

HISTORY FOR YEAR 9

English Version



History Department, Curriculum Centre Annexe

2020

List of Units

| | |
|---|-------|
| Unit 9.1 Malta under the rule of the Order of St John | p. 1 |
| Unit 9.2 The Order's Heritage (1) Valletta | p. 8 |
| Unit 9.3 The Order's Heritage (2) Mdina | p. 12 |
| The Order's Heritage (3) The Fortifications | p. 15 |
| Unit 9.4 Everyday Life in Malta under the Order | p. 19 |
| Unit 9.5 The End of the Order and the French Occupation | p. 29 |

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This booklet is intended to provide English-speaking students with the necessary historical background of the topics covered in the Year 9 History Curriculum.

Raymond Spiteri
Education Officer for History
January 2020

9.1 MALTA UNDER THE RULE OF THE ORDER OF ST JOHN

THE KNIGHTS OF ST JOHN TAKE OVER THE MALTESE ISLANDS IN 1530

The Knights of St John arrived in Malta in 1530 and were to rule over these islands for the next 268 years, until they were driven out of the islands by the French in 1798. On arriving in Malta, the Knights took up residence in Birgu, which was within the Grand Harbour where their fleet of ships could be anchored. During their first years in Malta, the Knights fortified Birgu by constructing strong defensive walls around this town. The Knights also strengthened the **Castrum Maris** which they renamed as Fort Saint Angelo and turned it into a strong fortress on the tip of the Birgu peninsula. Sometime later, the Knights built Fort St Elmo on the tip of Mount Sceberras which lies between Grand Harbour and Marsamxett Harbour.

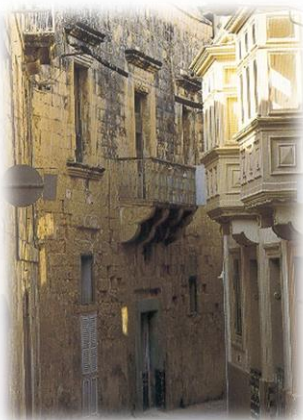


Detail from a map of 1550 showing Malta's main harbours.



The Castellán's residence in the Castrum Maris became the Palace of the Grand Master during their stay at Birgu.

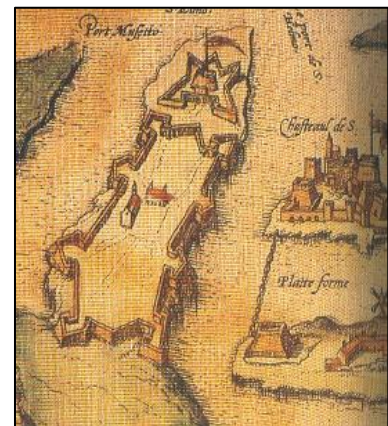
During the short reign of Grand Master **La Sengle** (1553-1557), the peninsula adjacent to Birgu was fortified and developed into the town of Senglea. The landward entrance of this new town was protected by **Fort St Michael** whose defence was to be crucial during the Great Siege after the fall of St Elmo to the Turks. During their 40 years stay in Birgu, the Knights turned the Castellán's residence in Fort St Angelo into a Magisterial Palace, built a *collachio* which housed the *auberges* of the Knights, a hospital and an armoury.



The Knights' *collachio* at Birgu.



Birgu and Senglea on the eve of the Great Siege.



The plan of 1560 on the proposed new city on Mt Sceberras. This plan had to be postponed because of the Great Siege.

THE ORDER'S ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE AT BIRGU

When the Order of St John took over the Maltese Islands in 1530, it took up residence in Birgu. In 1530, the only fortified town in Malta was the old capital city of Mdina. However, since the Order was a seafaring power it could not establish its headquarters at Mdina, as this city was too far away from the harbours which were important to the Knights as a base for their fleet of ships.



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fort_St._Angelo_at_Malta.jpg
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Malta-senglea-57.jpg>

In 1530, Birgu was not a fortified town. It was a harbour-side maritime suburb inhabited mostly by people who made a living from the sea. These would have included fishermen, sailors, pirates and merchants who traded with other countries in the Mediterranean. At the tip of Birgu stood an old castle, possibly built during Arab rule, which the local inhabitants referred to as the *Castrum Maris* (or Castle by the Sea). Shortly after taking up residence in Birgu, the Knights strengthened the *Castrum Maris* by transforming it into a strong fortress and renamed it as Fort St Angelo. The purpose of this fortress was to defend Birgu as well as the entrance to the Grand Harbour. During the first years in Malta the Knights also built defensive walls around Birgu. By the time the Knights moved from Birgu to Valletta in 1571, they left behind a good number of buildings in Birgu.

The Church of St Lawrence (right)

The present Church of St Lawrence was built on the site of a smaller church which was also dedicated to St. Lawrence. This church served as the Order's first Conventual Church from 1530 to 1571. The present Parish Church of St Lawrence was designed by the Maltese architect **Lorenzo Gafà** in the late 17th century.



The Auberge of France (left)

The Auberge de France was built in 1533. This building housed the Knights of the French Langue until the Order moved to Valletta where a new and larger Auberge de France was built.

The Auberge of Angleterre (right)

The Auberge d'Angleterre was built in 1534 and housed the Knights of the Langue of England. A new Auberge of Angleterre was not built in Valletta as the Langue of England ceased to exist because England had become a Protestant by the time the Knights moved to Valletta.



The Inquisitor's Court and Palace

The Inquisitor's Palace was built during the reign of Grand Master La Cassiere (1572-1581). In 1574, **Monsignor Pietro Dusina** arrived in Malta as the first Inquisitor and took up residence in this palace. This palace also housed the **Inquisition Tribunal** (Court) and prison cells. The main courtyard (right) of this palace was built by the Order in Gothic style, similar to its buildings in Rhodes.



With the coming of the Knights, all authority was taken over by the Grand Master who ruled over the Maltese like a prince. The nobles of Mdina lost all say in the running of the islands. In 1560, a prominent Maltese, **Matthew Callus**, sent a petition to the King of Spain complaining against the autocratic rule of Grand Master de Valette. The petition, however, was intercepted and Callus was arrested and hanged for treason. The common Maltese people continued with their lives as before and the islands continued to be raided by Berber corsairs. In 1551 the Corsair **Dragut** landed with the intention to attack Mdina, but finding that town too strong for the size of his force, decided to attack the smaller and weaker Gozo Castle.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE GREAT SIEGE OF 1565

Jean de Valette was elected Grand Master as the successor of La Sengle. By 1562 he started receiving secret messages from Christian spies in Constantinople that the Ottoman Turks were preparing for a large-scale attack on Malta. De Valette immediately set about making the following preparations so that Malta could be able to withstand the imminent siege:

- Forts St Angelo, St Elmo and St Michael were strengthened, as were also defensive walls around the towns of Birgu and Senglea;
- An iron chain was placed under the surface of the water to deny the Turkish ships entry into the creek between the two towns of Birgu and Senglea;
- A pontoon bridge was constructed between Birgu and Senglea to be able to send reinforcements, weapons and provisions between these two towns;
- The **Dejma** militia was re-trained and all able-bodied Maltese men were trained in the use of arms, while those who were not fitted to fight, such as the old and the sick were transported to Sicily. This was done to secure their safety and to avoid these being an added burden on the defenders;
- De Valette also asked the Christian rulers of Europe to send to Malta all that could spare for the siege against the Turks, such as soldiers, weapons, ammunition, food and medicines. King Philip II of Spain promised de Valette that he would send a fleet of ships with Spanish soldiers to assist the Knights during the siege;
- Besides some 700 knights, the Order had around another 9,000 Maltese, Spanish, Italian and Sicilian soldiers to defend Malta against the Turks.



A painting by Perez d'Aleccio, depicting a scene from the Great Siege of 1565, exhibited in the Grand Master's Palace, Valletta.

THE GREAT SIEGE OF 1565

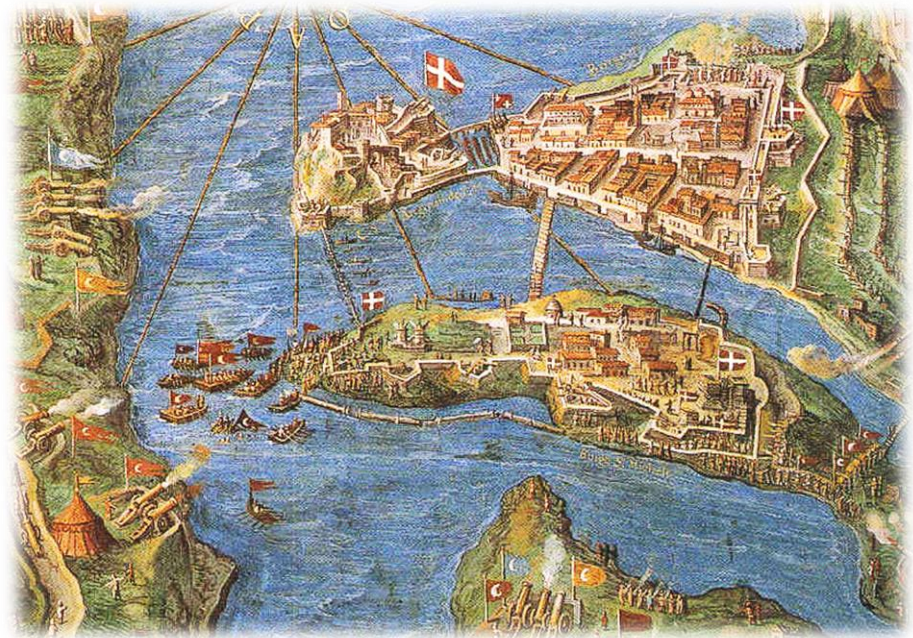
The Ottoman Armada, made up of around 180 ships and 30,000 soldiers on board, appeared off the coast of Malta on the 18th of May 1565. The two Ottoman commanders were **Mustafà Pasha**, who commanded the land forces, and **Piali Pasha**, who was in command of the fleet. After setting-up their main camp at Marsa, the Turks immediately started their preparations for the attack on Fort St Elmo. The Turks assumed that once St Elmo was captured, they would be free to anchor their fleet inside Marsamxett Harbour.

The Leaders of the Turks and the Knights during the Great Siege



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/42/Jean_de_Valette_-Antoine_Favray.png
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Siege_of_Malta#/media/File:Sultán_Solimán_\(Palacio_del_Senado_de_España\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Siege_of_Malta#/media/File:Sultán_Solimán_(Palacio_del_Senado_de_España).jpg)
<http://www.reformation.org/great-siege-of-malta.html>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_II_of_Spain
<https://alchetron.com/Piali-Pasha>

Towards the end of May, while the Turks were still attacking St Elmo, the famous Turkish corsair, **Dragut**, arrived in Malta with more Turkish reinforcements. The Turks bombarded and attacked St Elmo for almost five weeks, until on the 23rd of June, the fort was captured. The Knights and the soldiers defending it had fought to the last man. But a significant loss for the Turks was the death of Dragut during one of the assaults against that fort. Following the capture of St Elmo, the Turks were now free to anchor most of their fleet inside Marsamxett Harbour and to concentrate their attacks on the two towns of Birgu and Senglea and on Forts Angelo and St Michael.



The Great Siege of 1565.
<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/02/DetalleSiegeMalta.jpg>

Part of the bastions defending Fort St Michael were low and could therefore be easily scaled by the Turkish soldiers. In order to prevent Turkish boats from disembarking soldiers close to this fort's low bastions, de Valette ordered the construction of a wooden wall supported by thick wooden poles embedded strongly in the seabed in front of the low bastions.

However, in spite of this, the Turks still managed to force an entry Fort St Michael. Just when this fort seemed lost, the Turkish soldiers were given the order to retreat to their camp in Marsa. This gave the Knights time to win back Fort St Michael. Why did the Turks, who were on the brink of capturing Fort St Michael, so suddenly retreat? What had happened was that as the Turkish soldiers were at the point of capturing this fort, the cavalry of the Knights, which was stationed in Mdina, had made a surprise attack on the Turkish camp in Marsa. The Turks, taken completely by surprise, had thought that they had been attacked by a large Christian force sent from Sicily. The Turkish commanders made the mistake of recalled their soldiers from their attack on St Michael to fight off the attack on their camp.

In early August, the Turks succeeded in digging a tunnel under part of the bastions which protected Birgu, and to place a large mine (bomb) right beneath the bastions. When the mine was exploded, a large part of the bastions collapsed and Turkish soldiers started pouring into Birgu through the large breach in the bastions left open by the explosion. At this point, de Valette, realising that Birgu was in danger of being overrun by the Turks, led the defenders in a desperate attack against the Turks. Seeing the Grand Master himself lead the attack, the defenders fought with such courage and ferocity that the Turks were driven out of Birgu. Repeated Turkish bombardments and assaults on Birgu, Senglea and on St Angelo and St Michael were unsuccessful and cost the Turks the lives of thousands of soldiers

As the month of September loomed close, the Turks began to lose heart. September is known for rough seas in the Mediterranean. Piali Pasha, knowing that the return voyage to Constantinople would take about two weeks, feared that the Turkish fleet would be caught in a storm and destroyed on its way back home. Moreover, the Turkish army had been very much reduced due to the great number of soldiers who had been killed or wounded. Furthermore, ammunition and food supplies were running very low and it was difficult for the Turks, who were so far away from their homeland, to receive more ammunition and food supplies, even from North Africa.



The Grand Soccorso
by Perez D'Aleccio.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La_ve_nuta_del_Gran_soccorso._07.09.1565.png

Finally, on 7th of September, the relief force known as the **Gran Soccorso** which the Grand Master had been promised by Philip II of Spain, arrived. A fleet of ships from Sicily, with a force of around 250 knights and 8,500 soldiers, arrived off Malta. The Turks, taken completely by surprise, and thinking that a much greater force had arrived to help the defenders, abandoned their positions in confusion, retreated hastily to their ships and sailed back to Constantinople.

The Victory of the Great Siege.
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/46/Levee_du_Siege_de_Malte_by_Charles_Philippe_Lariviere_1798_1876.jpg



Why did the Turks attack Malta in 1565?

- From their base in Malta, the galleys of the Order had been attacking Turkish ships sailing in the Mediterranean, as well as the coastal villages which made part of the Ottoman Empire;
- Malta's position in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea and its excellent harbours could be used as an Ottoman outpost;
- If the Turks had conquered Malta, they could have been in a strong position to attack Sicily and Italy which were situated in the heart of Christian Europe.

Why did the Turks fail to win the Great Siege?

- Gran Master de Valette was one of the greatest military commanders the Order. He was the right man to lead the Order at the right time;
- Although the Ottoman army outnumbered the Christian defenders roughly 3 to 1, the Knights and the Maltese had the advantage of fighting from behind the protection of the fortifications;
- The Turks were fighting far away from their bases in Constantinople and North Africa. It was therefore difficult for them to bring more supplies, such as fresh soldiers to replace the killed and wounded ones, weapons and food provisions for their troops in Malta;
- Disagreements between the Turkish commanders led to a number of tactical mistakes being taken;
- The death of Dragut was a great loss to the Turks because he was a more capable and experienced Turkish general who had attacked the Maltese Islands in 1551;



Detail from Mattia Preti's painting showing the death of Dragut.

- The hard rock prevented the Turks from digging mines under the fortifications of the Knights;
- The Turks had to win Malta before the end of the summer and before the Knights received help from Europe.

What were the consequences of the Great Siege?

- Many Knights and Maltese lost their lives during the Great Siege;
- The Knights decided to remain in Malta and to build a new city, Valletta;
- The Knights made Malta one of the most fortified places in the Mediterranean;
- Malta became the shield of Christendom against the spread of Islam in Europe;
- Under the rule of the Knights Malta became a leading centre of commerce in the Mediterranean;
- Under their influence, Malta acquired a thoroughly European cultural identity, especially since they commissioned the works of famous European artists, architects and military engineers to Malta.



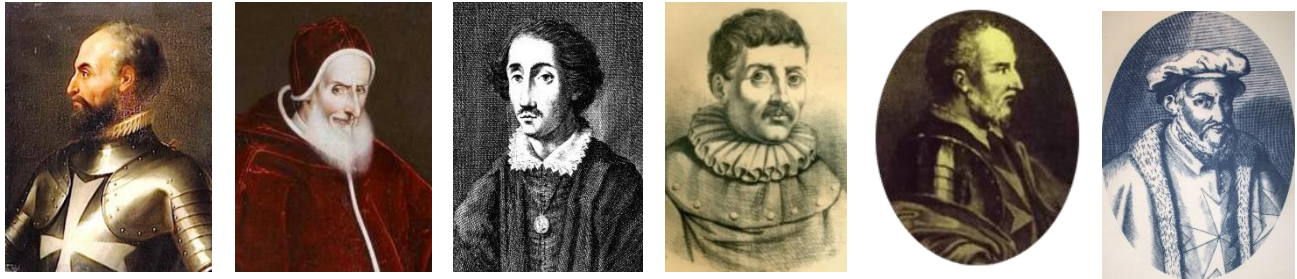
The Sword and Dagger donated to Grand Master De Valette on the Victory of the Great Siege by King Philip II of Spain. These were sent to France by Napoleon in 1798 to be exhibited in the Louvre Museum in Paris.

9.2 THE ORDER'S HERITAGE (1) – THE CITY OF VALLETTA

HOW WAS THE NEW CITY OF VALLETTA BUILT?

The new city of Valletta, which started being built after the Great Siege of 1565, was named after Grand Master Jean de Valette. The site chosen for the new city was the peninsula on **Mt Sceberras** which jutted out between, and dominated, the Grand Harbour and Marsamxett Harbour.

THE PROTAGONISTS IN THE BUILDING OF VALLETTA



Grand Master Jean de Valette.

Pope Pius V. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1a/Papa_Pio_V.PNG

Francesco Laparelli. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francesco_Laparelli

Girolamo Cassar. <https://alchetron.com/Girolamo-Cassar#demo>

Grand Master Pietro del Monte. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6f/Pietro_del_Monte.gif

Grand Master La Cassiere. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/81/Grandmaster_Jean_de_la_Cassiere.jpg

The Christian kings and princes of Europe helped in the building of Valletta by sending money and workers. Most of this aid came from King Philip II of Spain and Pope **Pius V**. The Pope sent his military architect and engineer, the Italian **Francesco Laparelli** to draw the plans for Valletta. Laparelli designed Valletta on a grid plan. Contrary to Rhodes and Birgu, no plan for a **colacchio**, (a part of the city reserved only for the Knights to reside in) was made in the new city.



<https://vassallohistory.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/map4.jpg>
The Chapel of Our Lady of Victory, Valletta, 1565

The foundation stone of the new city was laid on 28th March 1566. Work started on the rebuilding of Fort St Elmo (which was nearly destroyed by the Turks during the Great Siege) and the construction of the defensive walls surrounding Valletta. Following Francesco Laparelli's sudden departure from Malta, the Maltese architect, **Girolamo Cassar**, took over the responsibility of overseeing the building of Valletta. When the fortifications of Valletta were completed, work started on the construction of buildings within the city walls. The **Officio delle Case** was set up to draw up the regulations on how the buildings in Valletta should be built. The stone used to construct the buildings in Valletta was quarried from Valletta itself, from the site which later became known as the **Manderaggio**. However, the plan to create the *manderaggio* (a safe port for ships within the defensive walls of Valletta) came to nothing because of the difficulty in cutting through the hard rock. In 1571, the Knights went to live in Valletta in temporary tents until their buildings were finished.

Girolamo Cassar also designed the plans for a number of important buildings in Valletta in which he made use of the Mannerist and Baroque architectural styles. These included:

- St John's Conventual Church (today's Co-Cathedral);
- The Magisterial Palace;
- The Holy Infirmary;
- The eight Auberges of the Knights;
- The Church of Our Lady of Victories.

IMPORTANT BUILDINGS BUILT BY THE KNIGHTS IN VALLETTA

St John's Conventual Church was the main church used by the Knights in Valletta. The facade of this church was designed in simple Mannerist style. However, the interior is a gem of Baroque art and architecture. Some important works of art found in this church are:

- The chapels belonging to each langue of the Order;
- The ceiling painted by the Neapolitan artist **Mattia Preti**;
- The paintings of the *Beheading of St John the Baptist* and *St Jerome* by the Italian artist **Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio** (right);
- The sculpture of *The Baptism of Christ by St John the Baptist* by the Italian sculptor **Giuseppe Mazzuoli**.



St John's Conventual Church in a 17th century painting.



Baroque interior of St John's Conventual Church.

The **Palace of the Grand Masters**, which is also known as the Magisterial Palace, was also designed by Glormu Cassar. This palace served as the official residence of the Grand Masters. Today this palace is served the function of Office of the President of the Republic of Malta.



The Magisterial Palace and Armoury



Auberge de Castille and the Cabinet of Ministers'

- The **Bibliotheca** or the National Library from 1812 onwards;
- The **Manoel Theatre**, built in 1732 by Grand Master de Vilhena and is one of the older theatres still standing in Europe;
- The **Castellania**, which was used as the Courts of Justice at the times of the Knights;
- The Old **University**, founded by Grand Master Pinto in 1771;
- The **Monte di Pietà**, a pawn bank for the poorest families of Valletta.

VALLETTA IN MODERN TIMES

Today, as it was also during the rule of the Knights, Valletta is an **administrative, commercial and cultural centre**.

The Office of the President of the Republic is housed in what used to be the former **Magisterial Palace**. The **Auberge de Castille** of the Knights from the Spanish language of Castille is nowadays used as the Office of the Prime Minister. In Valletta, today one finds a number of government departments and ministries.

VALLETTA AS A COMMERCIAL CENTRE

Since the time of the Knights and the British, Valletta contained was the main commercial and retail centre in the whole island, such as:

- Retail shops which sell all kinds of merchandise;
- Restaurants and cafés;
- An open-air market;
- Professional services such as legal and notarial offices, insurance brokers, importers and exporters of goods.



Republic Street, one of Malta's busiest commercial centre.

VALLETTA AS A CULTURAL CENTRE

Valletta is a UNESCO **World Heritage Site** and was **Europe's Capital City of Culture** in 2018. In Valletta one finds the following cultural centres:

- The National Museum of Archaeology;
- The Museum of Fine Arts at Muza at the former Auberge d'Italy in Merchants' Street;
- The War Museum housed in a section of Fort St Elmo;



The cruise liner terminal at the Valletta Waterfront.

- The Lascaris War Rooms;
- The Bibliotheca or National Library;
- The Malta Experience;
- The Manoel Theatre (right);
- Valletta also hosts national cultural events, such as Carnival and *Notte Bianca*.



The MUZA Arts Museum in the former Auberge d'Italia
<https://culturemalta.org/muza-the-malta-national-community-art-museum/>

THE WIGNACOURT AQUEDUCT

The need for Valletta to have a regular and constant supply of fresh water had been felt for quite some time. A number of attempts by previous Grand Masters to construct an aqueduct to supply Valletta with water had failed. Grand Master **Alof de Wignacourt** was determined to build such an aqueduct. For this purpose, he brought over to Malta **Natale Mesuccio**, an engineer from Messina, to plan this much needed project. An abundance of natural water was found in the vicinity of Mdina and Dingli. However, Mesuccio had encountered difficulties how to transport it to Valletta. Consequently, the project had to be abandoned. Not wishing to abandon this project indefinitely, Grand Master Wignacourt brought over another engineer, **Bontadino Bontadini** from Bologna, Italy.



The Wignacourt Aqueduct and Sarria Fountain at Floriana
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wignacourt_Aqueduct

This second engineer encountered the same difficulties as the first one. However, a Maltese master mason named **Ganni Attard**, who was one of Bontadini's assistants, proposed the building of a series of arches which would get the water over the valley which ran between the villages of H'Attard and St Venera and to continue on its way to Valletta. Attard's solution made possible the completion of the aqueduct, which was 15 km in length, took five years to build (1610-1615) and provided work for 600 workers.

9.3 THE ORDER'S HERITAGE (2) THE OLD CITY OF MDINA

Mdina is the old capital city of Malta. Archaeological evidence suggests that under the Romans this city was larger than it is today. This is because it is believed to have included a large part of Rabat too. The Romans called this city **Melitæ**. When the Arabs took over the Maltese Islands in 870 AD, it is thought that they reduced the city to the size it is today in order to be able to defend it better. The Arabs renamed this city Medina. During the Middle Ages and up to the arrival of the Order of St John in 1530, Mdina remained the capital city of these islands.



The map of Malta by Johannes Quintinus, 1536.
<https://www.um.edu.mt/think/tag/johannes->



Mdina in 1565 from a detail from one of Perez d'Aleccio's painting.

Since the Knights made Birgu their headquarters in 1530, Mdina started losing its administrative importance, even though it remained the preferred residence of most of the old noble families of Malta. It gradually started losing its population from around 1000 in 1530 to around 300 by the early 1700s, a figure that remained roughly unchanged to the present day.

The earthquake of 1693 destroyed most of the old medieval buildings in Mdina. As a consequence, many of its inhabitants left the city and took up residence elsewhere. This was the time when Mdina started being referred to as the 'Silent City'. Some years after the earthquake, Grand Master **Manoel de Vilhena** (1722-1736) embarked on an ambitious restoration project of Mdina. This Grand Master commissioned the French architect **François de Mondion** to draw up the plans for the restoration of Mdina. Mondion designed the plans for the new buildings of Mdina in the 18th century elaborate Baroque architectural style which was very much in fashion at the time. Mdina was thus beautifully restored. However, de Vilhena's plan to attract the people back to Mdina and so give the city a new life, did not happen. Some important buildings built by the Knights of St. John in Mdina are:

The Main Gate (1 and 2)

The Mondion Gate is a fine example of 18th century Baroque architecture. It bears the coat-of-arms of Grand Master de Vilhena. The location of the old gate was used before the restoration of the 1720s, is still visible a few metres to the right of the new gate.

The Tower of the Standard (3)

The Tower of the Standard is located in the square just inside the main gate of Mdina. It was built on the site of a medieval tower which was called the **Torre Mastra** or the **Torre de la Bandiera**. This tower, which occupied the highest position in Malta, served the purpose of guarding the entrance of Mdina and relaying signals from Mdina to the rest of the island.

The Magisterial Palace (4)

This was the Grand Master's official residence in Mdina. The cost for the building of this palace was borne by de Vilhena himself who left it as his legacy to the Order. Nowadays it houses the National Museum of Natural History.

The Banca Giuratale (5)

The **Banca Giuratale**, also known as the **Municipal Palace** where the **Università** (or local government) made up of the Capitan of the Rod (or *Hakem* or Mayor) and the Jurats (or Magistrates) of Mdina used to meet.

St Paul's Cathedral (6)

St Paul's Cathedral was built on the site of an older Norman Gothic-style cathedral destroyed by the earthquake of 1693. The present Cathedral was designed by the Maltese architect Lorenzo Gafà and it the principal Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Malta.

The Archbishop's Palace

The Bishop's Palace was built on the site of the old Bishop's Palace, likewise destroyed by the earthquake of 1693. This palace is located in the square adjacent to St Peter and St Paul's Cathedral.

The Old Bishop's Seminary (7)

The Old Seminary, which is located in the same square as the Bishop's Palace, was the place where young males were prepared for the priesthood. Today this building houses the Cathedral Museum.

The Corte Capitanale (8) and the Herald's Loggia (9)

The **Corte Capitanale** forms part of Vilhena Palace and it used to house the Courts of Justice presided over by the Captain of the Rod. The figures of Justice and Mercy can still be seen on the façade of this building. The adjacent balcony was the place where the heralds used to read out the decrees (*bandi*) to the public.

The Carmelite Church (10)

The Carmelite Church was built in 1659 and was previously known as the Church of Santa Maria della Rocca. This church was designed by the Maltese architect Francesco Sammut. It was outside this church that the Maltese uprising against the French on 2nd September 1798 began.

THE RESTORATION OF MDINA

The earthquake which had hit the Maltese Islands in 1693 had destroyed a good part of the fortifications and buildings in the old city of Mdina. This city was left in ruins for a number of years and it was almost depopulated, since many of its inhabitants were forced to move out and find residence elsewhere. Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena (1722-1736) started the ambitious project to restore Mdina. For this purpose he commissioned the French architect **François de Mondion** to draw up the plans for the city's restoration. Mondion planned the important buildings of Mdina in lavish baroque style which was very much in fashion in the early 18th century.

The Grand Master hoped that the restored city, with its new grandiose buildings and large squares, would attract people to take up residence in it and thus give the city a new life. However, although Mdina was beautifully restored, this did not happen. In fact its population remained so low (around 300), that during the British it was referred to as the Silent City.

The Order's Legacy in Mdina

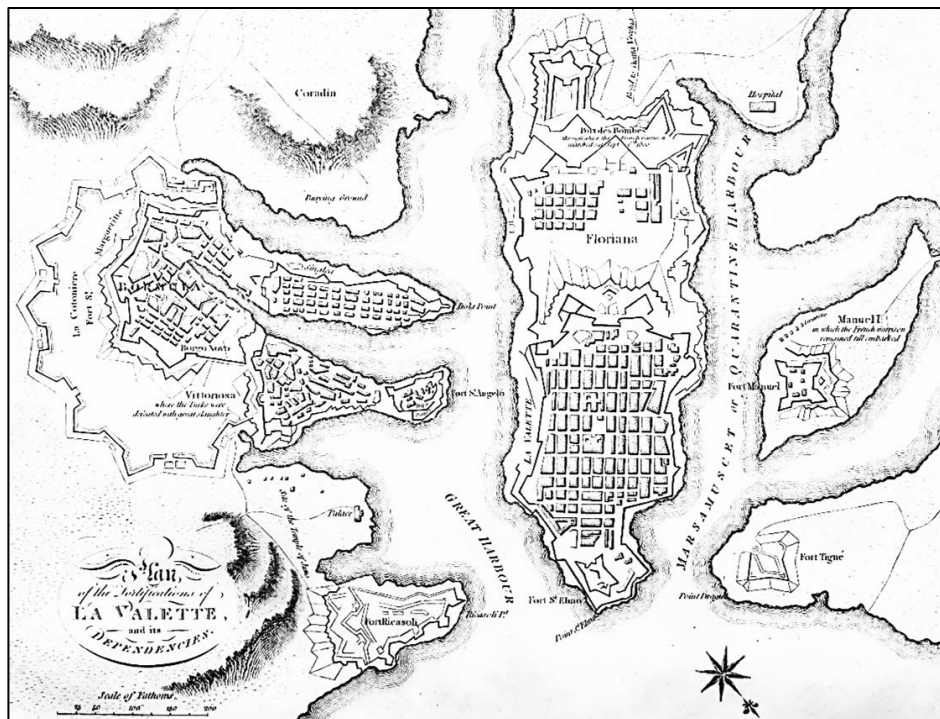


THE ORDER'S HERITAGE (3) – THE FORTIFICATIONS

THE FORTIFICATIONS BUILT AROUND THE HARBOURS

During their rule in Malta, the Knights built an impressive defence system of fortresses, fortified towns and defensive lines around Grand Harbour and Marsamxett Harbour. On their arrival in 1530 the Knights established their general headquarters at Birgu. During their stay in Malta they built the following fortifications around Grand Harbour and Marsamxett Harbour:

- The **Castrum Maris** at the tip of Birgu was strengthened and renamed as Fort St Angelo.
- **Defensive walls** were built around Birgu and Senglea;
- **Fort St Elmo** was built at the tip of the Sciberras Peninsula (1552);
- **Fort St Michael** was built in the new town of Senglea (1552);
- The building of **Valletta** started after the Great Siege (1566);
- **The Floriana Lines** (started in 1636) were built to protect Valletta from a landward assault;
- **The Santa Margerita (or Firenzuola) Lines** (started in 1638) were built to protect Cospicua from a landward assault;
- **The Cottonera (or Valperga) Lines** (built between 1638 and 1730) were intended to protect The Three Cities of Vittoriosa, Senglea and Cospicua.
- **Fort Ricasoli** on Rinella Point (started in 1670) was intended to defend the entrance to Grand Harbour in conjunction with Fort St Elmo.
- **Fort Manoel** on Manoel Island (started in 1723) was built to defend that side of Valletta overlooking on Marsamxett Harbour.
- **Fort Tigné** on the tip of Sliema (built between 1761 and 1795) was intended to defend the entrance to Marsamxett Harbour.



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/23/Plan_of_the_Fortifications_of_La_Valette_and_its_dependencies_%281803%29.png



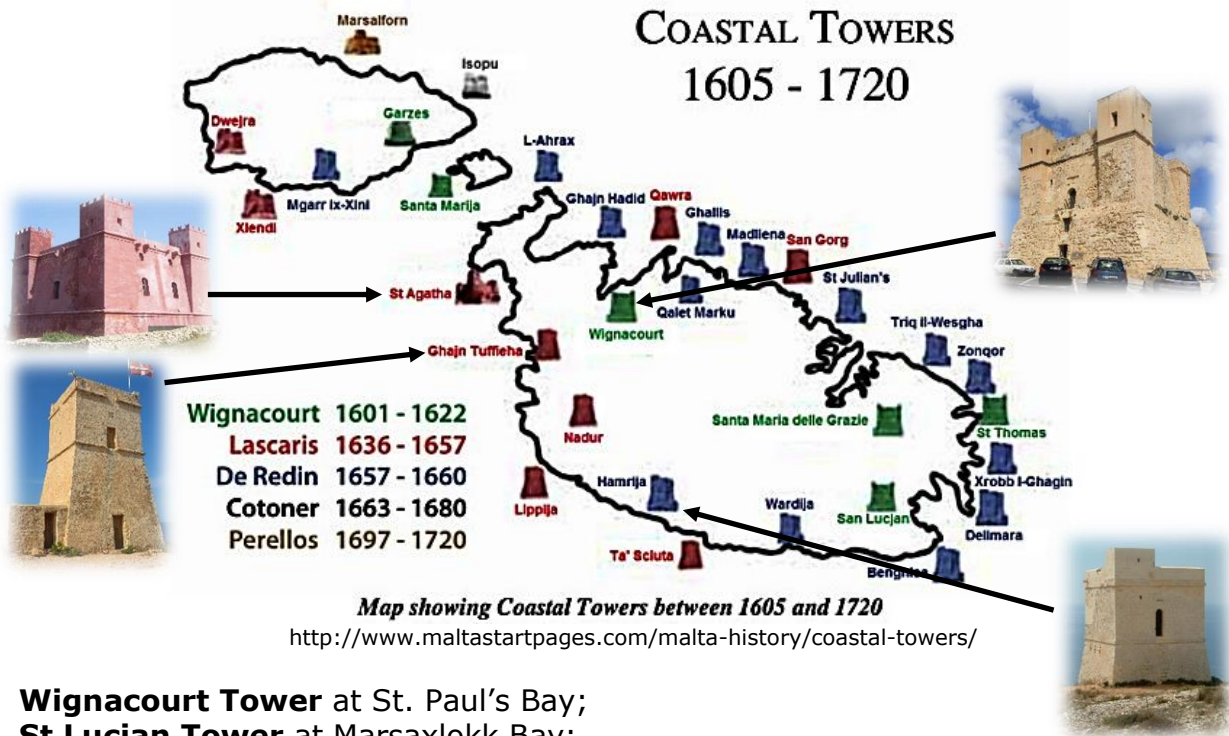
Malta's Harbours in the 18th century.
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/33/Malta%3B_view_of_the_city._Etching_by_M-A._Benoist%2C_c._1770%2C_a_Wellcome_L0019024.jpg

THE MAIN HARBOUR FORTIFICATIONS OF THE ORDER

| | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| | |
| <p>Fort St Elmo (1552)</p> | <p>Fort St Angelo</p> |
| | |
| <p>Margherita and Cottonera Lines (1638-1680)</p> | <p>Fort Ricasoli (1670-1680)</p> |
| | |
| <p>Fort Manoel (1722)</p> | <p>Fort Tigné (1761-1795)</p> |

THE FORTIFICATIONS BUILT AROUND THE COAST

The Knights also built a large number of coastal towers to defend the coast from enemy raids. The building of these coastal towers helped to make the lives of the Maltese people living in the countryside more secure from Muslim corsairs. Between 1610 and 1618, Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt built four large square towers to prevent the landing of the enemy from a number of bays around the coast of Malta. These were:



- **Wignacourt Tower** at St. Paul's Bay;
- **St Lucian Tower** at Marsaxlokk Bay;
- **St Thomas Tower** at Marsascala Bay;
- **St Mary Tower** on the island of Comino.

Another square-shaped tower was, similar to those of Wignacourt was built by Grand Master Lascaris in 1647, known St Agatha or Red Tower overlooking Mellieha Bay. Twenty smaller coastal watch towers were built by Grand Master Lascaris (1636-1657) and Grand Master Martin de Redin (1657-1660) to serve as signal posts in the event of a corsair raid and maned by the Maltese Militia or **Dejma**.



Two coastal watch towers. <https://travelpast50.com/watchtower-golden-bay-malta/>



A member of the Dejma Militia in the 18th century
<https://afm.gov.mt/en/info/history/Pages/History-of-the-AFM.aspx>

THE FORTIFICATIONS IN GOZO

For a long time during the Knight's period, the only place of refuge for the population of Gozo in case of enemy attack was the Citadel or, as it was also known, the **Gran Castello**. To strengthen the island's defences against another attack similar to that of 1551, **Grand Master Garzes** (1595-1601) remodelled the fortifications of the **Cittadella** and built Fort Garzes overlooking Mġarr Harbour. But since the Cittadella was not considered strong enough to withstand a large-scale attack using the artillery weapons of the time, **Fort Chambray** was built in 1760. This large fortress was also built overlooking Mġarr Harbour, was intended to provide refuge to the entire Gozitan population in the event of enemy attack.



The Gozo Citadel which was strengthened by Grand Master Garzes in the 1590s.
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/05/Fort_Chambray_0001.jpg



Fort Chambray was built to guard Mġarr Harbour.
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Invasion_of_Gozo_\(1551\)#/media/File:Citadel_in_Victoria.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Invasion_of_Gozo_(1551)#/media/File:Citadel_in_Victoria.jpg)

Between 1605 and 1661, the Knights also built a number of watch towers around the coast of Gozo. Some of them are: Garzes Tower at Mġarr (now demolished). Marsalforn Tower (now demolished). Xlendi Tower Dwejra Tower and Mġarr ix-Xini Tower.

9.4 EVERYDAY LIFE IN MALTA UNDER THE KNIGHTS

THE HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE OF MDINA, BIRGU AND THE GOZO CITADEL

During the Late Middle Ages, the only settlements which were large enough to be called towns were Mdina and Birgu in Malta and the Citadel, or *Gran Castello* in Gozo. Besides being administrative and residential centres, these towns were also the places from where the defence of the Maltese Islands was organised and where the people sought refuge during enemy attacks. Both Mdina and the Gozo Citadel were built on high ground in the centre of the islands. They were also surrounded by defensive walls. Mdina was the capital city of Malta during the Middle Ages and most of the local noble families resided in it. Birgu, on the other hand, is situated on a peninsula which juts out into the Grand Harbour. Birgu was defended by the *Castrum Maris* which stood at the tip of this harbour-side town and in the middle of the Grand Harbour.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF VILLAGES

Many Maltese lived in the villages and hamlets which were scattered in the centre and the southern part of the island. Due to the constant fear of attack by Muslim corsairs, the villages were usually situated some two kilometre away from the coast. During the Middle Ages a number of villages began to outgrow the other villages in both population and size. As a result of this, those villages which did not experience such growth started to be abandoned and eventually ceased to exist and became referred to by historians and archaeologists as '**lost villages**'. Until 1436, the only settlements which were large enough to become parishes were the towns of Mdina, Birgu and the Gozo Citadel. In 1436, ten villages had experienced such growth in population that they were also declared parishes. These were the villages of: Naxxar, Birkirkara, Birmiftuħ (made up of the hamlets of Ġudja, Ғal Luqa, Ғal Tarxien, Ғal Kirkop, Mqabba, Ғal Safi and Ғal Farruġ), Ғal Qormi, Żejtun, Żurrieq, Ғaž Żebbuġ, Siġġiewi, Mellieħa and Ғal Tartarni (which later came to form part of the village of Ғad-Dingli).

During the Order's rule some of these villages continued to grow to eventually become small commercial centres where the farmers of the surrounding countryside took their farm produce to be sold. These villages also became the centres from where the defence of the surrounding countryside organised by the *dejma*.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TYPICAL MALTESE VILLAGE

The old traditional Maltese village developed around a core made up of the village main or parish church and the village main square (or *misraħ*). Chapels, niches with statues of Saints on the corners of houses and streets evidenced the religious devotion of the Maltese in the past. Narrow streets and alleys in most cases led to the main square of the village. This type of street network protected the houses from the heat of the sun in summer and from cold winds in winter.



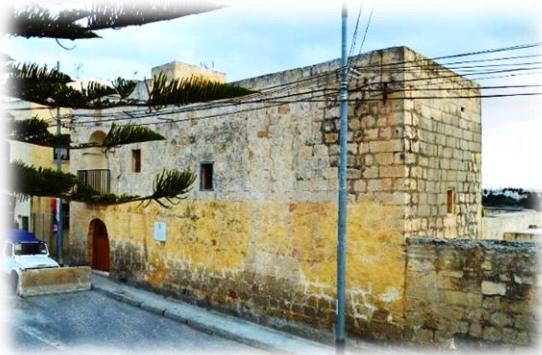
A narrow village alley at Rabat.
<http://www.malta.com/media/en/about-malta/city-village/rabat/rabat-street.jpg>
A corner niche at Senglea.
<https://localgovernment.gov.mt/en/lc/Senglea/Pages/Locality/Statues-and-Niches.aspx>
A typical wayside chapel at Siggiewi.
Mal<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wi>



A traditional village square with a *dejma* cross at Gharb, Gozo.
<https://www.visitgozo.com/here-to-go-in-gozo/towns-villages/l-gharb/>

The **Dejma Cross** (or *Salib tad-Dejma*) was believed to be the location where the Dejma militia used to meet to organise themselves during an enemy attack. The washing spring (or *għajn tal-ħasselin*) was used by the village women to wash clothes. Windmills (or *mithna*) were the place where wheat and grain produced by the farmers was taken to be ground into flour to make bread.

Further from the centre of the village one would have found a number of farmhouses. A typical Maltese **farmhouse** (or *razzett*) consisted of a number of rooms built on one or two storeys around a central yard. The farmhouse was inhabited by the farmer and his family together with the animals they bred.



Ta' Xindi Farmhouse, an 18th-century farmhouse built during the Order of St John in San Ġwann, Malta. It was used as a outpost of the Maltese insurgents during the blockade against the French (1798-1800).
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/76/Ta%27_Xindi_Farmhouse.jpeg

Rubble walls (or *ħitan tas-sejjeħ*) were built with irregularly-shaped stones placed loosely together without mortar or cement. The main functions of rubble walls were to separate fields from each other, to protect crops and trees from strong winds, to keep the soil from being washed away by rainwater and to stop animals from entering the fields.



A Maltese corbelled stone hut (*girna*).
<https://www.wikiwand.com/fr/Girna>

Typical Maltese rubble walls.
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/da/Wied_il-hlas_rubble_wall.JPG
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/ab/Malta_Talayot.JPG



The **corbelled stone hut** (or *girna*) is one of the oldest vernacular buildings in the Maltese Islands. It consists of a small roofed room built in the shape of a circle or a square. It was built with irregularly-shaped stones similar to the rubble wall. It was built in the middle or by the side of the fields and it was used by the farmers:

- to provide them with shelter in bad weather;
- to store farming tools;
- to store and protect harvested crops from the natural elements.

The **wash house** (*ghajn tal-hasselin*) was the place where women used to wash their clothes in the past. One can still find two of these which still stand at Msida, Marsaxlokk and Fontana (Gozo).



The wash house at Marsaxlokk. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/70/Msida_Wash-House.jpg
The wash house at Msida. <https://www.guidememalta.com/en/6-springs-maltese-housewives-used-to-wash-their-clothes-in-back-in-the-day>

THE AUTOCRATIC RULE OF THE GRAN MASTERS

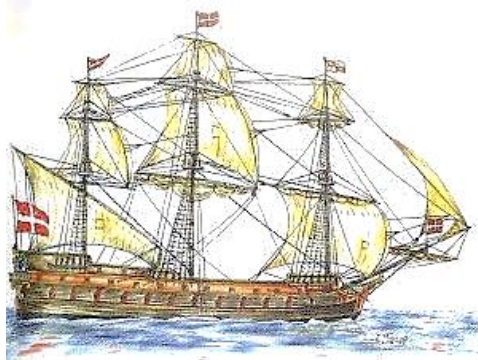
The Grand Masters ruled over the Maltese in an autocratic way. This meant that the Grand Master had supreme power to make laws and to take decisions as to how these islands were to be governed. To help him in matters of government, the Grand Master was advised by the members of the Grand Council of the Order. The Maltese, on the other hand, were denied any participation in the government of their own country. Before the Knights took over the rule of the Maltese Islands, the **Consiglio Popolare** had exercised some limited authority local government of the islands. However, on their arrival in Malta the Knights stripped the *Consiglio Popolare* of most of its powers, except that of organising the importation of grain from Sicily. In those days, law and decrees issued by the Grand Master and his Council, as well as other important government notices, was communicated to the people by means of the **bandu**, whereby messengers, or heralds, read out such information aloud to the public in the main squares of the towns and the villages.



The Grand Master during a meeting of the General Council of the Order in Rhodes in the late 15th century. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/ab/Knights_hospitaller.JPG

EMPLOYMENT UNDER THE ORDER

During its rule in these islands, the Order of St. John generated a wide variety of employment for the Maltese. These included: employment in the Order's navy; in the building of fortifications; in the Order's militia regiments; in the hospitals and the administrative departments of the Order.



A Hospitaller galley of the 1680s.
A Hospitaller vessel of the 17th and 18th century.

EMPLOYMENT IN THE ORDER'S NAVY

The Order was considered one of the naval powers in the Mediterranean. The Order's fleet of galleys and ships, although small in comparison to the fleets of Spain and the Ottoman Empire, was considered among the best when it came to the structure of the ships, the armaments used and the quality of the crews which manned the ships. The ships of the Order's navy were mainly used to:

- Patrol the seas around the Maltese islands and thus prevent enemy ships from attacking the coast;
- Attack Ottoman and Barbary ships sailing in the Mediterranean;
- Protect cargo ships which carried all kinds of merchandise to and from Malta from attack by Muslim corsairs.

Many Maltese men were employed in various jobs connected with the Order's navy. A typical galley employed the following: a captain, sailors, soldiers, gunners, rowers, kitchen servants, an *agguzino*, a carpenter, a blacksmith, a cook, a doctor, a priest and a clerk.

Many other Maltese men were employed in the Order's shipyard in Birgu for building parts and repairing its ships. Others craftsmen were indirectly connected with the shipping and corsairing industry, such as: carpenters, blacksmiths, sail-makers, rope-makers and caulkers. The latter filled the gaps between the planks of the hulls to make them watertight.



The slave master (*agozino*) (left) and a Knight Captain of the Galleys (right)

The Order's navy took part in many sea battles against Ottoman navy. They did this on their own or in alliance with the navies of other Christian states, namely Spain, Venice, Tuscany and the Papal States.

THE BATTLE OF LEPANTO (1571)

This was the biggest battle fought between the Ottoman fleet and a combined Christian fleet made up of the ships of the Order, Spain, Venice and the Papacy. The combined Christian fleet was made up of 208 ships, ten of which belonged to the Order. The Christian fleet was under the command of Duke John of Austria. The Turkish fleet consisted of 230 ships. This naval battle took place in the Gulf of Lepanto, off Greece and resulted in a resounding victory for the Christian fleet. Almost all the Turkish ships were either sank or captured, while the Christian fleet suffered much fewer losses. The Order lost three of its ships in this battle. It was the first time a Christian fleet managed to win the Turks at sea.



Types of ropes used on the ships of the time



The Battle of Lepanto.
<https://www.pinterest.at/pin/525654587750101071/>

EMPLOYMENT IN THE BUILDING OF FORTIFICATIONS

During their rule in Malta, the Knights built a large number of fortifications to protect the Maltese Islands from enemy attack. The fortifications built by the Knights include fortified towns, fortresses, defensive lines, coastal towers and gun batteries. These defensive projects provided employment to many stone masons and other ancillary jobs, such quarrying and stevedores. Some of the fortifications, such as those around Valletta, were on such a large scale that additional workers had to be imported from other lands.

Besides fortifications, the Knights also built a large number of other buildings and projects which did not have a military function. Two very important projects of this sort were the aqueduct, which was built to supply Valletta with water, the restoration of the old city of Mdina following the earthquake of 1693, the Manoel Theatre and the Pinto warehouses.

EMPLOYMENT IN THE ARMED FORCES OF THE ORDER

Many Maltese men found employment as soldiers in the armed forces of the Order. The large number and size of the fortifications built around the two harbours required a large number of soldiers to guard and to man them in case of an enemy attack. The Knights also built a good number of coastal towers and gun batteries which also required a large number of *dejma* militiamen to perform guard duties on a roaster bases in them.



(Left: A Maltese soldier in the *Regimento di Malta* in the 1780s. <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/385972630556174214/>
 Right: A Maltese soldier in the *Regimento dei Cacciatori* in the 1780s. <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/681943568558019657/>

The **dejma** militia, which was set up during the Late Middle Ages, was not only retained by the Knights, but their number was increased. During Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt's reign (1501-22) the dejma soldiers also started being paid.

EMPLOYMENT IN THE ORDER'S HOSPITALS

Before the Knights came to these islands in 1530, there were two hospitals in Malta: that of *Santo Spirito* and *Ta' Sawra*, both in Rabat. While they were still residing in Birgu, the Knights built their first hospital in Malta, known as the Holy Infirmary, inside the Convent of Santa Scolastica.



The Knights' Holy Infirmary at Valletta.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_Conference_Centre#/media/File:Sacra_Infermeria_in_2016.jpg

The *Lazzaretto* (Pague Hospital). https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/ff/Malta_-_Gzira_-_Manoel_Island_-_Lazzaretto_%28St._Andrew%27s_Bastion%29_01_ies.jpg

After the Great Siege of 1565, the Knights built a new and larger Holy Infirmary in Valletta. Some years later, they built another hospital on Manoel Island which they called the **Lazzaretto** for it was used to treat infectious diseases such as plague, cholera and smallpox.



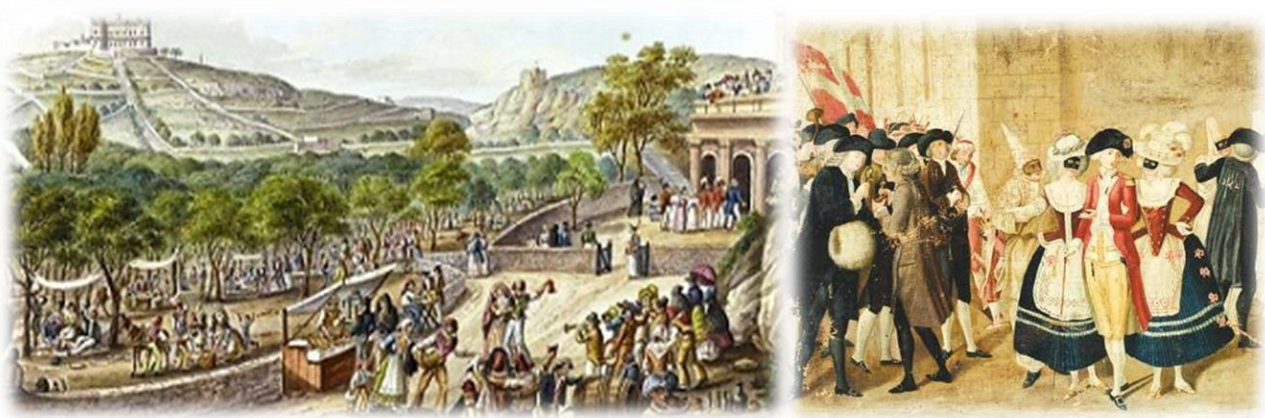
Knights administering the sick at the Holy Infirmary.

<http://museumstjohn.org.uk/disease-and-dissection-a-history-of-surgery-in-malta/>

During Grand Master Nicholas Cotoner (1663-1680) a School of Anatomy and Surgery was founded inside the Holy Infirmary. Thus, those who took up studies to become doctors and surgeons did not have to travel abroad to do so. The Order's hospitals provided the Maltese with a number of employment opportunities, such as: nurses, doctors, surgeons and pharmacists, wardens, kitchen staff and cleaners.

THE DAILY LIFE AND PASTIMES OF THE MALTESE UNDER THE ORDER

The daily life of the Maltese people during the Knights, especially of those who lived in the countryside, was much simpler than today. Life in those days was centred round the Catholic religion. Consequently, the main forms of recreation and entertainment were connected to the feasts celebrated in honour of the saints venerated in the various towns and villages. There were also a number of feasts which took on a national character, such as:

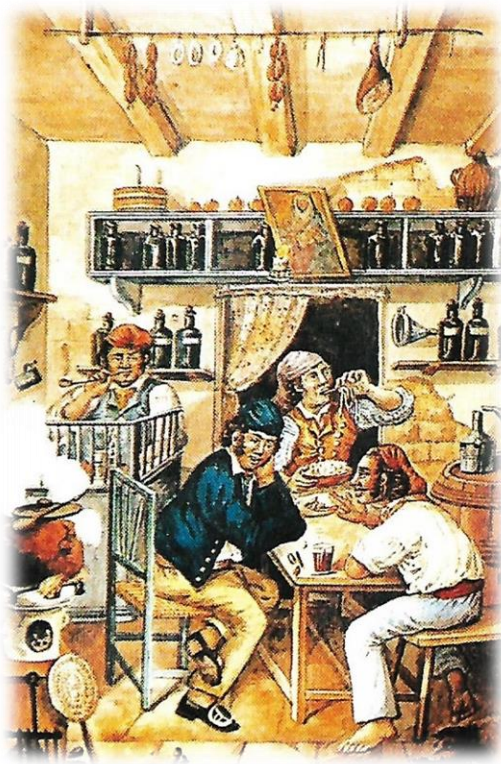


(Left: Celebrating *I-Imnarja* at Buskett Gardens. <http://maltawinds.com/2019/06/27/mnarja-the-ultimate-celebration-of-our-heritage/>
 Right: Carnival in Malta from an the 18th century painting.

- The ***Imnarja*** was the feast of St Peter and St Paul and was celebrated by food and feasting at Buskett and horse races at Rabat;
- The feast of Our Lady of Victories (*Vitorja*) commemorated the victory o Great Siege of 1565 and celebrated by the ***Regatta*** (boat races) in Grand Harbour.
- The feast of St Gregory celebrated on the first Wednesday after Easter Sunday at Zejtun and Marsaxlokk.
- **Carnival**, which was brought to Malta by the Knights in 1535.
- The feast of St John the Baptist on 24 June, the patron saint of the Order was celebrated with bonfires on the night of 23 June.



A painting of a religious procession in Valletta in around 1630.



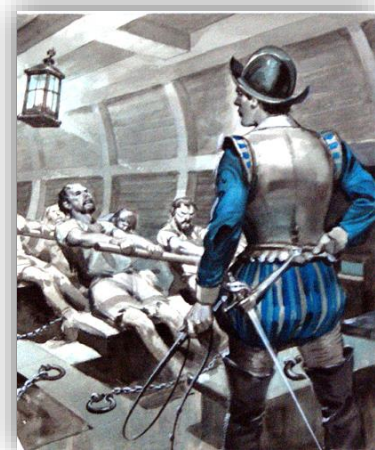
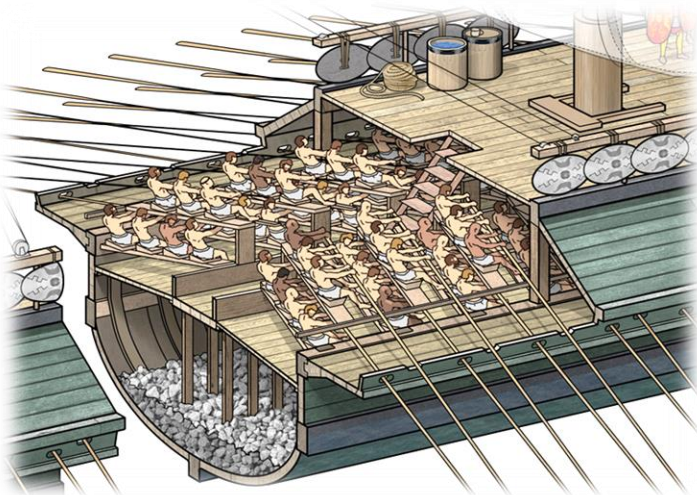
A village *tverna* (wine bar) in late 18th century Malta.

The main highlights of religious feasts in those days were the religious processions with the relic and statue of the patron saint, in which all the members of the clergy took part. Pastime in those days was enjoyed by men by gossiping and drinking wine with friends in the village taverns. Other pastimes were hunting, especially for rabbits, bird-trapping and fishing. Pastimes enjoyed by the women were sewing, knitting wool and lace making. A form of entertainment reserved for Knights and the wealthy upper classes of was that of attending plays and musical concerts at the Manoel Theatre.

HARDSHIPS SUFFERED BY THE MALTESE AT THE TIME OF THE ORDER

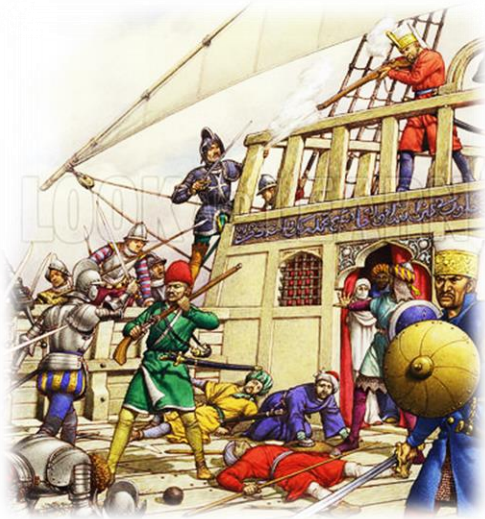
During the Order's rule, the Maltese suffered also a number of hardships. In those days, poverty was commonplace. This was mainly due to long periods of unemployment and the absence of social security measures which are enjoyed by workers nowadays.

Disease proved to be a much greater threat to our ancestors than it is today. This was because in those days doctors had far less understanding of the causes, prevention and cure of diseases. Infectious diseases tended to turn into **epidemics** due to the poor personal hygiene and the absence of adequate public sanitation. In fact, one of the most feared diseases was the **plague**. This used to visit our islands from time to time. One of the worst plague epidemics which struck the Maltese Islands during the Order's rule was that of 1675-1576, which cost the lives of over 11,000 people out of a population of 60,000. Other common deadly infectious diseases were **cholera** and **smallpox**.



<https://dribbble.com/shots/4010989-Oarsmen-slaves>
<https://www.liberaldictionary.com/galley-slave/>

Another hardship was that caused by **corsairing**. A large number of Maltese men used to find employment on board corsairing ships which were owned by wealthy individuals or by the Order. Corsairing brought with it great risks, as many Maltese men were either killed, disabled or enslaved during naval battles against Turkish corsairs. This led to untold hardship to the many married women who lost their husbands and became widows at a very young age. As a consequence, such families were often reduced to extreme poverty and many had to resort to begging in the streets, or worse, in order to make a meagre living. Furthermore, Muslim corsairs carried out attacks on these islands. These attacks often resulted in the capture and enslavement of Maltese men, women and children. Quite often, those carried away into slavery were never seen again by their relatives.



A sea battle between Christian and Muslim corsairs.

There were times when the Knights imposed heavy taxes on the population. These taxes were mostly levied to pay for the fortifications that were being built in the 17th and 18th century. Lack of rainfall was another cause for hardship. A dry winter was usually followed by a poor harvest. This could then lead to hunger and starvation.

However, it cannot be said that the Knights were insensitive to the suffering of the Maltese. In fact, a number of charitable foundations were set up by the Knights to help the poor. The **Monte di Pietà** was founded to help the poor by pawning valuable objects and lending them money at a low rate of interest. Another charitable foundation, The **Marriage Legates**, was charitable foundation set up to provide orphaned brides and those coming from poor families with a decent marriage dowry. The **Monte di Redenzione** was another foundation set up to help those had been captured as slaves by the Muslims who were unable to pay for their ransom. The money to fund these charitable foundations came mostly from donations made by the Grand Masters and the Knights, as well as from wealthy families and individuals.

THE ROMAN INQUISITION IN MALTA

The Roman Inquisition Tribunal was established by the Catholic Church to protect its teachings from Protestantism (which had been rapidly spreading in Europe since the early 16th century), as well as from any other forms of religious belief which ran against the teachings of the Catholic Church. In 1574, Mons. **Pietro Dusina** was sent to Malta by the Pope to act as the first Inquisitor in these islands. Dusina took up residence in the Inquisitor's Palace in Birgu. This palace, besides serving as the residence, also housed the Court of The Inquisition and the prison cells.

People who were accused of **heresy** (an act which vent against the teachings of the Catholic Church) were tried by the Inquisition Tribunal. The Inquisitor was the supreme judge of this court. He was helped by other members of the clergy to ascertain whether the people who appeared before him were innocent or guilty of the offence on which they were accused. Offences that were considered heretical were:



Emblem of the Malta Inquisition at the Inquisitor's Palace, Birgu.



The room of the Inquisitor's Tribunal (left) and one of the prison cells (right).

- Subscribing to other religions such as Protestantism and Islam;
- Reading books and other literature which was prohibited by the Catholic Church;
- Blasphemy, polygamy and other acts which could serve to give scandal to Catholics;
- All forms of occult practices, such as belief in superstition, witchcraft and sorcery.

People arrested and accused by the Inquisition were often kept in damp and uncomfortable cells located on the ground floor of the Inquisitor's Palace at Birgu. During the time spent in their cells, the accused were encouraged to meditate on their wrongdoings and to change their lives. During the trial itself, the accused could be tortured if they refused to admit their guilt. Those found guilty were punished according to the gravity of the offence committed. If the offence committed was considered not a serious one, the guilty person was given a stern warning not to repeat the wrongdoing. For minor infringements, a guilty person be given a religious penitence, such as reciting prayers, hearing mass or fasting regularly for a prescribed period of time. However, those who were found guilty of a more serious offence, such as witchcraft, were punished more severely. Such punishments included long periods of imprisonment, exile or rowing on the Oder's galleys for some years. It is believed that the Inquisition rarely resorted to the use of torture or the use of a death sentence in Malta.

The Inquisition Tribunal was closed down and the last Inquisitor was expelled from Malta by General Napoleon Bonaparte when the French took over the Maltese Islands from the Order in 1798.

Two Inquisitors in Malta that were later elected Popes: Alexander VII and Innocent XII.



In the field of education **Grand Master Verdalle**, who was also made a Cardinal, invited the Jesuit Order to open a secondary school in Valletta. This school which became known as the **Jesuit College** in Valletta (opened in 1593) for the education exclusively of males from the Maltese professional and upper classes. In 1771, **Grand Master Pinto**, with the approval of the Pope, expelled the Jesuits from Malta and turned their college into a **University of Studies**, the foundation date of today's University of Malta.



Left: The Old Jesuit's College and Church in Valletta. Right: The logo of the University of Malta brings to this day the coat of arms of Grand Master Pinto.

9.5 THE END OF ORDER AND THE FRENCH OCCUPATION

WHAT CAUSED THE FRENCH REVOLUTION OF 1789?

Before the French Revolution, which started in 1789, French society was divided into three social classes called Estates.

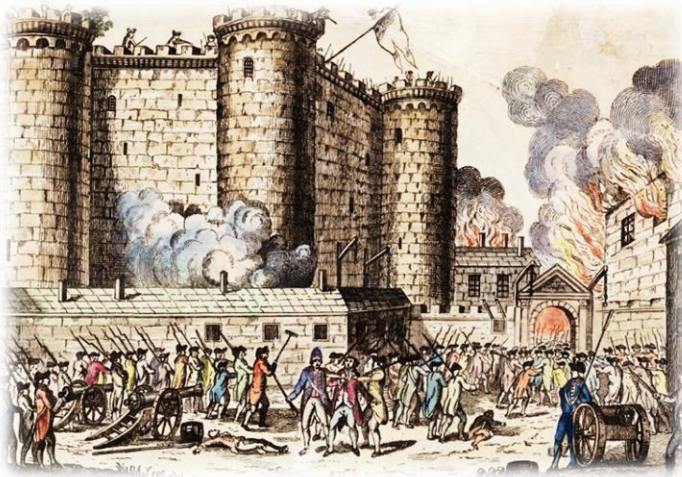
- The **First Estate** was made up of the clergy (members of the Catholic Church) such as bishops and priests. These had a lot of privileges and did not pay any taxes. Some of them, especially the bishops, were very rich and lived a life of luxury.
- The **Second Estate** was made up of the nobility. These also possessed many privileges and were extremely rich. Many of them owned large areas of land. In spite of their wealth, the nobility hardly paid any taxes.
- The **Third Estate** was made up of everyone else. These had few rights and the peasants, who formed the vast majority of the Third Estate, lived in extreme poverty. Almost all the taxes in France were paid by the people of the Third Estate.

In 1788, just a year before the French Revolution started, France had a bad harvest and food became very scarce. This pushed up the prices of food and many of the poorest people of the Third Estate, especially the peasants who lived in the countryside, faced starvation.



The Three French Estates in France: in satirical cartoon published before the Revolution.

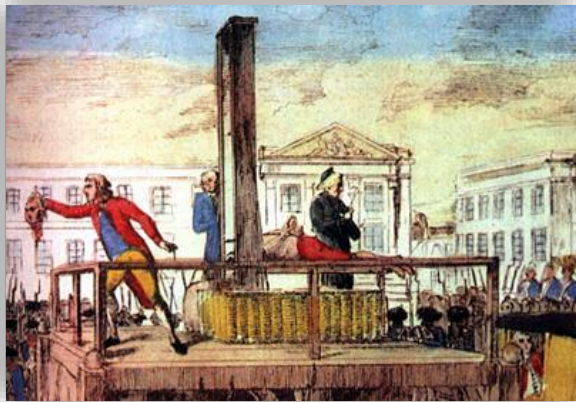
WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION?



The Storming of the Bastille by the angry people of Paris on 14th July 1789 marks the beginning of the French Revolution.

On the 14th July 1789, the people of Paris revolted, and soon the revolt spread to other French towns. The peasants, who lived in the countryside, also revolted. In Paris, as well as in other French towns, Revolutionary Courts were set up and many nobles were tried for inhuman treatment of the people of the Third Estate. Many of the nobles who were tried in these courts were found guilty and sentenced to death by having their heads cut off by the **guillotine**. In 1793, the French King **Louis XVI** was also taken to court by the French revolutionaries and condemned to death by guillotine.

After the Revolution, France was no longer a monarchy (a country ruled by a king or queen). It became a republic, governed by a parliament made up of representatives elected by the French people themselves.



The execution of King Louis XVI during the Revolution.



The French National Assembly elected by the people.

WHAT GOOD CAME OUT OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION?

- All the French people began to be treated equally and were given the same rights by law;
- Taxes in France were collected in a fairer way, with all the French people paying taxes according to how much money they earned;
- Education was extended to everyone and not only to those who could afford to pay for their children's education;
- The Catholic Church in France lost much of the power it had before the Revolution. Most of its riches were confiscated and used to help the poorest members of French society.

THE FRENCH OCCUPATION OF MALTA (1798-1800)

MALTA DURING THE LAST YEARS OF THE ORDER

During the last years of the Order's rule, Malta was in a very bad state. As a result of the growing weakness of the Turkish (Ottoman) Empire, the Order had lost its role as the shield of Christianity against the spread of Islam in Europe. Also owing to the weakness of the Turkish Empire, corsairing in the Mediterranean had decreased considerably. Therefore, the material wealth which the Order had derived from the capture of Turkish ships had almost come to nothing.

A large portion of the Order's wealth came from the lands which it possessed in Europe and especially in France. Following the French Revolution, the lands which the Order had in France were taken over by the government of the new French Republic and therefore the Order lost the financial income it had formerly derived from these lands. The bad state of the Order's finances led to unemployment and poverty among the Maltese. This made the Order very unpopular with the Maltese.



The Knights surrender Malta to Napoleon.

A number of French Knights, as well as some Maltese, driven by their sympathy and patriotism towards the principles of the French Revolution (*Liberté, Fraternité, Égalité* Liberty, Fraternity, Equality), were secretly plotting to help the French to invade and capture Malta from the Order.

THE FRENCH INVASION AND TAKE OVER OF MALTA

The French fleet, under the command of **General Napoleon Bonaparte**, which was on its way to Egypt, arrived at Malta on the 9th of June 1798. Napoleon requested that the French ships be allowed into Malta's harbours to take on water for the rest of the voyage to Egypt.



Grand Master Hompesch and General Napoleon Bonaparte at the time of the invasion of Malta.

Napoleon Bonaparte taking possession of the Maltese Islands.
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/ee/Nap_malta.jpg

Grand Master Ferdinand von Hompesch immediately summoned an urgent meeting of the Order's Council to decide what should be done. The Grand Master informed Napoleon that only four armed vessels could be allowed at once into the harbour.

Napoleon took this reply as an offence and gave orders for the French troops to invade the Maltese Islands. On the following day, the French troops disembarked from their ships and invaded the Maltese Islands in different places including St Julian's Bay, Marsaxlokk Bay, St Paul's Bay and Ramla l-Famra in Gozo.

The opposition offered by the Knights and the Maltese was so feeble and badly led that by nightfall almost all the coastal fortifications had surrendered to the French. By the 11th June, the French troops had taken their positions around the harbour fortifications and were preparing to lay siege to them.

Grand Master Hompesch realised that the Order was not prepared to resist a long siege without the loss of many lives and the destruction of the harbour fortifications. Seeing no other way out of this situation, the Grand Master decided to surrender the Maltese Islands to the French. On the 12th June 1798, a delegation of Knights and leading Maltese citizens was sent on board Napoleon's ship, the Orient, to ask for the terms of surrender (capitulation) of the Maltese Islands to the French.

FRENCH RULE IN MALTA

Before continuing on his voyage to Egypt, Napoleon spent six days in Malta during which he drafted a number of reforms (changes) which he intended to be carried out in Malta.

- Napoleon established a Constitution which allowed for the formation of a **Government Commission** composed of nine members which would include a number of Maltese.
- The Maltese Islands were to be divided into twelve **municipalities** (districts) with each municipality being administered by a local government made up of a President and four members.
- Among the changes to the laws of the Maltese Islands which Napoleon intended to make were that all Maltese citizens were to be treated equally and have the same rights by law.
- The abolition of slavery and noble titles.
- The establishment of 15 primary schools and the closing of the University in Valletta and its replacement by a *Ecole Polytechnique* specialising in the study of mathematics and the sciences.
- Foreign members of the clergy (priests, monks and nuns) were to leave the islands. Each religious order could only possess one convent. The abolition of the Inquisition.

Before departing for Egypt with the French fleet, Napoleon left **General Vaubois**, together with a garrison of around 4,000 troops to administer the Maltese Islands.

THE UPRISING OF THE MALTESE AGAINST THE FRENCH

Not long after Napoleon's departure to Egypt, under orders from General Vaubois, French soldiers began to loot precious objects from buildings which had belonged to the Knights, the homes of noble Maltese families and also from churches.

On the 2nd September 1798, a group of French soldiers commanded by an officer named **Masson** were sent to Mdina to collect the tapestries of the Carmelite Church with the intention of selling them.

When the local inhabitants heard of this, a large crowd formed in front of this church. Sword in hand, Masson ordered the crowd to disperse. This angered the mob, who hurled themselves against the French soldiers, killing them on the spot. Masson took refuge inside a nearby house, but a number of Maltese forced the door in and threw him to his death from one of the balconies of the house.

After some fighting, the crowd of Maltese was forced out of Mdina by the French troops who immediately shut the gate of this city and opened fire from the bastions on the mob outside. The Maltese sent messengers to the villages to inform the people of what had happened in Mdina. Many Maltese hurried from the villages towards Mdina to support those who had started the revolt against the French there.



The Maltese Revolt of 2nd September 1798.

On receiving the news of what had happened in Mdina, General Vaubois and the French Government in Valletta sent hundreds of French soldiers in the direction of Mdina. However, the large numbers of Maltese who came from all over the island forced the French soldiers to retreat back to Valletta in great confusion. On the next day, the 3rd of September 1798, the Maltese, after several attempts, succeeded in forcing their way into Mdina where they massacred the whole French garrison of this city.



The failed French attack against the village of Żabbar in October 1798.

THE BLOCKADE OF THE FRENCH IN THE HARBOUR TOWNS

Meanwhile, on the orders of **General Vaubois**, the French troops blockaded themselves in the fortified towns and fortresses situated around the harbours. The Maltese, on the other hand, organised themselves for war. They formed village battalions, whereby the large villages formed battalions of soldiers composed of men who lived in the village. Leaders from the villages were chosen to lead these battalions. The Maltese also elected a number of influential Maltese men to form a National Assembly. As their two main leaders against the French, the Maltese elected **Manuel Vitale**, a notary from Rabat and the priest **Francis Saver Caruana** who hailed from Haż Żebbuġ.

When news of the revolt in Malta arrived in Gozo, the Gozitans, led by **Dun Saver Cassar** revolted against the French garrison in their island. It did not take much time for the Maltese to realise that they could not, on their own, force the French to surrender and that they needed the help of a foreign power for this to happen.

One of the British batteries against the French blockaded in the harbour forts and fortified towns.



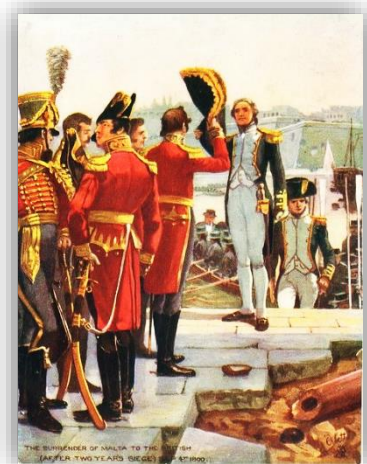
Meanwhile, the French fleet in Egypt had been destroyed by the British fleet commanded by Admiral Horatio Nelson. The Maltese National Assembly decided to ask the British, who at the time were at war with France, to help the Maltese in blockading the French in the fortifications around the harbours. It was not long before Nelson sent some British warships under the command of **Capt. Alexander Ball** to blockade the French in Malta from the sea. This put the French in a difficult position, as now they could not receive any help by way of reinforcements, ammunition and food from France.

In October 1798, the French garrison in Gozo surrendered to the British. In January 1799, a number of Maltese, led by **Dun Mikiel Xerri**, who were locked in with the French inside Valletta, secretly planned a revolt during which they planned to force open the gates of Valletta to let the Maltese on the outside to enter and defeat the French garrison of this city. However, the French discovered this revolt before it took place and Dun Mikiel Xerri together with over 40 other conspirators were shot by French soldiers in Valletta. The French were blockaded inside the fortified towns and fortresses around the two harbours. The British Admiral **Horatio Nelson** who sent ships of the British Navy to help the Maltese in blockading the French. Dun Mikiel Xerri and other Maltese patriots being shot by French soldiers in Valletta after their plot was discovered.

THE CAPITULATION OF THE FRENCH TO THE BRITISH

Meanwhile, the food provisions of the French who were blockaded in the fortified towns and fortresses around the harbours had become dangerously low. It is said that the French garrison in Valletta, together with the Maltese who were blockaded with them in this city, were forced to eat horses, dogs, cats and rats due to the lack of food in Valletta.

By August 1800, the situation of those blockaded inside the cities was desperate. Food provisions had finished and sickness was spreading both among the French troops and the Maltese. On the 5th of September 1800, General Vaubois had no other option but to capitulate (surrender) Malta to the British. A few days after the signing of the **capitulation**, the French troops departed from Malta and British flags were hoisted on the harbour fortifications and other strategic places in the Maltese Islands.



The French garrison surrendering to the British.

