaborated on many of *Din l-Art Helwa*'s green projects. He was co-founder and very active member of the NGO Men of the Trees and at one point spent some time doing missionary and teaching work in South America. Caritas Malta also benefitted from his philanthropic endeavours, especially as he was co-founder of the Foundation for the Victims of Usury.



Sanctuary of St Theresa of the Child Jesus in Birkirkara

Dr David H. Trump (1931-2016)

by Daniel Cilia

David H. Trump first visited Malta in 1954, to assist John Evans with excavations at Ġgantija. After taking his B.A. in 1955 and Ph.D. three years later, he accepted the post of Curator of Archaeology at the National Museum of Malta. From 1958 to 1963, apart from working at the Museum, he excavated on a number of sites, Skorba being the most rewarding.

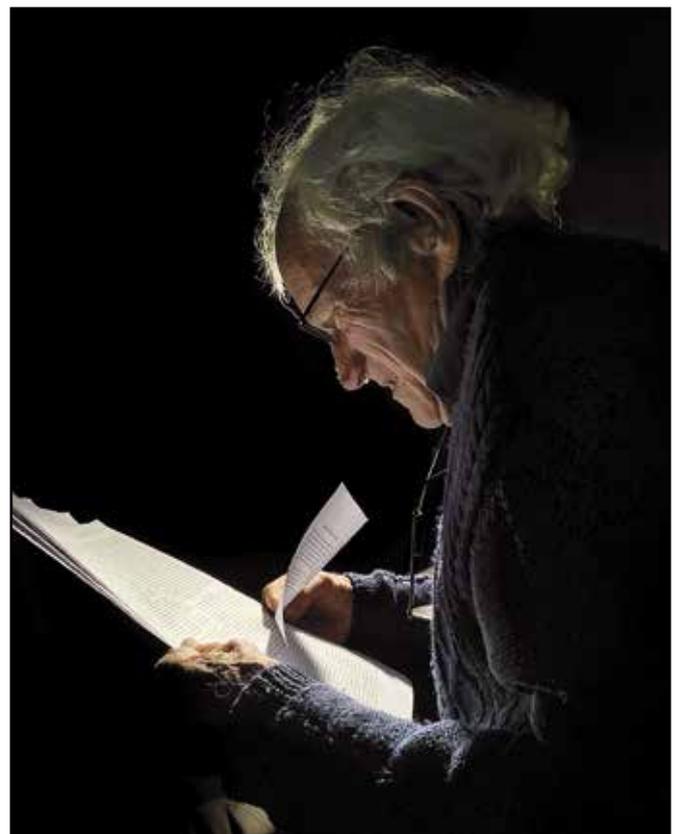
He returned to Cambridge as Staff Tutor in Archaeology with the University's Board of Extra-Mural Studies, a post he held for the next thirty years. His field activities moved to Sardinia where, as in Malta, he added new phases to the prehistoric sequence. He continued to visit Malta at regular intervals, usually leading parties of adult students.

From 1986 to 1994 he dug with the team which excavated the Xagħra Circle, the field direction being in the hands of Drs S. Stoddart and C. Malone.

After retirement from teaching in 1997, he continued his research in Malta and Sardinia, publishing numerous books and articles. In December 2004, Dr Trump was appointed *Honorary Officer of The National Order of Merit of the Republic of Malta* (U.O.M.). On what was to be his last visit to Malta, in December 2015, the University of Malta awarded him the honorary degree of Doctor of Literature for his lifelong commitment to the archaeology of the Maltese Islands.

During his many visits to Malta, along with his personal archaeological research or work at the National Museum of Archaeology he always tried to organise a talk, presentation or excursions in conjunction with Heritage Malta, the Mġarr local council and a number of NGOs. One of his last talks was at the Valletta office of *Din l-Art Helwa*. As many can vouch, the way he presented the subject was always entertaining and straight to the point.

He loved teaching about Malta's prehistoric periods through his talks and his books. In the last three years he worked hard and before passing away he managed to finish more books about Malta which are to be published posthumously.



ARBOR VITAE ART Exhibition by Jeni Caruana at Majjistral Park

On Friday November 4th, artist Jeni Caruana launched her exhibition entitled Arbor Vitae (Tree of Life) at the Visitors' Centre of the Majjistral Nature and History Park, Ghajn Tuffieha. The popular information centre, a British period barracks recently converted by the Majjistral Park Federation made up of *Din l-Art Helwa*, Gaia Foundation and Nature Trust Malta, provided a most suitable backdrop to this artistic celebration of nature. Many guests were present on the night, including the Hon. Owen Bonnici MP, Minister for Justice, Culture and Local Government, the Hon. Karl Gouder MP, Opposition Spokesman for Culture and Mr Salvador Vella, Chairman of the Majjistral Park Board.

Trees have always been one of Caruana's recurrent motifs, and with the Arbor Vitae collection, Caruana wanted to explore the many meanings attached to trees, and how vitally important it is that we preserve, respect and protect them.

Simone Mizzi, Vice-President of *Din L-Art Helwa*, welcoming the guests, thanked Caruana for choosing the Majjistral Park for her exhibition, commenting that 'nature is so calming and so soothing we need it in our everyday lives. We need fresh air for healthy living and trees to keep our atmosphere clean and filter the pollution we create for ourselves. Trees offer shelter not just to man but to the small wildlife and the birds that abound in every place where they exist.'

The exhibition was officially inaugurated by His Excellency Stuart Gill, British High Commissioner to Malta. In his comments, the High Commissioner said that it was fitting that the paintings were being exhibited in an area of the Maltese countryside that can still be enjoyed in its natural state and one which is now being revitalised. He also commented that "it is a brilliant piece of planning, given Jeni's passion for the environment that today is the day the Paris agreement on climate change entered into force and is now part of international law."

The Majjistral Nature and History Park is the first National Park in the Maltese islands and enjoys 6 km of uninterrupted natural coastline. It falls under the governance of *Din l-Art Helwa*, Nature Trust Malta, and the Gaia Foundation.

For further information visit www.jenicaruana.com and Facebook Event page Arbor Vitae. For further information about the Majjistral Nature and History Park visit www.majjistral.org or call 2152 1291



From left to right - Simone Mizzi, H.E. the British High Commissioner to Malta, Mr Stuart Gill, Artist Jeni Caruana, Mr Salvador Vella, Chairman of the Majjistral Park Board, Mrs Stuart Gill

Dott. Sante Guido receives an award in Calabria

Last December, Rotarians from the Rotary Club *Riviera dei Cedri* in Calabria were invited by members of the Rotary Club *La Valette Malta* to attend the unveiling of the restoration of Mattia Preti's *Santa Rosalia* at Sarria Church, for which *Din l-Art Helwa* received sponsorship from both Clubs.

Several members of the Rotary *Riviera dei Cedri* Club visited Malta and admired the high-quality work being carried out by Giuseppe Mantella Restauri on paintings by Pretti – '*Il Cavaliere Calabrese*' – in Malta. The then President, Pasquale Passero, suggested to the Council of his club that an award be presented to Dott. Sante Guido – who was born in Cosenza, Calabria – in recognition of the restoration carried out by him on the works of Preti. Dr Guido gave a very enjoyable talk to the group of Rotarians at the Sarria Church followed, the day after, by a guided tour of St John's Co-Cathedral.

The award was presented during a Rotarian dinner on 23 August in the delightful surroundings of Scalea Antica, in Calabria.

Dott. Sante Guido with former president of Rotary Club Riviera dei Cedri President Pasquale Passero



Dott. Sante Guido receiving the award from Rotary Club Riviera dei Cedri president Ciro Alessio Matteucci, with Patricia Salomone, representing Din l-Art Helwa and Rotary Club La Valette

Launch of *Il-Biedja f'Malta*

A small ceremony was held at *Din l-Art Helwa's* offices on 5 October to mark the launch of *Il-Biedja f'Malta*, a book written by Council member, Dr Stanley Farrugia Randon.

The author's love for his country and his wish to ensure that certain terminology relating to ancient agricultural activities is not lost have inspired him to write *Il-Biedja f'Malta*, a history of agriculture in Malta and the effects it has had on the Maltese landscape and environment. This book is also a practical guide to the sowing, cultivation and harvesting of local fruit, vegetables and herbs, as well to the diseases that can attack them.

Stanley Farrugia Randon is a medical doctor who grows produce organically in his yard and has gathered a great deal of information from farmers, particularly in Gozo. He encourages people to grow produce in their own garden, yard or on their roof tops, especially in an organic manner. This can be a very satisfying hobby – serving as a therapy for the body and the mind, encouraging the amateur to love nature and closely observe the stages of development of the plants and the greatness of the Creator.



Stanley Farrugia Randon



Executive President Maria Grazia Cassar addressing the audience at the book launch

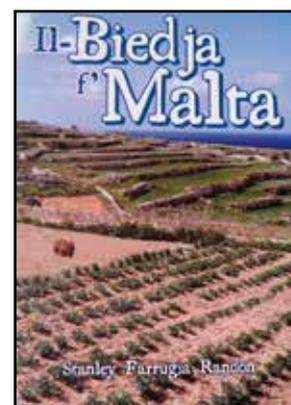
from left to right - Mr Malcolm Borg who leads the Agriculture Centre at MCAST, Prof. Emanuel Delia Chairman of APS Bank and the author Dr Stanley Farrugia Randon



In the pages of *Il-Biedja f'Malta*, as well as during his brief presentation, Stanley recommends that both professional and amateur farmers save irrigation water and refrain from using much ground water, the salinity of which results in inferior produce. He also points out that a problem that requires a solution is the fragmentation of fields that are not economically viable.

Chapters of the book are dedicated to the cotton industry and to the olive tree and the last chapter is a glossary of old terms and implements that have now become obsolete.

Din l-Art Helwa Executive President Maria Grazia Cassar expressed her pleasure that a Council Member, so busy with his medical profession, should be so dedicated as to find the time to research and write a book that is printed in full colour, in Maltese, and contains 400 photographs. The author thanked APS Bank for their financial support in the printing of the book which is available at all bookshops.



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

(again!)

It is pretty safe to assume that if you are reading *Vigilo*, you are interested in Malta's cultural heritage and the many beautiful old buildings cared for by *Din l-Art Helwa*. Maybe you've previously thought about becoming a volunteer at one of them but done nothing about it.

Well, here's another chance! We really need people to join the team of volunteers at Wied iż-Żurrieq Tower to help with its day-to-day running and the organising of visits and events.

If you have a few hours to spare on a regular basis, and would like to help, please contact Rosanne Zerafa at DLH's office on 2122 5952 or email admin@dinlarthelwa.org

We really *would* love to hear from you.



Rotarians sponsor the restoration of the painting of Santa Rosalia in Sarria Church, Floriana

On Friday 2nd December, Rotary District 2110, Sicily and Malta, Governor Nunzio Scibilia, accompanied by his assistant Ian Decesare, incoming Governor John de Giorgio, District Secretary Alfredo Nocera and Rotary La Vallette Club President David Dingli, visited the Church of Sarria, Floriana, to view the restored painting depicting Santa Rosalia by Mattia Preti.

Saint Rosalia, patron saint of Palermo, is believed to have delivered the city from the plague in the late 17th century. The Rotary Clubs of Palermo were glad to join the Malta clubs in sponsoring the restoration of this painting which forms part of the common heritage of our two islands. Restoration was expertly carried out by Giuseppe Mantella Restauri. Patricia Salomone, who was instrumental in co-ordinating this sponsorship and restoration, welcomed the guests who included many Rotarians from Sicily and Malta, as well as Philip Mercieca, Secretary General *Din l-Art Helwa*.

Din l-Art Helwa Executive President Maria Grazia Cassar presented Governor Scibilia with a set of Kenneth Zammit Tabona prints of Din l-Art Helwa Sites as a token of gratitude. Fr. Lino Spiteri S.J., rector of the Jesuit community at Sarria, made available the recreation room where a light refreshment was offered to all present.

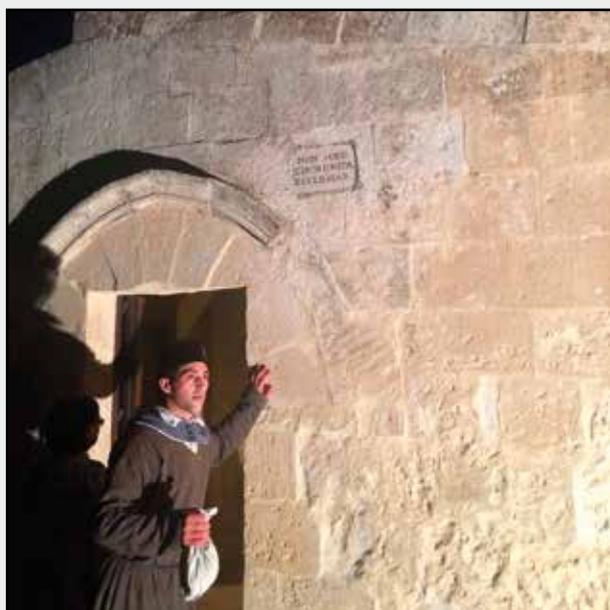


Left to right Rotarian Roberto Tristano, Giuseppe Mantella, Fr. Lino Spiteri S.J., Rotarian David Dingli President Rotary Cub La Valette, Rotarian Patricia Salomone, Executive President Maria Grazia Cassar, and Rotarian Lina Ricciardello

Saint Rosalia by Mattia Preti, restored by Giuseppe Mantella Restauri

Sunset over a medieval village

On the 15th October, a special event called “Sunset over a medieval village” was held at Hal Millieri. The re-enactment group Compagnia San Michele transformed the site of the Church of the Annunciation, which is so well looked after by Anthony Mangion, by re-creating snapshots of medieval life within its walls. Impersonators of the candle-maker, the fresco artist, the priest, the merchant and their families set up tableaux and interacted with the public to inform and explain these various aspects of life, centred around this unique site. It was a magical setting, and the event was well-received and pronounced a success.



Anna, aged 10, spent a couple of days with her family at Delimara Lighthouse. This is a story she wrote during her visit.

Our haunted night in Delimara Lighthouse

By Anna Sheehan

Last week we went to stay the night at Delimara Lighthouse with some friends. Little did we know that it was haunted!

We got there at lunchtime and explored the rooms where we were going to stay, and we ran up the stairs to the lantern. The stairs were dark, steep and a little bit creepy.

After lunch we walked down to Delimara Bay for a lovely swim in the clear, deep water. When we returned to the lighthouse we made supper in the small kitchen, but all 10 of us squeezed round the table for a fun supper.

Suddenly the night fell and it was extremely dark outside. It was time for bed. We kids were already petrified because we had heard an unexplained knocking from one of the upstairs wardrobes. We went to bed. Everything was quiet in the Delimara Lighthouse.

In the middle of the night I woke up to see bursts of white lights flashing across the room. I couldn't understand this as the lights from the WIFI were red! It was a really hot night but I did manage to get back to sleep. However, the haunting was not over. I woke once more because I was so cold I was actually shivering – ghosts bring down the temperature of a room, right?

Would I visit Delimara Lighthouse again? YES! The views of the sea were beautiful and it's very exciting to spend the night in a haunted place.



Anna Sheehan (right) with her little friends at Delimara Lighthouse

Din l-Art Helwa Autumn Concert

The Din l-Art Helwa Autumn Concert and dinner was held on the 11th November at the historic St John's Cavalier, which was made available to us by His Excellency Ing. Umberto Di Capua, Ambassador of the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St John. The guests were enchanted by the Rotterdam Ensemble, under the artistic direction of Maestro Roberto Beltran-Zavala, who were kindly sponsored by Dr John Vassallo and Dr Marianne Noll. The Honourable Mr Evarist Bartolo, Minister of Education graced us with his presence, as did The Ambassador of the Netherlands, His Excellency Mr Joop Nijssen and Mrs Nijssen, and Dr Elena Grech, from the EU Commission.



The Rotterdam Ensemble



Dr. John Vassallo and Dr. Marianne Noll who sponsored the musicians with Executive President Maria Grazia Cassar and Council Member Mrs Cettina Caruana Curran



Guests at the dinner in the beautiful St John's Cavalier

2016 Comino Festa Weekend

Carolyn Clements

Warden Santa Marija Tower

As well as being in a visibly commanding location some 230 feet above sea level, Santa Marija tower on Comino featured prominently in the attractions of the 2016 Comino Festa weekend of 19 and 20 August. The enthusiastic team of Gozo and Comino volunteers were on the island during extended opening hours on both days to welcome the hundreds of visitors from Gozo and Malta as well as many from travellers from abroad, who responded to the call of the red and white flag of the Knights of Jerusalem fluttering in the breeze from the roof of the tower.



*Images of the
Compagnia San Michele, Malta - Re-enactment Group
at Santa Marija Tower, Comino*

*All photographs are by
Peter Lanman*

Visits to the tower were enhanced each day by the presence of the re-enactment group, *Compagnia San Michele*, enabling visitors to step back to the time of Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt to experience living history, even handling weapons during the guided one-to-one exchanges with the 'Knights'. Lingerers waited patiently on the roof to watch the fabulous sunsets as darkness gradually crept into the Comino panorama before wandering down to the courtyard of the old isolation hospital for the traditional feast or to enjoy musical interludes following the celebration of Mass at the chapel, the latter two activities and other events having been arranged by the Festa Committee.



Show of Arms at Wignacourt Tower

Martin Vella

Warden Wignacourt Tower

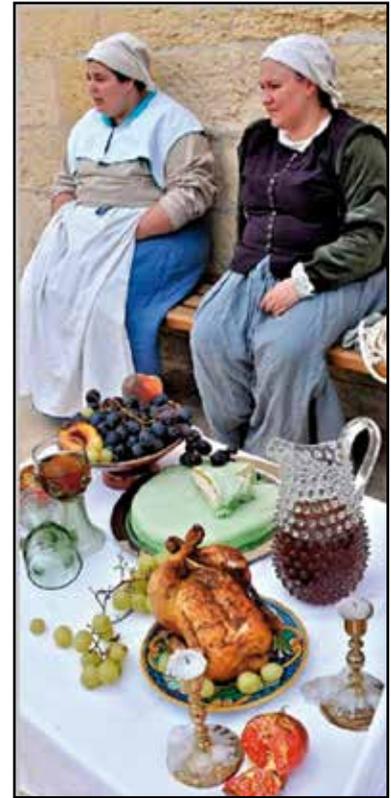
The echoes of musket fire thundered once more in nostalgic waves on the weekend of 23 and 24 July, when Maltese enactment group *Show of Arms* held a re-enactment event at Wignacourt Tower, the first coastal watch-tower in Malta. The aim of the event was to raise awareness of the historic importance of these coastal towers, to bring to the attention of the general public the ongoing 'crusade' to preserve these iconic landmarks and the dedication and passion of their curators and volunteers.

Lectures and tours were provided all day for visitors, with each tour coming to a climax in a show on the tower's roof when the full loading and discharge of the most distinctive weapon of the early 17th century – the matchlock musket – was carried out by trained members of *Show of Arms* in accordance with a training manual dating back to 1643. No fewer than 250 rounds were fired during this two-day event. The highlight of the event was a historically accurate banquet, held in the surroundings of the tower. The public could enjoy the adherence to the etiquette, protocol and table manners of the period, down to a specially prepared three-course meal based on meticulous research, and topped off with a toast of mead to conclude the event.

This event was organised by *Show of Arms* in collaboration with *Din l-Art Helwa* and the Warden and volunteers of Wignacourt Tower. *Show of Arms* runs a sword fighting



*Images of the
Show of Arms at
Wignacourt Tower*



school dedicated to the accurate representation of the way of life in Malta between 1380 and 1450 and the early 17th century.

The group comprises about 30 members, 20 of whom are trained in the art of mediaeval sword fighting and the use of other weapons pertaining to the period, such as the mediaeval arming sword, the Baroque rapier and the classical small sword. Fighting techniques follow the *Fechtbücher* (*books on fighting*) and combat manuals written by renowned swordsmen such as Fiore dei Liberi, Hans Talhoffer, Achille Marozzo and Ridolfo Capoferro. Instruction in this form of martial art is given by the only fully-qualified and registered *Maestro d'Armi* in Malta, Daniel Sammut, who received his training at various fencing schools in Europe, and has over 50 years' experience. He is part of the committee that guides the progress and development of the group.

Show of Arms members are themselves volunteers. They carry out research so that each show is as faithful as possible to the particular period and great attention is paid to the smallest detail, such as the way fabric was stitched, the type of table crockery and goblets used and the jewellery worn, so that they present a snapshot of history as accurately as possible. The group gains valuable experience through regular participation in re-enactments, mediaeval festivals and banquets – most recently in Daugmales in Latvia, Canelli in Italy, Noto in Sicily and Youghal in Ireland. Locally, they take part in events organised by Heritage Malta and local councils.

Wignacourt Tower, like all Malta's coastal towers, offered security and peace-of-mind to our forefathers. It is now up to us to ensure that these national treasures are protected against general neglect and deterioration and are passed on to future generations. *Show of Arms*, like other re-enactment groups, are making a great contribution to keeping these historic locations very much alive.



Bringing Life to Dwejra Tower

Colin Hammer - Warden

Dwejra is a beautiful place and Dwejra Tower proudly looks over the whole scene: the azure window, the Inland Sea, Fungus Rock and Dwejra Bay. The view is fantastic and most of our visitors find the fascinating history of the tower an added bonus.

When I became warden of the tower last year, I wanted to increase awareness of it, increase the income it generates and enable it to be used as more than just somewhere historic to visit. The first thing I did was to create a Facebook page – now with around 200 likes – and a Twitter account, [@DwejraTower](#), with over 300 followers.

*opposite:
The azure window*

Dwejra Tower



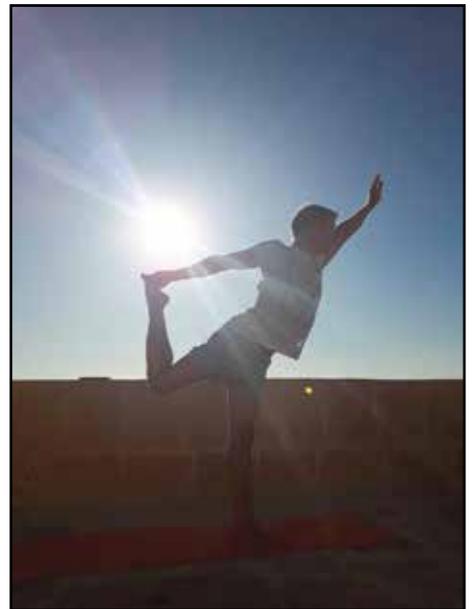


My team of volunteers then started to think of how to use the tower for other purposes, we started yoga classes on the roof, a monthly ‘sunset picnic’ and – probably the most successful – astronomy nights with the University of Malta. At the first one we had around 300 visitors and the next will be on 12 December.

The tower has been used for numerous weddings, sleep-overs and parties this year, which does present environmental issues with Dwejra being a ‘dark sky area’ and Natura 2000 site.

For the future, we are always looking for new ways of using the tower. I have plans to turn the basement room into a seminar/meeting room, the University of Malta is planning to place a telescope permanently on the tower and the Gozo Ministry is proposing to install webcams in the very near future.

Most of all, we look forward to you visiting us in the near future as we try to open every day of the year except on Christmas Day and New Year’s Day.



Yoga classes on the roof



‘Sunset picnic’ at Dwejra Tower

Fungus Rock and Dwejra Bay



Din l-Art Helwa to Restore L-Ahrax Tower (It-Torri l-Abjad)

Stanley Farrugia Randon

The L-Ahrax Tower was built during the reign of Grand Master Martin de Redin, who succeeded Lascaris and built 13 towers in the first two years of his brief three-year reign. These are, in sequence north-east to south-west, L-Ahrax Tower (Torri l-Abjad) at L-Armier (partly modified), Ghajn Hadid Tower in Selmun (mostly demolished), Ghallis Tower on the Salina Coast Road (under the care of *Din l-Art Helwa*), Qalet Marku Tower on the Salina Coast Road (under the care of *Din l-Art Helwa*), Madliena Tower (now in good condition), St Julian's Tower (converted into a bar), Triq Il-Wiesgħa Tower in Xgħajra (in good condition), Żonqor Tower (collapsed), Xrobb l-Għagin Tower (partly destroyed), Delimara and Benghisa Towers (both demolished by the British services), Hamrija Tower (in good condition) and Wardija Tower in Żurrieq (in fairly good condition). These were paid for by the Grand Master himself and the cost of all the towers, including the woodwork, amounted to slightly over 6,428 scudi.

The L-Ahrax Tower was constructed in 1658 for 589 scudi, which did not include the cost of the wooden apertures. It was the sixth tower to be built at the expense of Grand Master De Redin and the original plaque commemorating this fact still exists. The *Università* paid the salary of the bombardier and the three *Dejma* soldiers and the tower was armed with two bronze cannon, four muskets, 16 cannon balls, musket balls and 10 *rotolo* (about 8kg) of powder.

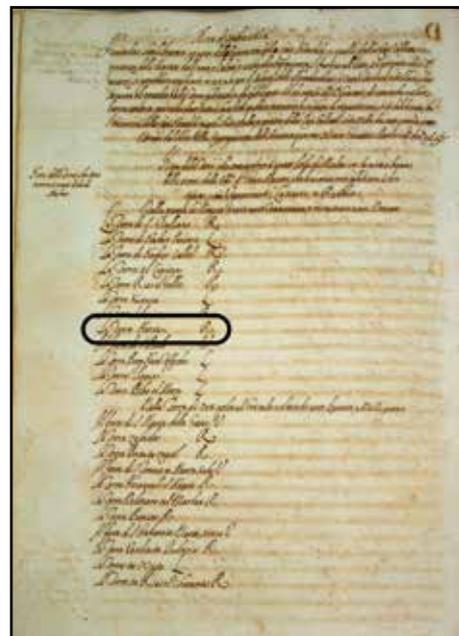
Other minor defensive posts built during the period of the Order of St John include batteries, redoubts and entrenchments. In 1714 and 1715, reports were prepared by the Knights D'Arginy and Fontet, accompanied by 2nd Engineer Bachelieu. The work proposed had to be planned and supervised by expert military engineers and, in February 1715, French military engineers – headed by Brigadier Louis François d'Aubigné de Tigné and Charles François Mondion as 2nd-in-Command visited the islands to enhance the defences of bays. In April, the Grand Prior of France, Philippe de Vendôme, joined the engineers.

Tigné was in favour of strengthening the harbour fortifications in Cotonera, Sta Margherita, Ricasoli and Floriana but Vendôme was more inclined towards the strengthening of the coastal defences and offered to donate money for their construction, as well as to make a loan without interest. This second strategy was preferred and adopted. A 1720 map by Charles Amadeus de Berey gives us a clear indication of where these batteries and redoubts were located. This was during the reign of Grand Master Perellos. The L-Ahrax Tower was strengthened with the addition of a blockhouse which still exists to the side of the tower. The tower and blockhouse were protected by a battery with a ditch. By the end of the 18th century the tower and battery were armed with 10 cannon, 700 cannon balls and 150 grape-shot. The gunpowder was stored in St Agatha's Tower. The practice to store the gunpowder in a larger tower was also followed on Comino where the gun powder for St Mary's Battery was stored in St Mary's Tower.

In 1720, a semi-circular wall with eight embrasures was also constructed, with a ditch around its external side. Unfortunately the wall with its embrasures no longer exists and the inside and surrounding walls of the ditch are presently full of overgrowth, planted trees and some fruit trees. *Din l-Art Helwa* is in the process of applying to the relevant authorities to relocate the trees and clean the ditch of the overgrowth. The ditch was partly excavated from rock and partly built and the roots of the trees are damaging the surrounding wall and in some places have brought some of it down.

A detailed map drawn by Don Felice Cutajar, a Maltese priest, dated 1833 gives us the names of the coastal towers, batteries, entrenchments, redoubts and curtains with the number of guns to be found in the coastal defences. On this map, the Maltese priest noted that the tower was still armed with two cannon and the surrounding battery with eight. We still hope to find some of these cannon buried in the vicinity of the tower!

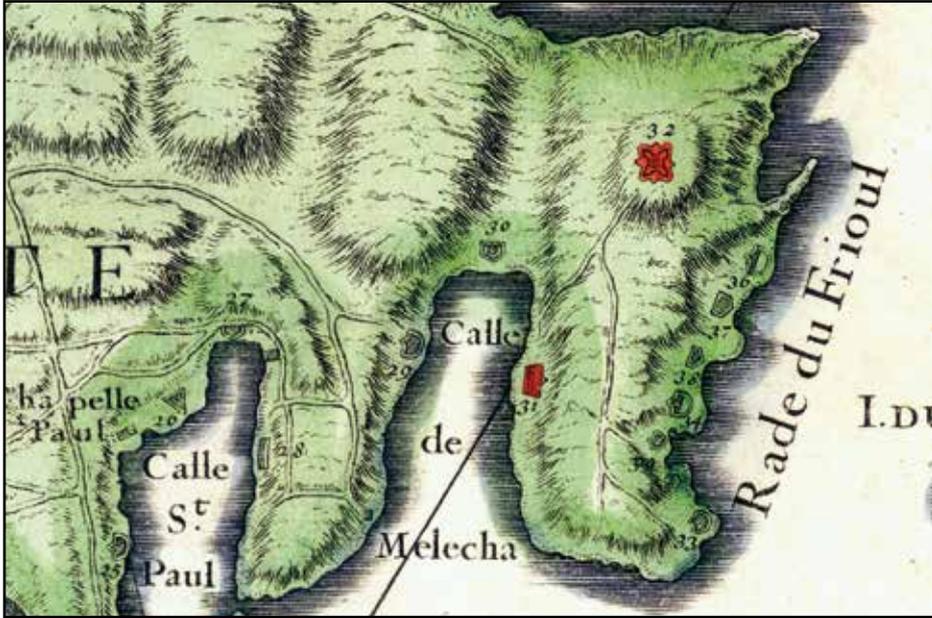
After WWI, the L-Ahrax tower and battery were handed over to the British Naval Authorities and after WWII, the tower underwent structural changes and additions, to both the roof of the original tower and the blockhouse as well as behind it. These were carried out to enhance its residential potential, which is why *Din l-Art Helwa* would like to reuse



Document listing the towers built by Grand Masters Wignacourt, Lascaris and De Redin

Manuscript dated July 1659 listing the towers built by Grand Master De Redin and establishing the annual payments to the guards by the Università





Detail of Charles Amadeus De Bery Map ' Carte des Îles de Malte, du Goze et Du Cuming' dated 1720 (the tower and battery are labelled number 33 on the map)

The ditch wall damage partly caused by overgrowth

it partly in this way. It is also an ideal place for a visitor centre and lectures on marine matters. Re-enactments and popular activities can still be held at the site but its recent residential history and modifications no longer make it a prime site for such activities. In the 1980s a garage was built behind the tower, partly destroying the *redan* wall and it is planned that this addition will be removed.

In November 2016, Mellieha Local Council signed an agreement with *Din l-Art Helwa* granting DLH the property and adjoining land on loan for 10 years for restoration, conservation and use. The first thing we have done is to secure the area and close it off. The tower has been abandoned for years and parts of it are collapsing, rendering the site very dangerous.

The original tower will be restored without any modifications but other work will include masonry and concrete work on additions made during the British period and later. Other work will include waterproofing the whole structure and plumbing, electricity and drainage work. Road works, landscaping and repairs to the concreted area around the tower will conclude the project, which is expected to take at least three years.

Martin Vella, warden of Wignacourt Tower in St Paul's Bay, will be leading the project but the restoration committee – comprising Josie Ellul Mercer and the writer – will also be involved. President Maria Grazia Cassar and Treasurer Martin Scicluna are working hard to find sponsors for this project. Architect Joseph Attard, who had been appointed by Mellieha Local Council to provide a method statement for the restoration of the tower before it was handed over to *Din l-Art Helwa*, is over-seeing the work.

Din l-Art Helwa plans to use the buildings for educational and academic initiatives, school and/or youth training facilities, exhibitions, a diving and marine-study centre, artistic performances and animation, corporate and philanthropic functions and heritage accommodation.

Photo of the tower when it was still used as a residential complex



The tower underwent four different stages in its development. Black shows original De Redin tower, green shows additions in 1716, red shows additions during British rule, and blue shows recent additions.



Giorgio Bassani and Maurice Caruana Curran Remembered

Italian Cultural Institutes the world over are this year celebrating the 100th anniversary of the birth of Giorgio Bassani, one of Italy's leading intellectuals of the last century and author of, among other works, *Il Giardino dei Finzi-Contini* and *L'Airone* – winner of the *Premio Campiello* in 1958. Bassani can also be credited with bringing to the attention of an international audience *Il Gattopardo* by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa.

Here in Malta, the occasion took on a particular perspective. At an event at the Italian Cultural Institute in Valletta on 13 October to mark Bassani's centenary, the director – Dott. Salvatore Schirmo – chose to celebrate the occasion by drawing attention to Bassani's work in the field of environmental and cultural conservation. In doing so, he acknowledged the work of *Din l-Art Helwa* by inviting Simone Mizzi to give her personal recollections of Giorgio Bassani's visit to Malta and his long-standing friendship with her father, the late Judge Maurice Caruana Curran, with whom he had so much in common.

Also invited – and especially welcomed to Malta – were two guests very closely connected with Bassani and his work in the field of environmental awareness: his daughter, Dottoressa Paola Bassani, and the Vice-President of *Italia Nostra*, Dottoressa Maria Rosaria Iacono.

A lover of history, an intellectual of the first order, ready to defend his cultural heritage and, above all, ready to defend freedom of thought. Bassani was thus described by *Din l-Art Helwa*'s founder Judge Maurice Caruana Curran. These two personalities had much in common and it was almost inevitable that a close friendship would develop between the two. Both had lost people they loved, were passionate sportsman, and had occasionally acted on the stage. Both were poets and loved literature, history, architectural and natural beauty. In particular, they both shared a spirit for active



Giorgio Bassani



involvement which pushed Giorgio Bassani to found *Italia Nostra* in 1955, and Maurice Caruana Curran to establish *Din l-Art Helwa*, in 1965, a year after Malta's independence. The Maltese organisation was among the first to join *Europa Nostra*, which had been founded on the suggestion of *Italia Nostra* as a federation of Europe's heritage protection organisations, in the awareness that nothing could keep Europe together better than its common heritage. At the time *Europa Nostra* had 12 member organisations, now they are 284.

Bassani's vision is relevant up to this very day. Undoubtedly, his greatest preoccupation, shared by Caruana Curran, was always the low level of appreciation of culture and cultural heritage. Although still the case, this was particularly true in those days. However, in those days the conservation of architectural heritage passed from being a nostalgic amateurish undertaking to becoming a scientific discipline as a result of two important events of international relevance:

1) The precarious situation of Venice, in danger of succumbing to the waters of the Adriatic. Venice is still under threat today by the passage of enormous cruise liners in its lagoon which undermine its very foundations;

2) The flooding of the Arno river in Florence in 1966 which was the catalyst for bringing together young people from all over Italy to extract innumerable masterpieces from the water and mud. These are still remembered as "gli Angeli del Fango" (the Angels of the Mud). This year the last

*Dottoressa Paola Bassani visiting
Our Lady of Victory Church,
seen here with (left to right)
Dott. Salvatore Schirmo, Ms Simone Mizzi,
Ms Patricia Salomone, Dott. Giuseppe Mantella*



Simone Mizzi and Dottoressa Maria Rosaria Iacono addressing the audience at the Istituto Italiano Di Cultura



masterpiece still suffering from that trauma, Giorgio Vasari's *Last Supper*, has been returned to its original location.

These were the years in which ICOMOS - International Council on Monuments and Sites – was born and in which the Venice Charter (for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites) was drawn up.

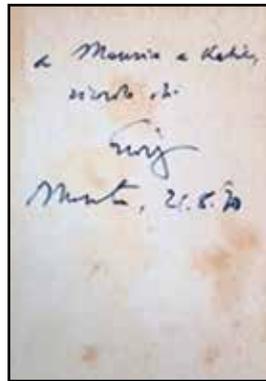
Paola Bassani presented an interview that her father had given on RAI back in the 1970s in which he gave a detailed and knowledgeable description of *The awakening of Lazarus*, a painting by Caravaggio which is to be found in Messina and which the painter executed soon after his departure from Malta.

Simone Mizzi had the audience fascinated by recalling Giorgio Bassani's visit to Malta in 1970, when *Italia Nostra* held its yearly assembly here and Bassani and other personalities were entertained by Sir Maurice Dorman, the first honorary president of *Din l-Art Helwa*. By this time Bassani and Caruana Curran were similarly concerned about the effect of mass tourism on our Mediterranean environment.

Giorgio Bassani's lifelong work as a teacher was stressed by his daughter but was especially described by Dottoressa Iacono. She gave a detailed



Maurice Caruana Curran with Duncan Sandys



A note signed by Giorgio Bassano addressed to Kate and Maurice Caruana Curran

Giorgio Vasari's Last Supper back to the church of Santa Croce after 50 years



account of the work of *Italia Nostra* among teachers – who have a fundamental role in encouraging an awareness of the need for loving and caring for our natural surroundings and our cultural heritage.

In his own words: "*The technological and industrial society in which we now live is unsustainable without our cultural and natural heritage. If it wishes to continue to exist, this industrial civilisation, which has shown that it is most efficient, now requires a 'soul'. It must be aware of not transforming man into a pure consumer. A predatory relationship with Nature is no longer bearable.*"

Bassani and Maurice Caruana Curran had much in common: two great minds whose heritage lives on. In Caruana Curran's words: "*May this inspiration guide those who wish to save the beauty that Nature and Man have created together.*"

Din l-Art Helwa is grateful to the Italian Cultural Institute's director Salvatore Schirmo for this collaboration in remembrance of Giorgio Bassani in the context of his ties to Malta and to our founder, Maurice Caruana Curran. This further enriches the synergy between our two organisations which, for the past 20 years, has seen the Italian Cultural Institute supporting DLH at the Bir Miftuh Music Festival and other cultural events and activities of great conservation, educational and entertainment value.

Dear Friends of *Din l-Art Helwa* and Supporters of Victory Church, as 2016 draws to a close and makes way for two important years for Malta and indeed for Europe, I wish to bring you news on the work that continues apace at the Church of Our Lady of Victory, Valletta. 2017 sees Malta taking up the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, and 2018 is now declared 'European Year of Cultural Heritage', layering a double cultural manifestation on top of V18, Valletta European Capital of Culture. This recent communication from the European Council renews our determination to have the work complete for 2018 so we can share our common European heritage with all. If we had planned for the church to take pride of place for Valletta in 2018, this objective is now doubly important as its restoration will constitute a major and lasting contribution to the European Year of Cultural Heritage. The church is a legacy, after all, of that intrepid early group of Europeans, the Order of the Knights of St John and of their vision to create beauty and art that was representative of their faith and of the history they themselves enacted.

First and foremost, I wish to give thanks to all the generous people, corporate sponsors and individuals that continue to make this complex restoration possible. The singular DLH flagship project, launched in 2012 to restore the interior of the church and its contents is now at an advanced stage. I believe we can safely say we are on the homeward run. Yet there remains the challenging task of raising funds to secure the deteriorating masonry of its imposing façade, its belfry and historic bells, two of which date from the time of the Order. For this 'grand finale' part of the project we are launching the Victory Church Façade Fund which seeks to raise some €80,000 needed to treat the exteriors, the belfry and its bells, well in time for 2018 - so any donations or fund raising ideas are more than welcome!

Should you have visited the church during the recent *Notte Bianca*, you would have captured the continued looks of amazement as the public entered and caught sight of Alessio Erardi's painted ceiling. This spectacular work continues to capture interest and earn respect for this Maltese Baroque artist. We cannot thank the HSBC Malta Foundation enough for having shared our vision to save the most unique treasure of Valletta's first church and bring it back to life after centuries of neglect. Erardi's monumental paintings depicting episodes from the life of the Blessed Virgin always leave us in awe.



The Magnificent Alessio Erardi Ceiling

2018 European Year A Goal for the Completion at Our Lady of

Simon

Vice President of



Putting the finishing touches to the Altar of St John Evangelist

Restoration continues on the internal left wall to reveal any remaining decorative murals. Fragments of early schemes make Victory Church perhaps one of the only churches in Malta to still bear evidence of its original decoration. *Din l-Art Helwa* thanks PwC Malta for its generosity towards this vital and painstaking aspect of our programme as well as for funding the restoration of numerous works of art, in particular this year, the St John of God painting, and its elaborate 18C gilt frame, and hot off the press, an unusual 1920s oleograph - 'The Guardian Angel' used by the Opera del Buon Pastore that had their teaching centre for underprivileged children in the church.

Through the kind sponsorship of the Alfred Mizzi Foundation, that celebrated its prestigious centenary at the same time DLH celebrated its own 50th Anniversary, the work on the elaborate altars and carved niches is almost complete. The altar of St John Evangelist, thought to be the earliest altar, was completed on September 8th, 2016 in keeping with the tradition of victories scored on this important date. The restoration of the last altar, that of St Liborius, Bishop of Paderborn, is due to be completed in November, bringing the 5 altars programme at Victory Church to a close.

Work on the restoration of the 18C organ is in hand, and we thank the Eden Leisure Group for underwriting the cost of this specialised work. The plan is to have the organ ready in time for V18 when the first notes will be played once more on the original

of Cultural Heritage of the Restoration Project Victory Church

e Mizzi
of Din l-Art Helwa



The restored St John of God painting

instrument of the church. The organ will be housed in the original 18C cabinets found in the church and these have been restored with the aid of the Tanner Trust.

Simonds Farsons Cisk Ltd and Farrugia Investments Ltd have lent their support to the difficult conservation of the wooden choir stalls. 14 hand-carved stalls and their semi-circular priedieu were all individually made to suit the curved apse and are firmly embedded in the bastion wall of St James Cavalier making the work doubly difficult. This work is due to start shortly with mapping studies of each piece of wood having had to be completed first. An important and generous helping hand has come from Dr John Vassallo and Dr Marianne Noll who have wished to personally support the restoration of the organ balcony and balustrades and their 40 elaborate gilt and painted wooden columns. Tests have already started here, and work is due to continue into the spring of 2017. As soon as the balcony is complete we will return the organ cabinets and organ to their original place.

Events continue to take place in the church to assist with fund raising. The most important this year has been that of the Harp and Piano recital staged for the 450th Anniversary of Valletta on the 1st April. This was made possible through the personal generosity of Mr Heribert Grünert, who continues to support *Din l-Art Helwa*, music and the arts in so many ways. We also wish to thank Mr and Mrs Sandro Raniolo for having organised a gifting scheme which raised considerable funds. Numerous others must be thanked

for lending this project support over the years, in particular, the Zammit Cutajar family and the P. Cutajar Foundation, the Vodafone Malta Foundation, Medserv Plc and the Malta Stock Exchange Plc as well as *Din l-Art Helwa*'s most valued Double Gold Life Members. Rest assured that no efforts have been spared to source funds these last four years. The Victory Church project also received awards from the ERDF scheme for Sustainable Tourism, the Good Causes Lottery Fund, and the Urban Conservation Fund of the Planning Authority.

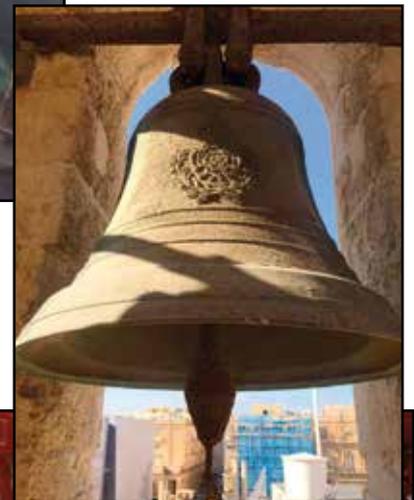
On behalf of the Executive President, Maria Grazia Cassar and the hard-working Council of *Din l-Art Helwa*, I would like to thank all mentioned above as well as all those numerous individuals who come forward unnamed and unseen to donate funds, advice or work in kind to the Our Lady of Victory project as well as to other projects underway by the organisation. DLH has saved 40 heritage monuments in just over 50 years and cares for 17 historic sites voluntarily for the nation. This is an extraordinary achievement which would not be possible without you.

We hope you have enjoyed reading this update on the Church of Our Lady of Victory, Valletta and invite you to inform us should you wish to organise private guided tours or personalised visits. Thank you all again for your continued generosity and interest in the work of *Din l-Art Helwa*. We hope you can help kick start the Victory Church Façade Fund, to seal the masonry, restore the belfry and the historic bells of Victory Church with any donation possible so that we will reach our ultimate goal of finishing the project for V18 and the European Year of Cultural Heritage. Here is an opportunity to share and enlarge our common roots that is not to be missed.



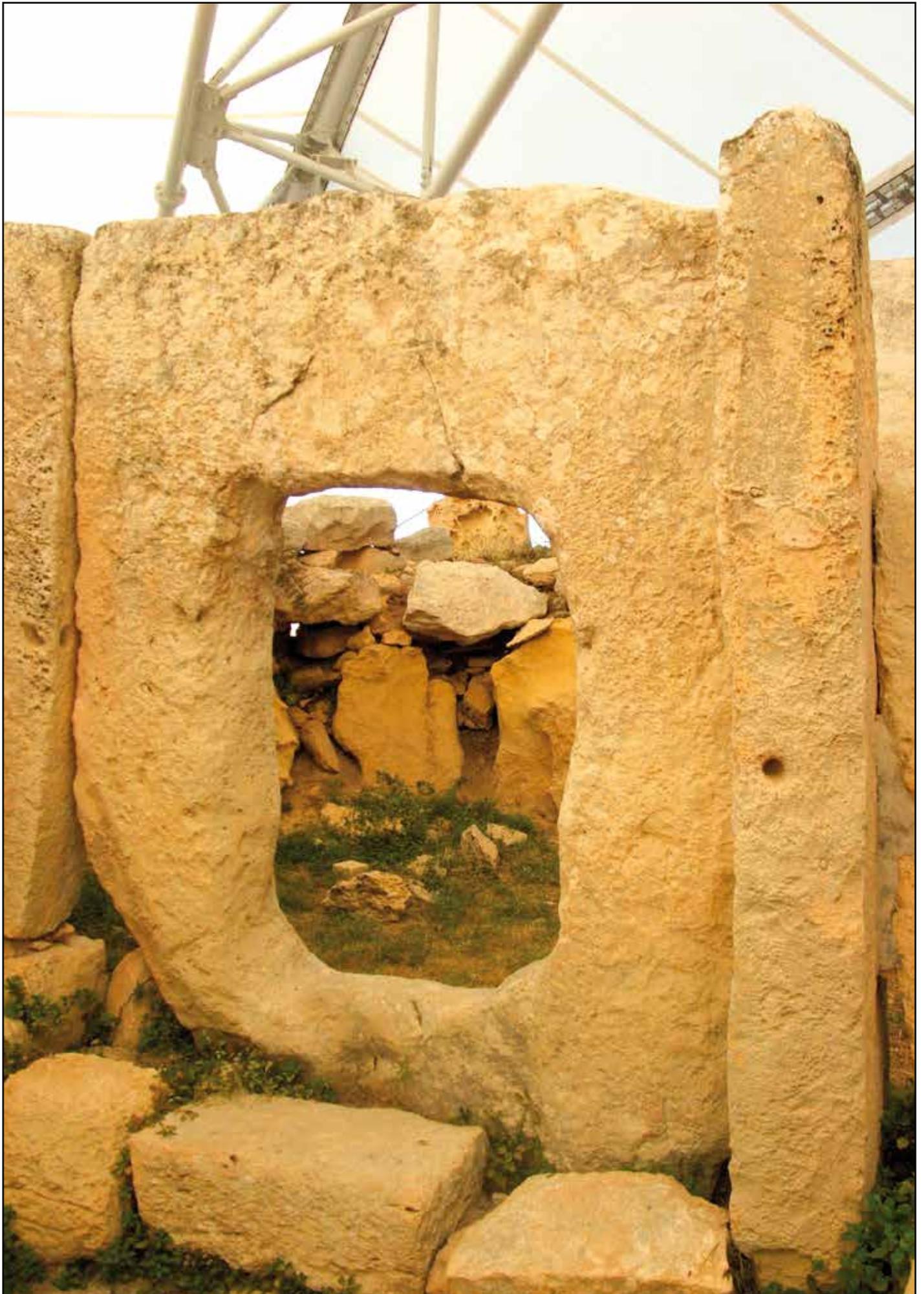
The Guardian Angel – a rare 1920s oleograph

One of the historic bells



The carved wooden choir stalls





Conference of Parties 22

The International National Trusts Organisation participates in the Conference of Parties 22, the climate change talks in Marrakesh held from 7 to 11 November 2016. Oliver Maurice, who visited Din l-Art Helwa in 2002, invited Simone Mizzi, DLH representative on the Board of the International National Trusts Organisation (INTO), to give her observations on the impact of climate change in Malta at a teleconference held on the occasion of the Conference of Parties 22. Oliver is a former director of the National Trust of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, also spearheading Enterprise Neptune, and is INTO's Director for Membership and Advocacy.

“Hello everybody in Marrakech; hello Oliver and the INTO team. This is Simone Mizzi calling in from Malta, representing *Din l-Art Helwa*, Malta's National Trust and member of INTO. As you know, I am no scientist and I am no geologist but I have worked in tourism and in the conservation of heritage most of my life. I am becoming more and more aware of the danger climate change poses to Mediterranean islands such as Malta and am particularly concerned about its effect on our extremely important tourism industry and built architectural legacy, which is so unique for the Mediterranean.

“Exposed to the elements, with very little rainfall and very little tree cover, any increase in extremes of temperatures such as we are seeing can cause visitors to stay away from our island during the high summer season. Tourism represents some 35 per cent of our national GDP and summer temperatures have been soaring to such a degree that we sometimes cannot enjoy our beaches and the sea, or walking around open-air heritage sites, unless it is in the early morning or late afternoon. If visitors chose to stay away and visit cooler countries, then our economy will suffer.

“There have been longer and longer periods of drought. Malta has never enjoyed much water, but this year has registered a record-breaking lack of rain. This means our natural aquifers and water reservoirs are under stress and farmers must make use of water converted expensively from the sea at the doubly high cost of using fossil fuels until alternative methods are found. This also puts our agriculture at risk and local summer fruit and vegetables, so delicious, were very scarce this year. Our cliff edges and clay slopes suffer erosion when sudden storms bring heavy brief periods of rain as the water percolates into the fissures that have formed due to long dry spells and our fragile limestone facings and the rare blue clay can break off and fall away, taking with them any natural shrub cover that may have formed.

“I am also seeing the effect of increasing extremes of temperature on Malta's unique built heritage. Mostly built in upper coralline globigerina limestone, we have an architectural legacy that spans 7,000 years. Maltese stone is easy to quarry and easy for building with – it provides a wonderful texture for the creation of buildings. Having worked in conservation for some 50 years, I have seen the accelerating deterioration of stone surfaces that is putting our buildings at risk and in need of more and more costly restoration. You see, when our limestone surfaces are exposed to high temperatures and are then battered by the cold prevailing north-westerly winds and sudden downpours, they become friable and fragile. The mortar joints dry out, edges are frayed and beautiful carvings are lost.

“Buildings are requiring more and more conservation. We could say this is the normal process of decay, but it is truly accelerating at an alarming speed. With seven Neolithic temple sites, all free-standing structures that are World Heritage monuments, our capital city of Valletta itself a Baroque World Heritage City full of palaces and important buildings, 365 churches and a network of extraordinary military fortifications that circle our coast, it means we have to be increasingly vigilant to keep in check the effect of varying excessive climatic conditions that have become the order of the day.”

On behalf of Din l-Art Helwa, Simone ended by wishing COP 22, Oliver Maurice and the INTO team every success, so the nations of the world can further defray and slow down the impact of climate change. It is worth noting that the framework of legal resolutions taken in Paris at the Conference of Parties 21 in 2015 became international law on 4 November 2016. The Conference of Parties refers to those countries that ratified the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

this page and opposite:

Neolithic temples at Haġar Qim are now covered by protective tents, in order to preserve the stones from erosion caused by exposure to the elements and varying climatic conditions. The Neolithic temple structures in Malta and Gozo are UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and are the oldest free standing self supporting monuments in the world. The two temples at Haġar Qim and Mnajdra were covered in 2009.



End the International Destruction of Cultural Heritage

Maestro Placido Domingo
President of *Europa Nostra*

Dear colleagues and friends from all over the world,

It is an honour for me to contribute to your special event as President of *Europa Nostra*, the voice of cultural heritage in Europe, and also as a goodwill ambassador of UNESCO. I salute – with great respect and admiration – all the heritage heroes and defenders taking part today in this critical discussion at the UN headquarters in New York. And I applaud the recent vital report, prepared by the UN special rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Karima Bennoune. This report constitutes a forceful human rights call to action to end the intentional destruction of cultural heritage which *Europa Nostra* wishes to endorse.

When you get older, and realise that there are more years behind you than ahead of you, you tend to reflect on the legacy you will leave as a parent and a grandparent, as a generation *and* as a civilisation.

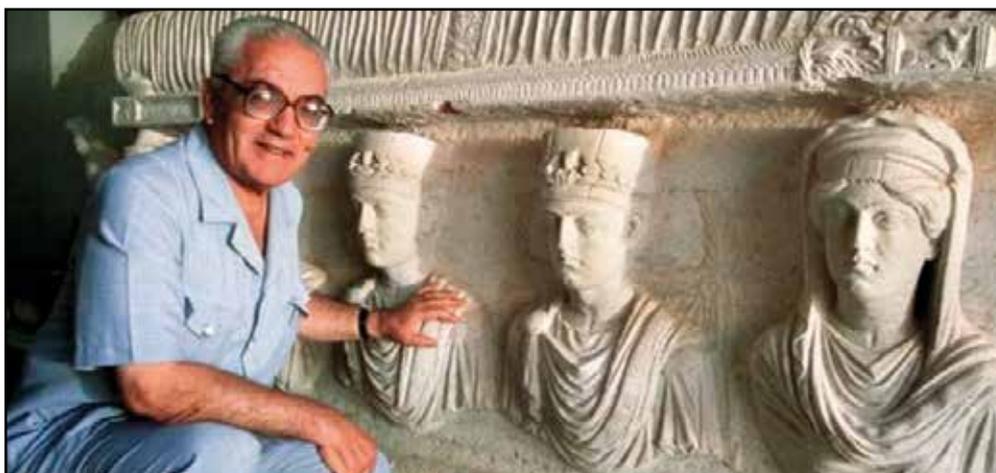
It is then that you understand that cultural heritage, tangible and intangible, is our anchor in time. It tells us the closely inter-connected stories of who we were in the past, who we are today and who we could become in the future.

This is why, of course, we need to safeguard our cultural heritage across the world. And this is why, of course, the intentional destruction of cultural heritage is a human rights issue. When cultural heritage is attacked, damaged or destroyed anywhere in the world, it is our heritage – yours and mine – that is attacked, damaged and destroyed. This destruction undermines our human right to know our own history and the histories of our neighbours. This destruction seeks to erase the record of human genius and human creation and, by doing so, to erase our collective memory as human beings. These deplorable acts therefore must be firmly condemned and eventually stopped, as advocated in the Report of the UN special envoy for Cultural Rights.

The address by Maestro Placido Domingo, President of *Europa Nostra*, given to the United Nations on its recent rapportage which proposes a vigorous human rights call to action to end the intentional destruction of cultural heritage and render it a violation of human rights, a proposal endorsed by *Europa Nostra*. The year 2018 will be the 70th anniversary of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.



Maestro Placido Domingo



*Syrian archaeologist
Khaled al-Asaad,
head of antiquities
for the ancient city
of Palmyra.
Executed by terrorists
on 18 August 2015*

As a musician who has dedicated my whole life to art, I am deeply moved by the heroic stories of those cultural heritage defenders who have taken the greatest risks to protect it, sometimes even at the cost of their life. Our best tribute to them would be to support the work of those who continue their efforts, to stand with the 'heritage heroes' of today. Let us all honour and be inspired by the power of example of:

- * those who kept singing when music was banned;
- * those who continued dancing when it was forbidden;
- * those who bravely saved manuscripts and artefacts from disappearing in flames;
- * and those who carefully reconstruct that which was destroyed. An act of destruction takes place in the blink of an eye, while we all know that an act of creation takes tremendous time and effort and requires ongoing care and commitment.

Cultural heritage does not belong to one person, one group, one culture, one religion, one country or one civilisation. We are one family, one tribe, one race, living on a very fragile planet on an outside spiral of just one of the billions of galaxies out there. This means that we have a shared responsibility for this planet. We must equally take care of its past, of its present and of its future.

There is so much we can and should do....

- For example, we must ratify and implement the various international and European conventions related to cultural heritage.
- We must also find the resources for educational programmes on the importance of cultural heritage and cultural rights, especially for young people, to encourage them to learn, understand and care for the cultural heritage of others.
- All in all, we must ensure that culture always remains a priority because – let us not forget – **it is culture that makes our lives worth living.**

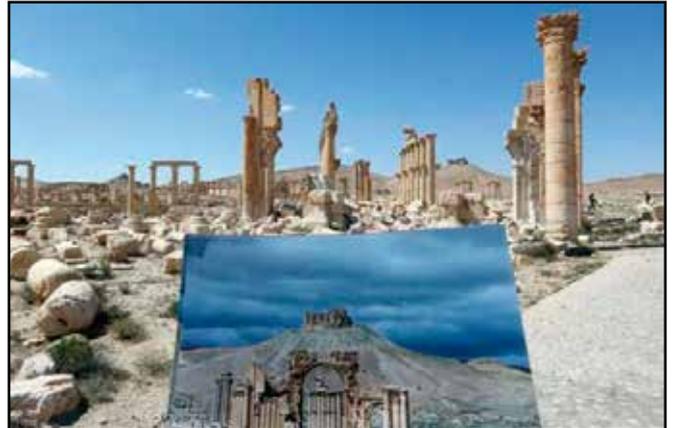
World leaders must demonstrate political will and leadership on all of this. And we, the citizens of the world, must encourage and support them to do so. As President of Europa Nostra, and as an artist, I urge everyone – institutions and civil society alike – to work stronger and closer together.

I see our shared task as a grand global *opera*. As you know 'opera' means work, both in the sense of the labour done and the result produced! We indeed have to work hard, again and again, until we get it right. We may play out of tune, we may hit a wrong note or get the timing wrong. Once we understand the different rhythms, melodies and timbres, we will find harmony in all our different voices, but if one voice is silenced, that harmony will be lost.

I once said that music is the *voice* of hope. To that I would add today that cultural heritage is the *face* of hope, the record of our shared endeavours to leave behind something beautiful, something meaningful – to construct a bridge from the past to the future which also enriches the present along the way. That bridge, that common theme of our world *opera*, is our cultural heritage.

It is our *human right* to protect and preserve it, to access it and enjoy it and to transmit it to our children and grandchildren. Today, these rights cannot be taken for granted and require our collective, vigorous defence.

This is a duty for humankind as a whole and for each and every one of us!



Destroyed cultural heritage sites in the ancient city of Palmyra



One of the monumental Buddhas of Bamiyan destroyed by dynamite over several weeks starting on 2 March 2001



The Malta Postal Museum

Lara Bugeja
Curator

It is fair to say that Malta's postal services really started in the 16th century during the period of the Knights in Malta. They were exceptional administrators, maintaining communications with Sicily, Naples and Rome and with cities further afield such as Marseilles, Paris, Vienna and London. The carriage of mail was handled by the masters of small sailing ships called *speronara*, that were based in the areas around the Three Cities and Valletta. These ships would stop first in Pozzallo, followed by Syracuse and then Palermo and the mail service was also supported by an efficient system of mounted couriers.

It seems fitting, therefore, that Malta's newest museum, the Malta Postal Museum (MPM) is located in the heart of the capital – *Città Umilissima* – which has for a long time been Malta's main point of entrance and exit, the centre of the Island.

The MPM probably started life as a grand, Baroque building in the heart of Valletta. Like most of its neighbours it suffered heavy bombing during the war years but was rebuilt in 1947. It housed a number of families until its purchase in 2011 by MaltaPost. Renovation work started in 2014 and today we can say that the building itself is a successful marriage of old and new – the recent restoration respects the original architecture but incorporates cutting-edge technology and interactive displays.



View of the Malta Postal Museum interior





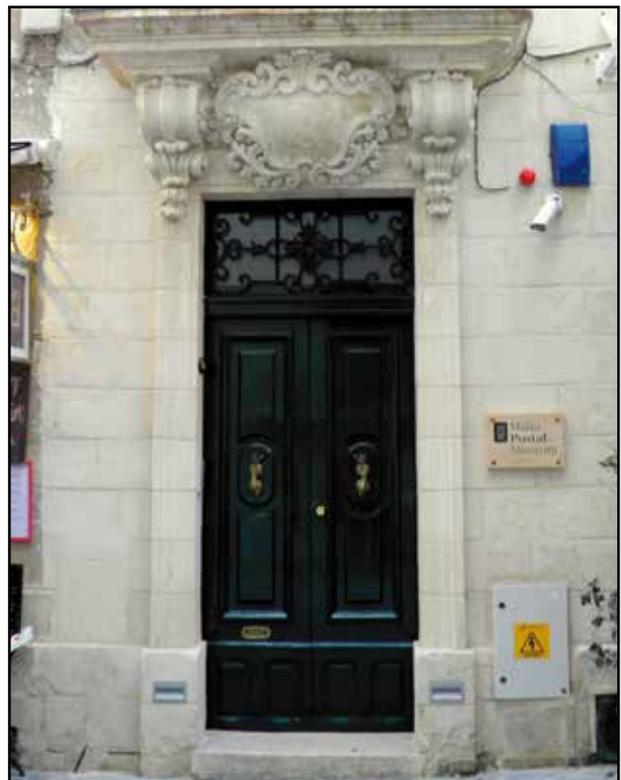
Diorama of an authentic post office complete with authentic customer counter

The facade of the Malta Postal Museum

The MPM emphasises MaltaPost's commitment to corporate social responsibility through its positive impact on the heritage scene. It shares the legacy of our postal heritage and tells us how the postal service shaped our nation. More often than not, the work of postal services is overlooked because it is simply there, it works, it is ingrained in our daily routine. In the past, people knew their postman – he was often invited into homes and asked to read letters to illiterate recipients – but today, the postal service has become somewhat anonymous. What the MPM hopes to do is remind us of the important historical role played by the post as well as the personal stories that would otherwise have been relegated to a distant, possibly forgotten memory.

The museum's collection has been brought together over a number of years. The focus is on stamps, but also on our rich and interesting postal history. Through a careful selection of documents, artefacts, interpretation and a judicious use of technology, the MPM offers an enlightening history of the development of Malta's postal service – from its inception when letters were transported by horseback and ship – to the turbulent war years.

Star exhibits include an early letter dating back to August 1576 – the third earliest recorded letter from Malta, the contents of which mention the liberation of French knights captured by Turks in a naval skirmish. There is also the rare but well-known 1798 cover with the MALTE hand-stamp, otherwise known as the *Loaf of Bread*, written by a soldier in Napoleon's army garrisoned in Valletta, as well as two letters dating back to 1799 and 1803 written by Horatio, Lord Nelson to Sir John Acton and Major-General William Villettes.



The temporary gallery spaces currently show two exhibitions. One is a collection of 13 black and white photographs shot by Richard Ellis – that acute observer of late 19th century Malta. The photographs relate exclusively to the *Palazzo Parisio*, the then GPO, and illustrate the sorting and parcel offices as well as the front of house. A second, larger gallery is showing a marvellous collection of original artworks by Maltese artist Emvin Cremona. These are just a sample of 22 years of collaboration with the Department of Posts, for which Cremona produced over 170 original designs for 62 sets of stamps. An accomplished self-portrait has also been loaned by one of his daughters for the duration of the exhibition.

Visitors will be able to immerse themselves into Malta's rich history. A diorama of an authentic post office illustrates the 'behind the scenes' activity of a busy sorting room. A shiny, larger-than-life motorcycle dominates the upper floor, together with a superb example of a postman's uniform from the 1920s, on loan from a private collector. A 14-minute documentary on the history of *Postal Services in Malta* can be viewed every half hour, together with five shorter audio visuals on various topics. Of course, stamps, letters and covers abound and inform the public on such diverse aspects as trade, politics, love and war.

The museum spaces are extremely versatile and have already hosted a book launch, experimental, immersive theatre and even astronomy sessions on the roof-top terrace. As a cultural hub, artists, actors and musicians are encouraged to make use of the space. Valletta's cultural scene has grown to be a vibrant and attractive feature and the city attracts a steady stream of visitors from different walks of life. The MPM is plugging into this and will be hosting a number of new and innovative events, collaborating with entities to bring Valletta to life. This approach fits into the wider concept of the museum not only serving as a postal museum but also as an arts hub and a venue where culture in its widest definition can be enjoyed.



The larger- than-life motorcycle at the upper floor

Like all museums, the MPM functions to serve society at large and should be a place of noise and enjoyment. Our exciting education programme marries parts of our collection to aspects of the national curriculum. This was piloted over the summer recess and was launched in October to specific age groups with surprising results. By the end of December, the MPM will have played host to well over 600 primary school students. The visits are fundamentally educational but hugely entertaining and interactive: children design their own stamps, dress up as postmen and march through the museum holding their activity sheets. It is very gratifying to see such curiosity and interest.

With Christmas just around the corner, special children's sessions include writing letters to Santa Claus and a stimulating and fun treasure hunt not just for children but also for parents. Anyone can dress up in our festive props and pose for a sheet of personalised photos, all of which will be valid for local and overseas postage. The MPM is also promoting its stamp *découpage* workshops which will be held on three Saturday mornings in the run-up to Christmas.

Feedback from visitors has been encouraging and very positive. People are generally surprised with what they see when they arrive and there's always a sense of "Wow – I never knew this existed!" or "Gosh, who would have thought a postal museum could be so interesting?" The reviews have been excellent and the staff are keen to maintain standards and continue the hard work.

The MPM is also a sub post-office. People can purchase stamps, send parcels and registered mail and avail themselves of a variety of other services. There is also a museum shop where art and philately come together to offer specifically designed merchandise, inspired by the legacy of the post and the museum's own collection. The museum's soft toy mascot *Peppi Pustier* is proving popular with children and can be seen on the branded products as well as in a newly-published comic.

For enquiries please telephone 2596 1750 or send an email to info@maltapostalmuseum.com

View of the Malta Postal Museum interior



The Architectural Development of the Jesuit Church in Valletta

Joe Azzopardi

At the origins of the Baroque architectural idiom are a series of qualities that actually originated during the Mannerist period but gained importance due to the new political scenario ushered in by the Counter-Reformation. These qualities include an emphasised communicative force, the search for dramatic effects, concern with the expression of coherent and homogeneous collective values, spatial investigation and freedom of detail design away from the rigour of classical inspiration.¹

These qualities began to be emphatically manifest in architectural projects undertaken in Rome in the third quarter of the 16th century and can be considered as a late response to the architectural achievements of Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564).²

The design of the Jesuit Church in Valletta represents the first instance in which novel late Mannerist/early Baroque architectural elements were introduced in local architecture. Through this, the Maltese architectural scenario was brought up to date with the latest architectural style of the era – an achievement due mainly to the second architect involved in the design of the church, namely Francesco Buonamici (1596-1677).

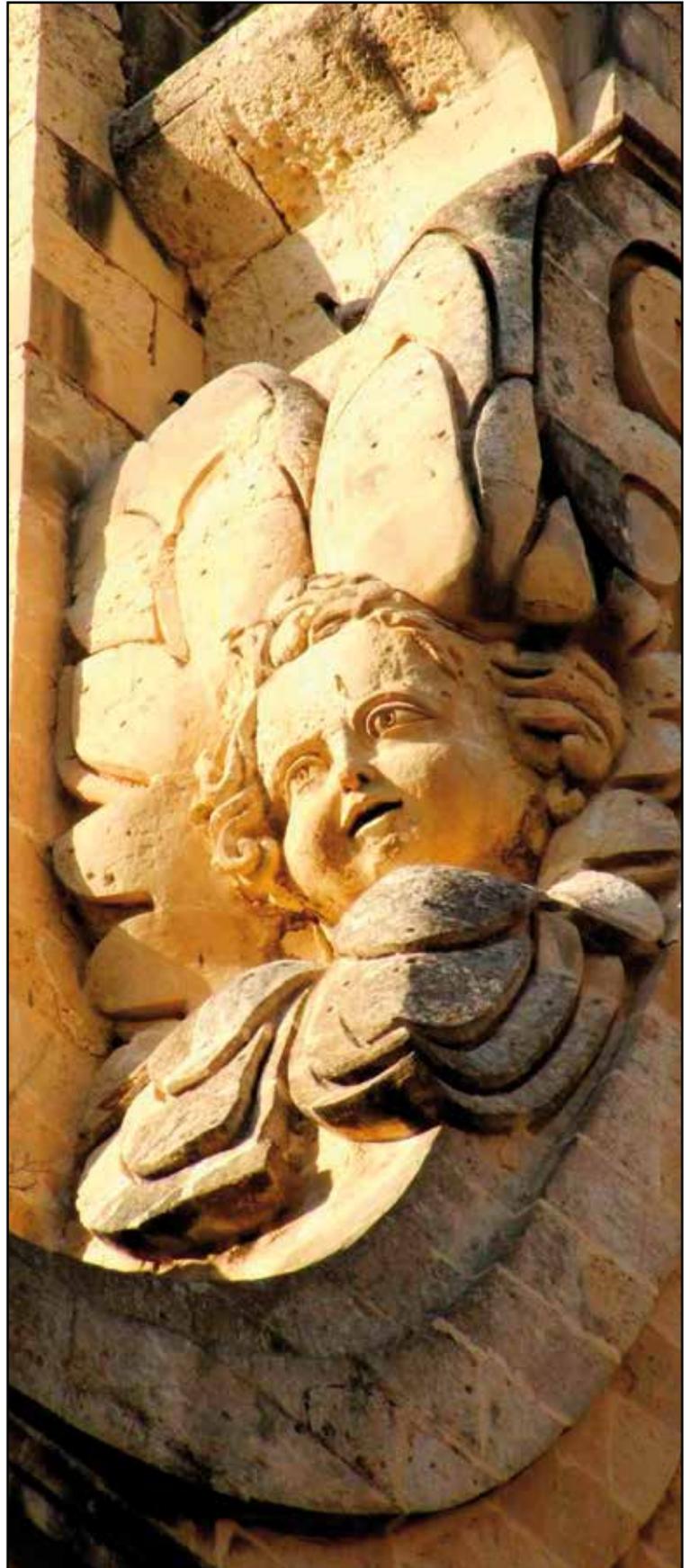
Francesco Buonamici's architectural formation

Francesco Buonamici was born in Lucca of an old respected family.³ In, or shortly after 1625 he followed in the footsteps of many artists of his time and moved to Rome which, at the time, was under the pontificate of Pope Urban VIII (Maffeo Barberini 1623-1644). It was here, in 1631, through the good offices of the noble Buonvisi family, that he obtained a commission to participate in the refurbishment work being carried out in the church of *Santa Croce dei Lucchesi e San Bonaventura*.⁴

In 1633, Buonamici was commissioned by the *Arciconfraternita del Suffragio*, in his native Lucca, to design a church to commemorate the many who had died during the plague that hit the city between 1630 and 1631.⁵ His designs for the Suffragio church (consecrated in 1646) show the influence of various Roman early Baroque buildings – the most influential being Bernini's *Santa Bibiana* (1624-1626).

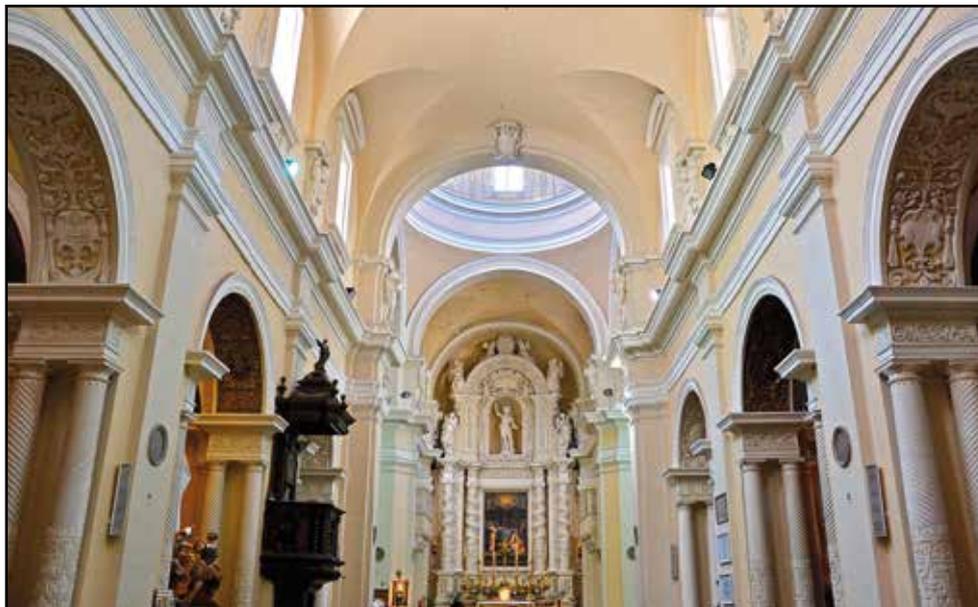
Following his return to Rome, in 1634 Buonamici was engaged by Cardinal Francesco Barberini (1597-1679) to design a set of theatrical scenes for a production of the opera *Sant' Alessio*.⁶ In the same year, he features as an *accademico* in the records of the prestigious *Accademia di San Luca*.⁷

Through his connection with the Barberini family and the Accademia di San Luca, Buonamici may have made the acquaintance of Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680), Francesco Borromini (1599-1667) and Pietro Berrettini da Cortona (1596-1669), the future protagonists of the Roman Baroque.⁸ However, at the time these had built little, so Buonamici was more heavily influenced by the late Mannerist/early Baroque architects such as Jacopo Barozzi aka il Vignola (1507-1573), Giacomo Della Porta (1540c-1602), and Carlo Maderno (1556-1629).



Detail of the façade of the Jesuit Church, Valletta

*Interior of the
Jesuit Church, Valletta*



*The church
Del Suffragio,
Lucca*

Francesco Buonamici in Malta

Through Cardinal Francesco Barberini, who was at the time Cardinal Protector of the Knights of St John, Buonamici came into contact with military engineer Count Pietro Paolo Floriani (1585-1638), in the retinue of whom he came to Malta in 1635.⁹ The request for a renowned military engineer to be sent to Malta was made by Grand Master Antoine de Paule (1623-1636). Floriani was singled out to come to Malta in view of his friendship with Fabio Chigi (1599-1667), the Papal Legate to Malta and future pontiff Alexander VII (1655-1667).

So Francesco Buonamici joined the ranks of foreign architects who settled in Malta for an extended period and who brought to this island, at the periphery of Europe, the latest architectural ideas and styles. Buonamici can, in fact, be credited with introducing various elements of the nascent International Baroque style to Malta directly derived from his experience in the cradle of the Baroque, Rome.

Buonamici's first period in Malta seems to have been characterised by some difficulties. These were, however, overcome particularly through

the high esteem in which he was held by Cardinal Barberini, which is evident from the latter's efforts on his behalf. In fact in 1637 Barberini corresponded with Fabio Chigi asking him to intervene with Grand Master Jean Paul Lascaris Castellar (1636-1657) so that Buonamici would be paid his salary, notwithstanding some problems which had developed in some warehouses built by him. Barberini also asked Chigi to take Buonamici under his protection.¹⁰

Francesco Buonamici and the Valletta Jesuit Church

In the same year, 1637, Buonamici was commissioned to work on the Jesuit church in Valletta by the Rector of the Jesuits, Fr Tagliava. In 1634, the building had sustained considerable damage following the explosion of a *polverista* located close by.¹¹ Buonamici was thus commissioned to remodel the interior and create a new vault, façade and dome.

The first drawings of the Jesuit church were drawn up by the architect of this religious order, Giuseppe Valeriano (1526-1596) with the possible involvement of Tommaso Blandino (1585-1628).¹²

*The dome of the
Jesuit Church, Valletta.
photo Kenneth Cauchi*





The plan is based on the model of the mother church of the Jesuit Order, the *Chiesa del Gesù* (1568-1584) in Rome designed by Vignola with architectural details by the Jesuit architect Giovanni Tristano (?-1571).¹³ However, the construction of the crossing, dome and apse is the work of Giacomo Della Porta, as is the design of the façade.¹⁴ Vignola probably followed an earlier design by Michelangelo Buonarroti that combined the central plan favoured during the Renaissance with the longitudinal scheme popular in the Middle Ages. This was in response to the new necessities imposed by the Counter Reformation and the Council of Trent.¹⁵

It is to be noted that many architectural projects undertaken by the Jesuits feature the collaboration of architects belonging to the Order. This shows the importance which the Order attributed to such undertakings and the first-hand control that was sought in the course of building projects. This is also confirmed by the fact that, as from 1565, Rectors had to send the proposed design of a building of the Order to the Vicar General in Rome for approval.¹⁶ With the increasing popularity of the *Chiesa del Gesù*, the Roman mother-house manifested an ever-increasing tendency to consider this as the universal model to be followed in church construction. After 1580 there are recorded instances in which the Vicar General sent out sample plans for churches based on the *Chiesa del Gesù* model for the provincial houses to choose from, thus fostering a Jesuit '*modo proprio*' (own style) of ecclesiastical architecture.¹⁷

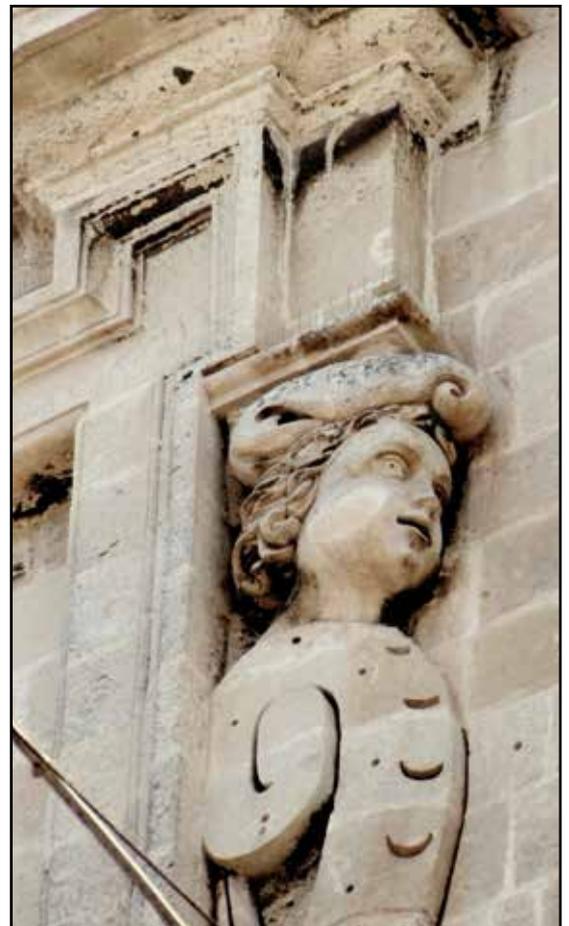
Francesco Buonamici's remodelling of the Valletta Jesuit Church

It is not clear to what extent the Valletta Jesuit church had been finished before the 1634 explosion, or what designs had been prepared. It is understood that the body of the church was in place and has been largely retained up to the main cornice.

The roof, which had probably sustained considerable damage, was dismantled.¹⁸ This gave Buonamici the opportunity to introduce to Malta a distinctive feature being used in Rome during that period – the attic band. It enabled him to add the lunettes pierced by large windows which flood the nave with light. The emphatically sculptural, and bulky, decorative details of the vault featuring garlands and scrolls are typically Mannerist, as are the angel/caryatids of the attic band, the massing of which is derived from upside-down *mensole* (corbels), a feature much favoured by Michelangelo.

It is also very probable that Buonamici introduced the series of paired columns and the overlying entablature that flank the openings of the side chapels. These stand free from the main piers supporting the vault and are richly carved and highly decorative, with the exception of the ones closer to the transept that feature plain Doric columns with an entablature comprised of triglyphs. These possibly show the original Buonamici design which was later 'enriched' with carved motifs.

*This page
Details of the façade
of the Jesuit Church, Valletta*



The crossing supports an elegant drum covered by a dome that rises prominently as never before seen in Malta.¹⁹ The octagonal drum rises from a circular cornice and each of the eight sections is separated by paired pilasters topped by composite capitals between which falls a garland. Each section accommodates a flat-lintel window surrounded by decorative frames with Mannerist motifs complementing those on the vault. The drum is once again crowned by a circular cornice from which springs the dome, culminating in a blocked oculus.

On the exterior of the drum, the window alcoves have a segmented top and are framed by ornamental panelling. The drum is crowned by a cornice, the outline of which extends and contracts following the plan of the underlying nave, transepts and choir. Each corner of the octagonal drum cornice is supported by a central large corbel and a pair of smaller corbels on each side. From the cornice rise three decreasing round-tipped circular steps which provide buttressing against the outward thrust at the base of the dome.

The dome is covered with impermeable *deffun*, being one of the few domes retaining this original feature and the resulting reddish-brown colour that formerly constituted the chromatic finish of most domes in Malta.²⁰ Corresponding to the *oculo* of the dome is a carved masonry base featuring the bases for eight pilasters, and buttressing volutes. This indicates that, even if it was never actually built, or was subsequently demolished, a lantern was intended to crown the dome.²¹

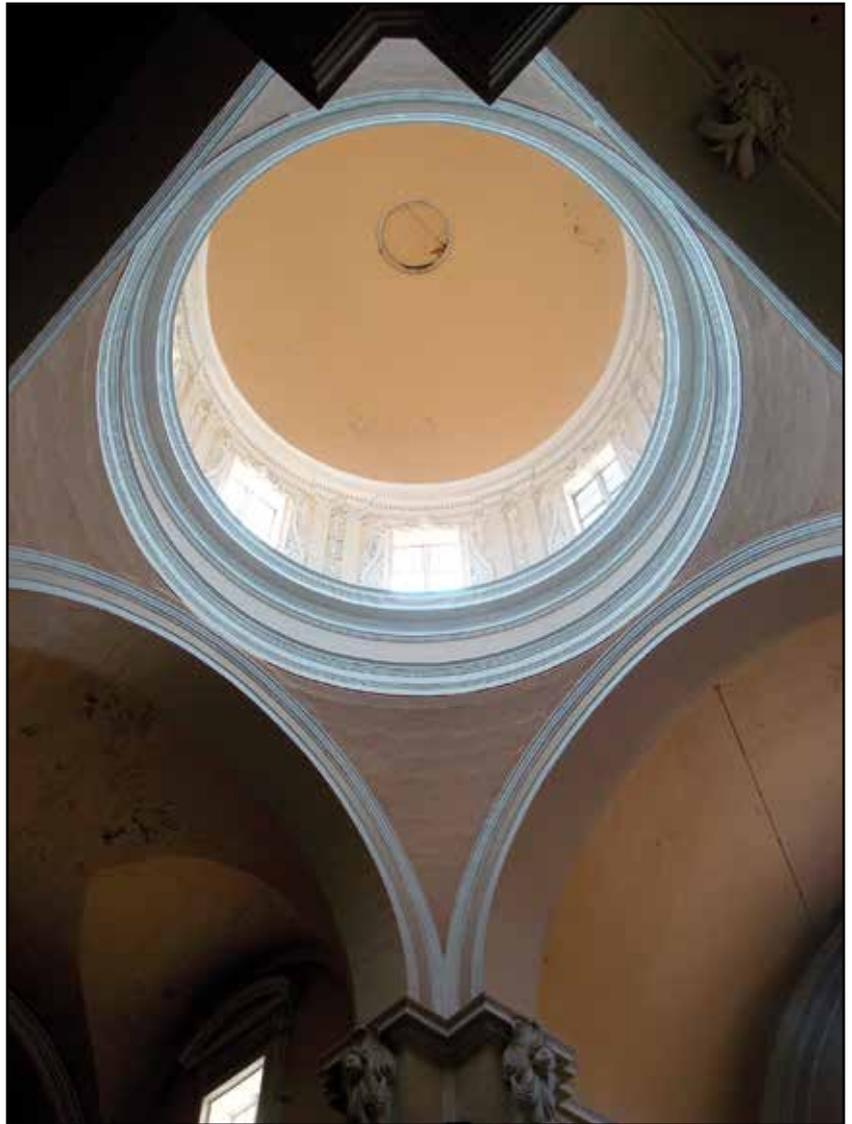
In a letter addressed to Floriani on 26 January 1637, Buonamici states that he had concluded the design for the dome of the Jesuit church. On 4 July of the same year he wrote again to Floriani informing him that the work on the church was progressing well.²²

Francesco Buonamici's façade

Following an interruption in the work, in 1647 the building of the façade was undertaken with a financial contribution of 200 *aurei* from Grand Master Lascaris Castellar.²³ The façade is characterised by a prominently vertical two-level central bay flanked by lower lateral bays. The central bay is linked to the lateral ones by concave scrolls on which rest monumental angel-heads, with heavily stylised wings, closely related to the ones on the vault. The downward and lateral visual sweep of the scrolls is halted by masonry bases, featuring hanging-drapes carved motifs, over which an ornamental element was once located.

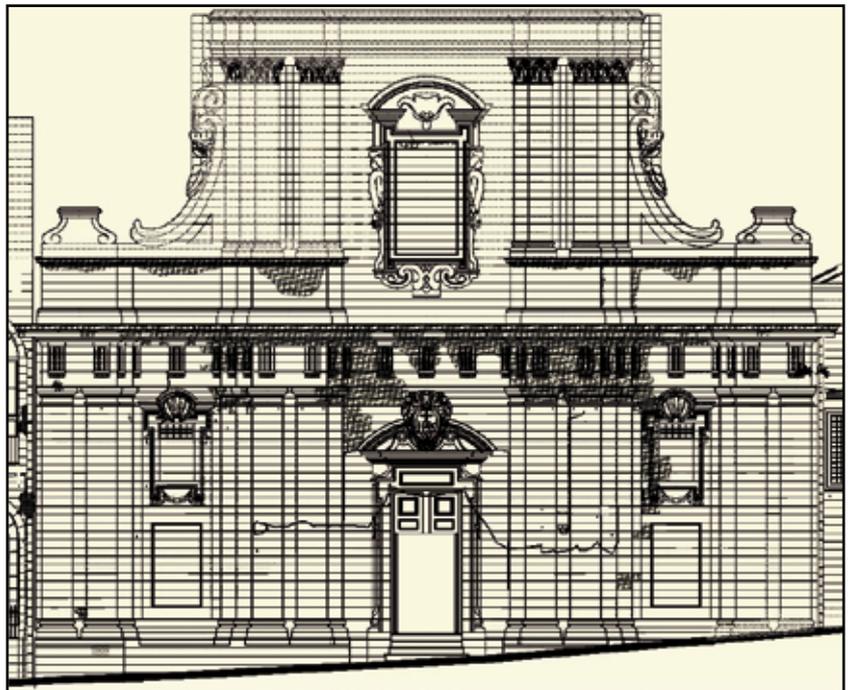
The central two-level section is extended towards the street by half pilasters that engage the surrounding area in a continuous dialogue. This vertical and forward movement is in contrast to and balanced by the strict horizontal rhythm created by the heavy paired Tuscan Doric pilasters which articulate the lower level, giving weight and *gravitas* to the façade. These rise on a discreet stylobate²⁴ which is now partly hidden behind the thickness of the pavement.

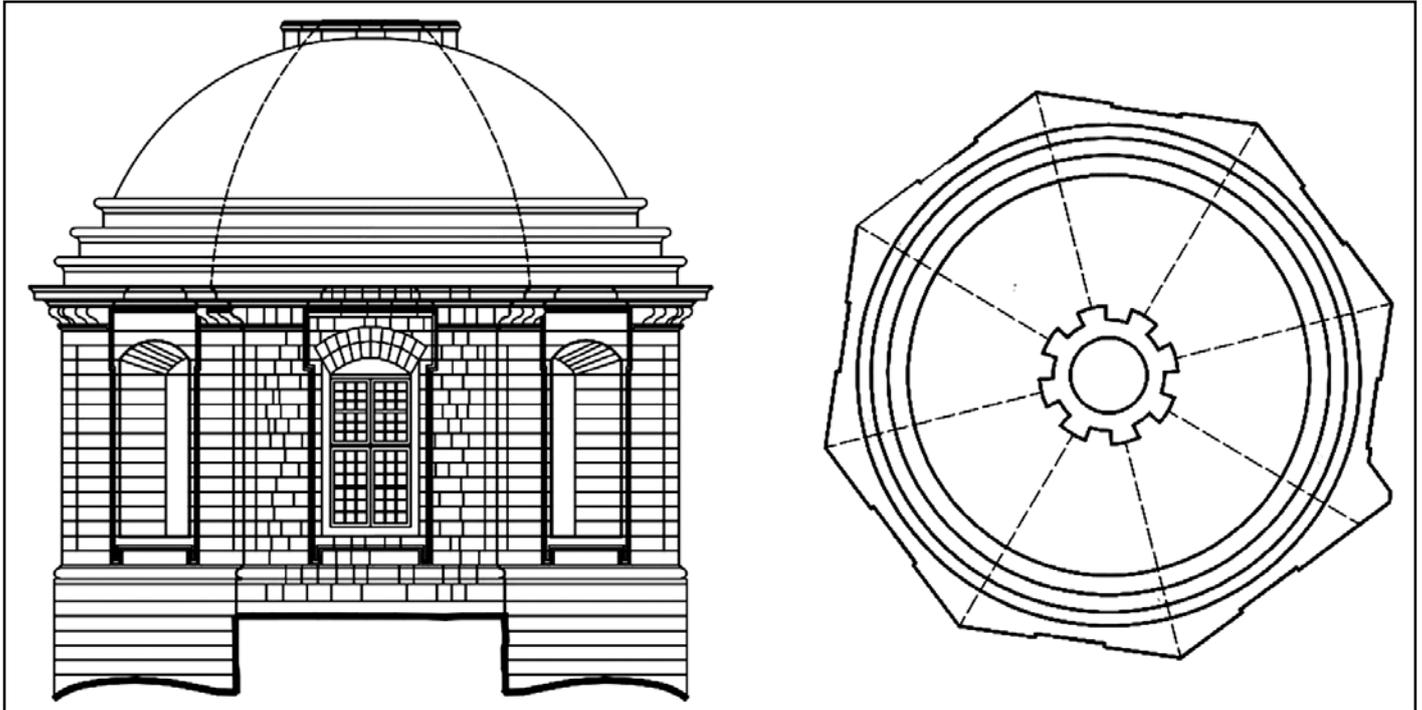
The sense of weight and stability is further reinforced by the overpowering Doric entablature



*The crossing and drum of the dome.
photo Kenneth Cauchi*

Drawing of the façade





Plan and elevation
of the dome

which follows in outline the rhythm set by the pilasters. Here, the refinement and academic training of Buonamici becomes apparent in the addition of *lotuli* (patterns on the base of the entablature). Over the entablature rises an attic band that functions as a base for the paired Corinthian pilasters of the second level. The central section houses a large – now blocked – window with a broken segmental pediment and a carved frame featuring angel/caryatids in profile. This particular element is very similar to the one designed by Vignola for the proposed façade of the *Chiesa del Gesù*, for which the Della Porta one was preferred.

In a somewhat laboured conjecture, Leonard Mahony investigates the possibility that, for the façade, Buonamici might have been inspired by an earlier design created by Valeriano that followed Valeriano's design for the church of *Santissimi Andrea e Ambrogio*, aka *il Gesù*, in Genova.²⁵ However, Buonamici was also probably inspired by some Roman churches, foremost amongst which is *Santa Susanna* by Maderno (1597-1603) and includes Giovanni Battista Soria's (1581-1651) *Santa Maria della Vittoria* (1625-1635)²⁶

The upper part of the façade does not appear to have been completed. It would appear that the upper part of the façade was not completed, and without documentary evidence it is impossible to know what Buonamici's intentions were for this area. Some other churches that might give an indication as to what was intended are the same *Santa Susanna*, Buonamici's own *Suffragio* church in Lucca, and *San Antonio dei Portoghesi* (started 1638) by Martino Longhi the Younger (1602–1660).

Conclusion

Francesco Buonamici's project for the Jesuit church in Valletta marks a turning point in Maltese architecture. It is at this juncture that the late Renaissance style prevailing on the Island was superseded by the late Mannerist/early Baroque then prevalent in Rome. Buonamici brought the local architectural idiom up-to-date and the style he introduced would spread by the work of his local followers such as Francesco Sammut (c1611-1666), Lorenzo Gafà (1639-1703) and Giovanni Barbara (1642 -1728).

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Malta's First Inhabitants

Dr Andy Welsh

It is assumed that the first people to live on these islands were the Temple People, or their immediate predecessors, arriving as farmers from Sicily in about 5200 BC.¹ This assumption is based on archaeological finds of traces of habitation and artefacts (including pottery of Sicilian pattern) from about that date, and the fact that Sicily is the nearest large landmass – being 80 kilometres from Gozo and just visible to the naked eye on a clear day – and, in fact, the only feasible sea journey at that time.

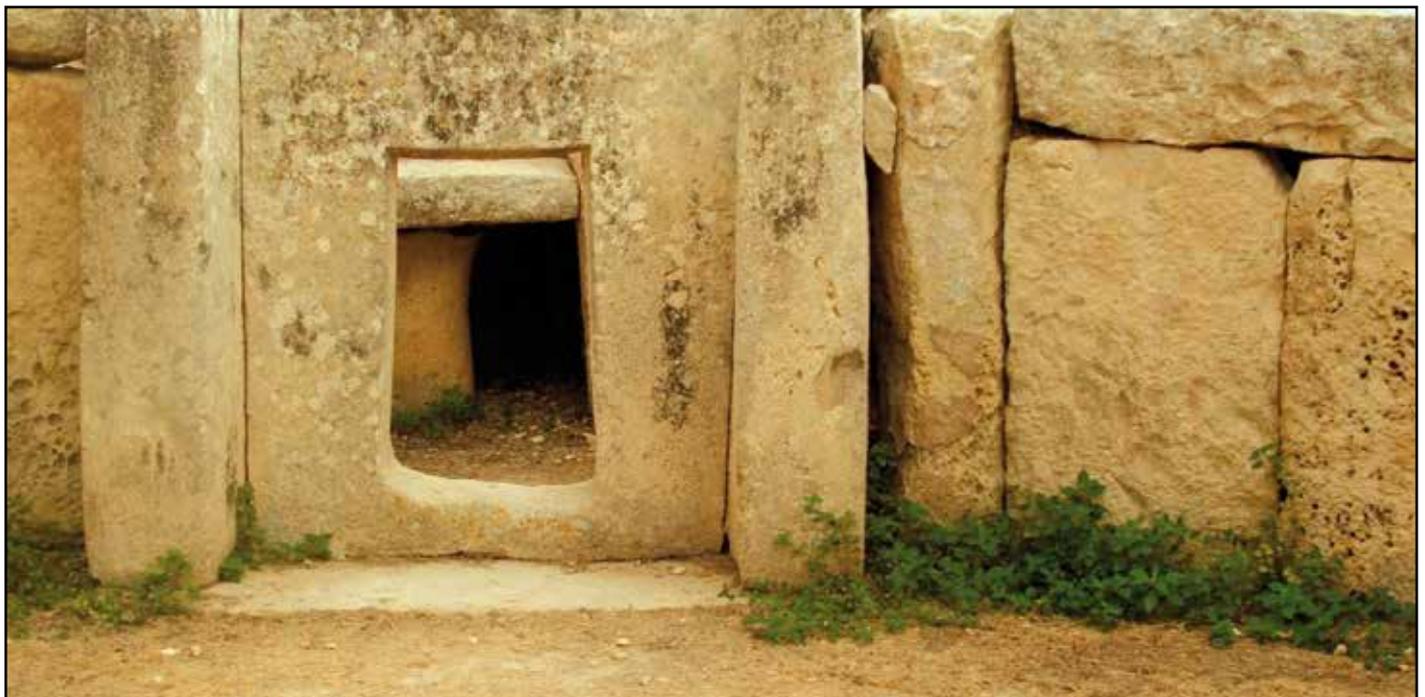
I recently had an opportunity to do some exploring on the southern coast of Sicily, courtesy of an excellent expedition organised by the Archaeological Society Malta, and I began to wonder about the logistics of the colonisation of Malta from Sicily. For some years I was a farmer, and I tried to look at the situation from a farmer's point of view. Sicily is a large and fertile island, whereas one imagines Malta at the time to be a small and rocky island, covered with small trees and scrubs.² To sail across in small boats would be a major task.

It would be necessary to have scouted Malta in advance and to have prepared animal pens with fodder and water. Animals could not have been turned out to forage for themselves or they would never be seen again, and if any were seen, they would be next to impossible to catch (and what would you do with them then?). There would need to be some sort of reception committee, perhaps lighting a signal fire to guide the boats to their destination and provide for the immediate needs of the tired and famished sailors after what might have been 15 hours or more on the open sea.

We do not know what boats were used – small ships with oars and a sail, perhaps – but larger vessels capable of taking several tons of cargo could have been built specifically for this expedition. Recently, remains of early boats have been discovered at La Marmotta, now under Lake Bracciano, north of Rome,³ which was occupied (from dendrology dating) from 5690 BC to 5260 BC. These boats, and similarly an even earlier one, discovered in the Netherlands, were dugouts: hollowed out from the trunks of oak trees. The largest were 11 metres long and it is suggested that they may have been used in pairs, one acting as an outrigger. There was a sail as well as oars. Such unwieldy craft would have been seaworthy in good weather conditions, although imagine catching and trussing, say, two young heifers, which even then would have weighed 200 lbs each, manhandling them into the bottom of the boat and making sure they could not break their legs while struggling – a beast with a broken leg is, of course, *finito*.



*Megalithic remains
from the Temple period*



A large dugout could carry about half a ton, which would have to include a steersman and at least four rowers. At a very rough estimate, something like 20 journeys would be needed (and 19 return trips). Some pretty pressurised rowing would have been required to make landfall in daylight, particularly if sea and weather conditions deteriorated. Even hardened hands would have been a disaster after one of these journeys. In theory, the whole operation could have been carried out but, with due respect to our Neolithic ancestors – who were hardy, pioneering types, I find it difficult to envisage them putting together the organisation and resources necessary. The risks were substantial – boats being blown off-course, and then there were the usual farming problems: animal breakouts, accidents, crop failures and so on. If it was necessary to mount a colonising expedition to Malta, they would have had to try, but was it necessary?

To establish a settlement on Malta would have required breeding stocks of cattle, sheep, goats and pigs, several of each animal, tied up at the bottom of the boats – and this would mean several journeys. Tools, seeds and food would be needed, possibly poultry and, of course, at least two families to start working up a viable community. Farming and husbandry take time – animals require time to breed and grow to usable size and crops require time to grow to harvest after the initial breaking of the ground, and sowing, fencing and walling are slow and difficult jobs. They might have used caves, such as Ghar Dalam,⁴ but if these were utilised, they would have to have been ancillary to other accommodation.

One would also need cooperation in Sicily to hold and provide for the animals etc., while the several journeys were taking place, and it would have required some major organisation and resources to assemble everything needed in the first place. Few farmers would have had the surplus of animals required to release the numbers needed for what would have been a hazardous and risky enterprise – and one from which they would receive no future returns. Once the exodus had taken place, they would be unlikely to see anything coming back.

In Malta, the first years would be a struggle: by the middle of the sixth millennium BC, Malta had reduced to its present size and the climate and sea level had become similar to what they are today. Trying to farm and raise stock during a hot, dry summer would have been no joke – although not impossible. There were fish in the sea for eating, and water much of the time in the valleys and springs, and natural hazards would have been similar to those in Sicily, but to me it seems a venture that was unlikely, unviable and, surely, unnecessary. What was the big attraction in the Maltese Islands to make it worthwhile to organise such a difficult and problematic expedition over 80 kilometres or so of open sea? Persecution or exile seem unlikely possibilities, in view of the cooperation that would have been needed, and I did not see land hunger being a major factor, as Sicily is so large and fertile. Some major driving force would have been needed to make it happen.

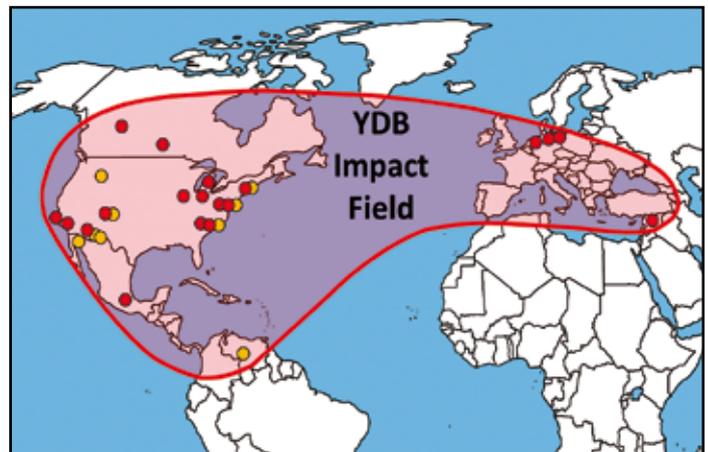
Taking everything into consideration, I wondered if there could have been an alternative scenario. At the end of the Younger Dryas, the last blip of the Ice Age, Malta was probably still connected to Sicily and Italy. The ice sheets over Europe had not melted sufficiently to bring the sea levels of the Atlantic Ocean, and therefore the Mediterranean Sea to anything like their present position. These ice sheets, which at their maximum had spread down to Northern Italy, had reduced the sea level to 100 metres lower than it is now. After the Younger Dryas, say 8000 BC⁵ there was a warm and balmy period, warmer and more stable than now and the ice would have melted away fairly quickly, but not so fast as to prevent people moving down from Sicily to Malta over land – a ‘Malta’ that would be bigger than now. Even now, we see traces of this with cart ruts that run into the sea and silos under water. It

is reasonable to expect the population to have lived mostly around the coasts and then later to have moved to higher ground as the sea level gradually rose and cut off the islands from the mainland.

I had some thoughts that I wanted to share with the readers of *Vigilo*. The possible alternative scenario then is that the landmass running down from Italy, Sicily and Malta attracted Neolithic man as warm and temperate conditions – and therefore vegetation and fauna – returned, making ideal conditions for human life. The lowest part of the peninsula-type landmass was Malta and initial settlers lived around a coast that is now under the sea, and then moved up to higher ground when the sea rose. Can this hypothesis be proved? Traces of Mesolithic habitation would be slight and mostly buried under silt around our coasts, but maybe the odd stone tool or arrowhead or settlement trace remain among the less disturbed areas to suggest how our first inhabitants may have come. All this is, of course, mere conjecture, but it seems to me a more likely story than an expedition via the sea.

As a footnote, my wife and I noted just how different Sicily is from Malta. No nice little fields with rubble walls but huge fields with concrete or steel post fencing, if any, acres of plastic-covered greenhouses and tunnels, huge agribusinesses and industrial sites. Few stone-faced buildings – all rendered and with canted roofs, covered with curved, Roman-style, tiles. There were baroque churches, but again not like ours – they were Italianate, not Maltese.

Maltese flora, figs, grapes, prickly pears, carobs, Holm oaks, etc., all grow in Sicily but, along with the trees and shrubs of Southern Europe, and in fertile profusion, it just looked different. Even the food was different, though very good indeed: another world!



Map showing the area effected by the Younger Dryas phase of the Ice Age

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Green Roofs A Sustainable Opportunity

Antoine Gatt and Vince Morris

“Habitat loss poses the greatest threat to species. The world’s forests, swamps, plains, lakes and other habitats continue to disappear as they are harvested for human consumption and cleared to make way for agriculture, housing, roads, pipelines and the other hallmarks of industrial development”. (WWF Global, 2016).

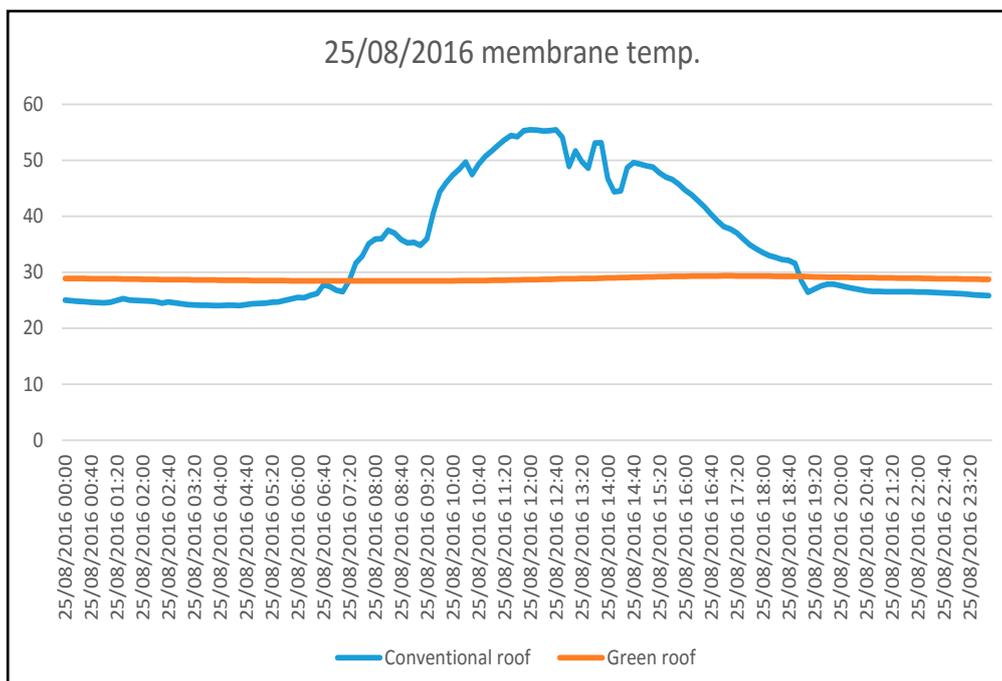
The above words are particularly relevant to Malta. Many of our habitats are in danger of increased degradation due to human interference. With the steady growth in human population, the consequences for the future could be quite dramatic. Over the past decades there has been a significant change in the way urban areas have developed. In Malta, for instance, in order to curb urban sprawl, it became the norm to replace the traditional terraced dwellings with medium-rise structures, destroying any existing green spaces there might be to increase the number of residential units within a given area. This practise is known as ‘garden-grabbing’.

The practice of garden-grabbing, and the lack of parks and other green spaces, impacts on the quality of life in towns and cities – often without our being aware of it. People have an affinity with nature and this has been-hardwired into our genes through evolution. So it is only natural that nature, or what is perceived as natural, should have a positive effect on our lives – physically, mentally and psychologically – and there is plenty of research to support this (European Environmental Agency, 2009).¹ Contact with natural areas has been found to benefit child development and heighten employee performance. Unfortunately, however, the fact that most of us live within the confines of urban areas has often brought about the notion that humans are distinct from nature, that humans and nature are two separate entities.

Ecosystem services provide those benefits which humans gain from nature and which provide the basic requirements for our existence. Some people might not realise that the link between man and nature is close. We need only imagine what would happen if bees were to become extinct. Who would pollinate the plants that provide us with food? Plants are also known to purify the air by accumulating particulate matter. They, and many other ecosystem services, are crucial to our existence and are important contributors to our well-being.

Although the standard of general health and life-expectancy in Europe has increased over the past 50 years, nevertheless there has been a fall in the quality of life for many living in urban areas. There is an increase in allergic reactions and lifestyle-related diseases. Energy consumption, transport and industry contribute to reduced air quality and the sustained growth in urban population densities is generating more noise and air pollution, impacting negatively on ecosystems and biodiversity. The long-term consequences for our quality of life are often overlooked by society as a reliance on short-term gains leads to anything but sustainability.

The inclusion of nature in urban areas is becoming increasingly vital. Policy-makers and urban design professionals are becoming more aware of the role nature has in creating sustainable urban environments. Through various documents and policies the EU has, in fact, drawn attention to the need to integrate natural processes and biodiversity into the urban environment. Documents such as the EEA Report 2/2009 provide a clear description of how a green infrastructure increases the well-being of urban dwellers and creates healthier and liveable urbanised environments.



Graph comparing the temperature of the damp proof membrane on a conventional green roof (in blue) and a green roof (in red). The substrate and plants provide a microclimate at membrane level that is more stable on a diurnal cycle



A typical view of the demonstration green roof at the Faculty for the Built Environment, University of Malta

Green roofs are today recognised as being an important addition to sustainable cities. They are not a new concept, having been around for a good many centuries. In cold northern-European countries, sod houses were commonly built to insulate the indoors from low ambient temperatures. Towards the latter half of the last century, green roof systems emerged in Germany with the expansion of large-scale projects. The technology developed proved reliable and, reassuringly, afforded protection against root damage to the integrity of the waterproof membrane covering the roof. An efficient and sophisticated irrigation system was an important element in the design to ensure reduced maintenance and greater plant survival. Over the years, green roof technology has become increasingly more reliable with an increase in scientific research revealing that green roofs have a role to play in rendering urban areas more comfortable. They have been found to insulate buildings from solar radiation, reducing the need to use air-conditioning. They also reduce flooding through storm water retention, reduce the urban heat island, act as a visual amenity and provide habitats for wildlife.

The technology has proved so beneficial that many European and American states now provide incentives and grants to encourage the use of green roofs. Germany leads the way with the largest percentage of green roofs and other countries are following suit. In October 2016, San Francisco became the first city in the US to require that certain buildings have to have a green roof installed. In July, the city of Cordoba became the first Argentinean city to incentivise green roofs and France passed new legislation to mandate the partial coverage by green roofs on all new commercial buildings.² In 2009 Toronto required green roofs on industrial and residential buildings. Green roofs in Germany have been supported and legislated for since the 1970s.

Unfortunately, in Malta, green roofs are not a popular concept as they are shrouded in misunderstanding. People claim that nothing would grow on roofs in our semi-arid climate and that they are a recipe for disaster due to the possibility of leakages. It was for this reason that the Faculty for the Built Environment at the University of Malta embarked on the LifeMedGreenRoof Project. This EU-funded project (under the LIFE+ funding body), managed by the University of Malta, is aimed at creating a baseline study on the performance of green roofs in a Mediterranean climate and the project partners include the Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority (MCCAA) and two Italian institutions, *Fondazione Minoprio* and *Minoprio Analisi e Certificazione*, both situated in the vicinity of Como. Through close collaboration between the four partners, the project has established that green roofs can be successfully constructed. Two demonstration green roofs have been created, one in Malta and the other in Italy, and they are open to the public on a daily basis. In the meantime, tests are continuing to establish the potential green roofs have to mitigate flooding and insulate the underlying rooms from solar radiation.

Over the past three years, the LifeMedGreenRoof Project has established that green roofs are able to provide feeding and breeding grounds for a myriad of beneficial insects and birds. Bees are regular visitors to the green roofs and ladybirds can be found feeding on aphids which congregate on stone crop (*Sedum sediforme*). An unpublished dissertation³ by a Master's degree student from Stirling University concluded that green roofs attract a large number of pollinators, especially when natural habitats have dried up during the summer months and there are fewer flowering plants. The most common species of pollinator is the honey bee (*apis mellifera ruttneri*), which is important for the honey industry.



Bath white butterfly (pontia daplidice) on the leaf of Jerusalem sage (phlomis fruticosa)

The green roof attracts additional species as well as pollinators, particularly those with increased mobility such as birds and insects. On the green roof at the University of Malta, various species of fauna have been recorded, including birds, hover-flies, dragonflies, spiders and the praying mantis. Other non-flying species have also been identified, such as geckoes, ants, spiders (which often use the wind for travelling) and even a chameleon. This is a clear indication of the importance of green roofs in nature conservation. Urban wildlife has suffered dramatically in recent decades, due to a change in construction methods that favour highly-finished walls and reduced green areas.

Green roofs could mitigate the effects of climate change through their ability to moderate ambient temperatures both indoors and outside. The volume of growing media on the roof provides a sufficiently large thermal mass to reduce the transfer of heat into the underlying roof slab. In addition, the humidity trapped within the substrate will absorb heat as it evaporates, resulting in the cooling effect of not only the spaces beneath the green roofs but also the ambient temperature above them. The plants that were cultivated also played a role in keeping the temperature lower, due to the fact that they require solar energy to photosynthesise and absorb the sun's energy and also cast shade on the underlying substrate. This means that the type of plants selected also has an effect on the degree of solar gain beneath the green roof. This insulation and shading effect has advantages for both the resident of the dwelling and society as a whole.

Many people will have experienced the heat that accumulates on the upper floors of buildings, usually necessitating the use of air-conditioners, which contribute to climate change as well as increased cost. Studies carried out at the University of Texas, which has a similar climate to that of Malta, show that, in the height of summer, the temperature measured in the living space beneath a green roof is 18°C lower than that beneath a conventional roof.⁴ This reduction in temperature would translate into considerable savings when calculating the reduction in energy use and carbon emissions. Experiments currently being carried out on the green roof located at the University of Malta are aiming to corroborate the findings of the studies from the University of Texas with particular reference to Malta's climate.

Most people will have also noticed the difference in ambient temperatures between urbanised areas such as Sliema and rural villages such as Dingli. This difference in temperature is caused by a phenomenon called 'the urban heat island'. Densely built-up areas have considerable swathes of hard surfaces such as buildings, roads and paths that absorb large quantities of solar energy which is eventually reflected back into the atmosphere during the cooler periods of the day. This means that urban areas have higher night time temperatures, which also translates into the increased use of air-conditioners. Plants are able to reduce ambient temperatures, so that the more vegetation there is in an urban area, the cooler the atmosphere is – resulting in a micro-climate that is more comfortable for everyone.

Three years into the LifeMedGreenRoof project, it can be said with confidence that green roofs have a role to play in our urban areas, especially if we aspire to live in a healthy modern society embracing sustainable principles. The project has not only proved that green roofs can be successfully cultivated locally but also that they can contribute towards improving our living environment and, to a certain extent, replacing the habitats that have been destroyed through urbanisation.

The LifeMedGreenRoof project is partially funded through LIFE+ which is the EU's financial instrument supporting environmental and nature conservation projects through the EU.

Find us on face book: Lifemedgreenroof Project
Website: www.lifemedgreenroof.org

Bees are regular visitors to the green roof



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Antoine Gatt is a Landscape Architect employed by the University of Malta. He currently manages the LifeMedGreenRoof Project and also lectures on green roofs, green infrastructure and landscape design at the Faculty for the Built Environment and MCAST. He has previous experience in various landscape design and habitat restoration projects both locally and abroad. His main interests include green infrastructure in urban areas, sustainable urban design, and habitat restoration. He possesses a Bachelor degree and a Master of Arts in Landscape Architecture from the University of Gloucestershire.

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The Arch-Confraternity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and its Oratory in Valletta

Mark Agius, John Farrugia and Carmel Pace

The Oratory of Our Lady of Mount Carmel has for centuries been a well-known landmark in Old Theatre Street Valletta. When one looks inside, one is immediately struck by the statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel which dominates the main altar, and also by the bust of Jesus Christ as Captive, positioned directly beneath it, and wearing the scapular of the Trinitarian Order, which used to be dedicated to the redemption of Christian slaves.

One is also struck by a unique feature, the huge number of silver ex-votos which are replicas of human body parts, which are so numerous that they are arranged in patterns in frames which adorn the pilasters and walls of the Oratory. These ex-votos give a particular atmosphere to the Oratory which is unique in Valletta and perhaps in Malta. The large number of ex-votos on the walls is evidence of the devotion of the people of our city to Our Lady under the title of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

The Oratory is the seat of the Arch-confraternity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, which is a lay organisation attached to the Sanctuary-Basilica and Monastery of the Carmelites next door, and which supports the work of the Carmelite Order in Valletta as well as promoting the scapular devotion.

The Confraternity of Our Lady of Valletta is mentioned for the first time in 1622, the last year in which Alof de Wignacourt was Grandmaster of the Order of St John. It was on 13th February of that year that the Confraternity was officially founded, and on the same day the members of the confraternity took part in a procession in Valletta for the first time.

*Maria Bambina
dressed in the style of
a noble Maltese baby*



The first oratory was composed of two rooms that were acquired from the monks by a contract which was made before Notary Ambrogio Sciberras on 10th July 1622. According to the acts of Notary Vella, on 16th May 1642 the Carmelite community assigned to the Confraternity another area near the main altar of the church which had a door opening on to Old Mint Street, for a rent of six scudi a year. Thus the Oratory was originally located in the area where the apse of the Basilica is now.

This oratory was sumptuously decorated with many works of art, including a painting of the Immaculate Conception by Francesco Zahra which can still be enjoyed in the Oratory today, two paintings by Stefano Erardi which are both in the Basilica Shrine of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, two other paintings of the school of Mattia Preti, and also the ceiling which was made out of sculptured gilded wood. Part of this ceiling was later moved to the new oratory and is located in the area which is first entered by visitors who approach the Oratory from the street.

When in 1895 the Carmelite church was raised to the dignity of a Minor Basilica, the friars asked the Brotherhood to give them their oratory in order that they could enhance the apse and build a canopy mounted on pillars over the altar, as is usual with minor basilicas. One year later an agreement was reached between the Friars and the Confraternity by which the confraternity was given in exchange a new oratory which was, in fact, a corridor of the Monastery. This is the oratory we have today.

It is recorded that some knights joined the Confraternity, such as Grand Masters including Raphael and Nicholas Cotoner, and Balis Pinto and Pappalardo. Major benefactors were the painter Giuseppe d'Arena (1712), the leading silversmith Michele Pianta (1725) and Gabriele Henin, professor of surgery and anatomy (1741).

Baron Cesare Passalaqua was also one of the greatest benefactors who are remembered to this day. In 1664 he donated to the Confraternity the exceptional necklace, known in fact as the Passalaqua Chain, which exists to this day and is worn by the statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in the Oratory. This necklace contains 28 rubies, 5 diamonds and 94 pearls.

The Confraternity has always been generous to the friars and the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Among other objects which the Confraternity have donated to the Sanctuary are the bronze Via Sagra (1852), the new damask of the

church in 1900, the silver pedestal of the statue, made in 1931 for the fiftieth anniversary of the coronation of the miraculous painting, and in 1949 the silver tabernacle that is used during the feast of the 16th July.

The Confraternity is duty bound to spread the devotion of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, so that it was at the request of the Confraternity in 1791 that the Novena began to be held before the feast.

During church ceremonies the members of the Confraternity wear a brown cassock and great scapular and a white small cape (*mozzetta*). The confraternity participates in the procession of the translation, which generally begins in the Oratory, and in the main procession of the feast of the patroness, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, on the 16th July.

Furthermore the confraternity is responsible for the altar of the Blessed Sacrament in the Sanctuary, and ensures that it is properly adorned for every necessity which occurs during the liturgical year. Therefore the confraternity has special devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and is responsible for all the liturgical utensils required by this altar. It also participates in a procession for the feast of the Sacred Heart, and used to participate in the Corpus Christi Procession which takes place from Saint John's Co-Cathedral.

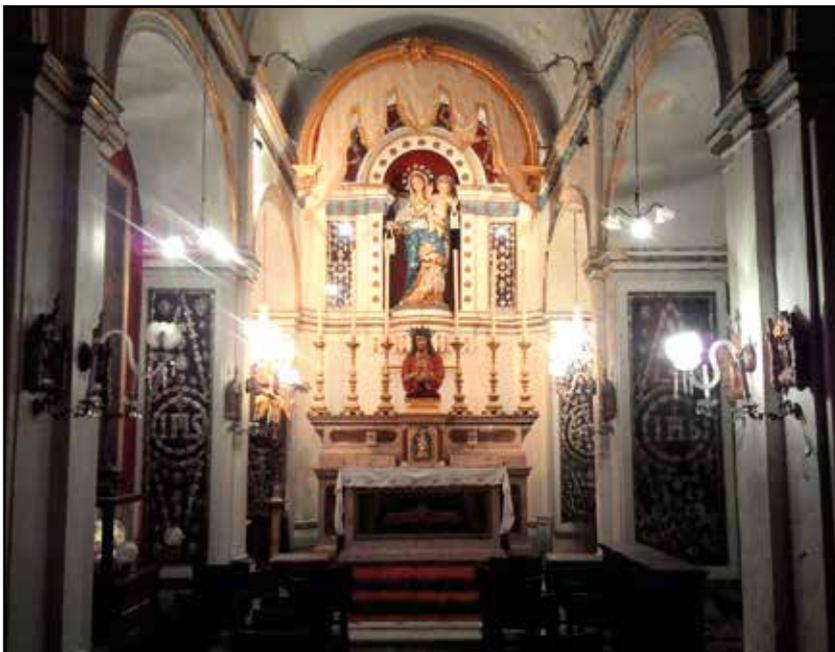
In the oratory, besides many other works of art, there is the FIRST processional statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in the Maltese Islands, going back to 1657, when it was brought from Rome and participated in the procession of the 16th July of that year. This is the statue which surmounts the altar of the Oratory. The confraternity is particularly interested at present in identifying the full provenance of this statue.

Subsequently, the Confraternity acquired another processional statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel from Naples, sculpted by Gennaro Reale. This was later given by the members to the Church and convent of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Balluta,



*Replica of the Infant
Jesus of Aracoeli*

*General view
of the Oratory*



where it is used as the processional statue today. Previously, the Confraternity had given to the Friars the church they owned in Balluta and also the land on which to build their convent. Thus the Confraternity, by helping the friars, did work which led to the development of an important parish community and so gave an important contribution to the development of the social history of the Sliema area of Malta.

The Oratory also contains other notable statuary. There is a recently restored Our Lady of Sorrows, and two very well loved and much bejewelled statues of children—a statue of the child Mary in the clothes of a child of a noble Maltese family (Cecilia Xuereb, personal communication) which is used in the feast of the birth of Our Lady and another statue of the Child Jesus which is a replica of the Infant Jesus of Aracoeli (Kenneth Zammit Tabona, personal communication), and to which there is much devotion.

Within the sacristy of the Oratory are the archives of the Confraternity, which go back to at least 1722, and seem to be in a good state of preservation. It is the intention of the Confraternity to digitalise its archive, so as to make it accessible to scholars.

However, over the past years, there has been little attention to the structural state of the oratory.

When the present Committee took office, we ordered an expert study on the state of the structure and it was evident that it had started to deteriorate. The report showed us that there are indeed serious urgent problems in the structure of the building which, if not treated quickly, will lead to further deterioration. We are very concerned that if problems are not addressed, the work of important works of art in the Oratory could be put at risk.

It is estimated that, in order to set right the damage to the structure and the decoration of the Oratory, we will in total need to plan to spend about €100,000, excluding the costs of the various permits required and VAT. This is far beyond the available assets of the Confraternity, therefore we have embarked on a campaign to raise funds to save this building which is part of the devotional and historic heritage of Malta, and in particular the City of Valletta.

We thank *Din l-Art Helwa* for the opportunity of raising awareness about the Oratory and about the work of the Confraternity. We encourage anybody who is interested in helping to contact: the Secretary, Mr John Farrugia, Oratory of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Theatre Street, Valletta, e-mail: fratellanzataalkarmnuvalletta@gmail.com.

TALK BY DR MARK AGIUS M.D.

A presentation by Dr Mark Agius on the historic, spiritual, and artistic development of the devotion to Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Malta will be delivered at the Judge Caruana Curran Hall, on Thursday April 27 2016 at 18.30.

Dr Agius teaches in the Department of Psychiatry, University of Cambridge, and is a Research Associate at Clare College Cambridge. His other interests are the history of Valletta, the history of the Carmelite Order, and Clare College Choir. He is Rector of the Archconfraternity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Valletta, where he leads on the rehabilitation of the Confraternity's Oratory. He has published widely in psychiatry and also on the History of the Carmelite Order and the Confraternity.

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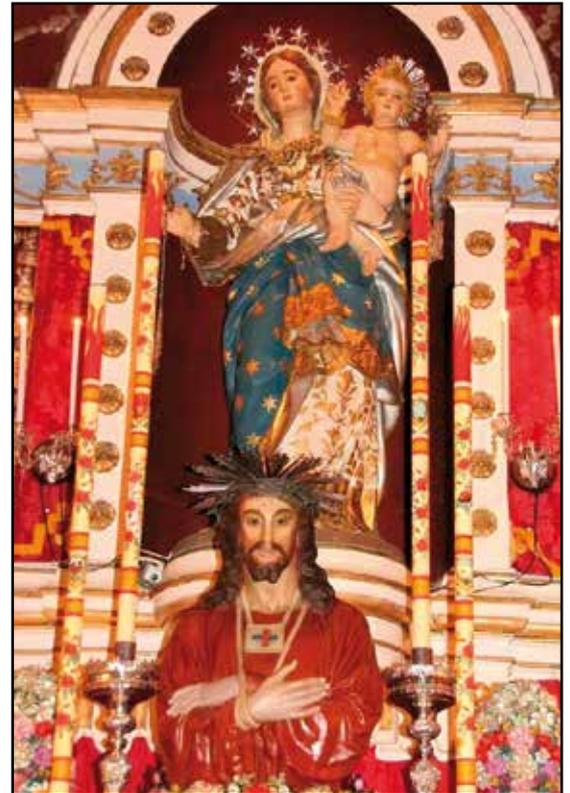
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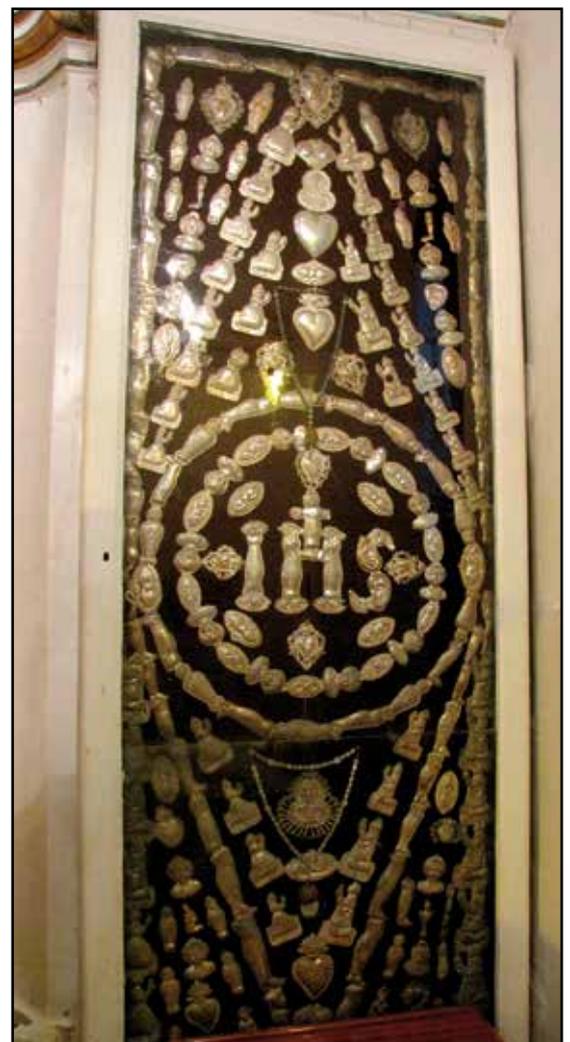
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The first processional statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Malta

Close-up of ex-votos arranged in a pattern



Letters to Vigilo

Dear Editor,

I am writing this letter to bring to the attention of Din l-Art Helwa and the readers of Vigilo, the three cannon that are currently submerged in a cave beneath Fort Ricasoli. I assume that they fell into the sea when this part of the fortification collapsed some years ago.

From what I can judge, these Armstrong muzzle loaders dating back to the turn of the 20th century, which were fired through electricity. They are the 'smaller cousins' of the 100 pound cannon at Fort Rinella.

This is the fifth year of my campaign to save these artefacts which form part of Malta's heritage and are at risk of being lost forever. I have contacted Heritage Malta and The Malta Maritime Museum about them; they expressed interest but nothing more. Two years ago, the Malta Tourism Authority informed me that there were funds available to lift these cannon within the following few months, and yet they still lie in their watery grave.

My fear is that during one of the powerful storms that are known to hit the area they might be crashed against the walls of the cave, or against each other and be irreparably damaged. There is also the risk that they might even be washed out to sea or that the fragile cave they are in might collapse and bury them forever.

I am aware that lifting the cannon, which I think could easily be achieved with a crane, would only be the first part of a restoration process, as some form of desalination treatment will surely be needed. This might take time and funds but I am sure it can be achieved. After all, cannon have been recovered from the seabed all over the world. Another option might be to lift and relocate them to somewhere less precarious in the sea. I am sure that if they were moved to a more accessible area they would make a magnificent underwater feature.

There are certainly a number of different options available but what should not – and must not – happen is that these elements of our national heritage are allowed to be lost forever. Everyone knows about them but everyone seems to forget – well, I won't let them!

Clemens Hasenschwandtner
Birgu



Heritage Publications Review

Publications for consideration
within this section
are to be forwarded to
the Editor:

Din l-Art Helwa
133 Melita Street
Valletta

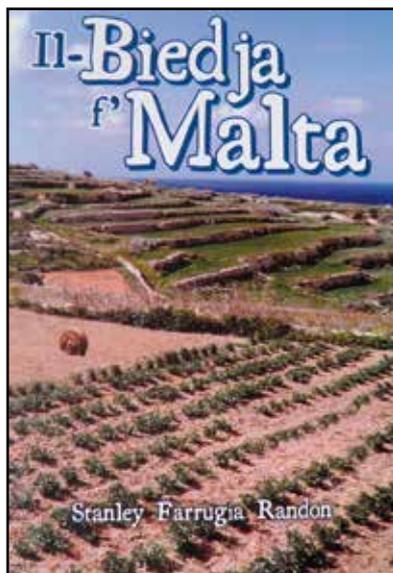
Il-Biedja f'Malta

Author – Stanley Farrugia Randon

Published by – The author

ISBN – 978-99957-1-005-7

Reviewed by Joe Azzopardi



Maltese strawberries



Agriculture is back! Following decades of industrialisation, land speculation, unbridled pollution and climate-changing irresponsibility, many people have finally realised that if our societies are to prosper we need to ensure the survival of our roots which are inextricably bound to the land we cultivate, which feeds us produce that is uniquely ours, which in turn contributes to make us who we are. Many European societies, including ours, have reconsidered the role of agriculture in their social and economic set-up. They have recognised the fundamental role that agriculture plays in maintaining a balanced and fulfilled society and its contribution to the quality of the environment, the landscape, the economy and, ultimately, life itself.

Politicians at both national and European level have discussed and legislated to provide certification of originality and uniqueness to agricultural products. In Malta, as is often the case, more needs to be done, and if the movement that seeks to protect and enhance our agriculture is to gain momentum a considerable lacuna needs to be filled. Many more members of our society need to be made aware that agriculture is much more than the rows of fruit and vegetables we see on display in various selling points.

This publication casts a fond eye on Maltese agriculture and is intended to provide concise and precise information about many aspects of this sector. This can go a long way towards filling the educational lacuna which affects our perception of agriculture. This educational purpose is manifest in the layout of the book, which is intended to allow ease of reference. Just going through the titles of the various sections is enough to engage the attention of the reader. The glossary of words and terms is a mine of information, listing not only the produce but all the ancillary world of tools, weights and measures, techniques and crafts.

The first section is a rollercoaster ride through 10,000 years of agriculture, from prehistory to the present day. It highlights the momentous change in humanity's evolution when people began settling in defined geographical areas, cultivating the land to provide their own food instead of gathering what nature provided and hunting animals.

This fascinating tale takes the reader through the Temple Period, the succession of conquerors who ruled over Malta, the establishment of an Agriculture Department in 1919-20 and the two World Wars. Throughout history, agriculture has played a fundamental role in bringing us to where we are today and will doubtless continue evolving into the future.

Two particular sections focus on what have – at different points in our history – been the most significant agricultural crops: cotton and olives. Cotton in particular was, for a considerable period, far more significant than we can ever imagine. It was one of the principal contributors to Malta's economy. Exported in large quantities it was a product that carried – and gave fame and lustre to – the name of our small island. Maltese cotton was a recognised quality brand and in a world without government welfare, it provided the means for many people to rise above the poverty line. This was particularly true for women who, apart from poverty, had to contend with a male-dominated society that allowed them very few ways of asserting themselves and making a living outside the strict social boundaries by which they were constrained. For many, cotton was a means of providing not only sustenance but also a degree of emancipation and the tax on cotton even contributed to the upkeep of the fortifications of Mdina.

Although most of us may not have even be aware of it, this publication has filled a gap in the volumes on Melitensia. It makes us look with fresh interest to our agricultural past and to realise how crops and farmers, produce and cultivation, have contributed to mould us as a unique country and people. From the sociological perspective, it puts agriculture on a par with the Maltese language and as such it should be studied, respected and promoted with the same care and attention we dedicate to our native tongue.

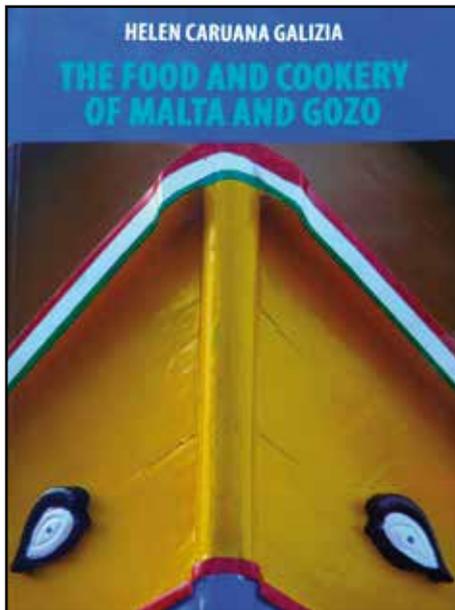
The food and cookery of Malta and Gozo

Author – Helen Caruana Galizia

Published by – Midsea Books

ISBN – 978-99932-7-557-2

Reviewed by Joe Azzopardi



There are few things that bring to mind the image of a country as rapidly as its food. Although, like most things nowadays, food has become international, spaghetti and pizza will always evoke Italy, fish and chips will always be English, yoghurt will always be Greek and *foie gras* French. Food may well be considered the identification card of a country.

It is in this perspective that food acquires a high cultural value. In the same way that the visual arts, architecture, landscape and even the language are the embodiment of a nation, so is its traditional food. This is because a country's food is the direct result of the particular environment, available raw materials and accumulated experiences of the people who inhabit it. Furthermore, due to its universal appeal, traditional food is often an experience shared by everyone in a particular country. It has a direct appeal, bolstered by childhood memories of one's family, particularly in the Mediterranean region, where conviviality served around a table is a way of life.

This might in part account for the sheer joy which leafing through this book has brought me. The senses are assailed – mostly through the photographs of Darrin Zammit Lupi – by a spectacle of colours and shapes. Single words such as *kawlata*, *stuffat*, *ravjul*, *fenkata* and *mqaret* jump out from the page and evoke a whole host of sentiments. It is a feast for the senses and a joy for the heart.

The reader will soon discover, and with pleasure, that this is no mere recipe book to be occasionally consulted and soon forgotten. It is a book to be read – and such reading will quickly demonstrate the depth of the author's knowledge and the painstaking research she has devoted to these pages. One adjective which can certainly be applied to this publication is 'exhaustive'. As the title implies, it takes the reader through every aspect of its subject – touching on oral tradition, history, social issues and global politics.

Away from any romanticised view of history, the text deals with some fundamental issues which are as current today as they were in the past. It is rooted in a context where food is not considered a guilty pleasure but the basis of a family's economy. Between its lines is a silent rebuke at the current degree of food wastage which characterises modern economies, and some effective lessons on how to achieve more with less. It gives well-founded and sensible hints on how our society can approach solutions to issues which risk becoming nothing more than buzz words such as 'ecology', 'sustainability', 'viability', 'fair distribution' and 'health promotion'. It brings back to the forefront a time when food was something not to be taken for granted, rather than a temptation to be scorned and avoided.

When it comes to fish, it lists well over a hundred types that can be consumed apart from the dozen or so that are universally offered for sale. This variety can do nothing but counteract the inconsiderate consumption of these few species which are fast disappearing in the wild or being farmed beyond any form of environmental sustainability.

And if any further confirmation was needed to underline the point that food is a fundamental aspect of our culture, we need only remember that, in 2013, UNESCO included the 'Mediterranean diet' in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Among the aspects referred to in its citation, UNESCO stated that the Mediterranean diet involves a set of skills, knowledge, rituals, symbols and traditions concerning crops, harvesting, fishing, and animal husbandry. Furthermore, it was seen as emphasising the values of hospitality, neighbourliness, intercultural dialogue and creativity, and a way of life guided by a respect for diversity.

This publication encompasses and celebrates all these aspects and, even if indirectly, poses a fundamental cultural question: "Can a society improve itself through its food choices?" Even more importantly, it provides a straight answer, well supported by facts: "Yes, it can"!





Tattooist Tony Psaila, known as 'Zalzettu'

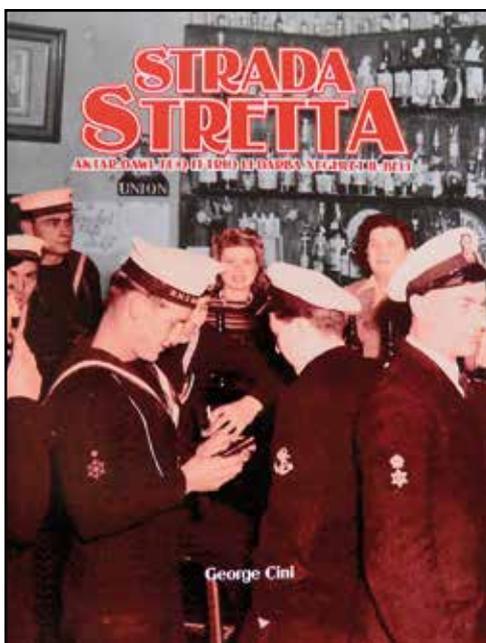
Strada Stretta – Iktar dawl fuq it-triq li darba xeghlet il-Belt

Author – George Cini

Published by – The author

ISBN – 978-99957-0-869-6

Reviewed by Joe Azzopardi



The few tens of metres in front of the couple of bars that have re-opened in Strait Street (Strada Stretta) can be a challenge to walk through on a busy weekend evening. You are likely to bump into people and objects that impede you from making any progress. It is possibly the closest we can get to evoke the atmosphere of the street in its peak years. Yet it is but a very pale impression compared to the hive of activity, legal or otherwise, which the whole of Strait Street used to witness at the apex of its popularity.

However, author George Cini once again comes to our rescue and opens up yet another window on that lost world. It was obvious that the space enclosed between the covers of his first book was too limited to contain an exhaustive description of the pulsating life which characterised Strait Street. From the first book Cini maintains his reference to light but after the first few pages of this second book, the horrendous truth that the darkness of far-away wars brought economic prosperity to Malta strikes the reader. The darker the conflict, the brighter the light, for it was the extent of the British garrison stationed in Malta, and the frequent passage of predominantly battleships, which brought a constant flow of clients seeking the services on offer in Strait Street.

Perhaps more successfully than before, Cini brings back the smoky atmosphere, low lights, and rowdy sounds of tinkling glass, music and unintelligible voices, the quickened pulse of lives fouled by alcohol and violently manifest in debauchery and bar fights, the allure of tattooing, gambling and sexual pleasure.

Cini achieves this – and here lies the great appeal of this book – through interviews with people who lived the phenomenon that was Strait Street. He carries out a socio-historic salvage operation, recording for posterity the words, thoughts, impressions and recollections of those who lived through that particular historic moment in time. The author's main job was to gain the trust of those he interviewed and encourage them to relate the details of their daily life. This is not an author's nostalgic reminiscences of earlier times, and far less is it a romanticised interpretation of recent history. It is not the product of archival research mediated by the interpretations of someone looking into the past to extrapolate meanings and interpretations. These interviews are the summing-up of lives that are coming to an end, lives that have been formed and transformed through their involvement with Strait Street.

Thinking about it, the author's approach is the only viable way of capturing the *spirit* of Strait Street. This is because what Strait Street was is not its buildings, or the few signs, shop fronts or interiors which have survived. Strait Street was about what some people sought and others were prepared to provide. It was about catering to the raw needs and instincts of those seekers and the fight for survival and emancipation lived every day by those who, in many cases, saw the fulfilling of these needs as the only way forward. For some, however, it was also a cocoon of freedom and self-affirmation in a puritanical and often claustrophobic society.

And it was also about money. Considerable amounts of money circulated in Strait Street. The notorious barmaids, who included a number of transvestites, carved for themselves a role which, in a night, earned them more than women in more conventional employment would earn in three months. The word 'barmaid' is too easily equated with 'prostitute' but in their role as barmaids, women did not necessarily offer sexual services. Many of them were, in fact, strong-willed women who, from nothing and in a frankly hostile society, carved out for themselves a lucrative trade. The choice many of them made between a steady wage and a more profitable commission is an indication of the entrepreneurial spirit and self-assurance of these women.

Quite a lot of space and ink is dedicated to present-day Strait Street as being an incubator of musical talent, featuring musicians who began their careers entertaining the crowds in various bars. It offered musicians what is still a rare occasion in Malta for an artist – the chance to practise his art and earn considerably from it – up to ten times a normal salary between wage and tips.

Along with the words, this is also a story told by pictures, a story rendered authentic by the expressions staring out at an unknown future on innumerable faces. But the most interesting images come from the catalogue of tattooist Tony Psaila, known as 'Zalzettu'. These are far simpler affairs than today's ink totems to self-indulgence and Cini informs us that they were created with smuggled tattooing ink and needles made out of old doorbells.

This book evokes the intensely-lived lives of many who, willingly or not, added their personal glimmer to the light that shone out of Strait Street and highlights the difference between what Strait Street used to be and what it is trying to become once again.

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