

Maltese maps on stamps

by
Joseph Schirò

Introduction

Cathy Moulder in her excellent article ‘Cartophilately: the world of maps in miniature’, says that philately and cartography are two interests which have a lot in common.¹ Cartophilately is the collection of postage stamps which display maps. In America there is even a CartoPhilatelic Society which has been active since 1955.

Being a collector of Malta maps, anything which has a Malta map on it immediately attracts my attention. This could be anything from simple advertising material to collectible items such as medals, postcards,² or stamps.

Malta has its fair share of Maltese maps on stamps and the following list of stamps were issued not only in Malta but also in Rome, in the Seychelles and in Curaçao. Most of the stamps were issued to commemorate an event which has had both historical and political significance. As an example, the outcome of the Great Siege of Malta of 1565 left such a political impact on the rest of Europe, that Malta was given the appellation of *Propugnaculum Europae*, the bulwark of Europe. It is also interesting to observe how the representation of Malta has changed from the crude round-shaped map of Quintinus, to the first fish-shaped map of Malta by Lafreri in 1551, to the more accurate map by De Fer in the early eighteenth century.

Stamp Issues

Malta

1962

A set of four stamps designed by Harrison and Sons was issued on 7 September 1962 to commemorate the Great Siege of Malta of 1565. The first stamp, with a face value of 2d, depicts the icon of the Madonna of Damascena acclaimed as the Protectress of Malta during the Great Siege and which is venerated at the Greek Catholic Church in Valletta. The second stamp, with a face value of 3d, depicts the bronze Great Siege Monument in Valletta, the work of one of the greatest Maltese sculptors, Antonio Sciortino. The



¹ Cathy Moulder, ‘Cartophilately: the world of maps in miniature’, *Bulletin de l’ACACC* (Association des Cartotheques et Archives Cartographiques du Canada), no. 143, 2013, 9-12.

² See Giovanni Bonello, ‘Maps of Malta as postcards’, *Histories of Malta: figments and fragments*, Vol. 2, Malta, 184-189.

third stamp, with a face value of 6d, depicts Grand Master La Valette's sarcophagus found in the crypt of St John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta. The illustrated fourth stamp, with a face value of 1s, shows the resistance of the knights of the Order of St John and the Maltese during the assault on Fort St Elmo. It is based on an engraving by Anton Francesco Lucini, found in an album of 16 engravings depicting the Great Siege, published in Bologna and Rome in 1630.

1966

The stamp, with a face value of 6d, is one of a set issued to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the founding of the city of Valletta in 1566. It was designed by the Maltese artist Emvin Cremona. As soon as the Great Siege of Malta of 1565 ended, Grand Master Jean Parisot de Valette began the construction of a fortified city next to and including Fort St Elmo. Before he could begin the actual construction he sought financial assistance from the Pope and the monarchs of France, Spain and Portugal. The Pope, in addition to financial assistance, also sent his official architect, Francesco Laparelli. The stamp shows a three-dimensional model of the city of Valletta with the architect-engineers, including Francesco Laparelli and Girolamo Cassar, discussing the plan of Valletta with the Grand Master at the top left corner.



1977

World Telecommunications Day in 1977 was celebrated with an issue of four stamps, with a face value of 1c, 6c, 8c, and 17c respectively. They were issued on 17 May 1977 and were designed by Harry Borg. Two of the stamps have a vertical design which show the geographical position of the Maltese archipelago in relation to the south of Italy, Sicily and North Africa. The other two stamps are designed horizontally and show a zoomed-in image of the islands of Malta and part of North Africa.



1989

Bush - Gorbachev meeting in Malta

To commemorate the Bush - Gorbachev meeting in Malta, a stamp designed by René Gomez, with a face value of 10c, was issued on 2nd December 1989. It shows a

portrait of Bush to the left and Gorbachev to the right. In between there is an outline map of the Maltese archipelago, the country where the meeting was held. There is disagreement among scholars and policy makers whether the outcome of the Malta Summit had any significance, but it will be always remembered for the stormy weather which engulfed the Maltese islands throughout the whole summit.



1990

British Authors stamp issue

In 1990 a four-stamp set was released to commemorate British authors who had a Malta connection. They were designed by Anton Grech and printed at Printex Malta. The first stamp was that of Samuel Taylor Coleridge who was in Malta in 1804-1805, with a face value of



4c, the second one, with a face value of 10c, was that of Lord Byron who was in Malta in 1809, 1811, the third stamp was that of Sir Walter Scott, with a face value of 12c, who was in Malta in 1831 and finally a stamp, with a face value of 25c, which shows William Makepeace Thackeray who was in Malta in 1844. Lord Byron is shown with a plan of Valletta in the background oriented with north-east to the top. Lord Byron is remembered for his description of Malta “as an island of yells, bells, and smells”. It is recorded that the map is based on van der Aa’s *La galerie agréable du Monde*. The title of the map is *Valetta Civitas Nova Maltae olim Miilitae*, published in Leiden in 1712.

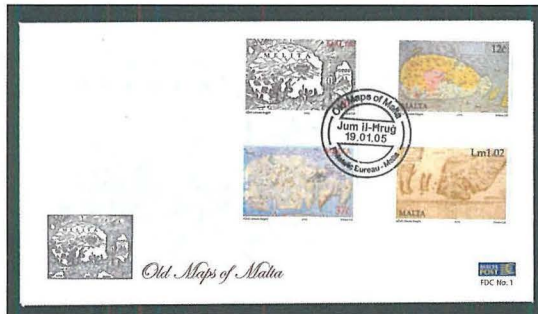
The other stamp, which also has a map in the background, is that of Sir Walter Scott. Sir Walter Scott came to Malta for health reasons and, inspired by his stay, he penned the novel *The Siege of Malta*. The visit to a warmer climate did not do him much good as he passed away in



1832, one year after completing the book. It was never published until 2008. The background to Scott's portrait is a detail showing part of Valletta and the harbour area. It is not easy to say from which map the artist was inspired as there seems to have been artistic licence. The Valletta promontory however seems to be a scene taken from the Siege of Malta painted by Perez d'Aleccio and found at the Grand Masters Palace in Valletta.

2005

A set of four maps titled *Old Maps of Malta* was issued on January 19, 2005. The set was designed by Alfred Caruana Ruggier after consultation with the foremost expert on the history of Maltese cartography, Dr Albert Ganado. The following maps were chosen and issued. The first one, with a face value of 1c of the old

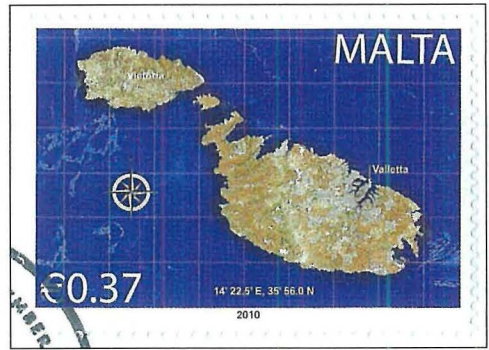


Maltese liri, is the Quintinus map which is found in the book by Joannes Quintinus titled *Insulae Melitae descriptio*, printed in 1536 in Lyon. The second map, with a face value of 12c, is a beautiful map of Malta printed by Antonio Lafreri in Rome in 1551. It shows the islands of Malta, Comino, Cominotto and Fifla, but only a small part of Gozo. The almost accurate shape of Malta became the standard for other cartographers, engravers and publishers. The third map, with a face value of 37c, is a map which shows the Great Siege of Malta of 1565 - one of the most momentous events in the history of these islands. It is taken from the series of siege frescos painted by Matteo Perez d'Aleccio and found at the Grand Masters Palace in Valletta. The fourth and last map, with a face value of Lm1.02c, is a manuscript map of Gozo, Comino, Cominotto and part of the Marfa peninsula on Malta. It was produced by the Maltese scholar and cartographer, Padre Luigi Bartolo in 1745, and forms part of the manuscript treatise *Il Gozo Antico-moderno e Sacro-profano, Isola Mediterranea adiacente a Malta Africana*, compiled by Gio. Pietro Francesco Agius de Soldanis.³

³ Albert Ganado, 'Maps of the island of Gozo (1630s-1907)', *A man of cultural achievements: essays in honour of Joseph Attard Tabone*, Mata, 2016, 33-34.

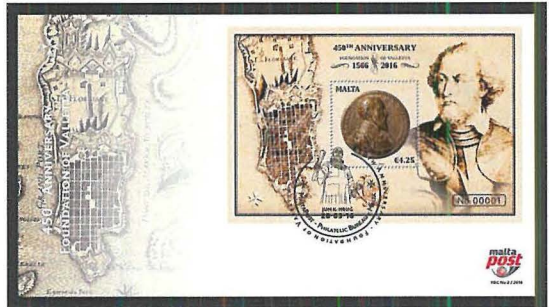
2010

This stamp, with a face value of 37c, showing a satellite photograph which was usable for the cartography of the Maltese archipelago, was issued in 2010. This stamp is often used in combination with other commemorative issues, such as the 50th anniversary issue of the Malta Philatelic Society in 2016 .



2016

On the 450th anniversary of the foundation of Valletta, MaltaPost issued a commemorative miniature sheet on 28 March 2016. It was designed by Sean Cini and shows a detail of the map of Valletta titled *LES VILLES, FORTS ET CHATEAUX / DE MALTE. / 1724* found in Vertot's *Histoire des chevaliers hospitaliers de S. Jean de Jerusalem*....



To the right is a portrait of Grand Master de Valette also taken from Vertot. The stamp, with a face value of €4.25c, shows a medal of Grand Master de Valette facing right. The reverse of the medal shows David decapitating Goliath with the motto *VNVS X. MILLIA* (one [against] ten thousand).⁴

Rome - The Sovereign Military Order of Malta

The Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of Saint John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta is a legally-recognized sovereign subject and the Order maintains diplomatic relations with 106 states. Its two headquarter buildings in via Condotti, Rome, enjoy extraterritoriality, similar to embassies, and it maintains embassies in other countries. Enjoying this status, the Order releases its own passports, coins, and postage stamps. The Order issues several sets of stamps, through the *Poste Magistrali* and the following stamps depict maps of Malta. Until 2004 the stamps were denominated in the currency of the order which was *scudi*, *grani* and *tari*, but since 1 January 2005 the stamps have been denominated in euros.

⁴ H. Calleja Schembri, *Coins and medals of the Knights of Malta*, London, 1908, Pl.2, Fig. 2.

1966

In 1966 a set of nine stamps were issued with various themes, which include among others, the keyhole of Villa del Priorato di Malta, located on the Aventine Hill, through which one can see the dome of St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican. Another shows the icon of Our Lady of Philermos, and a stamp, with a face value of 8 *grani*, which shows a plan of Valletta with a medal of Grand Master de Valette.



1968

In March 5, 1968 the *Poste Magistrali* issued a set of four stamps which show the seats of the Order in the past and in the present. The first stamp shows Jerusalem where the Order originated and had its first seat. It has a face value of 5 *grani*. The second stamp shows Rhodes where the Order operated from 1310–1523, with a face value of 15 *grani*. The third stamp with a face value of 2 *tari*, shows the island of Malta of which the Order was Sovereign from 1530 to 1798 until the Order was expelled during the French occupation. The last stamp with a face value of 1 *scudo* shows a map of Italy and the various places where it temporarily resided until it settled definitively in Rome.



1989

In October 17, 1989 the Order issued a set of commemorative stamps joined horizontally with a face value of 5 scudi, 3 scudi and 2 scudi respectively. The occasion was the meeting in Malta of all the Associations of the Order which came from all the world. The Convention was held from 17 to 23 October 1989. The first stamp of 5 *scudi* shows the coat of arms of the late Grand Master Fra' Andrew Bertie, the second map with a face value of 2 *scudi* shows an outline map of the territory of Malta, and the third stamp shows two hands clasping above the legend *Raduno Mondiale dei Cavalieri – Malta – Ottobre 1989*.



1996

On 29 April 1996, the *Poste Magistrali* issued a blocksheet of four stamps of 4 *scudi* with a total face value of 16 *scudi* of a map of central Mediterranean showing Corsica, Sardegna, Malta and the northern coast of Africa. It is titled *Seconda Campagna Fatta Dalli Navi S. Giovanni e S. Giorgio L'Anno MDCCXXXI* (1731). It deals with the exploits of the galleys San Giovanni and San Giorgio from 30 September to 8 December in the Central Mediterranean. It is a manuscript map which is found in a private collection.



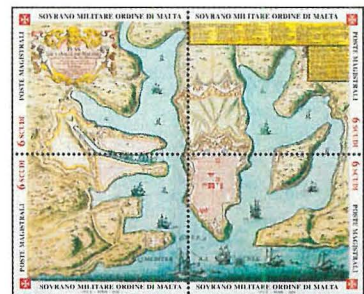
1999

A very beautiful set of three stamps, joined horizontally, were issued in March 1, 1999 with the title *Nove Secoli di Vita dell'Ordine* and all have a face value of 6 *scudi*. The first stamp shows a map of Jerusalem by Sebastiano Paoli and engraved by Giovanni Petroschi. The title of the map is *Regno di Gerusalemme in tempo delle Guerre Sagre...* and is dedicated to the Grand Master Fra' Antoine Manoel de Vilhena (1722-1736). It was published in the *Codice Diplomatico del Sacro Militare Ordine Gerosolimitano oggi di Malta di Sebastiano Pauli* (sic), Lucca 1733. In the book there is also a map of Malta titled *Isola di Malta e Gozzo*. The central stamp depicts a map of the Maltese islands by the cartographers Henri Michelot and Laurens Bremond. The engraving is attributed to P. Starckman. It has an inset map of Valletta at the top right corner and a beautiful cartouche at the top left corner with the title *Nouvelle Carte de Lisle de Malthe*. It was published in 1718 and was sold in Marseille. The last stamp depicts three different maps of Rhodes.



2002

A blocksheet of four stamps of 6 *scudi* with a total face value of 24 *scudi*, was issued in October 2002. It shows a plan of Valletta and the Three Cities and the title of the map is *Plan de la Ville de Malthe - Ses forts, ses Nouvelles Fortifications*. The map was prepared by Nicolas de Fer (1646-1720)



and reissued by Guillaume Danet (c.1670-1732) in Paris in 1723. But the original cartographer was Nicolas de Langres (fl.1600s).

2003

In October 13, 2003 the Sovereign Order issued a blocksheet of four stamps of 4 *scudi* with a total face value of 16 *scudi*. It depicts a very attractive map titled *ISOLA DI MALTA / GOZZO COMINO E COMINOTO / cauata dalle piu recenti notitie, e data in luce da Gio. Giacomo de Rossi / dalle sue stampe in Roma alla Pace con Priu. Del S. Pont.e l'anno 1686*. The map of Malta is in the upper half of the sheet, while a large



plan of the harbour area with a key to place-names inside a baroque cartouche, is in the lower half of the sheet. Giovanni Giacomo De Rossi (1627-1691) was an Italian printer and publisher active in 17th century Rome.

2008

In May 26, 2008 the Sovereign Order issued once again a blocksheet of four stamps of €1.50 each, with a total face value of €6.00. It depicts all the islands of the Maltese archipelago and is titled *L'ISLE DE MALTE / Et cettes de GOZE et de COMINO....* Along the foot of the map are three lines of coats of arms of grandmasters from Fra Gerard (c.1040–1120) to Ramon Perellos (1697-1720). The top-right corner has been completely taken up by a large cartouche containing the title, flanked on the left by the coat of arms of de Mesmes and the dedication to the same: *Haut et Puissant Seigneur Monseigneur Iean Iacques / de Mesmes de l'Ordre de Malthe* written on two lines. The map was published in Paris in 1709 by Nicolas de Fer. The De Fer family were mapsellers, publishers and geographers.



2016

The year 2016 was the 450th anniversary of the foundation of our beautiful and unique capital city of Valletta. The year was marked with several activities and exhibitions and the Malta Map Society commemorated the year with the publication of the book titled *The Pre-Siege maps of Malta: 2nd century AD – 1564* written by

Albert Ganado and Joseph Schirò.

One of the activities of the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order to commemorate the founding of Valletta was the issue on 15 June 2016 of a beautiful stamp with a face value of €2.55. It shows a hand-coloured engraving of a bird's-eye view of Valletta taken from an imaginary point at the entrance to the Grand harbour and Marsamxetto harbour. It



is titled *Malte – Vue de l-Entrée du Port* and was published in Paris before 1735, by Sieur Philippe Nicolas Milcent, who in several instances described himself as *Ingenieur du Roy*.⁵

Seychelles

1986

A commemorative stamp, with a face value of 5 Rupee, titled *Celebration Day of the Coptic Catholic Knights of Malta* was issued in the Seychelles in 1986. The stamp shows two coats of arms inside an oval. The one on the left is the coat of arms of the Seychelles with the Latin motto *Finis coronat opus* (The end crowns the work), and the one on the right is the coat of arms of the breakaway group, the Sovereign Order of Coptic Catholic Knights of Malta



incorporated in New York by Francesco Pazienza and Mario Ricci, also known as Johannes Marius I, as its president for life.⁶ It is set in a miniature sheet which includes a bird's-eye view of Rhodes at the top and of Valletta at the bottom. The other four scenes show the Holy Infirmary liberally taken from an engraving found in Verdala's Statutes, a scene from the Great Siege based on one of Perez d'Aleccio's fresco scenes of the Siege at the Grand Masters Palace in Valletta, De Rohan's galley, and the landing in 1798 of Napoleon in Malta, taken from a drawing by

⁵ See Albert Ganado (2010), *Series of Talks on Malta's Relations with States – France*, Malta, 13, 51.

⁶ Naylor, R. T., *Economic Warfare: Sanctions, embargo busting, and their human cost*, Boston, 1999, 149.

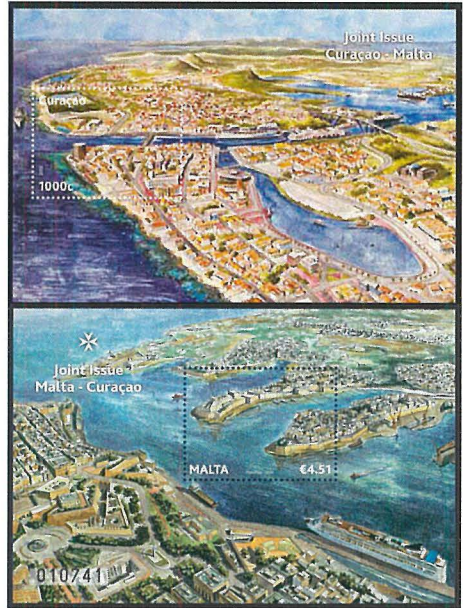
Nodet, which effectively ended the Order's rule of Malta from 1530-1798.⁷

2013

Curaçao - Malta

MaltaPost issued a Joint Stamp Issue with Curaçao in August 20, 2013 featuring 'Harbours' as a common theme between the two islands. The Curaçao stamp shows the mouth of Schottegat Harbour, with a face value of 1000c (100c to 1 Netherlands Antillean guilder is roughly the same value of the counter Malta stamp of €4.51), set on a miniature sheet depicting the whole harbour area. The counter miniature sheet of the Grand Harbour of Malta, designed by Cedric Galea Pirota, shows a stamp, with a face value of €4.51, of the promontories of Senglea and Vittoriosa. The designs of the miniature sheets are by different artists.

Curaçao, is a Dutch Caribbean island and its capital is Willemstad.



⁷ See Carmel G. Bonavia, 'De la Valette in Postage Stamps', *Jean de la Valette 1495-1568: The man-A siege-A city*, Malta, 1995, 23.

**One of Italy's top Philatelists want to dispose
of his Postal History
Malta Collection in one sale.**

Contact Dr A Bonnici.
(00356) 99495066
abonnici@maltanet.net