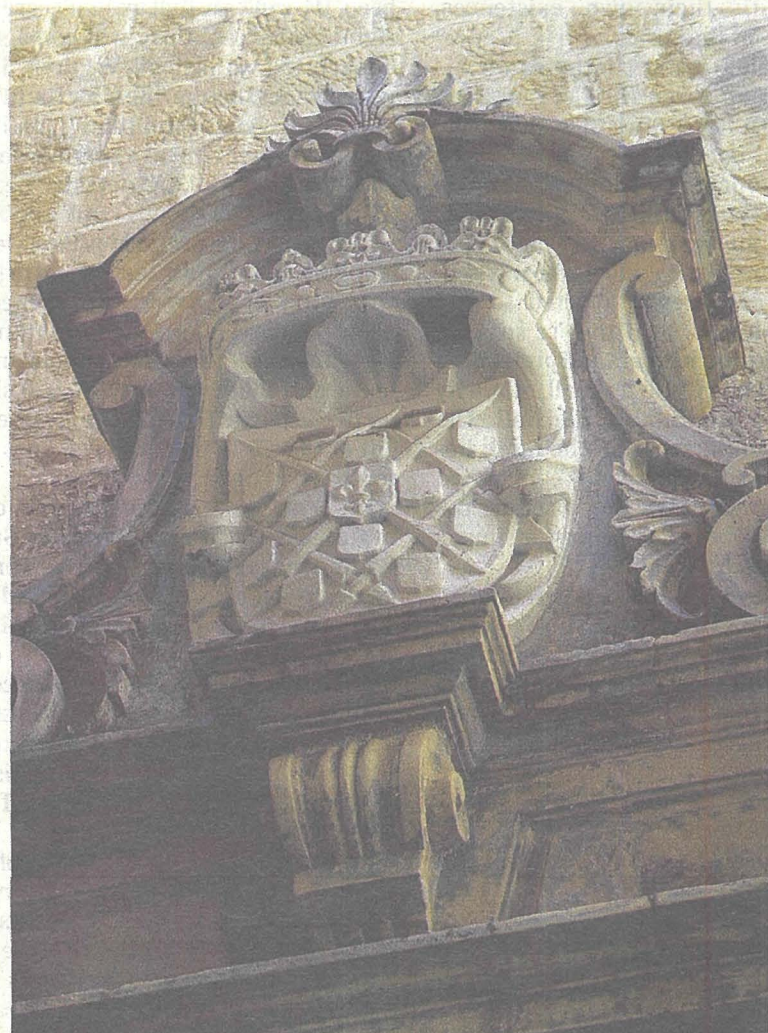


# An unknown prestigious house in Valletta – part 1



The coat of arms of the de Villages family above the old fountain.



A close-up showing the coat of arms of the de Villages family.



ALBERT GANADO

One of the most prestigious houses in Valletta lies at 36, Archbishop Street. Together with the adjoining buildings, which cover an area of 253 square metres, it was owned by the de Villages family of Marseilles at the time of the Order of St John. Among the knights of this noble French family, there is a record of Charles and Louis in 1619, and Thomas in 1677.

In the 18th century, there were in the Langue of Provence Leon Luis (born 1706) and Jean Baptiste (born 1742). In 1754, Jean François de Villages Villevieille submitted the proof of his noble lineage. A de Villages was in 1785 captain of the *Galera Vittoria*, and in 1786, captain of the *Galera San Luigi*.

In the yard of the house, there is an old fountain adorned with the coat of arms of the de Villages family. The house stands at the corner where Archbishop Street joins Strait Street, forming part of a tenement which at the end of the 18th century comprised numbers 35, 36 and 37 in the former street and 75 and 76 in the latter. When in 1800 the French invaders were ousted from the Maltese islands two years after they had captured



The building at 36, Archbishop Street corner with Strait Street, Valletta. PHOTOS: PETER BARTOLO PARNIS



The main staircase of the house.



The Art Nouveau style loggia in the house.

them from the Order of St John, the tenement passed to the government of Malta.

In the volume *Inventario dei Beni Urbani*, in the section 'Famiglie estere', the house at 35-36-37 was referred to as "Casa spettante alla famiglia Village".

In 1813 the house was let to Dr Alessandro Locano, who graduated LL.D. in 1792, for 200 *scudi* per annum. It was registered as tenement number 664 in the first volume of the Land Revenue Department which was run by four Maltese *Amministratori dei*

*Beni Pubblici*, after Governor Sir Thomas Maitland had reorganised the service of this department, and an English Collector of Land Revenue, Hector Greig, was appointed on June 28, 1814.

**"It was owned by the de Villages family of Marseilles at the time of the Order of St John"**

It has not yet been established whether Alessandro was the son of Dr Giorgio Gio Batta Locano, who studied medicine at Montpellier, obtaining the doctorate at that university in 1749.

Dr Alessandro Locano graduated LL.D. from the University of Malta on September 14, 1792. He died on January 28, 1857.

On December 25, 1825, the premises were granted on a year-to-year lease to Gio Batta Gilibert for an annual rent of 300 *scudi* (£25). It is worth mentioning here that although Gilibert, or Giliberto, is not a common Maltese surname, yet it stretches back to the 18th century in Valletta. Later, in virtue of a deed published by Notary Diego Vella on June 19, 1833, an emphyteutical concession was made to Gilibert for 50 years as from July 1, 1833, in consideration of an annual ground rent of 230 *scudi*. In



The large room on the first floor painted in oil by Attilio Palombi, containing the collection of law books of Albert Ganado.

the electoral register of 1849, his name appears at 36, Strada Vescovo.

The 1833 lease expired in 1883 and the ownership reverted to the government. On February 4, 1884, in virtue of a deed published by notary Francesco Saverio Camilleri, the premises were granted on emphyteusis for 99 years as from January 1, 1884, to Giuseppe Raffaele Attard. They were marked tenement number 588 in the land registry office.

On January 5, 1905, Attard transferred the *utile dominium* of the property for the remaining period of the emphyteutical grant to Luigi Apap, a rich Maltese merchant, who thus became the actual owner on a temporary basis. It was mainly through this transfer that the house of 36, Archbishop Street (formerly Strada Vescovo) acquired a new dimension of historical, cultural and artistic value.

Apap was born in 1857. At the age of six, he entered "Zarb's college" and he received his education at the best schools available. He became a prominent member of the mercantile community in Malta. In 1922-23, he was president of the Chamber of Commerce. When Malta finally achieved self-government in 1921 with a new constitution, he was one of the Chamber's two representatives in the Senate.



Portraits of Luigi Apap and Rosa née Cicolari. Oil on canvas by G. Guggino (1841-1914), 150cm x 79.5cm. COURTESY OF PINACOTECA REPOSSI, CHIARI, BRESCIA, ITALY

While travelling in Italy, he met and married Rosa Cicolari, taking up residence at 36, Strada Vescovo. He converted the house to suit his needs. He was always after the best and he engaged Andrea Vassallo (1856-1928) to introduce features in the Art Nouveau style, a style of art developed in the late 19th century with ornamental and flowing designs, which can still be admired today.

Vassallo also built Apap's summer residence in the same style, which Apap named after his wife - Villa Rosa, St Julian's.

### Acknowledgements

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The same loggia shown in an old photograph. The whereabouts of the statue is unknown.