



**GOZO CATHEDRAL
PARISH CENTRE**

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MALTA : MEDITERRANEAN MEETING PLACE OF CULTURES

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1. Mr. M'Bow at Mdina

The Republic of Malta is an archipelago of five islands - Malta, the largest, Gozo, Comino and two small uninhabited ones - with a total area of 316 kilometres and a population of about 310,000. Situated where the sea separates Italy from the African coast, the country has been the recipient of influences from all over the Mediterranean and beyond. Those who have come to Malta include the Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Normans from Sicily, knights from Western Europe, and the British, many of whom have chosen to stay on since the country became an independent state in 1964 and a republic ten years later.

Last 16 February, the Director-General of Unesco, Mr. Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, speaking in Mdina, the ancient capital of Malta, launched an appeal to the international community to assist the Maltese government in the safeguarding of the Mediterranean republic's historical buildings and sites.

The government is determined to preserve Malta's historic treasures in all their wealth and variety, as an integral part of mankind's universal heritage, Mr. M'Bow said. But the scope of the task, he continued, is beyond the capabilities of a country without great resources.

So, Mr. M'Bow said, he was asking all men of good will to contribute generously, both financial and technical assistance, to the Maltese effort, "so that once again what men have built together in the past may provide the opportunity for them to join together in meeting the challenge of the future.

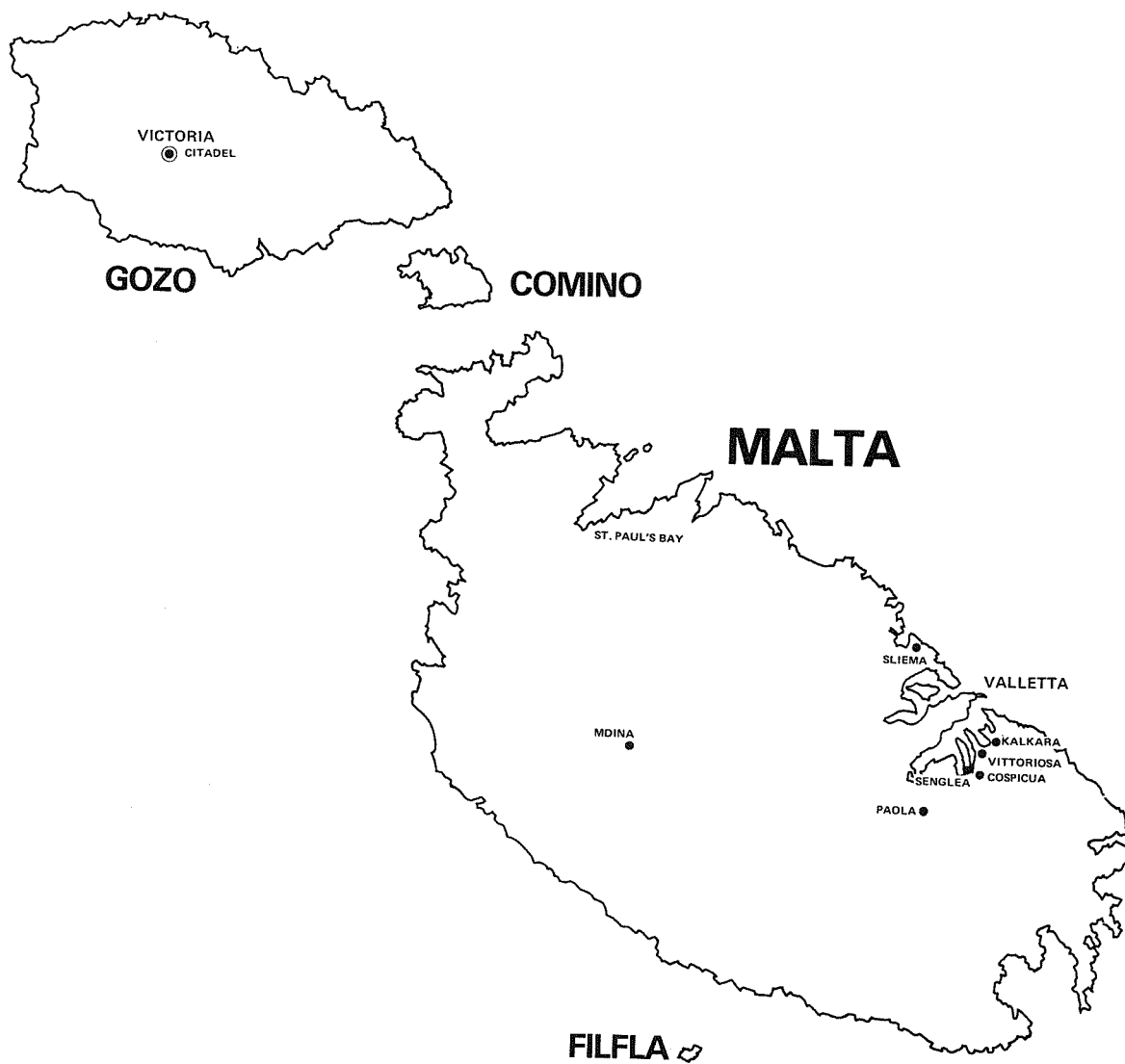
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In the first three articles of this issue of Unesco Features, Derk Kinnae describes some - but far from all - of the monuments which comprise Malta's heritage. The two last articles deal with the contribution of Dr. Anton Buttigieg, President of Malta, to the Maltese language and poetry, and the Pope John Peace Laboratory, a Maltese venture in international peace and understanding.



2. "From island fortress to a centre of peace"

minn gżira-fortizza għal centru ta' paċi





3. *The threshold of the south temple of Ggantija.*

MASTER BUILDERS OF PREHISTORIC MALTA

by Derk Kinnane

Malta was brought into the story of mankind when sailors developed sufficient skill to stop hugging coastlines and sail out onto the high sea. This happened about 7,000 years ago and it is to this period that the earliest remnants of human settlement on Malta belong. This is according to current dating which has moved back in time earlier estimates made by radiocarbon techniques.

The first settlers, as well as being sailors, were farmers who brought crops with them from Sicily; barley, primitive wheat and lentils, as well as cattle, sheep, goats and pigs. They were also able to make pottery, pressing decorations into it in the same way as was done with earthenware found at Stentinello in Sicily.

Towards the end of the first thousand years of settlement, a new culture arose, possibly under the impact of another wave of

settlers. Further changes followed until about 3,500 years ago when a people appeared who produced unique buildings that are among the most impressive monuments of prehistory.

Megalithic structures, that is buildings made out of huge blocks of stone, are found elsewhere around the Mediterranean and in Western Europe where they served as tombs. But those of Malta and its sister island of Gozo were temples. Today some 23 temple sites remain from this culture which lasted 1,000 years.

Among the most striking is the Ggantija, the Giants' House, set on the lip of a plateau near the village of Xaghra on Gozo. Seen from a bird's eye view, the complex looks like a "D". The roughly semicircular curve is a perimeter wall made of stones of gigantic size. The straight line is the façade which, in fact, is slightly concave. Within are two temples. The entrance on the left is to the older and bigger temple. The exterior is made of roughly dressed hard coralline limestone but the entrance is lined in well-tooled, softer globigerina, the golden stone of Malta. Beyond this passage, to the left and right, is a pair of the rounded chambers and beyond them a trefoil of similar rooms of which the largest, on the left, occupies 85 square metres.

Ritual cups

Plaster, painted red, once covered the interior walls; traces of it survive. The altar blocks in this temple have been carved with spirals in relief and there is a hole in the earth, thought to have been the recipient of libations. Associated with such holes, common in the Maltese temples, are thousands of fragments of a special form of cup which may have been used for pouring the libation and then ritually shattered.

The second and later temple has a slightly concave interior made of carefully dressed stone slabs. The whole structure would have been roofed with timber, long since vanished. In front of the Ggantija building, megaliths have been embedded in the ground to form a forecourt. This suggests that religious ceremonies included crowds outside the temples as well as persons inside them.

A similar terrace is found in front of the Mnajdra temples. These monuments, situated on the southern coast of Malta, with the Hager Qim temples nearby, have an especially beautiful and evocative character. Set in the hollow of a hillside sheltered from sea winds,



4. Altar at Tarxien with semi-circular cavity for sacrificial knife.

Mnajdra, too, has a concave facade which is indeed characteristic of megalithic buildings in various parts of Europe.

Another feature particular to the Maltese temples, of which an example is found at Mnajdra, is a hole in a slab of stone separating the temple chamber from another room with its own entrance from the outside. The idea seems to have been that "oracles" were transmitted through the hole by someone secreted behind the slab.

Oracle holes, also present at Hagar Qim, the important Tarxien temples, and elsewhere, strongly suggest the existence of a priesthood. Certainly animal sacrifice was practised as shown by the animal bone

ashes found in an altar from the Tarxien temples, now in the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta. The altar also has a cavity, provided with a stone plug, behind which was found a long flint sacrificial knife and a goat horn core.

Divine "Fat Lady"

The very impressive complex of temples at Tarxien, in the Valletta suburb of Pawla, yielded the statue of a "Fat Lady", also in the archaeology museum, almost certainly the deity to whom the temple was dedicated. The statue, in fact, does not clearly indicate what sex is intended. Another unique statue at Tarxien, of the goddess standing, must have been about three metres tall. Nothing of comparable scale was made elsewhere in the Mediterranean, including Greece, until several centuries later. The statue was quarried over the ages and today exists only from the waist down. If, as seems likely, the deity was a fertility goddess, her cult was also linked with death.

Indeed, there is reason to believe that the form of the temples derives from tombs like those cut into the rock at Xemxija



5. *The 'holy of holies' in the Hypogeum.*

used for ceremonies as well as for burials.

The visitor enters the hypogeum (the word means a below-ground building) by descending four metres down a modern staircase which brings one to the bottom of a cistern. It was a labourer digging the cistern in 1902 who felt the earth give way beneath him and tumbled into one of the most extraordinary and numinal monuments to be found anywhere. From the floor of the cistern the visitor goes down another metre to the heart of the complex.

Every year scores of thousands of tourists do just this, their way lighted by electricity throughout the hypogeum's cavern-like maze. Unfortunately the effect of the electric light has been to encourage the growth of moss which is causing deterioration to the wall surfaces as does simple breathing by so many visitors.

"You can see the damage being done", says Father Marius Zerafa. Father Zerafa is director of the National Museum of Fine Arts and as such has his own plans that require funding, but he believes the hypogeum must be given top priority among conservation activities. A Unesco study is to determine what kind of airconditioning system should be installed to combat the algae and lichen now attacking the painted decorations.

at St. Paul's Bay on the north-eastern coast of the island.

Just the opposite approach, however, characterised the design of the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum, also in Pawla. This appears to have been a copy carved into subterranean rock of an above-ground temple. Unlike the temples, it was used for burials and remains of an estimated 6,000 to 7,000 people belonging to the culture of that era have been recovered from it. But it is also endowed with libation holes, altars and hearths and other temple appurtenances. So its finely carved chambers were almost certainly

Let us imagine that we can use the original entrance which it is intended to open up once more. It is adjacent to a space at present enclosed by the papered walls and ceiling of an Edwardian front parlour with a door giving onto the street. The parlour floor has been removed and there is only a rock surface below it on which lie a few boulders. These are all that remain of what was probably a megalithic temple.

Rough steps lead down to the first chamber of the hypogeum proper, 2.75 metres below ground. This lobe-shaped room markedly resembles the tombs at Xemxija. Other rooms lead off from it and one cannot tell whether they were natural caves, caves enlarged by men or wholly man-made chambers. This is the oldest part of the complex; from it one descends further to a middle level. Here, among other rooms is the main chamber, its floor 5.5 metres below the street. It is roughly circular in shape and the rock is carved in imitation of post and lintel doorways. There are a number of these, some blank, others leading to rooms.

Passing through an opening one comes to more steps. These bring you into a chamber off which is the Oracle Room, roughly rectangular, with three small oval side chambers. If a man speaks into the smallest of these, which is set at face level, his voice reverberates eerily throughout the hypogeum. A woman's voice, it is said, produces no effect.

Snake pit?

Separated from the chamber but within hearing distance of the "oracle" is a room which possesses four vault-like cavities in which people may have slept in order to receive omens in their dreams. There is an orifice through which offerings might have been dropped into a two-metres deep pit. Some think sacred snakes were kept here and certainly the pit would have provided suitable accommodation for them. But no evidence exists to indicate clearly the purpose of the pit or the chamber.

Also on this level is the "holy of holies" with its splendid concave façade of stone meticulously carved to reproduce the details of post and lintel construction, centering on the entry to an inner chamber. In the floor is a large perforation for libations. The inner sanctum appears to have been left unfinished, or perhaps to have been undergoing an enlargement that was never completed.

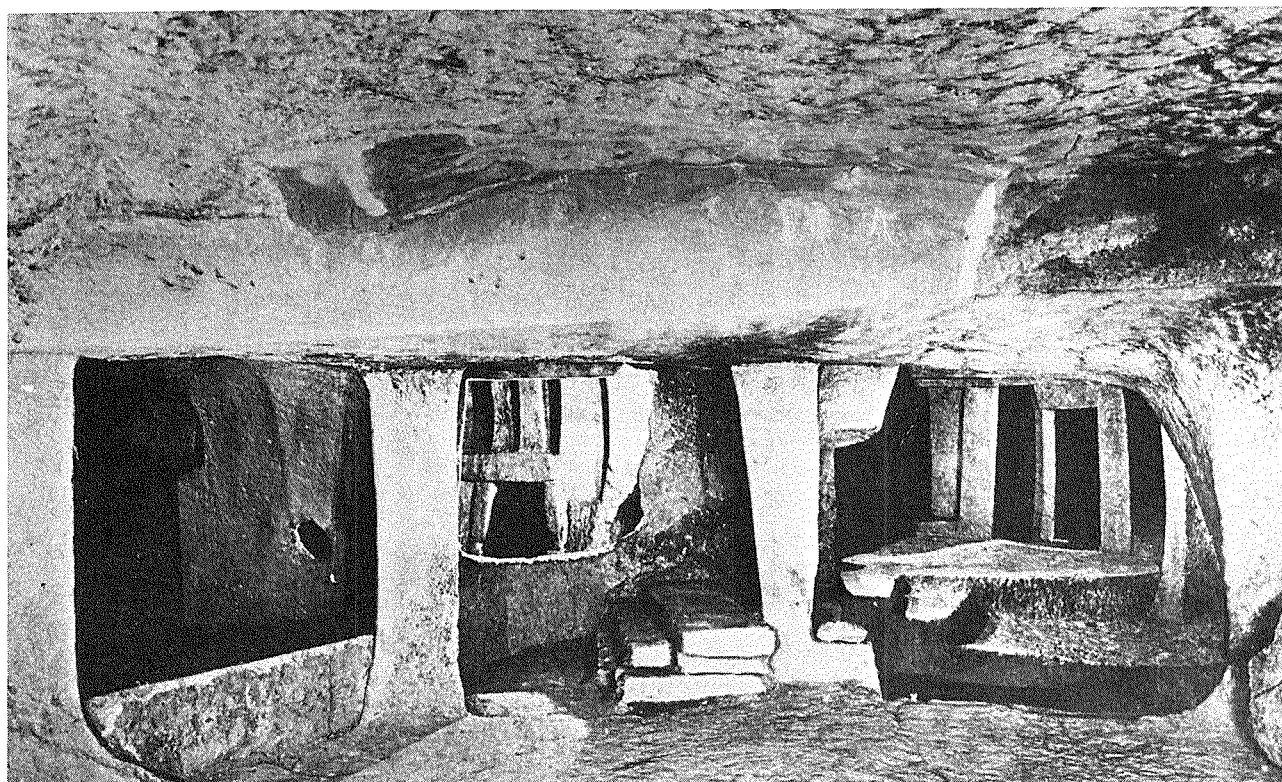
Turning back from the holy of holies one comes to more steps which take us to the deepest set rooms, one of which has its floor 10.6 metres below the surface.

The first two steps down are of the same height; the third step of a different one. The uninitiated, moving in the dark, would be likely to plunge two metres to the rock floor. At the sixth step the visitor must move onto a step concealed around a corner or, again, he will fall. The deepest chamber has holes to receive bolts on the inner side of its door. Was treasure kept here? Again the evidence is inadequate to support anything more than speculation.

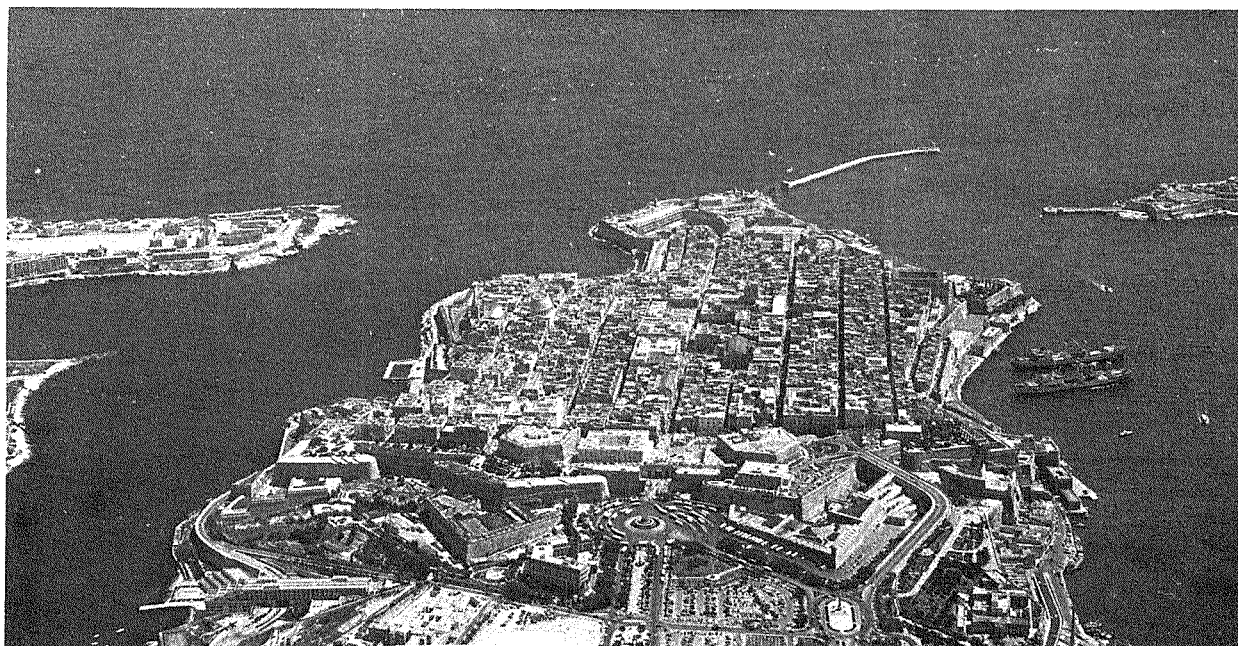
This extraordinary monument and the others of this culture were made by men wielding picks, made of antlers, and wedges along with heavy stone mallets. The fine dressing and the carving was done with obsidian or flint blades. The huge blocks of stone were moved on round stones, used like ballbearings. These remarkable builders were a long-headed race, a branch of a Mediterranean stock still widespread in the region. Their world seems to have collapsed swiftly and completely. We do not know why. The next culture in Malta, that of the Bronze Age, was made by a different, round-headed people related to the Alpine type. Their utensils and their customs were very different.

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6. *Inside the Hypogeum.*



7. Valletta thrusts towards the sea between Marsamxett Harbour (left) and Grand Harbour.

THE PROUD STONES OF VALLETTA

by Derk Kinnane

For 450 years, Malta, strategically situated in the centre of the Mediterranean, lived by being a military base. Now, a new chapter has opened in its long history, a chapter dedicated by the Maltese Government to peace.

Malta's economic dependence on supplying goods and services to armies and navies began in 1530 with the arrival of the crusading Order of St. John of Jerusalem, better known as the Knights of Malta. In 1798 the French seized the island for a brief period before it was to come under British rule. The last political ties with Britain were severed in 1974 when the island nation became a republic. But it was only on 31 March 1979 that the last British forces withdrew.

Imposing array

Malta's long military career is still evident in the vast fortifications erected by the Knights and maintained and added to by the British. Today, new uses must be found for this imposing array of buildings.

Fortunately, what the military engineers built was not only resistant to cannon balls and time, it was also handsome. The bastions

and walls that ring Valletta and the Grand Harbour, constructed out of the island's golden-hued limestone, make an imposing contribution to Malta's architectural heritage. The Renaissance engineers and architects who designed them elegantly reconciled the imperatives of defence and the requirements of peacetime urban life.

Built on a rocky tongue of land jutting into the sea and separating Grand Harbour from the harbour of Marsamxett, Valletta was called into being as a result of the perils and hardships endured by the Knights and Maltese, huddled together in the older towns of Birgu and Senglea, during the Great Siege of 1565. From 18 May to 8 September of that year they held off the might of the Ottoman Empire in an unsurpassed demonstration of courage and endurance. Already, in 1522, the sultan, Suleyman the Magnificent, had forced the Knights from their previous island possession, Rhodes. Forty-three years later and past his 70th year, Suleyman sent a fleet of 181 ships carrying some 40,000 men to invest Malta and rid the Ottoman maritime trade once and for all of harrassment by the sailor Knights. That Suleyman failed in this endeavour was largely due to the exceptional leadership provided by Jean de La Valette, the French knight who was Grand Master of the Order of St. John.

From humble to proud

On 28 March 1566, six months after the Turkish fleet had sailed back to Istanbul, La Valette laid the foundation stone of a new city built on the rock of Mount Sceberras and named Valletta in his honour. It was laid out by an Italian engineer, Francesco Laparelli, who had built for the Medicis in Florence and Pope Pius IV in Rome. Officially *Humillima Civitas Valettae*, The Most Humble City of Valletta - it would later be called *Superbissima* - The Most Proud.

Valletta was built not as a fort but as a fortified city, designed to be able to take in the people from the surrounding countryside with their livestock as well as the hundreds of other people, followers of the Knights, still arriving in Malta. It was completed in 1571, by Gerolamo Cassar, Laparelli's native Maltese assistant. Together, in the words of Michael Ellul, a Maltese architect noted for his work in restoring monuments, the two engineers "designed a precise, ordered mass of ditches, counterguards, bastions, ravelins and cavaliers, rising one above the other in tiers of solid massive

masonry the like of which had rarely been seen before or since.

"On the seaward side the formidable walls rise sheer from the water's edge, and meet in a dramatic climax in the stupendous fort of St. Elmo.

"The town planning aspect of the new city engaged Laparelli's attention as much as the fortifications themselves and he prided himself on the fact that never before, with the possible exception of Alexandria, had a new city been built in completely virgin land.

"Cassar, who designed and constructed most of Valletta's original buildings, made very good use of the natural contours of the terrain, 'so that the palaces and houses rise terraced tier upon tier,

like gigantic flights of stone steps, in blocks of light and shadow which break the uniformity of the flat roofs and façades, and present a varied and interesting skyline'."

Valletta consisted then, as it does today, of a grid of nine streets running the length of the peninsula crossed by 12 others, the whole surrounded by the fortifications and with a road within them girdling the city.

The streets fall away from a steep central ridge along which runs the main thoroughfare, Republic Street, still to many, Kingsway, the name the British gave it.

Running straight as an arrow for a kilometre, Republic Street begins at an altitude of 43 metres



8. *Windows encased in wooden balconies are typical of traditional building in Valletta.*

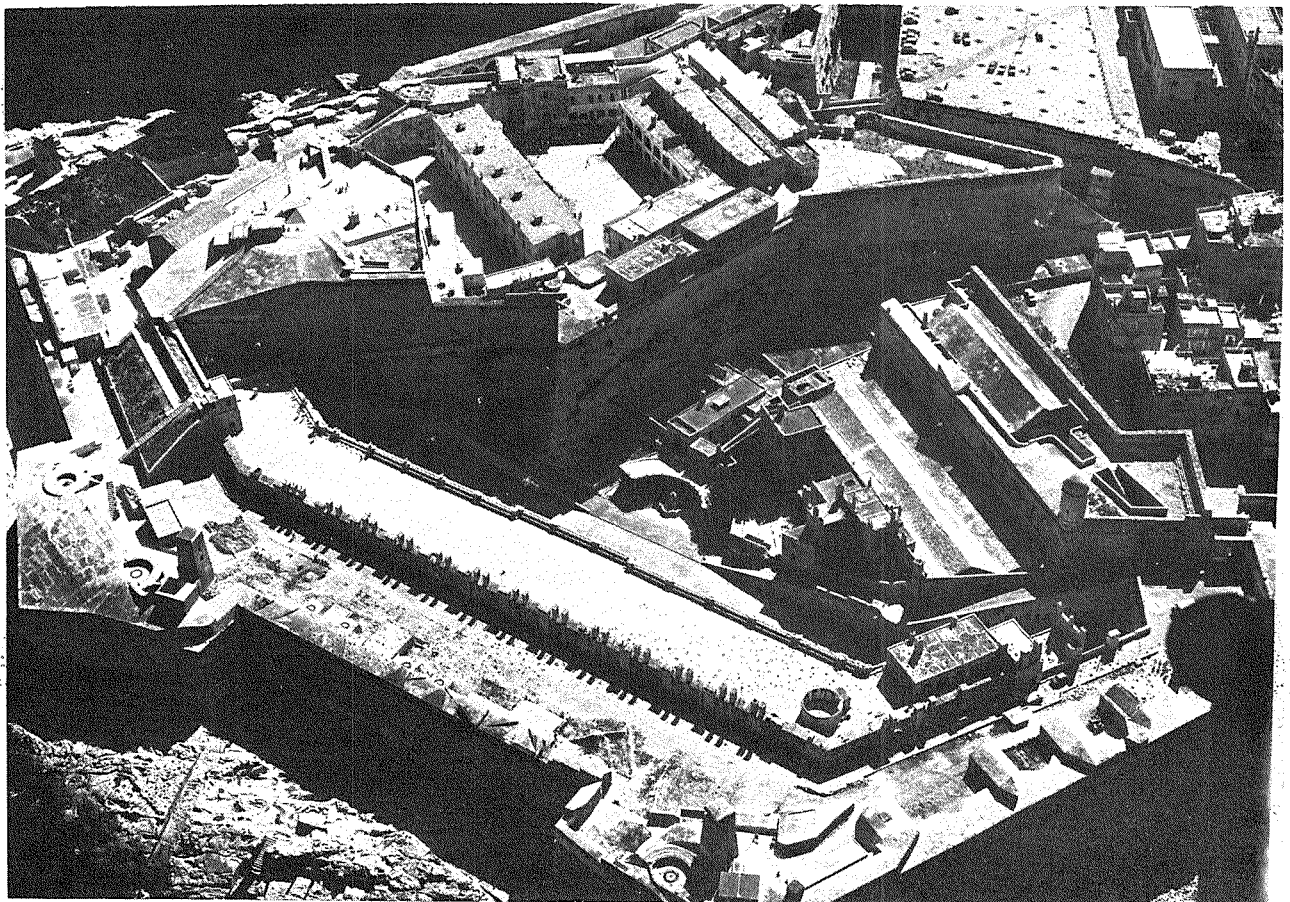
at the landward end, first descends gently, then midway, dips sharply to sea level, ending in front of Fort Saint Elmo, which occupies the whole tip of the peninsula.

In the 15th century a watchtower stood on the site and a chapel, dedicated to Saint Elmo, patron of sailors. A fort was built

in 1488 and strengthened in 1551. It was this fortress, commanding the entrances to Grand Harbour and Marsamxett Harbour, which saw the bitterest fighting of the Great Siege of 1565. Fort Saint Elmo held out for 31 days before the Turks at last planted their standard on its pulverised defences. They had thought to take it in a week. It cost them 8,000 men; the defenders lost 1,500.

When Valletta was designed the new fort was conceived and built on a grand scale and continued to play a key rôle in Malta's defences up till the Second World War.

The visitor, strolling the ramparts, has a superb view over the two harbours. Looking to the left he can make out the Dragonara headland with its square, colonnaded 19th century villa, now a gambling casino. To the right is Fort San Angelo and the Three Cities. An old drill hall houses mementoes of World War II during which the Maltese endured a second great siege, imposed from the air by the Axis powers. There were 3,343 air raid alerts and 16,000 tons of bombs dropped. The very first bomb made a direct hit on a gun battery atop the fort's



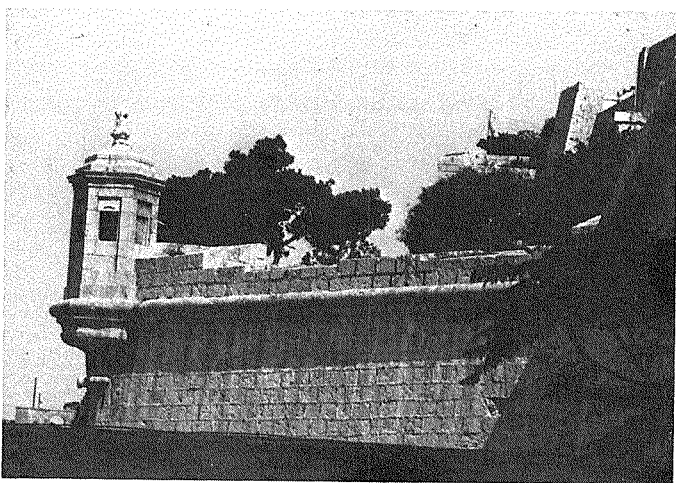
9. *Fort Saint Elmo.*

cavalier. A simple low square stone marks the spot where it struck at 7.45 a.m. on Tuesday, 11 June 1940.

Fort Saint Elmo is named in the Unesco appeal on behalf of the Maltese monuments. Most, if not all, of the undistinguished buildings added in recent times will have to be removed. But the future use of this splendid site is unclear. The government does not want to turn it over to unbridled commercial exploitation, but a suitable tenant for such a vast, special complex of buildings, is not easy to find.

A similar question mark hangs over the future of Fort San Angelo, across the Grand Harbour, a monument even richer in significance to the Maltese.

The Phoenicians, Greeks and Romans are thought to have had temples there and St. Angelo's Chapel (formerly St. Anne's) is said to be built over a Greek temple and perhaps to contain a pagan remnant, the column of red granite, a stone foreign to Malta, which supports its pointed vault.



10. *Water, stone and vegetation meet in harmony on the Grand Harbour.*

The first fort was built by the Arabs. By the time the Knights arrived a jumble of structures had risen, the most interesting being the Captain's House, a square tower in the style brought over from Sicily by the Normans. San Angelo's Chapel is attached to the tower, which dates back to the 14th century.

Surrounding these and the other buildings at the upper levels is dense Mediterranean vegetation, one of the lordly amenities with which San Angelo has been endowed since the days of the Normans when it became an administrative centre. Under the British, the fort's splendour was refurbished as it became first the headquarters of the commandant of the Maltese garrison, then a naval base and eventually headquarters of the Royal Navy Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean.

But life in the fort was not only lordly. It was sometimes harsh and deadly as attested by the mass grave of knights who died in the siege and the oubliette in which an erring knight might be dropped and left to consider his ways. Indeed it could be far more cruelly



11. *Fort San Angelo bestrides the Grand Harbour across from Valletta (bottom right) and Kalkara Creek.*

oppressive, as it was for the slaves who manned the galleys of the Order of St. John.

The grim quarters in which they were kept give on to a landing stage so that they could be put aboard quickly and without inconvenience to their masters.

For the slaves, it was the whip, exhaustion and the likelihood of death, an experience the Grand Master de La Valette himself survived: at the age of 47 he was for a year a prisoner-slave aboard a Turkish vessel.

Petticoat Lane

Next to the slave quarters at Fort San Angelo are the underground stores built by the Knights and enlarged by the British during the Second World War when Fort San Angelo was, once again, a centre of military activity. The stores are tunnels and chambers, cut into the rock and lighted by electricity. To relieve the gloom the British sailors gave the corridors names from London; Petticoat Lane, Marble Arch, Piccadilly. They played skittles in Regent Street. Now there

is no noise of bombs or bows, only the susurrus of the cleaner's and painter's brushes. What will finally become of San Angelo remains to be decided.

New use for old fortification

What to do with a fortification, if not a whole fort, has been happily demonstrated in one part of Valletta's defences. This is St. John's cavalier, one of two cavaliers that dominate the bastions on either side of City Gate, the main entrance to the city.

St. John's cavalier is a pentagonal block, 18 metres high, its broad walls virtually windowless. The entrance, above a short flight of stairs and through a pair of heavy wooden doors, leads into an immense vaulted hall, hung with the banners of the eight *langues* or nations in which the Knights of Malta were organized when they came to the island. This is singularly appropriate as the order, having built the cavalier in the first place, acquired it again 400 years later and made it into the offices and residence of Dino Marrajeni, the order's ambassador to the Republic of Malta. (The order is



12. Inside St. John's Cavalier.

recognised as a sovereign entity by two score governments.)

When it was first erected, the cavalier was half its present imposing height. In 1582 it was decided to enlarge the building but it was only in 1746 that what is today the embassy chancellery, now reached by lift, was completed. It was built as a bomb-proof powder magazine. By the time the building was finished, thousands of cubic metres of earth had been poured in to fill the volume between the walls and the roof with its six stone gun emplacements.

The guns are no longer there. Instead the architect who carried out the conversion, Roger de Giorgio, has put up a graceful suite of rooms that make up the ambassador's residence. Stepping through the french doors of the drawing room, the ambassador and his guests can enjoy a panoramic view over Valletta, and the sea around it, as far as Sicily, 100 kilometres to the north. De Giorgio took pains to arrange the residence so that it cannot be seen from street level, thus preserving the same silhouette the cavalier had when it housed a garrison of troops.

There are more palatial embassies, and bigger ones that hum with the varied business of big governments, but surely none more imposing in character.

Another highly successful restoration and conversion - and on a much larger scale - is the rebuilding by the Maltese government of the famed hospital of the Order of Saint John.

Dedication to the sick

The order emerged in the 11th century as a brotherhood providing medical care for travellers in the Holy Land and throughout its history it has retained its devotion to "Our lords the sick and poor". One of its greatest institutions was the *Sacra Infermeria*.

Begun in 1575, the hospital rose on the south east corner of Valletta near Fort Saint Elmo and the mouth of the Grand Harbour. This enabled patients to be landed from ships directly at the entrance to the hospital, avoiding having to carry them uphill through the streets. They passed through a covered way piercing the sea wall and leading into the lowest ward. Above, the Great Ward was and still is one of the longest rooms in Europe, 161 metres long. It could accommodate 600 patients.

Rich and poor, knights and slaves, Protestants, Orthodox Christians and Muslims were admitted to the hospital. Strict attention



13. (Left) Knights attend the sick in the Great Ward in this wood engraving from the statutes of the order, printed in 1586 and now in the National Library, Valletta.

14. (Right) The ward as it looks today.

was paid to hygiene, bed linen was changed regularly. Patients ate off silver, were waited on by the knights and visited twice daily by doctors as skilled as any of the day. There were specialized wards for the wounded, contagious diseases, dysentery, lithotomy cases and other disorders. The insane, the destitute and illegitimate children were also cared for.

In the 150 years after its founding the hospital's buildings were constantly expanded and in 1676, the establishment of a School of Anatomy and Surgery enabled the hospital to train its own doctors from among the local people. In 1769 the school became the faculty of medicine in the newly constituted University of Malta.

Bonaparte's loot

The end came for the hospital when Bonaparte seized Malta: the patients were thrown out and the silver instruments and dishes looted to pay for the revolutionary army's invasion of Egypt.

Under the British the buildings were used as a military hospital. At the end of the First World War they became the headquarters of the Maltese police. In the Second World War, they were reduced to a shell by bombing and remained a ruin until 1978.

Beginning in November of that year, Maltese workers restored the remains of the old building, roofed over its courtyard and, in the astonishing time of three months, created a magnificent



15. *The shell of the Sacra Infermeria before restoration.*

with room for 60 musicians and the stage is hung with a vast red velvet and gold trimmed curtain, a gift from the San Carlo Opera in Naples.

What was the Great Ward is now the main foyer, used for receptions, exhibitions, registering conference participants and providing them with telecommunication and other facilities. The ward below is La Valette Restaurant where 1,000 people can be served.

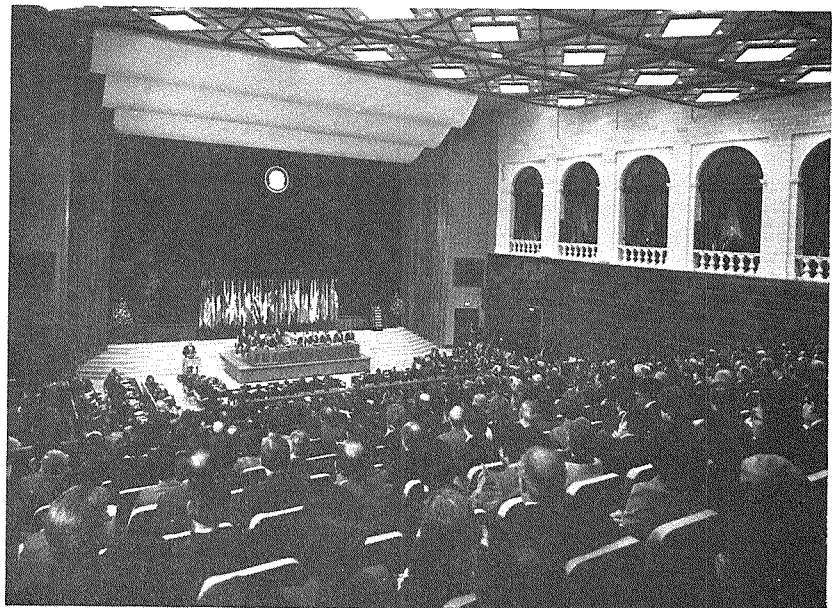
Virtually the day after work was completed on the Mediterranean Conference Centre, it opened its doors to the Conference on European Security and Co-operation, attended by 250 delegates from 38 countries.

The conference, which lasted six weeks, put the centre through its paces and at the end, the Maltese knew it worked - and worked well. Malta had begun its new career as a forum for peace.

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16. *The Conference on European Security meets in Republic Hall.*



conference centre. With facilities for handling interpretation into eight languages, the former courtyard, now Republic Hall, seats up to 986 people. Lined, like the centre's five smaller meeting rooms, in exotic Brazilian woods, Republic Hall has a stage that can be used for concerts and theatrical performances.

There is an orchestra pit



17. *Crossing the Grand Harbour in a traditional Maltese boat.*

PAST GRANDEUR, PRESENT VITALITY

by Derk Kinnane

- I -

Long before the Knights of St. John arrived in 1530, Malta's Grand Harbour had been a magnet to ordinary Maltese. While the island's aristocracy favoured the old fortified city of Mdina, which rises in the centre of the island, those seeking a living as sailors, boat builders or merchants, were drawn to the Three Cities on the south eastern side of the Grand Harbour. These cluster together in a horse-shoe on and around two spits of land separated by Dockyard Creek.

A maritime power, the Order of St. John needed dockyard workers and found them to hand when it moved into one of the cities, Birgu, and established headquarters there and in the Fort San Angelo at the tip of its tiny peninsula.

After the Great Siege of 1565, Birgu was renamed Vittoriosa, but most often the Maltese still call it by its original name, just as they may call Senglea, across the creek, L-Isla and Cospicua, at the back of the creek, Bormla.

Looking after ships is still a major Maltese industry. Indeed, Malta Drydocks is the biggest enterprise in the country, employing over 5,000 people. They and their families with many others continue to live in the Three Cities from whose bustling population have emerged some of the most prominent figures of present-day Malta, including Prime Minister Dom Mintoff, who was born in Cospicua.

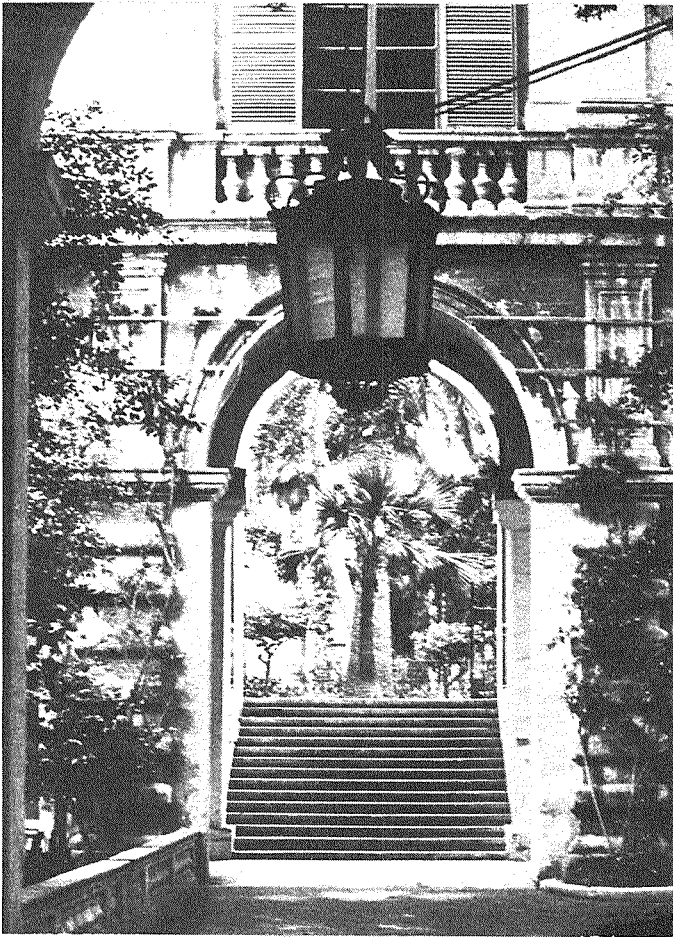
Newest museum

Appropriately Malta's newest museum, devoted to political history, will be housed in the heart of this community in a handsome old building in Birgu. The house, now being restored, was the Auberge de France, that is, the hostel of the Northern French knights, before they moved to Valletta.

With its characteristic narrow spiral staircase rising from the ground floor to the roof, the simple single moulding which gives



18. *The Auberge of Castile.*



19. *A courtyard in the Grand Master's Palace.*

built for the Knights from the south of France, on Valletta's main thoroughfare, Republic Street. It is now the National Museum of Archaeology with Punic, Greek and Roman artefacts as well as an important collection of prehistoric items.

Cosmopolitan court

Further along Republic Street is the palace of the Grand Masters. With a façade 89 metres long it is a complex of halls, corridors and courtyards. Now the President of Malta has his office there and it is the seat of the House of Representatives. It has a museum too - of arms and armour left behind by the Knights - and the richly decorated state rooms are open to the public. They display the civilization of a cosmopolitan European court of the 16th to 18th centuries. In the Knights' Supreme Council chamber, now known as the Hall of St. Michael and St. George, a frieze of paintings by Matteo de Lecce, a pupil of Michelangelo, recounts the Great Siege. On a hot day, the courtyards, with their fountains, draw the stroller

definition to doorways and the pilasters which ornament its façade, the house is a fine example of Maltese building of the 16th century.

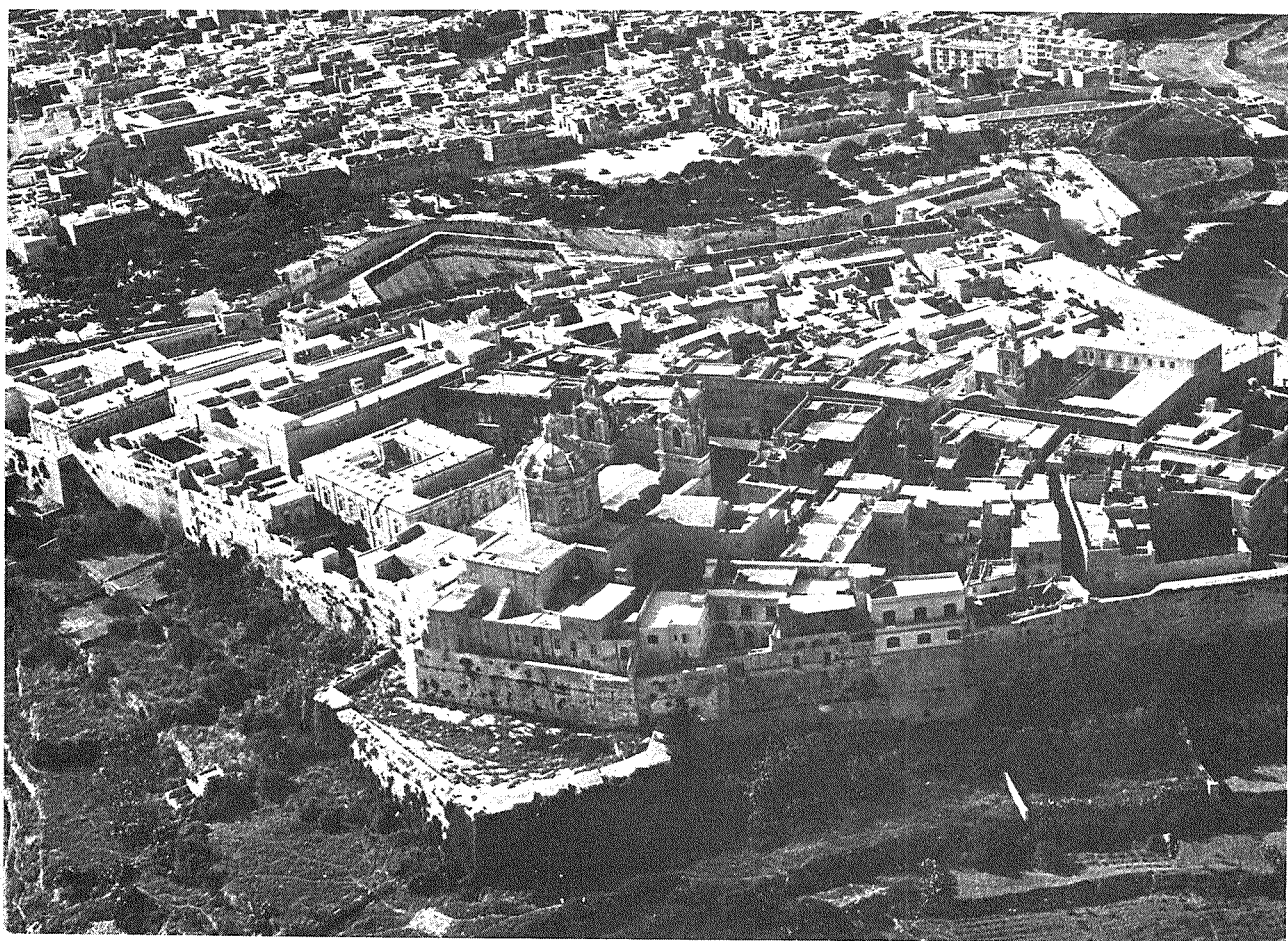
Thanks to the Knights, there is no lack of such buildings to serve as museums or for other modern purposes. The grandest of the auberges is that of Castile, which housed members of the Order of St. John from Spain and Portugal. The original building was reconstructed in 1744 in an exuberant Baroque style. Today it houses the offices of the Prime Minister and offers the citizens of Valletta a short cut between Merchants' and St. Pauls' streets by way of a charming courtyard. In striking contrast is the severe façade of the Auberge de Provence,

to the coolness of their arcades.

Another residence of the Grand Masters, the Vilhena Palace, has become the National Museum of Natural History. Built in the French style in 1730 for Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena, the palace lies just inside the main gate of Mdina, set atop a hill.

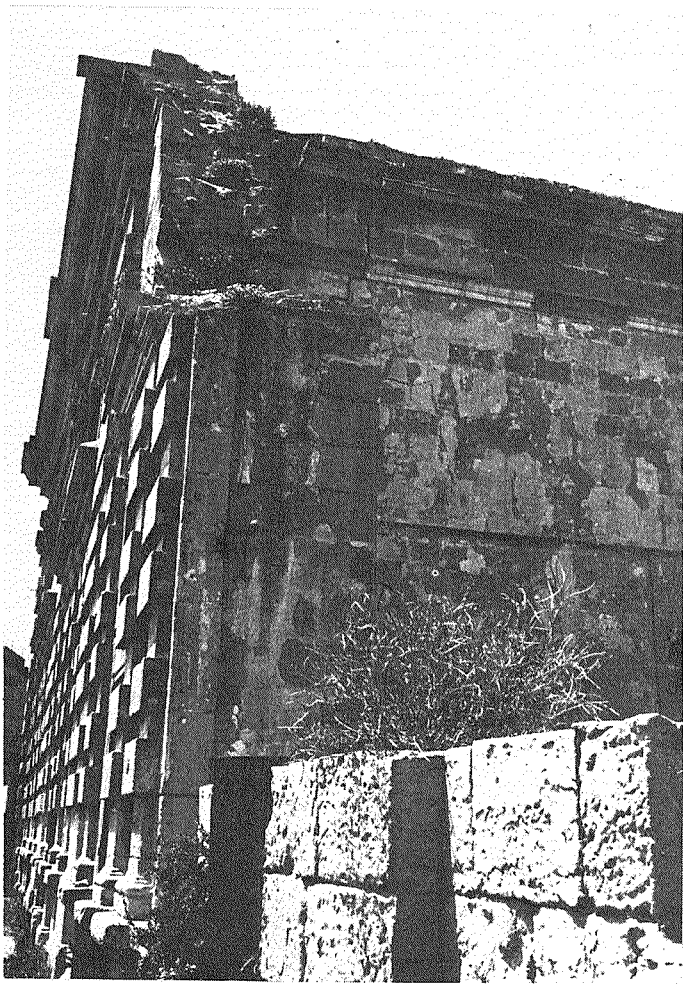
Mdina, the oldest city in Malta, was known to the Phoenicians and called *Melita* by the Romans, from the Greek word for honey, which the island exported. The word, indeed, may be the source of the name Malta.

Mdina dominates the surrounding countryside, its walls sparkling in the sun, its skyline broken by the red dome of its splendid



20. *The walled city of Mdina with the cathedral in the foreground and the Vilhena Palace on the far left. The modern town of Rabat can be seen at the top.*

17th century cathedral. Some of the houses lining its narrow streets go back to the days when the island was ruled by Normans from Sicily. Beyond the ramparts on the south side is the modern town of Rabat, with its ancient Roman house and extensive catacombs.



21. *The damaged back of the Vilhena Palace.* wall of the palace dining hall, thus losing an ideal exhibition room.

An attempt to stop the earth moving was made by planting a block of cement over 7.5 metres square and 15 metres high into the foot of the bastion. But the clay goes down 21 metres before reaching rock, so the bastion and the palace keep on pulling away.

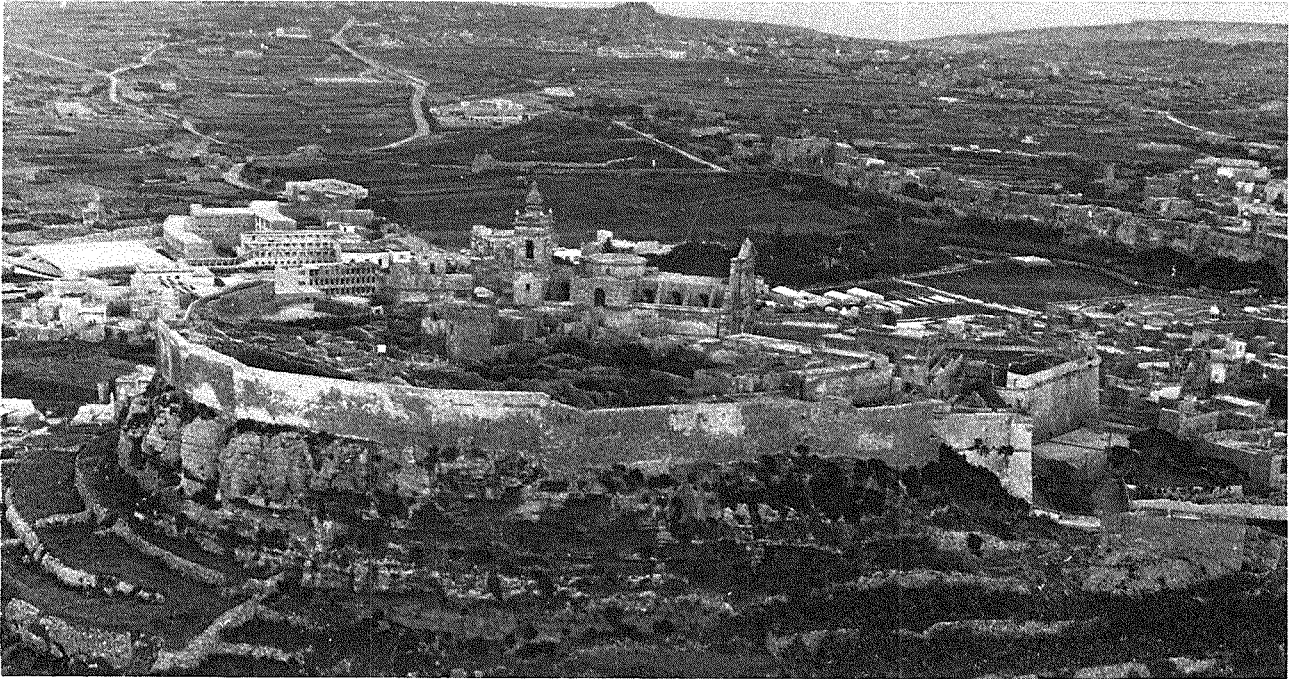
Finding a solution to the problem of Mdina's walls is part of Unesco's programme in Malta, as is shoring up similar hilltop walls, those of the Citadel of Gozo, the smaller, sister island of Malta.

Natural defence

It is not known when the flat hilltop, offering a strong natural defence from attack, was first inhabited. The Romans, at the end of the 3rd century, described the Gozo Citadel and the town below it as flourishing.

Mdina has never been deserted by its inhabitants, but the Gozo Citadel occupies a cramped space and was gradually abandoned for the lower town. "Today only one building remains inhabited", said

From the eastern ramparts, one looks over fields of vegetables and fruit trees, as far as the sea and Valletta, a view that can be enjoyed from the Vilhena Palace, but only at one's peril. This is because the rear of the palace is supported by a bastion of the city wall. This, in turn, rests on earth of which a crucial component is clay. The clay is sliding away, together with the overlayer of limestone, tearing the bastion and the rear of the palace away from the front half of the building. Walls have cracked, the ground over the bastion is not safe to walk on and the director of the museum has had to remove the roof and take down the back



22. The Citadel of Gozo.

Mr. Francis S. Mallia, director of Malta's Museums Department, explaining what is hoped to be done in Gozo.

"The Unesco campaign, as well as consolidating the Citadel's walls, includes plans for renovating the remaining buildings and finding suitable uses for them", he said.

Over half the structures within the Citadel have fallen down. Others are in poor condition, including a few elegant survivals from the Middle Ages. The cathedral, built at the end of the 17th century, is intact and the old prison and the keep of the Citadel still stand, as does the Casa Bondi. Built in the 17th century by a well-to-do family it is now the Gozo museum.

Among its exhibits is a marble tombstone with superbly carved Arabic calligraphy. It was made in the 12th century for a 12-year-old girl named Maimuna. Carvings on its back show that the stone had previously been part of a building put up in Roman times.

Excavations are to be made to try and find further remains of the Arab and earlier civilizations which would cast more light on the history and cultural development of Malta and the Mediterranean region.

The Casa Bondi is not the only town house to be turned into a museum. Another is Admiralty House. One of the first buildings to be erected in Valletta, it was transformed in 1763 into a graceful rococo mansion. In 1821 it became the official residence

for the senior British admirals in Malta and acquired its present name. Today it is the home of the national fine arts collection and a museum of exceptional charm.

- II -

Malta, with a population of only some 310,000 people, has reason to take pride in its several museums. The National Museum of Fine Arts permits the visitor to survey European painting from the 14th century down to the present. It contains works by Perugino, Carpaccio, Tintoretto, the circle of Jan van Scorel, David Teniers, Ribera, and François Boucher.

There are also paintings by Mattia Preti and Antoine de Favray who, like Caravaggio, lived in Malta, working for the Order of St. John and becoming knights. Native Maltese artists are, of course, shown too: the sculptor Antonio Sciortino, probably the best known



23. *The baroque staircase of Admiralty House.*

modern Maltese artist, is very well represented.

In the cellar of Admiralty House is a restoration workshop. Here two armourers are kept busy repairing and keeping clean the four to five thousand pieces of assorted weaponry once part of the Knights' arsenal. To look after paintings there are two restorers and an assistant. Recently they have been working painstakingly on a Greek icon, taken along by the Knights when they left Rhodes in 1522. Badly damaged in the Second World War, the icon will be returned, when the work is done, to the Greek Catholic Church in Valletta.

The workshop is also carrying out the huge task of restoring the paintings from ceilings of the corridors of the *piano nobile* (first floor) of the Palace of the Grand Masters. Taken down for their protection at the start of World

War II, they were damaged in handling and by damp when they were stored. George Farrugia, who is carrying out the restoration, assisted by Christine Mercieca, a polytechnic student, required one year to complete a 17 square metres portion of the ceiling, now back in place and a brilliant delight to the eye. He expects it will take him five more years, working full time, to complete the rest.

Dating from 1725, the paintings are made up of designs of shells, *putti*, and the arms of the Grand Master Vilhena. They include a representation of a pierced dome soaring up to heaven where God the Father can be seen wearing a fashionable 18th century triangle for a halo.

Not too much the same

Farrugia, who studied at the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property in Rome, is using polymer colours. As these are darker than the original paint, he takes care to lighten them. Where the original work has been obliterated, he turns to the opposing, balancing part of the overall design which he follows without copying it exactly: to do so, he says, would go against the varying of similar motifs practised in the art of the period.



24. A painting of 18th century Maltese ladies by Antoine de Favray in the National Museum of Fine Arts.

As well as its heritage of paintings, Malta also possesses some notable tapestries. Kept in the Museum of the Co-Cathedral of St. John, 29 of them were commissioned by Ramon Perellos, commemorating his election as Grand Master of the Order of St. John in 1697. Executed by Judocus de Vos in Brussels, they consist of 15 large panels, with a combined surface of nearly 700 metres. Depicting episodes from the New Testament, 14 of them were woven from cartoons of paintings by Peter Paul Rubens. The fifteenth is a copy of a painting by Nicolas Poussin. There are also 14 smaller tapestries following designs by Mattia Preti.



25. *The de Vos tapestry based on Rubens' painting of The Nativity.*

Other outstanding tapestries presented to the order by Perellos were a set of the famed *Tentures des Indes* (Indian Hangings). They can be seen together in one room, the Council Chamber of the Palace of the Grand Masters. Based on paintings by Franz Post and Albert Eckhout, who accompanied Prince Maurice of Nassau to South America and Africa between 1634 and 1644, they are a remarkable record of how Europeans first saw people, animals and plants in parts of the globe new to them

The tapestries badly need restoration but the cost of sending them abroad for repair is prohibitive. The solution, in the view of Father Marius Zerafa, Director of the National Museum of Fine Arts, is to set up a tapestry repair shop on the spot. Once established, the workshop should be able, he believes, not only to take care of Malta's needs, but to undertake restoration work for other countries.

The tapestries are only a small part of the artistic treasure of the co-cathedral which, in addition to its importance as a centre of worship, could be described as Malta's grandest museum.

- III -

St. John's has been called an anthology of the history of art in Malta from the arrival of the Knights to their departure. It was built between 1573 and 1577 as the conventual church of the Order of St. John, and raised to equal status with the Metropolitan Cathedral in Mdina in 1816.

Nearly a century after its erection, the church was modified at the request of Mattia Preti, the painter from Calabria who had been commissioned to decorate it. A window was added over the main entrance, the windows in the nave just below the ceiling were enlarged and the small doors connecting one side chapel with another were replaced by bigger, arched doorways, in effect creating aisles running parallel to the nave.

Preti had studied in Rome and Naples and absorbed Venetian influences while developing a masterly style of his own. The ceiling of St. John's, his most striking achievement, shows scenes from the



26. *The interior of St. John's Co-Cathedral.*

life of the saint.

The paintings are marked by airy overall compositions, forceful in drawing, and by a transparency of colouring with deep contrasts of light and shade. As well as the ceiling, Preti contributed many other paintings to the cathedral's embellishment, and fittingly, is buried just below his "Birth of the Virgin", a lunette above the entrance to the main sacristy.

Another painter-knight who ended his days in far different circumstances was Michaelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, the greatest name in art associated with Malta. A man of passionate and disreputable life, he brought great psychological intensity to painting as well as technical brilliance, a powerful sense of composition and an innovative use of chiaroscuro, the dramatic use of light and dark. He used humble contemporary settings and found his models for holy figures in the streets, shocking his fellow artists and outraging the clergy. But so compelling was his talent, that he was accepted as a great artist.

Having to leave Rome in 1606 after a brawl in which he killed a man, he went to Malta. There he was made a Knight and executed a portrait of Grand Master Alof de Wignancourt, now in the Louvre, and other works. The most important of these is the "Beheading of St. John", painted for the Knights' oratory attached to the cathedral.

Terrible realism

Caravaggio was 35 when he depicted this scene with terrible realism. The executioner, sword in hand, bends over the prostrate body of John and is about to lift the severed head. A gaoler and a woman look on in horror while a young woman bends forward with a salver to take the head. To the right, someone watches from behind the barred window of a cell. The scene is lighted obliquely, as from an aperture in the roof of the prison chamber. The beholder's eye is drawn down to where the blood from the victim's neck flows onto the ground. Looking closely, one can read in it the beginning of the name Michaelangelo; it is now accepted as Caravaggio's one and only signature on a work.

It was about the time he painted the "Beheading of St. John" that he was admitted as a knight. This took place on 14 July 1608. Soon after he was in trouble again and by October, he had escaped from

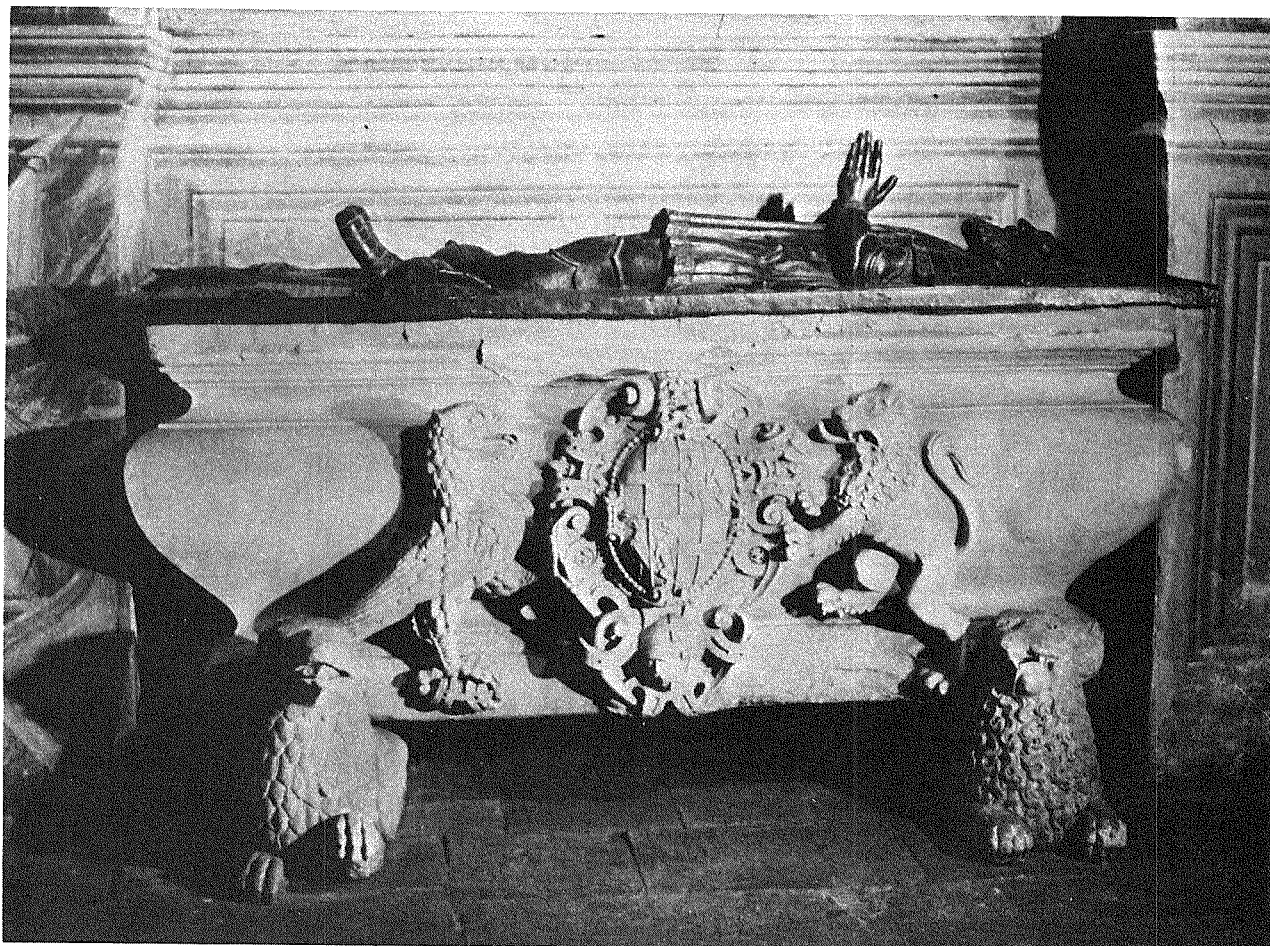
confinement in Fort San Angelo and left Malta. On 1 December he was denounced as "putrid and fetid" and expelled from the order.

He made his way first to Syracuse, in Sicily, then moved to Naples with the intention of going on to Rome to pursue his petition for a pardon of his old crime. One day a gang of men set upon him as he was entering an inn, beat him, and so gashed his face that he was left unrecognizable. It took him eight months to recover.

Rage, then death

At the end of June 1610, he sailed from Naples and disembarked at Porto Ercole in Tuscany. Again he was arrested, but this time by mistake. When he was released, he went to board the felucca he had been travelling on but found it gone. Thinking the captain had made off with his belongings, he was seized by a fit of rage. Already weakened by malaria he had contracted as a youth, he died there on the beach. The pardon from Rome arrived just afterwards and it turned out that the captain had put Caravaggio's goods in store.

In Valletta, death was surrounded by decorum and pomp. The



27. *The tomb of Jean de La Valette in the crypt of St. John's.*

first man to be buried in the city was its founder, Jean Parisot de La Valette, the Grand Master of the Order of St. John who defeated the Turkish attempt to seize Malta in 1565. This hero, endowed with surpassing strength of character and ability to lead men, lies in a sarcophagus in the crypt of the co-cathedral, along with 11 other heads of the order.

When there was no more room in the crypt, the grand masters were buried in the side chapel associated with their particular nation. They took pains to see to their memorials while still alive. The result is that the church was endowed with a diversity of 17th and 18th century sculpture. Other knights were commemorated by brilliant inlaid marble tombstones emblazoned with their coats of arms and their epitaphs. The entire floor of St. John's is covered by some 400 of these, making up a unique and magnificent display of heraldry.

The richness of decoration, all the paintings, marble, bronze, silver and gilt, catch the eye everywhere as one walks through St. John's. But somehow the architectonic harmony is retained in this great ensemble of southern baroque art.

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Please credit photo: 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 13, 15, 18, 20, 22, 23, 25, 28, 29 - Department of Information, Malta; 5, 8, 11, 14, 16, 17, 26 - National Tourist Organization, Malta; 2, Eric Gerada and Chris Zubar, Malta: an island republic, Editions Delrosse, Boulogne-sur-Seine, France; 12 - Roger de Giorgio & Partners, Malta; 24 - Museum Department, Malta; 1, 27 - Unesco/Vorontzoff; 19 - Unesco/Dupin, 21 - Unesco/Galy.

Note to Editors: The following photos are available in black and white glossy prints upon request. Please specify photos wanted by number prefixing the caption: 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 14, 20, 22, 26, 28, 29.

MALTA'S PRESIDENT - POET

28. *President Buttigieg*

The Maltese have clung tenaciously to that vital part of a nation's fabric, its language. The roots of the Maltese tongue are semitic and can probably be traced back to the Phoenicians. But the two centuries of Arab rule, which began in 870 AD, also made a lasting imprint.

Present-day Maltese springs from this grafting of Arabic onto an ancient tongue, further enriched over the years by contact with Latin, Spanish, Italian and English. The grammatical structure is similar to that of Arabic and approximately 40 per cent of Maltese words are of semitic origin; 60 per cent come from the Romance languages.

Maltese, which may be considered a semitic based language, is the only one written in the Latin alphabet.

Poet and statesman

The history of written Maltese is relatively short. Although a few specimens date back 500 years, it was only in the mid-1930's that Maltese was recognized - along with English - as the official language of the island.

It was at this time that Anton Buttigieg, now President of Malta, became known as a champion of his native tongue. Buttigieg was one of a group of students who saw how Maltese might be used as a literary medium. Although he became a Doctor at Law, and embarked on a political career, his literary interest continued and he became a poet as well as a statesman.

A collection of his poems, translated into English by Francis Ebejer, has recently been published in the Unesco Collection of Representative Works. The book is called *The Lamplighter* and takes its name from the first poem:

This article is based on a programme prepared by Unesco Radio in collaboration with Xandir Malta.

Each evening
 when with the dusk
 the strength of the day wanes and dies,
 Majsi arrives with his small ladder;
 he lights for me
 under the window
 a small street-lamp
 that alleviates the night's darkness.

My own strength too
 wanes with each day;
 but the gentle Muse
 climbs up her little ladder each evening
 to light inside my heart
 a lamp that eases
 my sadness.

It would be a sad day if Majsi
 were not there to kindle a little light,
 sad too if with Majsi there were not also
 the Muse.

A feature of President Buttigieg's poetry is its variety, not only in subject matter but in style. As he explains: "When Maltese was introduced as an official language, I felt it my duty to build up a literature. I have studied various literatures - English, Latin, Italian, French, Spanish, Japanese, some Indian, some Chinese - and I try to introduce every form into my poetry... We are always against isolation and we try to increase Maltese culture by taking on whatever good we find elsewhere."

A poetic style that has intrigued President Buttigieg is the Japanese Haiku - he has written more than 600. A Haiku should be composed of 17 syllables in three lines, and, for Buttigieg, the structure of the Maltese language is ideally suited to this form:

A viper's nest
 under a stone - full of warmth,
 full of love.

The streets of Malta
 all named after the saints -
 the devils live in them.

I like the sound
 of rain; how I long to hear
 the sound of dew!

In the late 18th century, although the Order of Saint John was in decline, Valletta was a sumptuously appointed city with many fine churches. The opposite side of the coin was the piracy rife in the Mediterranean and the flourishing market in stolen goods and slaves.

In "Malta 1780", Buttigieg writes:

A range of high ramparts unassailable.
Palaces and Auberges of sumptuous architecture
feast the eye, where in comfort live
the Knights jealous of each other.

And grandiose churches adorned with rich tapestries
with gold of chandeliers and candlesticks.
In the city's low quarters exist destitute
the wretched bastards of the Knights

Into port, well armed galleys enter
laden with stolen merchandise;
and others, in turn, sail out to continue
their brave mission of piracy.

Underground dungeons choked with slaves
bound in chains, starving, oppressed...
Oh Lord, protect and preserve this Island,
staunch bulwark of the faith and of culture.

"Fra Diego Square" gives us another vision of Malta:

Thirty trees,
thirty green slum-dwellings around the square,
where at night,
after a hard day,
the tired birds sleep,
and dirty the branches
and the people beneath

Twelve green benches
on which rest
the folk of the nearby slum-dwellings
after a day of travail,
folk who from their windows
hang out their washing
that wets whoever is below...
and the old people from the Institute
who moan and grumble against the Nun,
or beg a cent or two for a cigar.

Fra Diego in the middle of the square
lives forever with the humble;
the sparrows, the poor people of the slums,
and the abandoned old,
that all together infest the square
with chattering and grumbling
and with the garbage of hazelnut shells.

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MALTESE 'PEACE LAB' PROMOTES CONCERN FOR JUSTICE29. *Father Mintoff*

"We are dedicated to promoting concern for peace and justice in Malta and throughout the world and our motto is, 'Let's start now!' Speaking was an energetic priest, Father Dionisius Mintoff, founder and director of the Pope John XXIII Peace Laboratory.

"Governments can't do everything and there is need for the things that non-governmental organizations can do," said Father Mintoff who is the brother of Prime Minister Dom Mintoff. The Peace Lab, as it is popularly called, is part of the world-wide Christian Peace Movement and, Father Mintoff explained, offers people, particularly the young, a place where they can discover their own potentialities by serving others and also meet, talk and relax.

The Peace Lab, situated at Hal Far, outside Valletta, holds seminars and study groups every month on such topics as emigration, pacifism or other social, economic, political and cultural issues. There are also annual international seminars in which young Maltese are joined by youth from abroad. The Peace Lab helps the visitors to get to know Maltese families and learn about life in Malta at first hand.

"Every week there are 40 to 50 visiting young people staying at the centre," Father Mintoff said. One of the most important sections of the Peace Lab is its Peace Academy which propagates the idea of peace through social justice. It produces radio programmes on subjects such as sports and peace or the role of the non-aligned nations in Third World development.

A monthly newspaper put out by the Peace Lab has a circulation of 15,000 "which is rather good when you consider that the circulation of the biggest daily in Malta is 6,000," said Father Mintoff with a smile. - D.K.

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