



THE GATE, THE DITCH AND THE BASTION

The history of City Gate and the entrance into Valletta is undeniably linked to the history of Malta and its people.

At the Gate, by definition, the weakest point in the enceinte of landward fortifications, people from Valletta and those arriving from outside the town met and mingled, creating a richness of social interaction only paralleled by the activity on the waterfront. Seen from this perspective, City Gate has constituted, since the beginning, a changing backdrop, not only to the everyday activities of the citizens but also to the commercial and social exchange with the country. This intercourse has always been a vital element of city life.

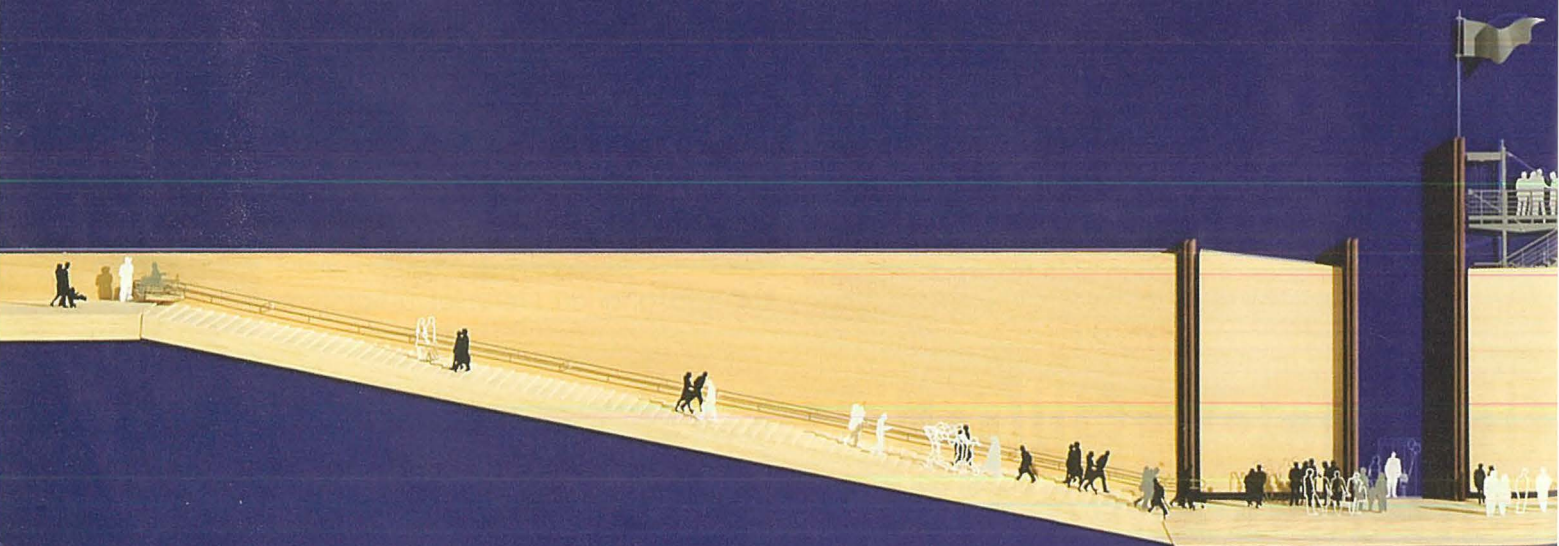
At this point of Valletta, important political and cultural events and manifestations commenced their progress through the town. Royal visits, political defiles and religious processions started their way down to St George's Square from City Gate, often richly decorated and candle-lit. Throngs of curious onlookers crowded the dramatic urban-scale staircases flanking the gate, keen to witness and participate in the spectacle.

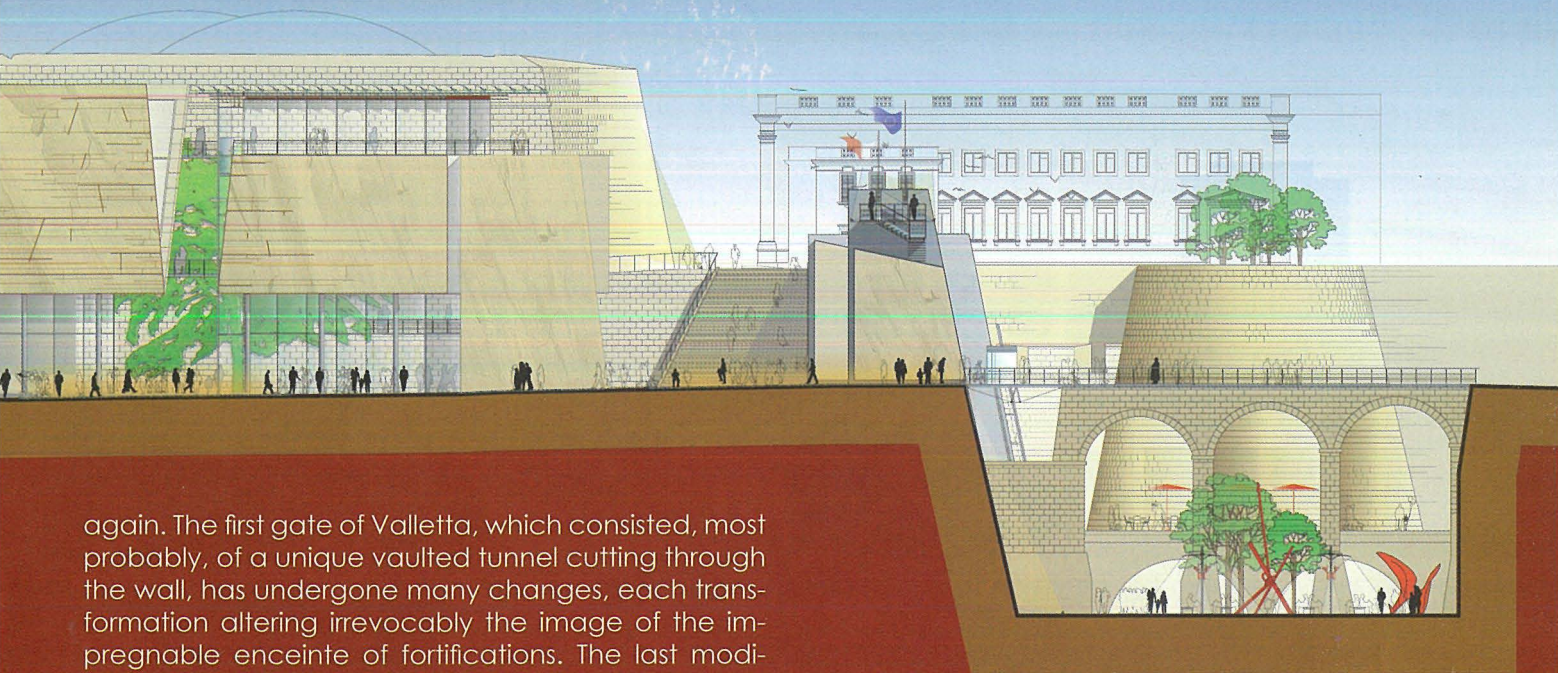
The social theatre that was created as a result could hardly have been better complemented by the construction of the Royal Opera House in 1863. In spite of

the apprehensions and misgivings of the population of Valletta with regards to the choice of location, the theatre contributed irrevocably to the spirit of the area, attracting to its monumental steps a host of finely dressed and prosperous people charmed by the blend of illusion and reality that created the magic of this place.

Given the ever increasing activity that began to characterize the area, the bridge leading to the Gate was, on several occasions, widened to cater for increasing traffic. The seventeenth century gate itself was demolished and rebuilt in 1853 by General Thompson of the Royal Engineers, this time with four openings, ostensibly to provide the local population with a more beautiful and efficient gateway. Confidential correspondence with the War Office indicates, however, that the enlargement of the gate was strictly dictated by defense requirements and the military

By definition, a bridge is rather narrow with respect to its length. The current bridge, has, as a result of several successive enlargements, completely lost its original functionality, becoming a hybrid between a piazza and a bridge. In order to reverse this unnatural transformation, the project proposes simply to restore the bridge in its original dimensions of Dingli's gate of 1633. In so doing, the experience of crossing over from one side to the other will be strongly enhanced and, what's more, the view to the ditch will at last become possible





again. The first gate of Valletta, which consisted, most probably, of a unique vaulted tunnel cutting through the wall, has undergone many changes, each transformation altering irrevocably the image of the impregnable enceinte of fortifications. The last modification, realized half a century ago, has destroyed the wall for a width of 32m creating, as a result, a complete and unprecedented new condition of blandness at the entrance to the town.

Our new design aims at giving back to the bastion walls their original expression of depth and strength by enhancing the feeling of narrowness while at the same time opening up the view to the perspective of Republic Street. The new gate is a breach, just 8 meters wide, compressing movement during the crossing. The fundamental new element is that the gate has become open to the sky. The street crossing above will be demolished and two large and gently sloped stairs, reminiscent of the dramatic staircases flanking the gate before the creation of Freedom Square, will lead from both St James' and St John's Cavaliers down to Republic Street. The fortifications will henceforth appear in their full height and strength from the inside, an image that is currently impossible due to the presence of the arcade and shop fronts on Freedom Square.

Gate and ditch shall be connected through a rede

signed stair and an exterior, panoramic elevator that provides the experience of the depth of the ditch and leads to the protected gardens below. Once the unpleasant car park has disappeared to be replaced by a lush and fresh garden atmosphere, harbouring charming and relaxing activities and promenades, visiting the ditch will become an extraordinary experience. Moreover, the planted ditch can also become the dramatic scenery for spectacular outdoor events and performances.

The architecture of the Gate itself shall express the greatest strength and a certain austerity, bare of superficial and conventional decorations and futile, stylish elements which can never be timeless. It is made of massive stone elements, monumentally shaped and flanked by high, framing blades of steel. The latter will underline the fracture between the past and the present. The gate's architecture must be simple and strong, steering away of any extravagance.

It is the best tribute to genuine intention and authentic construction.

