A RESTORATION METHODOLOGY FOR THE FORTIFICATIONS OF VALLETTA

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ABSTRACT

Built to the designs of Francesco Laparelli da Cortona in 1566, the fortifications and the city of Valletta have been the subject of numerous studies and publications. While designed to the latest developments in the method of construction of fortifications, the increase in the range of cannon fire required continuous improvements to these fortifications. By the nineteenth century, these fortifications were obsolete and the defense of the Island was entrusted to isolated forts meant to house large guns, placed well outside the lines of fortifications that ringed Valletta, Floriana and the Three Cites.

As the military significance of the fortifications of Valletta diminished, so did the attention towards their safeguarding. Buildings extended right up to the walls, gardens and orchards were planted in the ditches, and repairs became sporadic. Right in the centre of the inner harbour area, they have undergone countless mutilations, sometimes justifiable in the name of progress, more often stemming from a lack of appreciation.

The aim of this thesis is to present a methodology for the restoration of the fortifications of Valletta. Not that these fortifications are in any way different from the rest; however in concentrating on the fortifications around Valletta, the study hopes to become a blueprint for the restoration of the other fortifications on the Island.

The thought of restoring the fortifications of Valletta can be overwhelming. Kilometres of towering walls surround Valletta, and these have received little or no attention for years. As the need to intervene becomes more and more evident, one is faced with the difficulty of deciding on where to start, what to do and how to do it. The manner in which the interventions are made becomes important because, if ethically or technically incorrect, more harm can be inflicted.

Tackling a restoration project of such a size requires that the problem be first approached holistically. Therefore this study first considers the theoretical and the general, and subsequently moves to the applied and the specific. Part I of this study underlines the manner by which any restoration project should be tackled. It proposes guidelines applicable to interventions on buildings of significant cultural and historical value, and the manner in which a restoration project should proceed. Although theoretical, the recommendations in this part of the study are important enough and will make the difference between a successful restoration project and one which is harmful.
Part II of this study consists of a preliminary general investigation of the fortifications. This follows as a direct consequence of the previous part of the study, and consists of a process of familiarization with the fortifications. It therefore considers the fortifications in their entirety and, while being comprehensive, is not detailed. By surveying the fortifications, their state of conservation is documented and the various types of defects are identified.

The recommendations for the required interventions on the fortifications are listed in Part III of this study. Also included are more detailed investigations on two sample areas. These sample areas have been selected so that together they demonstrate the widest possible range of defects. By going through a full mapping process and by carrying out scientific investigations on these sample areas, a methodology is established, one which can be easily adapted for other areas not only of the fortifications of Valletta, but for any other fortification on the Island.