

A History of the Valletta *Mandraġġ*



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Valletta's *Mandraġġ*: The Long and Tortured Road to Demolition.

A dissertation submitted in accordance with the requirements of
the University of Malta for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY

by

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2024

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To Anna, my wife
and to Leo for his disruptions.

'For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore, I command you, saying, 'You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.'

Deuteronomy 15:11

Preface

The *Oxford Concise Dictionary* provides two definitions for the term slum in English. The first definition describes it as 'an overcrowded and squalid backstreet, court, alley, or district in a city.' The second definition reflects the word's etymological roots, tracing back to the early 19th century when it referred to 'going about the slum to visit or examine the conditions of its inhabitants.' It is worth noting that the first edition of this dictionary was published in 1911, while the 1964 edition has been consulted to uncover these meanings.

Until the 1970s, the term 'slum' in Malta referred to overcrowded and squalid districts, often characterised by alleys and substandard buildings. Such areas were common in various Maltese cities, with Valletta's *Manderaggio* being particularly notorious. This dissertation examines the history of this specific district in Valletta, tracing its development from its origins until its clearance after the Second World War. The study emphasises how this area deteriorated into a slum, aligning with the second definition provided by the *Oxford Concise Dictionary*: '*going about the slum to visit or examine the conditions of its inhabitants.*'¹ Additionally, it explores the regeneration projects, particularly the one planned in the late 1930s, aimed at eradicating the area's squalid conditions.

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Malta's slums and degraded areas were concentrated chiefly around the harbour conurbation, particularly in the southern regions. An exception was Victoria, the capital of Gozo, which, despite its central location on the island, had its own slums. In the minds of 19th and 20th-century Maltese people, overcrowding and poor living conditions defined a district as a slum. Erin Serracino-Inglott, in his dictionary *Il-Miklem*

¹ *Oxford Concise Dictionary*, Fifth Edition, (United Kingdom, 1964).

Malti, notes that the Maltese term for slum came to signify ‘an area inhabited by poor people.’² Today, these areas are being revalued as conurbations expressing vernacular habitat.³ However, this is a recent perspective. In the past, there were considerations to clear all these areas to provide residents with modern and commodious dwellings built according to contemporary sanitary standards, plans which, in some cases, never materialised.

As many of these slums have been cleared, a form of nostalgia has developed, with these areas becoming part of a romanticised historical narrative, especially amongst those whose parents or other relatives originated from these areas.⁴ Today, the view differs substantially from that generally expressed during the 1930s and previous decades. Nowadays, descendants of the residents of these places speak with particular pride about this past and their ancestors.⁵ Yet, this element of pride is not reflective of the actual history of these areas, which at most times were considered dark places.

This dissertation investigates the transformation of Il-Mandraġġ in Valletta into a slum, as defined by the Oxford Dictionary. The area originated during the rule of the Order of Saint John, who began constructing a

² Erin Serracino Inglott, *Il-Miklem Malti*, 6, Malta 1979, 37.

³ What follows is a short biography of articles about this subject. These publications provide comprehensive insights into various aspects of slum revitalisation and regeneration across different contexts: Cletus Moobela, ‘From worst slum to best example of regeneration’, *Complexity in the regeneration of Hulme, Manchester*. *Emergence: Complexity & Organization*, vii, 1, 29-42, (University of Reading, 2005), Sam C. M. Ofori ‘Urban Slum Upgrading as a Form of Regeneration in Developing Countries: Zongo and Inner-City Communities, Ghana’, *Civil and Environmental Research*, xvi, 1 (United Kingdom, 2024), Sam C.M Ofori , ‘Appraising the Institutional Context of Urban Regeneration and Slum Upgrading Initiatives, A Developing Country: Zongo and Inner-Cities Regeneration and Development Programme in Ghana’, *Public Policy and Administration Research*, xiii, 6, 25-40, (United Kingdom, 2023); Y. Su. H. Zheng, J. Jin. & Li, Y. Ding ‘*Road Planning for Slums via Deep Reinforcement Learning*. (2023), <https://arxiv.org/abs/2305.13060>, B. Murgante, G. Las Casas & M. Danese, ‘Where are the slums? New approaches to urban regeneration’, *Social Computing, Behavioral Modeling, and Prediction*, pp 176-186, (Springer, Boston, MA; Z. A. Teferi & P. Newman, 2017), D. A. Krueckeberg & K. G. Paulsen, *Slum Regeneration and Development of Sustainable Communities: A Case of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*. PhD Thesis, (Curtin University, 2000), R. Turley, R. Saith, N. Bhan, E. Rehfuess, & B. Carter, *Urban Land Tenure Policies in Brazil, South Africa, and India: An Assessment of the Issues*, Working Paper, (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2013). ‘Slum Upgrading Strategies Involving Physical Environment and Infrastructure Interventions and Their Effects on Health and Socio-Economic Outcomes’, *Informal Settlements: A Perpetual Challenge?*, (M. Huchzermeyer & A. Karam, (eds.), (University of Cape Town Press, 2006), Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*. (Verso Books, 2006).

⁴ Denis Darmanin - The Story of the Valletta *Mandraġġ*, Education and Culture DG, Youth in Action Program, St. Augustine’s Youth Group (SAY), (Valletta Malta, 2009).

⁵ *Ibid*.

mandracchio, a sheltered harbor for galleys in 1566. The project was abandoned, and by the late 16th century, unplanned housing developments led to overcrowded and squalid conditions, marking the area's decline into a slum.

The study of these factors led me to form the following research question: 'What socio-economic and political factors contributed to the transformation of *Il-Mandraġġ* in Valletta from a planned maritime infrastructure into a slum, and how did these factors align with the definitions of 'slum' as provided by the Oxford Dictionary?'

Introduction

As will be shown in this dissertation, everything has its transition periods. And *Il-Mandraġġ* in Valletta is not an exception. The choice of such a topic was not an easy one. Various books and dissertations have referred to this area, and many well-researched articles have been written on Valletta and some aspects of its *Mandraġġ*. So why was the decision taken to study in this area?

My family originates from *Birgu* (Vittoriosa) and never had any particular connection with Valletta other than visits for shopping or running an errand. Before the early 1970s, the only *Il-Mandraġġ* that I had known of was in Vittoriosa, the city from which I hail located within the Grand Harbour and where the Order of Saint John had settled when arriving in Malta in 1530.⁶

My first personal encounter with Valletta and its *Mandraġġ* was during one particular summer in the early 1970s, when I accompanied a friend on his *frejgatina*, a small open fishing boat, roughly 3 to 3.5 metres long, carvel-built, rowed with two oars and in the past, equipped with a mast rigged with a spritsail. Small engines were fitted in them. In the 1950s, a small open fishing boat, to meet his girlfriend who hailed from the area. As was the case with people from *Il-Mandraġġ* and the surrounding area, they went (and still do) to the area within Marsamxett Harbour called *il-Banjijiet*, (English: baths) were square, rock-hewn pits of the late 19th century, excavated in the rocky

⁶ Victor Mallia Milanese, 'The Birgu Phase of Hospitaller History', *Birgu-A Maritime City i*, Lino Bugeja, Mario Buhagiar and Stanley Fiorini (eds.), Msida, Malta, 1993, 191.

foreshore, each bath was connected to the sea and had a wooden shack to bathe in privacy, discontinued in the late 1930s. Who would have known at such a time that I would meet and marry a girl from this area many years later? My father-in-law and his family were from *Il-Mandraġġ*. Valletta became my home, and my wife and I reside on the borders of the *Il-Mandraġġ* area! I fell in love with the location and 'The City', as most people from the capital call Valletta, although of course today Valletta is no longer what it was over forty years ago.

As I sit just two blocks away from where the old *Mandraġġ* once stood, I find myself pondering its history. The lore of this area has always intrigued me, particularly the question: Why was *Il-Mandraġġ* neglected and allowed to remain a marginalised part of Valletta for approximately 350 years? Was it indeed always a substandard location? If not, when did it become a squalid district?

The answers to these questions are complex and elusive. While many have commented on the state of *Il-Mandraġġ*, few have explored why it was allowed to deteriorate into a slum. As I will illustrate in the literature review, studies on this area often focus on the social conditions of its inhabitants, with most of these analyses centered on the British period. But what about the era of the Order of St. John?

This study examines the development plans for *Il-Mandraġġ* during the Order's rule, a period for which there is little to no evidence of significant efforts to develop the area. Moreover, none of the demolition or regeneration proposals during the 19th century came to fruition. Notably, there were attempts in 1881 and 1888 to demolish parts of *Il-Mandraġġ*, yet these efforts are often overlooked in secondary sources. Instead, such works typically either emphasise the initial construction of Valletta or describe the degraded state of *Il-Mandraġġ*.⁷

⁷ GMR314, *Report submitted to the Governor*, Prof. S. L. Pisani, (Government Printing Press, Malta, 1888), 3.

Furthermore, most studies focus on the post-Second World War era, when *Il-Mandraġġ* was finally demolished, and new, respectable apartments were built. By addressing these gaps, this dissertation sheds light on overlooked periods and events that shaped the area's history.

In light of the existing research gap, I have concluded my study by focusing on the '*Manderaggio Scheme*' of 1935 — the first comprehensive plan to demolish and rehabilitate the area. This scheme encompassed detailed surveys, rehousing strategies, cost analyses, financing plans, material specifications, permits, statistics, and numerous other practical considerations. It even necessitated a new legislation for its implementation.

Despite the residents' efforts to maintain a decent life in the only environment they had ever known, the area had deteriorated into an unhygienic slum, fitting the Oxford Dictionary's definition. In Malta, this designation carried a stigma more acutely felt by the residents than attributed to the area itself. Serracino Inglott adds that the inhabitants suffered from this stigma in the first half of the twentieth century, as the Maltese term for slum was used to disparage those who knew nothing but fighting, quarrelling, and misbehaving. This observation is documented in *Il-Miklem Malti*, where the term is associated with individuals exhibiting such negative behaviours.⁸

Unfortunately, the 1935 scheme was shelved due to the outbreak of the Second World War. However, researching this plan revealed a preceding history leading up to 1935, prompting me to examine earlier events in the preceding decades and throughout the nineteenth century. This exploration led me to study the origins of *Il-Mandraġġ* from a different perspective. Furthermore, recognising the stigma the district's residents faced, there was a compelled feeling to carry out a thorough investigation of the history of these people to determine whether this stigma was inherently tied to the area or developed independently.

⁸ Erin Seracino Inglott, vi, 37. '*tghajjira lil min ma jafx hliet jiggieled jitghajjar u jgib ruhu hazin*'.

Unfortunately, researching and compiling this dissertation was difficult due to my past disrupted and piecemeal educational formation and even neglected years of studies. I am indebted to several people who provided encouragement, assistance and guidance. When learning of my ambition to continue my studies at this level and at my age, I received great encouragement which reassured and motivated me, even though there were moments when I was somewhat hesitant and even afraid of the task ahead, sometimes wondering whether I should proceed due to a lack of familiarity with how academia works and what is required of a Masters' dissertation. Ultimately, I persevered in the hopes of producing a piece of work that would shed light on this part (hitherto not examined in any detail) of the history of *Il-Mandraġġ* and potentially add something of value to the current literature on its history. In addition to the long list of references and citations contained herein, this work also considers first-hand recollections shared with me by some of the former residents themselves, many of whom are sadly long gone, and to whom I am grateful for passing on this information.

Interest in *Il-Mandraġġ* was rekindled in the early 2000s by Fr. Lucjan Borg, then Provincial of the Augustinian community in Malta, and Fr. Saviour Grima, then Parish Priest at the Augustinian parish church. Fr. Saviour Grima's tenure as parish priest was marked by his dedication to addressing the social challenges in the *Mandraġġ* area, earning him recognition within the community. Today, *Il-Mandraġġ* falls within the parish of Saint Augustine, established in 1968; previously, pastoral care for this area was under the Dominican friars of the parish dedicated to Our Lady of Safe Haven, commonly known as Saint Dominic. In 2007, Fr. Saviour formed the *Saint Augustine's Youth Group (SAY)*⁹ and engaged parishioners in rehabilitating neglected historical remains in the convent's underground sections. I participated in this project by assisting with the rehabilitation work and producing a related research paper. The rehabilitation efforts included restoring the World War II shelter complex beneath St. Augustine's Church with the help of volunteers.

⁹ Saint Augustine's Youth Group (SAY), V-Life, empowering people living Valletta-Life, A European Union Programmes Agency (EUPA) National Youth Initiative project funded by the Education and Culture Directorate

These initiatives aimed to preserve the area's historical heritage and improve the quality of life for its residents.

My first piece of writing relating to *Il-Mandraġġ* was an article in Maltese within a booklet published for the feast of Saint Augustine,¹⁰ the patron saint of our parish in Valletta. The subject was mainly the history of the former bakery of the Order of Saint John, which, until demolished, was located on the opposite façade of the convent and church in *Triq I-Ifran* (Old Bakery Street) and of the former *Mandraġġ*. My next publications were explicitly on *il-Mandraġġ*. They were two booklets with photographs, one in English¹¹ and one in Maltese,¹² which were part of a programme sponsored by the SAY of the same parish in Valletta. These booklets were more detailed and meant to serve as an educational reference for children from the parish, or if requested by older parishioners and other Maltese and foreigners alike. They related the history of this badly reputed area from birth as a ship-pen, the years following the post-war reconstruction and the later embellishment of Mattia Preti Square. Emphasis was placed on including a demographic passage and accounts of people who lived there. Many copies were distributed to leading authorities, libraries and schools, but unfortunately were not registered for an ISBN, were not adequately covered by copyright, and were freely used uncited in various works, including other university studies.

The content of these booklets was tailored for residents, offering historical accounts designed to engage the average reader. While they acknowledged issues such as unsanitary conditions, disease, poverty, illiteracy, and overcrowding, these challenges were presented in a way that also highlighted the positive aspects of life in *Il-Mandraġġ*. The area was recognised as the birthplace of many bakers, musicians, artisans, and other talented individuals who later gained prominence throughout Valletta and Malta. Conversely, negative aspects like epidemics and crime were omitted or minimally addressed.

¹⁰. Denis A. Darmanin, 'Knisja u Kultura: I-Mandraġġ u I-Ifran', *Festa Santu Wistin: 40 Sena Parroċċa*, (2008), 10-12.

¹¹. Darmanin, *The Valletta Manderaggio or Mandraġġ*.

¹². *ibid*, *L-Istorja tal-Mandraġġ tal-Belt*.

This approach aligns with the recollections of former residents who, despite acknowledging the hardships, often speak fondly of their community. Phrases like *'għalkemm agħar, konna nies sinjuri'* (although poor, we were rich) and *'fil-Mandraġġ ħadd qatt ma miet bil-ġuħ'* (in the *Mandraġġ*, no one ever died of hunger) reflect a sense of pride and resilience among the inhabitants.¹³

By focusing on the community's strengths and contributions, these narratives provided a more balanced perspective of life in *Il-Mandraġġ*, countering the prevalent unfavourable stereotypes associated with the area.

As with any publication, the reaction to these booklets varied, receiving a mixture of negative and positive criticism. Some locals were quite happy that their kin were mentioned, but others were not because this rekindled family memories and the stigma of the area. Some expressed that more demographic information should have been included, and others felt that more personal experiences, whether good or bad, would have given better appeal to the booklets. Being a sixteen-page booklet, space was necessarily limited.

Since physical copies were limited in number, a digitised copy of the English version was uploaded on the In-Service Software Upgrade (ISSU),¹⁴ which is a feature that allows uploading, by subscription, of static literature and publications to be converted into embedded flipbooks, email graphics and other methods on the internet for all to access. The English version was also published in two parts in the *Sunday Times of Malta* in 2015¹⁵ without any changes.

During the same period, I was studying for a Diploma in Baroque Architecture at the University of Malta, consisting of the history and remaining

¹³ Denis A. Darmanin and Saviour Grima, *'Jiena Mill-Mandraġġ', Reviving the Past*, Education and Culture DG, Youth in Action Program, St. Augustine's Youth Group (SAY), (Where's Everybody, Malta, 2009), DVD.

¹⁴ Denis A., Darmanin, 'The Valletta Mandraggio or Mandraġġ', *ISSU*. Retrieved on 3 May 2022 from [The Valletta Mandraggio or Mandraġġ by Denis Darmanin - Issuu](#) (2012), 1-13.

¹⁵ Darmanin, 'Origin and development of Valletta's *Mangraggio*', Part 1 and 2, *The Sunday Times of Malta*, (21 and 28 June 2015).

physical evidence of the first Augustinian church and convent of 1572 to the present-day church and convent that occupy this particular block in Valletta.¹⁶

Today, primary and secondary reference sources have taken a new format thanks to digital resources. Thus, online sources also proved to be essential sources of information that supported or supplemented available material in local libraries or collections. Due to budget restrictions, travelling abroad was not considered. Still, materials in the local libraries and other materials available in electronic format, including the digitisation of archival records, proved to be of major help in this research. Many of these sites have been searched, and the relevant material available is cited in this dissertation. The sites visited, which referred to *Il-Mandraġġ*, are all listed in the bibliography.

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¹⁶ Darmanin, 'A study of Saint Augustine's Church and Convent in Valletta', (Unpublished Dip. Baroque Architecture dissertation, University of Malta, 2008).

Melitensia Library of the University of Malta, the members of *Ħiliet fil-Komunitá*, all who have helped, especially to that particular person in most times of need. Dean Prof Dominic Fenech, who is also my supervisor and to all who have assisted or encouraged me whenever the need arose, as I would not have been able to manage without the knowledge attained.

Last but not least, I'm incredibly grateful to my wife Anna, who at times found it difficult to understand my ambition to fulfil this endeavour yet still showed great support, and patience, and shared with me when the weight was heavy or family and personal matters became an obstacle.

Without all these people, it would not have been possible for me to walk head-high and proudly exclaim that I may have achieved what could well be the highest and last accomplishment in my life!

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List of Abbreviations

AWD	Archives Works Department
CDO	Chief Draftsman's Office
CSG	Chief Secretary to the Governor
DVD	Digital Versatile Disc (video recording)
EU	European Union
CSG	Chief Secretary of Government
GCB	Grand Cross, Order of the Bath
GCMG	Knight Grand Cross, Order of Saint Michael and Saint George
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GMR	General Miscellaneous Reports
GOV	Government
GOV	Governor's Despatches
HM	Heritage Malta
HMSO	Her/His Majesty's Stationery Office
ISSU	In-Service Software Upgrade
JSTOR	Journal Storage
LGO	Lieutenant-Governor's Office
MGG	Malta Government Gazette
MLP	Malta Labour Party
NAM	National Archives of Malta
NARMLGO	National Archives of Malta, Lieutenant-Governor's Office
NLM	National Library of Malta
NMM	National Maritime Museum, Malta
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
OSA	Order of Saint Augustine (<i>Monastic</i>)
PN	<i>Partito Nazionale/Partito Nazionalista</i>
PW	Public Works

PWD	Public Works Department
SA	<i>Status Animarum</i>
SAY	Saint Augustine's Youth Group
TNA	The National Archives, Kew, England
TTM	The Times of Malta
WD	Works Department
WO	War Office, United Kingdom

Chapter 1 - Literature Review

1.01 Introduction

The *Il-Mandraġġ* area is known for its long and chequered history, yet it lacks a complete written account. While it is mentioned in several books, these references are often presented from specific perspectives or within particular historical frameworks. This dissertation aims to provide a more comprehensive account of the area by analysing the socio-economic and political factors that contributed to its classification as a slum, as defined by the Oxford Dictionary; a definition reflecting the understanding of the term in the late 19th and 20th centuries.

The broad aim of this literature review is to familiarise the reader with published and archival material related to the history of the area of *Il-Mandraġġ* in Valletta. Researching and compiling available sources revealed a selection of different historical materials and other categories of information. While the written material about *Il-Mandraġġ* has proven to be vast, only the most relevant will be discussed in this chapter.

Much has been written about the colourful but sad history of *Il-Mandraġġ*. Most accounts focus on the poverty and the deplorable living conditions of the inhabitants of this zone - this is arguably only a part of its history. It is also worth noting that despite the evident struggle to survive in substandard conditions, many inhabitants were relatively happy with such a quality of life because this was the only life they knew.¹ Like others in similar situations, wives and mothers did their best to keep the family clean and comfortable, and many fathers worked menial jobs to maintain their families to the best of their abilities.²

This literature review will seek to establish the works that sought to understand the state and origins of this area as a refuge for the poor. Poverty has diverse levels and life at *Il-Mandraġġ* was not easy, but the inhabitants

¹ Darmanin and Grima, DVD.

² PW1159/36, Manderaggio Scheme, unpaginated lists 'A', Sets 1 to 3.

survived. In Valletta, there was another area worse than *Il-Mandraġġ* which, as will be explained later in this dissertation, had the same historical origins.³

Before a discussion on the topic of slums is made, one needs to review the various primary and secondary literature on the subject. The principal questions that then need to be asked are what makes a slum and who the inhabitants are or were. Was a slum area a derelict part of a city that once had some useful purpose but was no longer needed or essential by the time its use changed, and why had it become derelict and ever neglected? Was it meant to be inhabited, or did the inhabitants come later and in a process?

The Oxford definition of slum does not take into consideration the actual change of status in an area. It only recorded what the English-speaking world understood by this term. The nature or change in an urban set up are more the subject of research conducted in urban studies. A number of studies have been conducted about slum areas in Europe that originally had not been slums.

A number of urban studies have shown that the 19th century was a critical period for the transformation of several European cities. Urban areas transitioned from moderately populated centres to overcrowded hubs of industrial activity, leading to the creation of slums, as defined by the Oxford Dictionary. One of the seminal works on this subject is by Charles Booth, who analysed the Life and Labour of the People in London between 1889 and 1903.⁴ His research mapped poverty across London, highlighting slum areas in the East End and illustrating the socio-economic stratification of the city. Similarly, in 1851, Henry Mayhew documented the lives of London's working class and the urban poor, focusing on their living conditions and the social factors contributing to urban poverty.⁵

In his 1845 work *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Friedrich Engels detailed the living conditions in Manchester, characterised by

³ Herbert Ganado, *Rajt Malta Tinbidel*, 1, 310-311.

⁴ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London (1889–1903)*, (London, 1895), 64, 145, 264-268, *et al.*

⁵ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851). 4-9, 42-47, *et al.*

overcrowding and unsanitary environments.⁶ Later, Asa Briggs, in *Victorian Cities* (1963), also examined Manchester, using its slums as a case study to explore the broader socio-economic changes of the Victorian era.⁷ Birmingham was another English city that attracted attention in urban studies. Thompson (1963)⁸ discussed Birmingham's working-class neighbourhoods, while Carl Chinn, in *Poverty Amidst Prosperity* (1995), focused on the city's working-class communities, particularly those living in overcrowded back-to-back housing.⁹

England, however, was not the only country to experience the development of slums in its cities during the 19th century. In *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris* (1958), David Pinkney explored how Napoleon III's urban transformation displaced poor communities from the city centre.¹⁰ Joan DeJean, in *How Paris Became Paris* (2014), provided a more recent analysis of the physical and social changes that shaped Paris into a modern city during the mid-19th century.¹¹

Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* offers philosophical insights into urban life and the socio-economic changes contributing to urban poverty on the city of Berlin.¹² More recent studies include Brian Ladd's *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (1997),¹³ which examines the historical transformation of Berlin and the development of working-class districts that later became slums, and Dorothy Rowe's *Representing Berlin* (2003), which explores the emergence of marginalised communities in impoverished areas.¹⁴

⁶ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Oxford University Press, 1993). 36-40, 76.

⁷ Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (Odhams Books, 1963). 117-115.

⁸ Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1964). 698-699.

⁹ Carl Chinn, *Poverty Amidst Prosperity: The Urban Poor in England, 1834-1914* (1995). 83-85, 132-137.

¹⁰ David Pinkney, *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris*, (USA, 1958). 99-132, *et al.*

¹¹ Joan DeJean, *How Paris Became Paris: The Invention of the Modern City* (2014). 78, 112-113, *et al.*

¹² Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (1927-1940). (Harvard University Press, 1999), 145, 405-406, 540.

¹³ Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (University of Chicago Press, 1997), 105-107, 113-114, 191.

¹⁴ Dorothy Rowe, *Representing Berlin: Sexuality and the City in Imperial and Weimar Germany* (Routledge, 2003). Various pages.

These works collectively highlight that slum, as understood by the Oxford Dictionary's definition, emerged as a distinct phenomenon in the 19th century. This observation prompts the question of whether a similar transformation occurred in the area of Valletta under investigation.

Urban historians such as Cannadine,¹⁵ Rodger,¹⁶ Sutcliffe¹⁷ and Stedman Jones¹⁸ are some of the urban historians who have shown that in the 19th Century, slums were viewed as threats to public health, morality, and aesthetics, and even though they were in historical settings, they necessitated demolition. This philosophy continued in the 20th Century, and as shown by Hall¹⁹ and Gandy,²⁰ post-war reconstruction often reinforced this mindset, prioritising modernisation and the demolition of slum areas. It was only recently that a growing interest in urban heritage preservation and adaptive reuse challenged the older demolition-first philosophy.²¹

Various other recent anthropological studies offer deep insights into the intricacies of life in slums, whether the socio-cultural, ways of survival and the resistance of the communities that reside in these marginalised urban spaces. Studies of the situations in various countries and more recent times by authors such as Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh²², Philippe Bourgois²³, Beatriz Magaloni, Edgar Franco-Vivanco, and Vanessa Melo²⁴ and Gerald D. Suttles²⁵, John Ndikaru Wa Teresia²⁶ analyse the types of crime and their causes in slum

¹⁵ David Cannadine, *Victorious Cities*, (Penguin Publishing Group, 2019), Various pages.

¹⁶ Richard Rodger, *Housing in Urban Britain, 1780–1914*. (Macmillan, 1989), 4, 42-50, 89.

¹⁷ Anthony Sutcliffe, *Towards the Planned City: Urban Reform in Victorian England* (Blackwell, 1981), various pages.

¹⁸ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (Verso, 1971), 197-201.

¹⁹ Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century*, 3rd edition, (Blackwell, U.K., 1988).

²⁰ Matthew Gandy, *The Fabric of Space: Water, Modernity, and the Urban Imagination* (U.S.A., 2014).

²¹ Miles Glendinning, *Mass Housing: Modern Architecture and State Power* (2021).

²² Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, , *Slum as a Way of Life: A Study of Coping and Adaptation in a Delhi Squatter Settlement*, (Oxford University Press, 2000).

²³ Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²⁴ Beatriz Magaloni, Edgar Franco-Vivanco, and Vanessa Melo, 'American Political Science Review', *Killing in the Slums: Social Order, Criminal Governance, and Police Violence in Rio de Janeiro*, cxiv, 2, (U.S.A., 2020). 552-572.

²⁵ Gerald D. Suttles, *The Social Order of the Slum: Ethnicity and Territory in the Inner City*, (University of Chicago Press, 1968).

²⁶ John Ndikaru Wa Teresia, 'Crime Differentials in Metropolitan Slum Areas: An Analysis of the City of Nairobi Slums, Kenya', Unpublished Ph. D. Kenyatta University, Kenya, 2011,

areas in different cities and countries, comparing crime victimisation across these different demographic characteristics.

The so-called slums in Malta fell within these categories, and it can be argued that the one in Valletta aligned closely with the definitions of how such areas came to be viewed in the 19th century; the perspective that persisted even in the post-World War II period. Just as similar structures in Europe, the one in Valletta was not appreciated for its unique architecture. Instead, social, religious, and other factors associated with this location contributed to its inhabitants being largely looked down upon, mirroring attitudes toward similar areas across Europe.²⁷

In the case of Malta, both the state and the church took note of the inhabitants living in this district. The Roman Catholic Church kept a note through its *Status Animarum*, or a list of the inhabitants that adhered to the Catholic faith. With the rise of awareness of hygiene issues in the nineteenth century, state authorities also started to pay special attention to such areas and sought to take counts of people living specifically in this area.

Il-Mandraġġ cannot be visualised as it once stood based on what is there now. Today, four blocks of residential flats surround the spacious Mattia Preti Square (*Piazza Mattia Preti*), many of which enjoy a breathtaking view of much of Marsamxett Harbour. Before the former *Mandraġġ* was demolished in 1948 and rebuilt, it was entirely different. The area was a deep hole with entrances from the higher parts of Valletta, and in the nineteenth century, a tunnel was dug in the bastions to give access to the area from its lower part towards Marsamxett Landing. The area had a main serpentine street and alleys (Fig. 1) and dwellings consisting of one or two rooms in which large families lived. Those in the deepest part of the pit hardly received any sunlight.

Retrieved on 2 Jan. 2025 from: https://www.academia.edu/66215109/Crime_differentials_in_metropolitan_slum_areas_an_analysis_of_the_city_of_Nairobi_slums_Kenya.

²⁷ Jordi Tejel and Clémentine Vidal-Naquet (eds.), *Slum Histories: Stories of Poverty and Urban Change in the Mediterranean*, (Routledge, UK, 2020).



Fig. 1. One of the alleys in *Il-Mandraġġ* photographed at the turn of the twentieth century. (Attilio Critien)

1.02 The subject for research

By the late 19th century, *Il-Mandraġġ* in Valletta had come to be regarded as a slum, to the extent that the term '*Mandraġġ*' became synonymous with slum-like conditions in the Maltese language.²⁸ The etymology of the Maltese term closely aligns with that provided by the Concise Oxford Dictionary. This area was demolished in 1948 as part of a more extensive regeneration programme. Slums have been the subject of numerous studies and academic reviews.²⁹ As expected, there is primary and secondary literature on the subject. Different authors have studied the sociological³⁰ and anthropological³¹ concepts of what

²⁸ Erin Serracino Inglott, *Il-Miklem Mlati*, vi, M-O, (Malta, 1979)

²⁹ Jerram Leif, *Streetlife, The Untold History of Europe's Twentieth Century*, (Oxford University Press, 2011), Robert Roberts, *The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century*, (Manchester University Press, 1971), Fabian Frenzel, Ko Koens and Malte Steinbrink (ed.) *Slum Tourism: Poverty, Power and Ethics*, (Routledge, 2012), .

³⁰ Alan Mayne, *Slums: The History of a Global Injustice*, (Reaktion Books, 2017); Gerald D. Suttles, *The Social Order of the Slum: Ethnicity and Territory in the Inner City*, (University of Chicago Press, 1968).

³¹ Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, *Slum as a Way of Life: A Study of Coping and Adaptation in a Delhi Squatter Settlement*, (Oxford University Press, 2000), Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, (Cambridge University Press, 1995), Datta Ayona and Simone AbdouMaliq, 'The Study of Slums as Social and Physical Constructs: Challenges and Emerging Research Opportunities', *Regional Studies, Regional Science*, iii, 1, 2016, 399-408, Sen Atreyee, 'Slums and Shanty Towns', in *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, Hilary Callan (ed.), (Wiley, 2018).

makes a slum. Urbanists³² and criminologists³³ are also interested in these areas. Thus, not only are the physical structures or the inhabitants the subject of these studies but also the psychology and other perspectives.

Like all slum areas, past and present, *Il-Mandraġġ* had a historical reason for its creation and existence. This study begins by examining the original purpose behind the area's construction and explores how and why it became a place of squalor. Each slum area has its unique history, and the case of *Il-Mandraġġ* in Valletta is no exception. Its transformation into a slum can be traced to the failure of its original intended purpose; a topic analysed in the succeeding chapter.

The inhabitants of *Il-Mandraġġ* led lives shaped by their unique circumstances. This analysis of the area's history begins with a study of its residents in the twentieth century. Despite its reputation as a slum, some residents managed to become property owners, with a few even acquiring multiple properties within the area and renting them out. Nevertheless, the majority of residents remained tenants, paying rent for their accommodations.

1.03 Methodology

This study employs a multidisciplinary methodology to analyse *Il-Mandraġġ*, a district in Valletta, combining approaches from social, economic, and urban history. Such a methodology reflects the practices of scholars whose works have informed this research. Their use of an interdisciplinary lens underscores the necessity of considering various facets of a district's history, enabling a comprehensive understanding of its evolution over four centuries. This chapter outlines the methodologies employed in this study while acknowledging that the following literature review will provide an in-depth analysis of the sources used.

³² Alan Mayne, 'What's in a Name', *The Oxford Handbook of the Modern Slum*, (Oxford University Press, 2023), 19-36; Robert Neuwirth, *Shadow Cities: A Billion Squatters, A New Urban World*, (Routledge, 2004) and Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, (Verso, 2006).

³³ Beatriz Magaloni, Edgar Franco-Vivanco, and Vanessa Melo, 'Killing in the Slums: Social Order, Criminal Governance, and Police Violence in Rio de Janeiro', in *American Political Science Review*, cxiv, 2, (2020), 552-572, Alan Mayne, 'Introduction: Slums and the Modern World', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Slums*, (Oxford University Press, 2023).

The exploration of the history of *Il-Mandraġġ* necessitated an engagement with its social structures, cultural practices, and demographic shifts. To achieve this, extensive archival research was undertaken, examining census records, parish registries, court documents, and social welfare records. These sources provide valuable insights into the lives of the area's inhabitants, including their family structures, migration patterns, and social hierarchies. Oral histories complement these written sources, offering perspectives from past and current residents about their lived experiences. These narratives are beneficial for understanding aspects of social resilience and cultural identity that may not be adequately captured in official records. Ethnographic methods further enrich the analysis by linking contemporary practices and traditions with historical accounts, thereby reconstructing aspects of community life that have endured or transformed over time.

Economic history forms another cornerstone of this methodology. Property dynamics and financial conditions were examined to trace the development of *Il-Mandraġġ* as an urban area and, ultimately, as a slum. Archival records, such as property registries, tenancy agreements, and tax documentation, were used to explore land ownership, property distribution, and tenancy patterns over time. Employment records and oral accounts provided information on residents' occupational structures, while studies of trade and informal economies shed light on how residents navigated economic challenges. Statistical analyses were also employed to measure income disparities, rent levels, and population densities, offering a quantitative dimension to the study.

The spatial and infrastructural evolution of *Il-Mandraġġ* is another key focus. Historical maps were compared with contemporary ones to trace changes in urban layouts, street networks, and housing patterns. Urban planning records, sourced from the National Archives and private collections, were instrumental in understanding planning decisions, redevelopment projects, and zoning regulations that shaped the district. The study also considered public health and sanitation records to evaluate the impact of infrastructure on residents' living conditions, focusing on elements such as

sewer systems and housing improvements. The analysis extended to architectural studies, examining the materials, construction methods, and modifications employed in buildings over time to chart the district's physical transformation.

Visual materials played a significant role in reconstructing the history of *Il-Mandraġġ*, especially since much of the area has been demolished. Photographs, sketches, and paintings were integral to the analysis, serving not only as visual aids but also as primary sources. These materials provided critical evidence of changes in the district's physical and social landscape, helping to recover lost details about its past.

The study also addressed the role of government intervention in the district's history through a detailed analysis of policies and legal frameworks. Eviction notices, redevelopment plans, and social reform measures were examined to understand their impact on the community. These sources offered a lens through which to evaluate the broader societal and state dynamics that contributed to the transformation of *Il-Mandraġġ*.

The comparative aspect of this methodology situates *Il-Mandraġġ* within a broader context of urban poverty and slum development. By comparing the district to other slums in Malta and abroad, the study identifies patterns that are either unique to *Il-Mandraġġ* or reflective of broader trends in urban history. This comparative framework enhances the study's ability to explain why and how *Il-Mandraġġ* developed in the way that it did, emphasising both local specificities and global parallels.

Any researcher fears that the available material, whether primary or secondary, may not be sufficient to reconstruct a correct historical narrative. Considering the nature of this study, the primary sources consulted were all available either in local public archives or selected libraries. One cannot exclude the fact that there is material in private collections, but their existence may not be known, and where known, their consultation would depend on the owner being willing to make them available. Unfortunately, few documents from private collections related to any aspect of the history of *Il-Mandraġġ* were

accessible. As in any other theme, the sources covering *Il-Mandraġġ* fall under various categories. The primary unpublished documents consulted were primarily governmental, and not all government sources were available or accessible to the author. In some cases, the author learned about their existence through secondary sources, and whenever this happened, such sources were cited through this secondary material.

While planning the research, the lack of collective memories and individual stories by residents was problematic. This was due to the period covered in this dissertation and the age of those persons old enough to remember the area as it was before it was demolished. Those who would have remembered the place well, particularly before the Second World War, have since died. Those who were then children either do not have a clear memory of the locality or their memories rely on and are moulded by what was passed onto them by their parents and elders, and hence are likely to be embellished by much nostalgia. Human memory is acquired through experience, communication, and socialisation. After a generation or two, the facts tend to alter and are not always an accurate reflection of the reality experienced by their predecessors. It was, therefore, not easy to collect and record information on the experience of living in such conditions at *Il-Mandraġġ*, particularly on the effects that this slum area had on the residents.

Furthermore, there is little information on the impact that the news may have had on the residents when they came to know about the government's decision to demolish the area and rehome them. Nor could it be investigated whether they knew of the pre-war project to destroy this area and evict all the residents. The surviving narrative is that the majority were not happy; however, the veracity of such a narrative is subject to discussion. Thus, this study had to rely exclusively on written sources, whether published or still in manuscript form.

While it would have been ideal to conduct interviews with individuals who lived in *Il-Mandraġġ*, the timeframe of this study, primarily focusing on the second half of the 1930s, made this impossible, as potential interviewees are no longer alive. Even the memories of their children, if available, are likely

influenced by nostalgia. Consequently, the acquisition of primary oral testimony is limited to existing audio or video recordings, where available. Interpersonal communication with descendants of these families was generally avoided, with one exception: insights were drawn from conversations that the author of this dissertation had with his father-in-law, who was born and spent part of his adult life in *Il-Mandraġġ* before passing away over a decade ago.

This methodology thus provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the history of *Il-Mandraġġ*, combining archival research, oral histories, ethnographic studies, spatial analysis, and comparative approaches. The following literature review will explore the sources utilised and their contribution to the study's findings.

1.04 Archival Sources and Material

Until 1968, the zone of *Il-Mandraġġ* formed part of the parish of *Porto Salvo*³⁴ (Saint Dominic), and therefore information of a religious nature concerning the inhabitants of this area was often recorded by this parish. One noteworthy religious document which sheds light on the people of this area is the *Status Animarum*.³⁵ By its nature, the *Status Animarum* was a list of individuals living in a parish, compiled according to the street and then divided according to those living in every home unit. The *Status Animarum* of this parish is spread across three different archives; some are in the parochial archives of *Porto Salvo*, others in the *Curia* Archives in Floriana, and others yet at the Ecclesiastical Archives of the Cathedral at Mdina. None of these archives have similar copies; each archive possesses a unique copy of this document compiled on an annual basis, with parish priests expected to compile it each year during Easter time. Those consulted for *Il-Mandraġġ* at the *Curia* have detailed records of the different alleys and door numbers, as well as the

³⁴. The Basilica of Our Lady of Safe Haven (Italian, *Madonna di Porto Salvo*) was built in 1571 and decreed a parish in the same year by Pope Pius V. It is dedicated to Our Lady of Safe Haven because of the sailors who frequented the earlier small chapel and prayed to the Holy Mother for a safe journey while at sea.

³⁵. In 1548, the Synod of Augsburg obliged Catholic parish priests to record the adhesion of their parishioners to the teaching of the church, the household, etc., and mainly a census. Also, the obligatory annual requirement of confession and receiving communion. This obligation was revoked by the *Codex Juris Canonici* in 1983.

numbers, names and ages of all the inhabitants of each dwelling. The parish archives of *Porto Salvo* also include the baptismal, marriage and death records of the people of *Il-Mandraġġ* - the inhabitants of *Il-Mandraġġ* were expected to baptise their babies in this parish and their deaths were also recorded in the registers of this parish. As for marriages, although not as an enforced rule, brides were expected to marry in their parish of origin; therefore, girls of *Il-Mandraġġ* were married at and recorded in the records of *Porto Salvo*, with boys only recorded therein when they married a girl from this same locality. Unfortunately, these records are incomplete when it comes to the study of residence as they do not give the residential addresses of the parents of those giving birth, of the bride and groom getting married or of the dead. They give only the name of their parish of origin.

Then there are the archives of the parish of Saint Augustine, which parish started to take care of the pastoral needs of the people of *Il-Mandraġġ* only after Saint Augustine became a parish in 1968. However, most inhabitants of this area felt a closer religious affinity to the Carmelite Order, whose priory and church were considered to be on the outskirts of *Il-Mandraġġ*. As shall be explained, not much material related to *Il-Mandraġġ* ended up or could be at the Carmelites; a physical object that once was in *Il-Mandraġġ* ended up at this convent, after this district was demolished. It is a statue that was given to the friars as a sign of appreciation and affiliation (see Chapter 6).

The archives of the *Curia* of the Archdiocese of Malta were also consulted for the *Status Animarum* related to the people living in the *Il-Mandraġġ*. The *Curia* has a well-preserved *Status Animarum* for the 18th century, but the archives of the parish of *Porto Salvo* had to be consulted for those of the 19th century. The reason is that since the parish of Saint Augustine had previously formed part of the parish of *Porto Salvo*, all birth, marriage, death and other official ecclesiastic records before 1968 were kept at the mother parish.

Since this study concerns urban and social issues, much of the primary material required is located in the National Archives.³⁶ Many old records and

³⁶. The building used as Santo Spirito Hospital became the home of the National Archives Office on 28 July 1989.

files from governmental departments (under whose remit issues related to *Il-Mandraġġ* fell) are housed in these archives today. However, not all government-related records of *Il-Mandraġġ* have been deposited in the National Archives. Records and at the time of my research, files dating from 1935 that pertain to the Public Works Department have not yet been archived at the National Archives and are still located at the Registry of the Public Works and of the Planning Authority in Floriana. They are a significant reference source and were consulted for information about infrastructural works undertaken at the *Il-Mandraġġ*. Another location under the same ministry is the archives at Project House, formerly the Chief Draftsman's Office, where volumes of files and plans of intended or implemented works at *Il-Mandraġġ*, dating to the mid-19th century are stored.

The Malta National Library at Valletta, also known as the *Bibliotheca*, is another location for manuscripts and published material, including local and some foreign contemporary newspapers of the period related to my research. The *Melitensia* and the main libraries at the University of Malta, including the section of Rare Books Archives are rich in source material and equally consulted for books, primary unpublished works, theses by graduates and other published secondary sources such as periodicals and reports.

The archives of the Malta Police General Headquarters at Floriana, the Lands Authority, the Land Registration Office, the Department of Health, and the Public Broadcasting Authority were also consulted but the material sought was not publicly available due to restrictions by the Data Protection Act.³⁷ Fortunately, in some instances, this difficulty was bypassed through secondary sources given that some of the relevant material which was not otherwise consultable had become the subject of articles or books in the public domain.

³⁷. 'The General Data Protection Regulation' (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR) and the 'Data Protection Act' (Cap 586) Retrieved on 12 Dec. 2022 from: <https://www.mca.org.mt/content/dataprotection#:~:text=You%20are%20entitled%20to%20know,comply%20with%20data%20protection%20legislation.>

Another primary source is the Hansard³⁸ files related to Malta, which form part of the Parliamentary Records of the United Kingdom, most records of which are available digitally. There is also material at the National Archives at Kew in the United Kingdom. These archives were not physically consulted owing to *inter alia* the fact that most of the material is now available online. Furthermore, intensive use was made of other digital deposits such as Quorum, Google Books, Academia, JSTOR and other public archives or academic institutions.

Locally, the National Archives at Rabat proved to be the most crucial repository of unpublished primary sources related to studies on the history of *Il-Mandraġġ* during the 19th century. The Despatches of the Chief Secretary of State were the primary sources consulted for reconstructing the history. These volumes are catalogued according to the Governor of the time, in date order and numbered accordingly, including by genre. These documents helped to fill the gap between the era of the Order of Saint John, which ended in 1798 and the early years of the British in Malta. On the other hand, the documents of relevance to *Il-Mandraġġ* at the State Archives commenced at the end of the 19th century and continued throughout the first half of the 20th century. The first volume used for this dissertation has the serial number *CSG01 - 1879, Vol. 18, Nos. 2551-2700*³⁹ and contains letters and despatches addressed to or sent by Governor Sir Arthur Borton⁴⁰ or on his behalf. Although the information in this register mainly relates to the second half of the 19th century, it helped reconstruct issues related to health at *Il-Mandraġġ* during the early years of the 19th century, particularly the Cholera epidemic, which was a major concern to the British army during this period. The records referred to information contained in books that were impossible to trace in local libraries or online old book depositories with information about *Il-Mandraġġ*.

³⁸ Hansard, the Official Report, the proceedings of both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, named after the surname of the family who printed and published the records of British parliamentary debates between 1812 and 1889. Retrieved on various dates from: <https://hansard.parliament.uk>.

³⁹ NAM, 'Chief Secretary to the Governor 01 - 1879, 18:2551-2700'.

⁴⁰ General Sir Arthur Borton GCB GCMG (1814 –1893) was Governor of Malta from 1878 to 1884.

Additional records at the National Archives related to *Il-Mandraġġ* of the 20th century are located in the records of The Public Works Department. One particular file, *PW 220/35, Police 643/35* contains a two-leaf file about the replacement of wooden beams at *Il-Mandraġġ*.⁴¹ The next document concerning the Public Works Department at the National Archives falls within the file of *PW1159/36, LGO 666/36 - Manderaggio*.⁴² This particular file has minutes of reports, correspondence and estimates related to projects that the government proposed to carry out in the zone of *Il-Mandraġġ*, referred to in the 1930s as the *Manderaggio Scheme* and extensively discussed later in this dissertation. The file contains various surveys related to the demolition; relocation, especially the availability at the proposed localities to where the inhabitants were to be moved; costings; building materials and other requirements; lists that include ages and occupations of the residents, the amount of rent being paid, the number of residents in each dwelling, the type of dwelling and the owners of the dwellings; as well as copies of correspondence by the authorities related to local administration and the project itself.

Another file related to the history of *Il-Mandraġġ* for the year 1936 was *PW1477/36, 170/PH/36*. This is a two-leaf report compiled by the Chief Government Medical Officer⁴³ on the sanitary conditions, including dirty streets and ratholes in the area. The file *GOV1698/1939 - Lieutenant-Governor's Office* contains more information about hygienic problems at *Il-Mandraġġ* for the period in question.

An extremely important and unbiased document at the National Archives recalls Vincenzo Maria Pellegrini's experience at *Il-Mandraġġ*.⁴⁴ In this twelve-page document, Pellegrini describes life in the *Manderaggio* as he had witnessed it in the 1930s. The author also recounts what he overheard while giving private lessons to students in that area.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, 'PW 220/35', *Police 643/35*.

⁴² AWD, 'PW1159/36', *LGO 666/36*.

⁴³ NAM, 'PW1477/36', *170/PH/36*.

⁴⁴ NAM, Vincenzo Maria Pellegrini, 'Life in the *Manderaggio*, *A short story spitefully dedicated to all those who will dislike it*', Private Deposits (PDE) 0029-004-02: 048.

Several plans were consulted during additional enquiries and searches in the archives at the former Water Works Department from where related additional material was extracted.

1.05 Printed Primary Sources

Among the most crucial published sources for the history of *Il-Mandraġġ* are the government reports, particularly those for 1934 and 1935. These reports dealt with sanitary conditions at *Il-Mandraġġ*. The conclusions made by Dr Critien helped in the drawing up of the *1937 Sanitary Legislation*.⁴⁵ Altogether searches were made through the volumes for the years 1934-1935, 1935-1936, 1936-1937 and 1938-39.⁴⁶ However, searches in the sections related to Public Works, Water and Electricity and Public Health, particularly in Key Plans, Drainage Extensions or Sundry Works, did not contain references related to works in *Il-Mandraġġ*.

The Blue Books are another primary source that contains official proclamations. The *Malta Blue Book* was first compiled in 1821 and ceased in 1938. It was common in all the colonies and dominions of the British Empire and it accurately detailed important statistics related to the population, expenditures by the military and civil administrations, revenues such as excise duties and taxes, imports and exports, infrastructural projects, health and hospitals, education, prisons and other vital statistics. The editions that mainly interest this study are those from 1935 till cessation in 1938.

Then, there are the Council of Government debates. The published volumes of these debates are mainly relevant to Government decisions and how this area was seen by the Maltese representatives and their British counterparts in the local Council debates. At this time, Valletta had a high proportion of representatives on this Council as it was the area with the highest number of voters. They had a strong and direct interest due to health issues.

⁴⁵. NAM, *Supplements to Malta Government Gazette of 1937*, 'An Ordinance enacted by the Governor of Malta. To make provision for the clearance of insanitary areas', Ordinance XXVI of 1937, (Government Printing Press, Malta), 367-378.

⁴⁶. NAM, *Despatches of the Secretary of State*, Volumes 145, 146, 147 and 148.

The Government Gazette is another source consulted for this dissertation. Despite its name, the Government Gazette did not function as a newspaper in the conventional sense. Instead, it served (and continues to serve) as the official publication for disseminating government white papers, new laws, and legislative enactments. Particular attention was given to the Supplements to the Malta Government Gazette of 1937, which contained critical information about the legislation enacted that year.⁴⁷ All Ordinances and Legislation approved by the Governor were published in the *Government Gazette* or its supplements.⁴⁸ During that year, there was another piece of legislation to amend the *Second Sanitary Law, 1900 (Ordinance No. XVII of 1901)*⁴⁹ though this was not related to slums but rather to pharmacists and medicines. Such notices were published in editions of the Government Gazette, every week.

The magazine *The Malta Penny Magazine* was published between 1832 and 1844. It was not a political journal and therefore it could be published without the approval of the Governor. *The Malta Penny Magazine*, published between 1832 and 1844, was not a political journal and therefore could be published without the approval of the Governor. It was a weekly illustrated publication whose primary target audience was the British working class in Malta. It aimed to elevate the social level of those who could not receive formal teaching and possibly increase their education level through the articles and information published on its pages. Free journalism in Malta commenced in 1839,⁵⁰ which enabled *The Malta Penny Magazine* to publish articles of a political nature. In its No. 17 issue of January 1840, it carried an article concerning *Il-Mandraġġ*.

47. MGG, *Supplements, i and ii*, 1937.

48. *ibid.*, Ordinance XXVI of 1937, 367-378.

49. *ibid.*, Ordinance XXXVI, 1 of 1937, 03-1097.

50. Joseph Bezzina, 'Church and State in an Island Colony', *The British Experience 1800-1964, The Impact on Maltese Society*, Victor Mallia-Milanes (ed.), Chapter iv, (Monerva Publications, Malta, 1988), 54.

1.06 Newspapers

Chandrika Kaul also wrote that the granting of liberty to the press led to the publication of several daily newspapers in Italian and Maltese.⁵¹ One of the first to take advantage of this new legislation was Filippo Izzo who started publishing *The Malta Times*.⁵² This newspaper was published from 1840 until 1902 and from 1924 to 1927.⁵³ The newspaper carried letters to the editor related to *Il-Mandraġġ*.

The second most popular English newspaper in the nineteenth century after the *Malta Times* was *The Chronicle and Imperial Services Gazette*, founded by Sir Augustus Bartolo and published on 14 November 1884. The paper changed its name several times when his sons Joseph and Augustus took over.⁵⁴ Although heavily featuring advertisements, the newspaper was aimed at the British garrison and expatriates in Malta and featured Government Despatches, political and military situations overseas, local and religious news and letters to the editor. This newspaper carried articles concerning the introduction of water and drainage in Valletta which have a direct connection with the situation in *Il-Mandraġġ*.

These two English newspapers were counterbalanced by the newspaper *Il Portafoglio Maltese*. It was bi-weekly in Italian but was the most influential and was published from 1843 until 1902. It was the newspaper most critical of British colonial rule. The editor and publisher was the lawyer Paolo Sciortino and its major features were political and religious but carried an article about *Il-Mandraġġ*.⁵⁵

During the first half of the 20th century, newspapers started to compete with radio transmissions known in Malta as Rediffusion which had commenced

⁵¹ Chandrika Kaul, 'The Local and the Global: Malta, Media and Empire in the Twentieth Century', *Journal of Maltese History*, iv, 2, Department of History, John Chircop (ed.), UOM, (2015), 4, Retrieved on 3 Mar. 2023 from: <https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/18052/1/2.The%20Local%20and%20the%20Global%20Malta%2c%20Media%20and%20Empire%20in%20the%20Twentieth%20Century.pdf>.

⁵² Joseph F. Grima, *Printing and Censorship in Malta 1642-1839, A general survey*, (Valletta Publishing Ltd, Malta, 1991), 79.

⁵³ *ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁴ Chandrika Kaul, 2.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 224.

in 1935. However, the strongest media in the mid-1930s was the newspaper, published in the three main languages in Malta: English, Italian and Maltese. The newspapers of the period showed interest in this area. By now, newspapers started to belong to political parties or support different political factions. Due to their importance, some issues of contemporary newspapers have been featured as primary sources since following the *Sanitary Legislation of 1937*, many editions had featured letters to the editors that were specifically directed at the *Manderaggio*.

The leading newspaper in the Italian language in the 1930s was the *Malta*, owned by Nerik Mizzi.⁵⁶ Despite the general idea that the main interest of this newspaper was in culture, it also carried articles of a social nature, including about *Il-Mandraġġ*. The *Malta* was counterbalanced by *The Times of Malta* founded by Lord Gerald Strickland and his wife Lady Strickland in 1929.⁵⁷ From its inception, *The Times of Malta* proved to be a strong partisan newspaper supporting the British administration and was effectively against Mizzi's newspaper *Malta*. This newspaper also carried letters to the editor about *Il-Mandraġġ*. A Maltese version of *The Times of Malta* was *Il-Berka*, by the same publishing house. Another popular newspaper in Maltese was *Il-Leñen is-Sewwa*, first published in 1928 by the *Azzjoni Kattolika* (Catholic Action) of Malta and based on the views of the Catholic Church.

1.07 Unpublished dissertations

Il-Mandraġġ was the subject of a specific dissertation by Diane Spiteri entitled '*The Manderaggio, Societies Reactions and Prospects for the Urban Regeneration of Valletta's Slum Areas*'.⁵⁸ During her planning and research for the dissertation, Diane Spiteri made extensive use of the author of this dissertation's publication on the history of *Il-Mandraġġ* entitled *The Story of the*

⁵⁶. William Zammit, *L-istorja ta' l-Istampar f'Malta* Kullana Kulturali, (Malta, *Pubblikazzjoni Indipendenza*, 2007), lxx, 225.

⁵⁷. Allied Newspapers Ltd., Our Products. <https://www.alliednewspapers.com.mt/products>.

⁵⁸. Dianne Spiteri, '*The Manderaggio, Societies reactions and Prospects for the Urban Regeneration of Valletta's Slum Areas*', (Unpublished B. A. Honours dissertation, UOM, 2013.

*Valletta Mandraġġ*⁵⁹ and at the time the author of this dissertation had assisted inter alia by providing references to certain works.

The dissertation by Spiteri aimed to discuss the history of *Il-Mandraġġ* from its origin and stops at the post-World War Two rehabilitation and regeneration, detailing the particular known events that occurred during this period, demographic and other statistics, especially extracts on the people who lived there and those who returned and certain matters up to the time of writing. The dissertation focuses mostly on the buildings, the urban configuration of *Il-Mandraġġ*, the non-existent services of most types and particularly the conditions in which the people lived especially their social circumstances.

The area of *Il-Mandraġġ* was also covered as part of the general history of the parish of *Porto Salvo*. Carmel Agius studied the social history of the parish of *Porto Salvo* between 1870 and 1890⁶⁰ and gives a vivid description of the social life at this parish basing his work on the parochial archives of the said parish besides information acquired from the two censuses held in 1871 and 1881.⁶¹ *Il-Mandraġġ* is covered by Carmel Agius in '*Chapter 3: Housing, Sanitation and Society of the of Salvo Parish*'.⁶² Agius also gives details about illegitimate births during this period born to women at *Il-Mandraġġ*. The dissertation is primarily a sociological investigation based on various statistics, particularly demographical ones based on censuses, with an emphasis on figures, numbers and reports, but does not address how *Il-Mandraġġ* was allowed to remain the slum colony that it was.

Roderick Livori discusses *Aspects of Out-migration from Valletta*⁶³, and although the subject of his dissertation was migration out of Valletta, Livori included references to *Il-Mandraġġ*. *The People of Valletta 1900-1935: An Overview*, was the subject of an MA dissertation by Marie Christine Bezzina⁶⁴,

⁵⁹. Darmanin, STM, 21 June 2015.

⁶⁰. Carmel Agius, '*The Parish of Porto Salvo Valletta: A Social History 1870-1890*', (Unpublished B. A. Honours dissertation, UOM, 2009)

⁶¹. Attilio Critien, '*The Manderaggio: Notes, Historical and Other*', (Hamrun, Malta, 1938).

⁶². C. Agius, 48-50.

⁶³. Roderick Livori, '*Aspects of Out – Migration from Valletta*'. (Unpublished B. A. Honours dissertation, UOM, 2004).

⁶⁴. Marie Christine Bezzina, '*The People of Valletta 1900-1935: An Overview*', (Unpublished M. A. dissertation, UOM, 2021).

in which Bezzina discusses statistics related to *Il-Mandraġġ* between 1900 and 1935.

1.08 Books and Other Published Secondary Sources

The reading list of printed books targeting *Il-Mandraġġ* in Valletta or related slum clearance was quite extensive. Nevertheless, an understanding of this zone also required reading books of a general nature which provide background or help elucidate the dynamics of the stories and references unearthed about *Il-Mandraġġ*. Thus, even if these books had no practical direct reference to this zone, they were still considered relevant to the subject under study and part of the wider research conducted on this area.

Il-Mandraġġ has been featured in many books, magazines and other sources. This review is not intended to cover all the books that discussed or referred to *Il-Mandraġġ* but will focus on the most important publications related to this study. The most important books about the origins of *Il-Mandraġġ* are the classical works of Iacomo Bosio and Del Pozzo. The subject of these two books is the history of the Order of Saint John and contains important references to this area. The history of *Il-Mandraġġ* during the time of the Order started to refigure in contemporary publications. The urban history of Valletta was the subject of a book by Roger De Giorgio entitled *A City by an Order*.⁶⁵ Roger de Giorgio was a leading architect, historian and the author of articles about Valletta. His work is counted as one of the earliest and most detailed books on the birth and making of Valletta which proved extremely useful in the reconstruction of the history of the origins of this area. In his book on the building of Valletta, de Giorgio explains the strategic planning for the defensive works and fortifications, of the many fine palaces and buildings, as well as the other infrastructural and essential projects.

Endemic Democracy: 1919-1930, Vol. 1: Responsibility and Power in Inter-war Malta,⁶⁶ by Dominic Fenech covers the political history of Malta from

⁶⁵. Roger De Giorgio, *A City by an Order*, (self-published, Malta, 1986).

⁶⁶. Dominic Fenech, *Responsibility and Power in Inter-war Malta, Endemic Democracy: 1919-1930, Vol. 1*, (Publishers Enterprising Group (PEG) Ltd., Malta, 2005).

the end of the First World War to 1930, the decade in which the next war had commenced. In this book, Fenech does not specifically cover the years related to the planned project at *Il-Mandraġġ* of the late 1930s. That notwithstanding, it cannot be denied that these two decades were full of events, political and otherwise that changed and remodelled the history of Malta. The author furnished solid explanations for the reasons that led to social unrest in Malta after the First World War and Self-Government and viewed this issue as a three-fold battle of sorts, in which the protagonists were of pro-Britain, pro-Italian or pro-Maltese indigence sentiments.

With the coming of the 19th century, *Il-Mandraġġ* started to feature in travelogues, which proved essential as there are no accounts of life at *Il-Mandraġġ* or its bordering streets written by its inhabitants. The first is Jules Verne (1828-1905). Verne, who came to Malta twice, first in 1878 and again in 1884, did not write a travelogue but used what he had seen at *Il-Mandraġġ* in his novel *Mathias Sandorf*. In this book, Verne dedicates an entire chapter to Malta.

It was not until the twentieth century that works were written explicitly about this area. In 1907, Thomas Gray Bonney, E. A. R. Ball, H. D. Trail, Grant Allen, Arthur Griffith and Robert Brown published their recollections on their visit to the Mediterranean in the book *The Mediterranean, its storied cities and venerable ruins*. The book includes the island of Malta and the description of *Il-Mandraġġ* does not reflect it being the hell that it came to be described as in later literature.⁶⁷

The book *Labels* by Evelyn St John Waugh (1903-1966) was written half a century after Verne. This book has a chapter dedicated to his journey to Malta, the places he visited and his impression of *Il-Mandraġġ*. Like Verne, Waugh sought to create a journal of adventures with the difference that while Verne relied on fictitious characters, St John Waugh recounted his journey in the Mediterranean. His descriptions of Malta, and particularly Valletta, are so

⁶⁷. Thomas Gray Bonney, et., 'The Mediterranean, its storied cities and venerable ruins', *SCRIBD The Project Gutenberg eBook*, (James Pott & Company, New York, 1907), 275. Retrieved on 21 Mar. 2023 from: <https://www.scribd.com/book/187109420/The-Mediterranean-Its-Storied-Cities-and-Venerable-Ruins>

detailed that the reader can paint a mental picture of each of the locations he visited in Malta, especially historical sites, churches, the megalithic temples and even his journey from one location to another, including by boat across the harbour and his visit to *Il-Mandraġġ*. Its description could not have been painted any uglier on any canvas.⁶⁸

The most important study to be published on this subject was *The Manderaggio: Notes, Historical and Other* by Attilio Critien (1872-1955), published in 1938. Due to its importance, this book cannot be considered as a secondary source. In truth, it is a primary source because it was based on an inquiry done by Critien himself for the 1937 health legislation.⁶⁹ Critien was a medical doctor by profession, the Chief Government Medical Officer and Superintendent of Public Health and renowned for his work during the outbreak of the Spanish Flu in Malta between 1918 and 1919. Critien had intended for his book to be more of a demographic and medical publication than just another publication containing valuable statistics. Critien used various sources in his work, such as *Malta Illustrata*⁷⁰ and other manuscripts at the Malta National Library. Researchers and students broadly used these same statistics in various works in the following decades.

*Malta, An Account and an Appreciation*⁷¹ published in 1949, is a book by Harry Luke another Englishman in Malta and the former Lieutenant-Governor of Malta (1930-1938). Luke was interested in *Il-Mandraġġ* primarily because of its origins and thus he explores the beginning of this area and then proceeds to describe it from a humanitarian perspective and as it was during his stay in Malta.

Austen St Barbe Harrison and Robert Pearce S. Hubbard built on the work by Critien and on a file currently preserved at the Public Works Department, already discussed above. Harrison and Hubbard's views were

⁶⁸. Evelyn Waugh, *Labels*, 'Chapter V - Malta', (Penguin Classics, London, 2011), 809.

⁶⁹. NAM, *M.G.G, Supplements– 1937, 26 Mar. 1937*, 367-378.

⁷⁰. Giovanfrancesco Abela, *Della Descrizione di Malta Isola nel Mare Siciliano: con le sue Antichita, Edaltre Notitie: Libri Quattro: Libro Primo Notitia I*, (Paolo Bonacota, Malta, 1647), 18.

⁷¹. Harry Luke Sir, *Malta, An Account and an Appreciation*, 2nd Edition, (Corgi Books, George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., U.K., 1970).

published in the book *Valletta, A Report to accompany the outline plan for the Region of Valletta and the Three Cities*, where they outlined their plans for the regenerating regions in Valletta, Floriana and the Three Cities, including for *Il-Mandraġġ*.⁷²

Malcolm Borg provides an excellent critique of British architecture in Malta in his book *British Colonial Architecture, Malta 1800-1900*⁷³ and brings to bear major mid to late-19th-century projects in Malta and the 1881 proposals for *Il-Mandraġġ*.⁷⁴ On these same lines is the study by George A. Said Zammit in *The Development of Domestic Space in The Maltese Islands from The Late Middle Ages to The Second Half of the Twentieth Century*. Said Zammit covers most aspects of life in Malta and offers special attention to the evolution of living spaces on the island throughout the years. He investigates the transition of habitation in Malta and its influence on the Maltese lifestyle, as well as detailing the similar effects, particularly on history, politics, culture, religion, traditions and especially the way of life of the Maltese of diverse levels of society. There are various references to *Il-Mandraġġ*, of which he gives a graphic description in the chapter titled '*The Maltese houses: literary sources, notarial acts, travelogues and the national censuses*'. It is a vivid description of destitute living. This argument is covered in other pages of his work particularly when he discusses the '*Urban lower-class dwellings*'.⁷⁵

The social situation in *Il-Mandraġġ* in the twentieth century was the subject of the four-volume book series *Rajt Malta Tinbidel* by Herbert Ganado. The first book *L-Ewwel Ktieb' 1900-1933*⁷⁶ covers life in *Il-Mandraġġ* as seen through the author's eyes, describing his own experiences and family life in this area. His description is unbiased and forthright. Although *Il-Mandraġġ* is

⁷². Austen St Barbe Harrison and Robert Pearce S. Hubbard, Valletta. *A Report to Accompany the Outline Plan for the Region of Valletta and the Three Cities*, (Government Printing Office, Malta, 1945).

⁷³. Malcolm Borg, *British Colonial Architecture, Malta 1800-1900*, (Publishers Enterprises Group, PEG, Malta, 2001).

⁷⁴. *ibid.*, 125.

⁷⁵. George A. Said Zammit *The Development of Domestic Space in The Maltese Islands from The Late Middle Ages to The Second Half of the Twentieth Century*, (Archaeopress Publishing Limited, United Kingdom, 2016), 138.

⁷⁶. Herbert Ganado, *Rajt Malta Tinbidel, L-Ewwel Ktieb, 1900-1933, It-Tielet Edizzjoni*, (Interprint Malta Ltd., Malta, 1977).

presented in just a few pages, this book⁷⁷ contains a detailed description of the dire living conditions, the physical and other sufferings of the inhabitants and the social stigma attached to this locality during the first half of the twentieth century.

Karmenu Ellul Galea is another contemporary author who delved into the social realities at *Il-Mandraġġ*. His works are a milestone in the history of trade unionism⁷⁸ and Catholic guilds or *fratellanzi*,⁷⁹ as well as other historical works in the Maltese language. This is just the first volume of four detailed books, and only the first volume was reviewed limitedly for its reference to *Il-Mandraġġ*, poverty and slums in Malta, particularly in Valletta.

In the twentieth century, the situation at *Il-Mandraġġ* featured in the social novel by Guze` Orlando, *I-Ibleñ* or (*The Fool*).⁸⁰ Even though this is a literary work published in 1948, Orlando describes the pitiful living conditions of the inhabitants of this zone during the interwar years. Oliver Friggieri⁸¹ dedicated an entire study to this book to explain how this novel covers concerns of social injustice, political class, corruption and political evil.

References to the social aspects of *Il-Mandraġġ* reappear in Mark Montebello's book about Dom Mintoff, the former Prime Minister of Malta.⁸² For several years, Mintoff's family lived in a house on the outskirts of *Il-Mandraġġ*. Montebello's study is primarily based on Mintoff's personal diary, supplemented by local and foreign records, as well as material acquired from various sources, including interviews with individuals who knew, worked with, or even opposed Mintoff. The book recounts stories and recollections from the time when the young Dominic and his family resided near *Il-Mandraġġ*. Mintoff's strong connection to this locality is particularly significant, as he would later spearhead the initiative to demolish and redevelop *Il-Mandraġġ* into its present form.

^{77.} *ibid.*, 307.

^{78.} Karmenu Ellul Galea, *Fratellanzi u Xirkiet tas-Snajja'*, (Malta, *Il-Hajja*, Malta, 1981).

^{79.} *ibid.*, *It-Trejdunjonizmu f'Malta: I-Ewwel Volum*, (*Publikazzjoni Indipendenza*, Malta, 1993).

^{80.} Guze` Orlando Smith, *I-Ibleñ*, (Progress Press, Malta, 1948).

^{81.} Oliver Friggieri, *I-Ibleñ, Il-Kuxjenza Mnikkta f'Societa` Aljenata*, 2nd Edition, (Malta, 1985).

^{82.} Mark Montebello, *The Tail that Wagged the Dog: The life and Struggles of Dom Mintoff, 1916–2012*, (*Sensiela Kotba Socjalisti*, (SKS Publishing, Malta, 2021).

The legal legislation that had a direct bearing on *Il-Mandraġġ* was discussed at length by Raymond Mangion in his book *Legislatures and Legislation in Malta, 1914 to 1964*. In this book, Mangion provided detailed studies on the enactment of laws that had a direct effect on *Il-Mandraġġ*, in particular, the 1937 legislation.

1.09 Featured Articles

Jon P. Mitchell's paper, *The Nostalgic Construction of Community: Memory and Social Identity in Urban Malta*,⁸³ does not focus on the interwar period nor directly on *Il-Mandraġġ*. Instead, it examines the memories of residents who lived in communities like *Due Balli* and other similar low-standard urban environments in Valletta that were demolished in the 1970s. Mitchell highlights that, despite living in conditions that many Maltese would have found undesirable, the residents of these areas shared a generally harmonious community atmosphere. While disruptions occasionally occurred, there was a strong sense of cohesion and camaraderie among them, born out of their shared experiences and familiarity with the environment they called home. His reflections are particularly relevant, as the inhabitants he studied were not fundamentally different from those discussed in this dissertation. They were Maltese and lived in similarly squalid conditions just a few hundred meters away from *Il-Mandraġġ*.

Mitchell's interviews reveal residents' nostalgia and sadness when faced with the threat of demolition and relocation. He emphasises the unity and strong sense of identity displayed by many residents during this period and their resentment toward the authorities, whom they blamed for their suffering due to the regeneration project. Some residents even questioned the project's necessity, suggesting it was politically motivated rather than essential for urban improvement. As with *Il-Mandraġġ*, the areas of the *Camerata* and the *Arcipierku*—long considered the less desirable parts of Valletta—fostered a deep sense of pride among their residents. This pride persisted even after their

⁸³ Jon P. Mitchell, 'The Nostalgic Construction of Community: Memory and Social Identity in Urban Malta', *Ethnos, Journal of Anthropology*, 81-101. Retrieved on 20 Apr. 2023 from: https://www.academia.edu/3416667/The_nostalgic_construction_of_community_Memory_and_social_identity_in_Urban_Malta.

temporary relocation during the replacement of their centuries-old homes with modern apartment blocks.

Giovanni Bonello discussed the connection of the Calabrian painter Mattia Preti with this area in Valletta.⁸⁴ The story of Preti and his connection with *Il-Mandraġġ* was also the subject of one of Alfonso Frangipane's works.⁸⁵ Simon Mercieca and Mark Cauchi also described this area concerning the Augustinian priory and why their priory and church were earmarked to be on the outskirts of the *Mandracchio* area.

During the Second World War *Il-Mandraġġ* was the focus of an interesting article by J. G. Cutajar Beck⁸⁶ in the *World Digest* entitled *Malta Calling, The 'Manderaggio'*. Cutajar Beck recounts the life in *Il-Mandraġġ*, possibly as it was before the war. Like most other authors, he commences with the origin of the name and its history and moves on to discuss its population, hygiene, other aspects of sanitation and the family life of the inhabitants.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the diverse sources utilised, focusing on the methodology, primary and secondary materials, and their relevance to this study. It presented a selection of the literature used to construct the historical narrative of *Il-Mandraġġ*. The books and documents analysed in this chapter provided a deeper understanding of the conditions in this area of Valletta, highlighting its transformations over the past three centuries. They also illuminated the key developments that contributed to the formation of a social stigma associated with this neighbourhood.

The chapter began by outlining the main primary sources, evaluating their merits, and briefly discussing each. Subsequent chapters will explore these aspects in greater depth.

⁸⁴. Giovanni Bonello, 'Mattia Preti: His houses in Malta', *Art in Malta: Discoveries and Recoveries*, (*Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti*, Malta, 1999), 69-72.

⁸⁵. Alfonso Frangipane, *Mattia Preti, Il Cavaliere Calabrese*, (Milano, Italy, 1929).

⁸⁶. Cutajar Beck, J. G., 'Malta Calling - The Manderaggio', *World Digest*, Miron Grindea (ed.), (The Practical Press, London, England, 51, July 1945), 36-38.

Researching and reviewing these sources while preparing the core chapters of this dissertation proved time-consuming. As with any research, the process was labour-intensive, but for this particular study, the challenge was compounded by the fragmented and scattered nature of the material across various books and archives. Compiling a literature review was instrumental in organising these sources, helping to sort out relevant references while identifying instances of repetition or irrelevance. Fortunately, such cases were few. Some facts and arguments appeared fragmented, while others presented controversial or conflicting perspectives on the subject. In some instances, authors disagreed with the views expressed by the people of *Il-Mandraġġ*. Yet, this diversity of opinions enriched the study, underscoring the importance of gathering and analysing all available data to present a nuanced and variegated history of this unique urban zone.

From the earliest stages of this research, the literature consulted revealed the profound impact *Il-Mandraġġ* had on Valletta and how the demographic history of this zone shaped the city. Although much has been written about this locality and its history, significant scope for further research remains. The literature reviewed provided a deeper understanding of the subject and inspired new questions and avenues for investigation.

Moreover, the methodology and literature review guided the engagement with archival materials, particularly those related to the social conditions of the area's inhabitants across different historical periods. This process affirmed the existence of a transition in both the physical environment and the community itself, a theme that will be explored in the following chapters.

Chapter 2 - History of Valletta and the *Manderaggio*

*It is common among us to say that since
France to be France required a Paris,
England a London and Italy a Rome,
so also Malta to be Malta required a Manderaggio.*

Vincenzo Maria Pellegrini, 1930.

2.01 The Topography

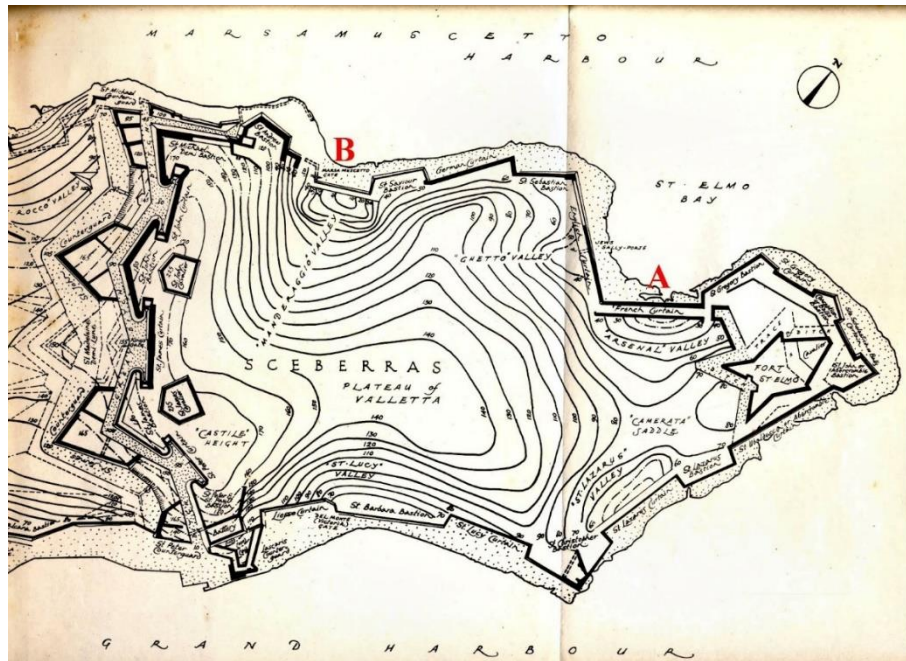


Fig. 2. Plan of the topographical contours of Valletta indicating the Arsenale Valley 'A' and the *Manderaggio* Valley 'B'. (Harrison and Hubbard).

The urban structure of Valletta was shaped by the topographical contours of the Sciberras peninsula, which lies at the centre of a semi-circular basin formed by Marsamxett Harbour and the Grand Harbour.¹ The land on the Marsamxett side, where the *Manderaggio* was intended to be excavated, is significantly lower in elevation when compared to the Grand Harbour side. This peninsula, once belonging to the Xiberras or Sciberras family,² was a barren landscape known as *Xagħriet Mewwija* (translated as 'wilderness') due to its exposure to the four winds. The area features five natural valleys sloping towards the sea,

¹ Harrison and Hubbard, 57.

² Alfie Guillaumier, *Bliet u Rħula Maltin*, (Klabb Kotba Maltin, Malta, 2002), 869.

with two situated within the Grand Harbour and three within Marsamxett Harbour. Among these, the largest and shallowest valleys became known as the *Manderaggio Valley* and *Arsenale Valley*.³

In truth, this area was not wholly uninhabited. Maps of the sixteenth century confirm that there was a small chapel, a watchtower and a beacon⁴ flanked by some tiny houses at the tip. Significantly, the small chapel on this peninsula was dedicated to Saint Elmo,⁵ the patron saint of mariners and navigators. Thus, the indications are that this area was inhabited, before the building of Valletta, by individuals whose living was connected to the sea and whose social status was rather meek.⁶

2.02 The Order of Saint John and the Birth of the *Manderaggio*

Following the loss of Rhodes to the Ottoman forces in 1522, the Order of Saint John sought a new base to continue their war against the infidels. In 1530, King Charles V granted the islands of Malta and Tripoli to the Order as a fief.⁷ Initially, the Order settled in *Birgu* (Vittoriosa), constructing their first *Citta Nuova* and convent on the rocky tongue of land.⁸ Recognising the strategic importance of Malta's natural harbours, the Order began fortifying key locations, including the Sciberras peninsula.⁹

Over the next thirty years, several military engineers, including Niccolò Piccino (1532-1535),¹⁰ Antonio Ferramolino (1535-1541), Prado (1552), Bartolomeo Genga (1558) (Fig. 3), Baldassare Lanci (1562) and Evangelista

³ Carmelina Gugliuzzo, 'Building a Sense of Belonging: The Foundation of Valletta in Malta', in *Foundation, Dedication and Consecration in Early Modern Europe*, Maarten Delbeke and Minou Schraven (eds.), (BRILL, 2012), 215.

⁴ *ibid.*, Gugliuzzo refers to a beacon for which the tip of the headland was known as *Il Punta della Guardia* (the tip of the guard-post), which she also refers to as 'the light at the point', 215.

⁵ Fernando and Gioia Lanzi, *Saints and Their Symbols: Recognizing Saints in Art and in Popular Images*, USA, 2003, 85. Retrieved on 22 Oct. 2022 from: https://books.google.com.mt/books?id=D_aF50Lo8lQC&pg=PA9&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=3#v=onepage&q=erasmus&f=false.

⁶ *The Malta Penny Magazine*, 17, Jan. 1840, 65.

⁷ Malta National Library (MNL), Valletta.

⁸ Stephen C. Spiteri, *The Great Siege: Knights vs Turks, MDLXV: Anatomy of a Hospitaller Victory*, (Self-published, Malta, 2005), 111.

⁹ *ibid.*, 111-114.

¹⁰ Also, *Piccinino* or *Pichino*.

Menga (1560-67),¹¹ submitted plans for a new fortified city on the Sciberras peninsula, though none included a mandracchio. These efforts were interrupted by the Great Siege of Malta in 1565¹² during which the Order, aided by relief forces¹³ successfully repelled a five-month-long Ottoman assault,¹⁴ solidifying their position on the island.¹⁵



Fig. 3. The plan for the *Citta Nuova* by Genga.
(A. Ganado)¹⁶

In the aftermath of the siege, the plans for a new city on the *Sciberras* headland were rekindled, and on 14 March 1566, the Order of Saint John set in motion the building of a new and fortified town to become its new seat of power. With the constant fear of retaliation and a new attack by the Ottomans, the Order was headstrong in building a new fortified city. However, little support arrived at the plea for assistance sent by the Knights to the various Catholic European monarchs. Those who had so much praised the Order for saving the spread of Islam further west and north of the Mediterranean region failed to help. When the Order threatened to depart from Malta, aid came from both

¹¹ Denis De Lucca, Stephen Spiteri & Hermann Bonnici, *Lines of Defence: Fortification Drawings of the Baroque Age at the National Library of Malta*, (UOM, Malta, 2015), 12-13.

¹² Giacomo Bosio, *Istoria Della Sacra Religione et Illustrissima Militia Di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano, Terza Parte, Libro Ventesimo Quinto, 1565*, FH-5-4, 520.

¹³ Jean Boudoin, *Histoire des Chevaliers de l'Ordre de S. Jean de Hierusalem*, (France, 1643), 481.

¹⁴ C. Spiteri, *Great Siege*, 502.

¹⁵ Albert Ganado, *Valletta Citta Nuova – A Map History - 1566-1600*, (Publishers Enterprises Group, Malta, 2003), 362.

¹⁶ Albert Ganado, *Valletta Citta Nuova, A Map History*, (Publishers Enterprises Group-APS Bank, Malta, 2003).

King Philip II of Spain and Pope Pius V Ghislieri (1566-1572). Pius V his military engineer and personal friend Francesco Laparelli, a Tuscan from Cortona sent to Malta.¹⁷ It was then that other monarchs commenced sending additional contributions towards this aim.

With this financial and material help, the Order could finally start building this new city to serve as a Mediterranean stronghold. Malta was to become a base and a stepping stone for those who wanted to reach the Levant.¹⁸ Simultaneously, this new town would have had the role of stopping the perceived fear of an Ottoman expansion towards the West. Moreover, this new fortified city was to serve as a maritime centre to facilitate Mediterranean commerce with mainland Europe.

Although the reconstructed Fort Saint Elmo offered some protection to both the Grand Harbour and Marsamxett Harbour, its vulnerability had already been proven because it had succumbed to the invading Ottoman army. The counterargument at the time was that despite its topography, the Sciberras peninsula was not an ideal location for building a city due to its lack of natural water and adequate landing and mooring facilities.¹⁹

2.03 Francesco Laparelli

Francesco Laparelli did not waste time to supply designs for the new city. In his book on the early maps of Valletta, Ganado refers to a quick, hand-drawn plan (Fig. 4) which the engineer submitted in early 1566 as his earliest idea of what to be built on the Sciberras peninsula.²⁰ Originally, Laparelli intended to utilise the morphology of the peninsula and planned a fortress in the middle of Valletta where the palace of the President is currently situated and dotted lines indicating the intended fortifications. Shortly afterwards, this idea was scrapped and was replaced by the concept of a fortified city. After discarding his rough

¹⁷ Pier Ludovico Occhini, *Un Grande Italiano del Cinquecento: Francesco Laparelli a Malta*, (*Archivio Storico Italiano*, Arezzo 1937), 55.

¹⁸ Simon Mercieca, 'Marriage Prospects in Early Modern Malta: The integration of Venetian subjects in an alien country', *Melita Historica*, xiv, 3, (2006), 312.

¹⁹ Brian W., Blouet, 'Town Planning in Malta, 1530-1798', *The Town Planning Review*, xxxv, 3, (1964), 185.

²⁰ A. Ganado, *Città Nuova*, 493.

sketch, Laparelli set out a plan in which the entire headland was surrounded by fortifications.²¹ This was the plan (Fig. 5) of how Valletta would eventually be built, but none of these two plans included a proposal for a *Mandracchio*.

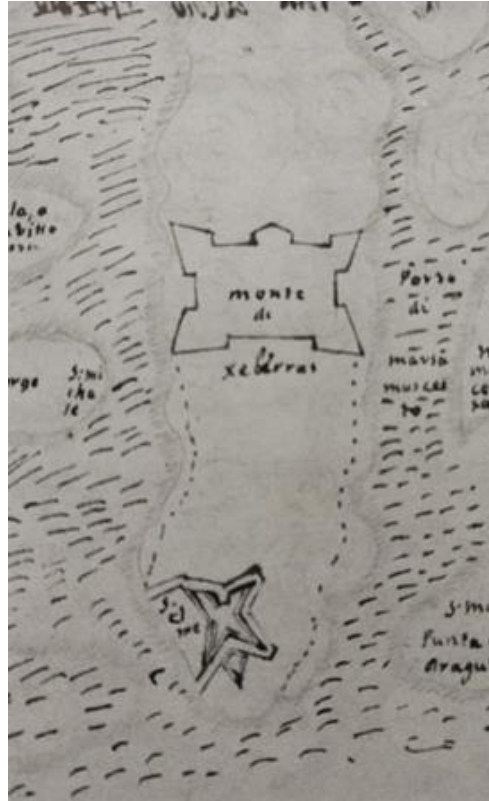


Fig. 4. The rough sketch by Laparelli to fortify the Sciberras headland.
(Denis de Lucca)

This plan was submitted on 18 June 1566. This was followed by four new proposal plans. The first proposal again ignored the presence of a *mandracchio* (Fig. 6). Laparelli showed again a detailed description of the fortifications around the peninsula, to which he added faint pencil lines representing the main street, which is shown traversing from *Porta San Giorgio* to Fort Saint Elmo, to serve as an axis to which various side streets will be connected and on which would be located various important buildings.²²

²¹ *ibid.*, 495.

²² *ibid.*, 496.



Fig. 5. The plan by Laparelli that surrounds the peninsula with fortifications.
(Denis de Lucca)

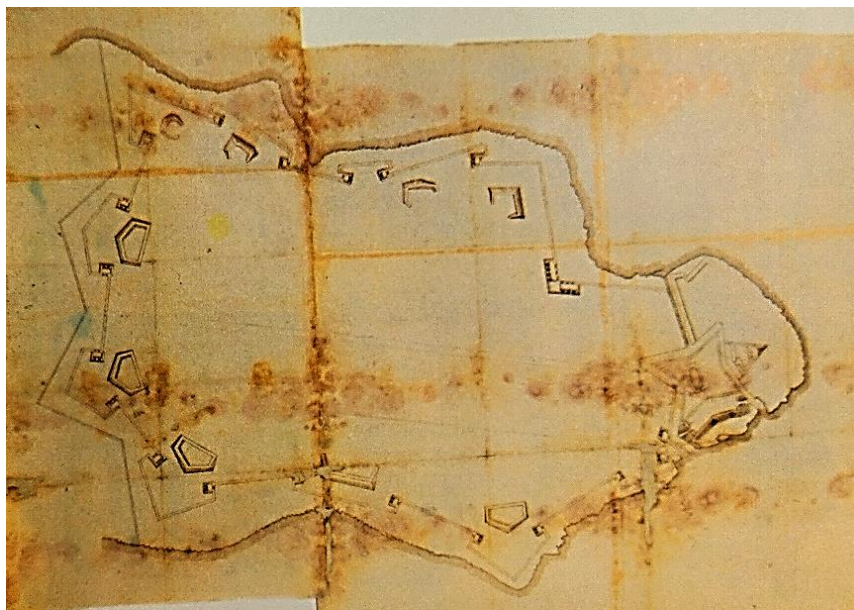


Fig. 6. The first plan by Laparelli shows only the fortifications around the peninsula.
(Denis de Lucca)

Since Valletta could not be planned with a *Collacchio*²³, in his successive plans, Laparelli included the streets and the layout blocks of buildings. The *mandracchio* still failed to feature in the plan prepared by Laparelli which featured the grid format for this city. In this fourth design (Fig. 7), Saint Elmo, the old fort at the tip of the peninsula was to be rebuilt. It was also at this stage

²³. *Collacchio* - an area where the Order reserved for itself and in which the public could not enter.

that Laparelli made the planimetry of the city. The main defensive lines consisted of nine cavaliers connected with curtains and a main ditch, separating the land-front fortifications from the mainland approaches. Four major streets were planned from the land-front fortifications running down close to Fort Saint Elmo and intersected by five entire streets and two lesser ones crossing from the Grand Harbour to Marsamxett Harbour.²⁴

The grid pattern served many purposes and was based on the old Roman grid or centuriation. It was used to establish conventional order and a spatial focus on urban life's civic, governmental, religious, and other functions²⁵. In many cases, the orientation of the grid and arrangement of the buildings had cosmological, hygienic, religious, military, or other symbolic values. Considering that the terrain of Valletta mainly consists of escarpments, the highest being at the inner landward side of the city at its enceinte and the other at its middle, Laparelli still created the grid-iron street formation without having any major requirements to level off or infill any of the terrain.



Fig. 7. The plan by Laparelli in which he introduced the iron-grid street pattern.
(Denis de Lucca)

²⁴. A. Ganado, *Città Nouva*, 497.

²⁵. From: 'El Orden que se ha de Thener en Descubrir y Poblal, transcripción de las Ordenanzas Dedescubrimiento, Nuevo Población y Pacificación de las Indias Dadas por Felipe II, el 13 de Julio de 1573, en el Bosque de Segovia', (General Archive of the Indies, Seville, Spain). (Reference received from Sofia Almagro Carrasco, *Escuela Superior de Conservación y Restauración de Bienes Culturales*, Madrid, Spain).

Thus, when Laparelli was asked to include spaces for a *mandracchio* or galley-pen and a shipyard, in his plan of June 1566, he kept the grid-iron pattern but changed the grid with the longest street now roughly running from North-East to South-West and those traversing them from North-West to South-East²⁶ (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8. The fifth submission by Laparelli, detailed in streets and including the galley-pen and shipyard.²⁷ (Albert Ganado)

The addition of an arsenal and a galley-pen was planned specifically not to decrease or cancel the impression of grandeur that the Order wanted to portray through their new city. Through Valletta, the Order wished to elevate Malta as a European jewel. Despite the changes affecting his design, Laparelli avoided redesigning the whole concept of Valletta. Thus, he included both the shipyard (*arsenale*) and a galley-pen (*mandracchio*) or camber for the harbouring of ships while keeping to the main design of the lines of fortifications and planimetry practically intact. The topography of the Marsamxett side of the peninsula prompted Laparelli to locate each project at the end of the two valleys that were part of the geological formation of Valletta.²⁸ Hence, the

²⁶ Edoardo Mirri (ed.), 'Francesco Laparelli: Architetto Cortonese a Malta', *Catalog of exhibition held at the Palazzo Casali, Cortona, Italy, Aug. 22-Nov. 22, 2012*, (Cortona, Italy, c2009), 52.

²⁷ A. Ganado, 'Città Nouva', 498.

²⁸ Denis de Lucca, *Giovanni Battista Vertova. Diplomacy, Warfare and Military Engineer*, (Malta, 2001), 53.

camber for the safe harbour of ships and the yard for the repairs of ships were designed at the end of the two deepest valleys in the area, choosing the deepest valleys for the harbouring of the ships.

The valley's contours (Fig. 2) offered adequate space for excavation and could have conditioned the design of these two projects. While the arsenal was designed in rectangular form and thus followed the planimetry of the city, the galley-pen did not observe the concept of straight lines. Instead, it took the form of an oval shape or what, at the time, was described as '*forma polilobata*'.²⁹ In the following design, the oval form of *mandracchio* was discarded, and the galley-pen was eventually redesigned into a rectangular form. This can be attested in the sixth plan by Laparelli. This plan confirms that the shape for a galley-pen was now designed in rectangular form, and the location of the galley-pen and the shipyard can be confirmed from the attached planimetric plans. In this plan (Fig. 9), the *arsenale* is marked as 'A' and the entrance to the *mandracchio* or galley-pen is marked as 'B', with a passage through a breach in the curtain walls for each proposal.³⁰



Fig. 9. The plan by Laparelli shows the galley-pen in a rectangular form.
(Albert Ganado)

²⁹. A. Ganado, *Città Nuova*, 173.

³⁰. *ibid.*, 499.

Perhaps the fifth plan by Laparelli is the most important of all these designs because the oval drawing is more contiguous to the area's natural topography. While the following plan better expresses the idea of having rectangular structures in the area, these would fail to materialise, as will be shown in this dissertation. While the *arsenale* area would remain rectangular, the *mandracchio* would fail to take this rectangular format. Once this project was abandoned, it would assume this oval structure within the planimetry of Valletta. Perhaps the reason for such a difference is to be found in the fact that the *arsenale* ended in the shallowest area,³¹ but the *mandracchio* was the largest.

Once the plans were concluded and the lines of fortifications intended to surround this new city were demarcated, on 28 March 1566,³² Grand Master Jean de Valette rushed to inaugurate the first foundation stone for the new city. Thus, just seven months following the end of the Great Siege the city was about to start taking form, and its parameters were established. Despite all the modifications, the Order wanted the construction work to progress rapidly.³³

2.04 After Laparelli - Successive plans and maps

From the series of plans and maps produced after Laparelli left Malta, it is evident that the Order continued to work on both projects, at least during the following four decades. Ganado features a number of these plans and maps and an illustrated and coloured bird-eye view of Valletta by an unknown hand of c1570³⁴ (Fig. 10). It mainly shows the shipyard as a dry rectangle and the galley-pen, completed and with the sea within, divided into an outer and inner chamber and galleys lolling at its entrance. These locations were titled the *arsenale* and the *mandracchio*, respectively.

^{31.} *ibid*, Fold-out plan opposite, 58.

^{32.} Gugliuzzo, 'Building a Sense of Belonging' 217.

^{33.} C. Spiteri, *Great Siege*, 524.

^{34.} A. Ganado, *Città Nuova*, 502.



Fig. 10. Bird-eye view of Valletta showing the *Arsenale* and the *Mandracchio*.
(Denis de Lucca)

Even Antonio Lafreri (1512-1577) attests to these developments about the *Mandracchio*. His first map shows all the fortifications of the *Citta Nuova*, excluding the shipyard and galley-pen. This confirms that the galley-pen was not on the cards of the Order at first. This is again confirmed by copies of the first plan that Laparelli had made, as reproduced by Paolo Forlani, Domenico Zenoi, and Palombi. They, too, did not include the *mandracchio*. Lafreri included the *mandracchio* in his second map of Valletta but while this map shows a galley-pen in an oval shape, the arsenale was not included³⁵ (Fig. 12). Ganado states that this second map was copied from the report submitted by Laparelli to Grand Master de Valette. According to Spiteri, this galley-pen was to hold ten galleys.³⁶ The plan by Wolf-Dietrich-Klebeband *Stadtebilder* (Fig. 11) excludes both the *Arsenale* and the *Manderaggio*.

^{35.} *ibid.*, 506.

^{36.} C. Spiteri, et., *Lines of Defence*, 222.

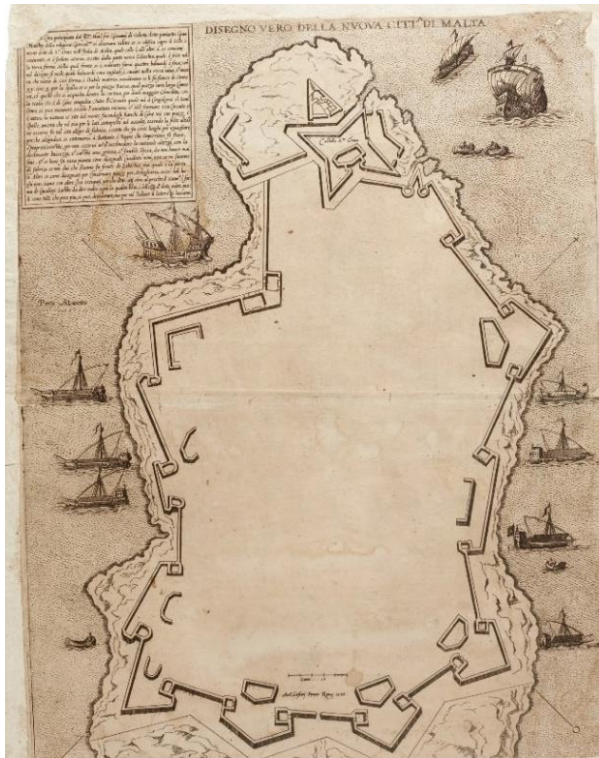


Fig. 11. Map of the Citta Nuova without a Manderaggio.
 Wolf-Dietrich-Klebeband Stadtebilder, Universitätsbibliothek Salzburg,³⁷

In 1582, Matteo Perez d’Aleccio produced a very detailed bird-eye plan of Valletta titled *La Nuova Citta e’ Fortezza di Malta chiamata Valletta*³⁸ (Fig. 13), showing the buildings in two-dimensional detail and a legend listing many of the buildings and locations. This contemporary artist was present in Malta some twenty years after the commencement of the building of Valletta, yet his detailed plan still shows that the *arsenale* and the *mandracchio* as existing. D’Aleccio shows the *arsenale* shaped like a Roman amphitheatre while the *mandracchio* is rectangular with an entry and a type of canal to both pens. According to Ganado, this map was successively copied by Anton Francesco Lucini in 1631 and Ignazio Danti, Philippe Thomassin, Daniel Spoecklin and other cartographers. However, by that year, both projects had been abandoned.

^{37.} *ibid.*, 507.

^{38.} *ibid.*, 436.

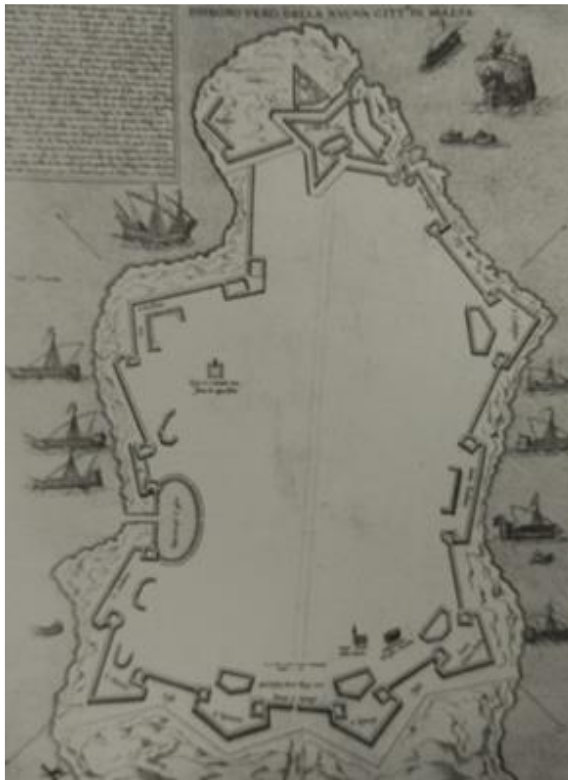


Fig. 12. Map of the Città Nuova by Lafreri that includes the oval-shaped galley-pen.³⁹

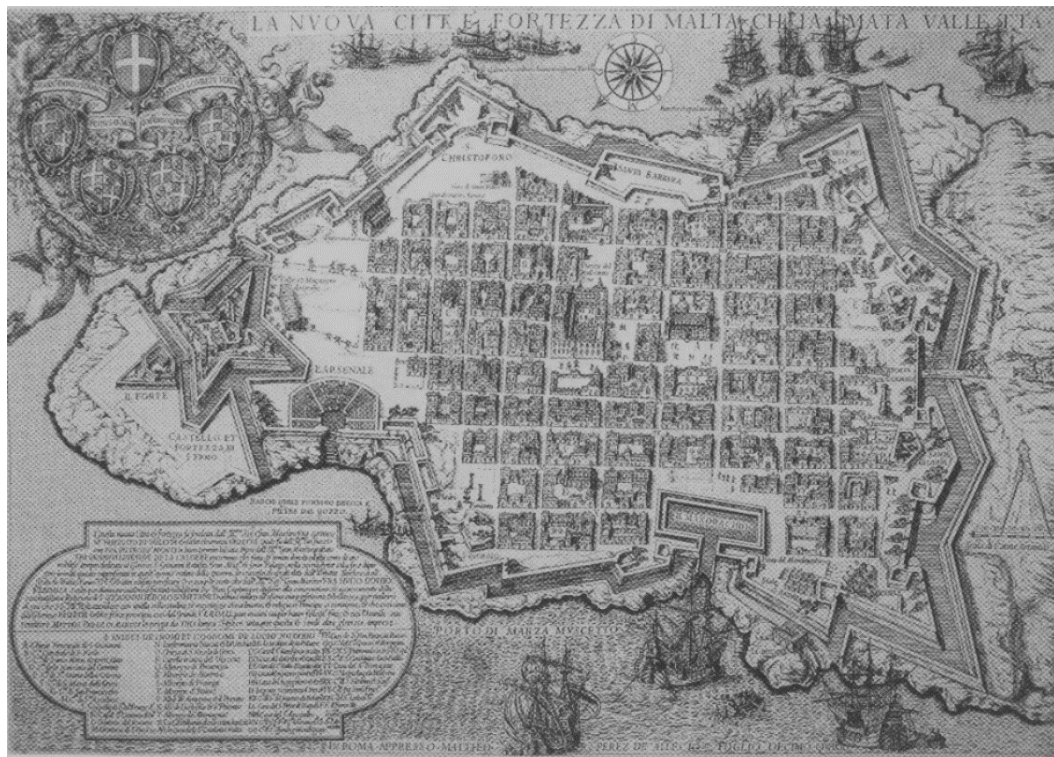


Fig. 13. The 1582 plan of Valletta by Matteo Perez d'Aleccio.⁴⁰

³⁹. *ibid.*

⁴⁰. *ibid.*, 541.

2.05 The building of Valletta and the *Mandracchio*

Once Laparelli left Malta, the work was assigned to his Maltese assistant, Ġormu Cassar. Cassar was one of the twelve *Capo Mastri* of the Order.⁴¹ Unfortunately, Grand Master Jean 'Parisot' de Valette did not live to see his city completed as he died during the initial building of the fortifications on 21 August 1568, and his successor, the Italian Fra Pietro del Monte, continued with the work. The new city was named *Citta' Valletta* in honour of Grand Master de Valette. During the laying of the foundation stone, the Italian Augustinian friar Angosciola⁴² made the inauguration speech and compared Valletta to the biblical town of Zion. Valletta was seen as an ideal city, reminiscent of the utopian town envisaged by Thomas More, where everyone was expected to live in peace and harmony.⁴³

The Order established a particular office for the regulation of buildings in Valletta. This distinct department was known as the *Officio delle Case*⁴⁴ or in Latin *Officium Commissariorum Domorum*. While Laparelli designed the grid structure for this new city, the palaces and residences were regulated by a code which was quite strict and well-enforced. The members of this commission also had the duty to assign the building sites within this new city. Their remit was primarily the design of the streets and setting of the building sites according to the individual's social status. These street designs were further enforced by a decree of Grand Master Pietro Ciochi del Monte in 1569⁴⁵. Maltese and even foreigners began to purchase land to build their palaces, homes, and places of business in this new city. When sufficient residences were built and started to be inhabited, the city was declared completed on March 18, 1571. In the following year, at followed, the Order of

⁴¹. Denis A. Darmanin, 'The First Augustinian Buildings in Valletta', *Humillima Civitas Vallettæ: From Mount Xebb-er-ras to European Capital of Culture*, M. Abdilla Cunningham, M. Camilleri & G. Vella (eds.), (Heritage Malta and the National Library of Malta, Malta, 2018), 50.

⁴². Simon Mercieca and Mark Cauchi, *Laudemus Viros Glorioso*, Patrijiet Agostinjani li għamlu isem', (Horizons, Malta, 2019), 381, while in *Lines of Defence*, the surname is given as 'Angosciola', 14.

⁴³. Simon Mercieca, 'The foundation of a Christian Republic According to St Augustine's Philosophic Principle of Humility', *Humillima Civitas Vallettæ*, 168.

⁴⁴. Stephen R. Borg Cardona, 'The Officio delle Case and the Housing Laws of the Earlier Grand Masters 1531-1569', *The Law Journal*, iii, 1, (1951), 55.

⁴⁵. Critien, 7.

confirming the intention of the Order to develop it as a galley pen (Fig. 14). While the Order designed various blocks to serve as open spaces, it sought, through this commission to create a '*relationship between a building or a block of buildings and the public street or the open space it faced*'.⁴⁸ In the case of the *mandracchio* and *arsenale*, these were primarily, the spaces meant to serve as quarries.

The building was complex as manpower was short, Quinton Hughes quotes that some 3,000 sappers were needed⁴⁹, while Stephen C. Spiteri states that additional workers were brought over from Sicily to construct the fortifications⁵⁰, and more since there remained a perceived threat of another Ottoman attack. Since buildings in Malta are constructed from the local globigerina limestone, the new building regulations issued by the Order on 12 May 1569,⁵¹ stated that the stone was to be principally cut from the rock originating from the two main quarries located at the areas which came to be known as the *Manderaggio*⁵² (today *il-Mandraġġ*) and the *Arsenale*⁵³ (today *Due Balli*). Albert Ganado also confirmed that in 1569⁵⁴ (Fig. 15). the Order issued the decree that all stone for buildings in Valletta was to be excavated from the *mandracchio* quarry. Ganado was referring to a passage by Bosio where he refers to the *Manderaggio* as the location where stone was cut for the building of the fortifications and houses of Valletta.

'Thus, everyone was obliged to cut and take the stone for building from the Mandracchio; which is a place that started as a quarry in the city, overlooking the Port of Marsa Muscietto, and it had been designed as an inlet sea to gather within its space the galleys so that they would be protected, covered, and safe in time of war, and siege'.⁵⁵

48. *ibid.*, 117-118.

49. Quinton Hughes, 'Fortress, Architecture & Military History in Malta', (England, 1969), 53.

50. Stephen C. Spiteri, '*The art of fortress building in Hospitaller Malta, 1530-1798, A study of building methods, materials, and techniques*', (B.D.L, Malta, 2008), 275.

51. MNL, *Liber Conciliorum*, MS.92 f.133.

52. De Giorgio, 93, 102 and 111.

53. The area which forms the *Due Balli* is the low-level land behind French Curtain close to Saint Elmo, today's Saint Joseph Street, which was the site intended for the *Arsenale*.

54. Narrated to me by Dr Albert Ganado.

55. Bosio, *Istoria Della Sacra Religione et Illustrissima Militia di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano, Volume Terzo, Libro Trentesimo Nono*, (1569, Rome, Italy, 1623), '*Ch'ogni uno obligato fosse a cauar, e pigliar lo pietra per fabricare, nel Mandracchio; il qual e un luogo, che s'era comminat a cauare nella Citta, verso il Porto di Marsa Muscietto, nel quale disegnato s'era di far entrare*

It is quite understandable that since bedrock is much more superficial in Malta, stone for buildings within the city was obligatory to be excavated from the plots and used in their construction, while the spaces created were to serve as cisterns and basements.

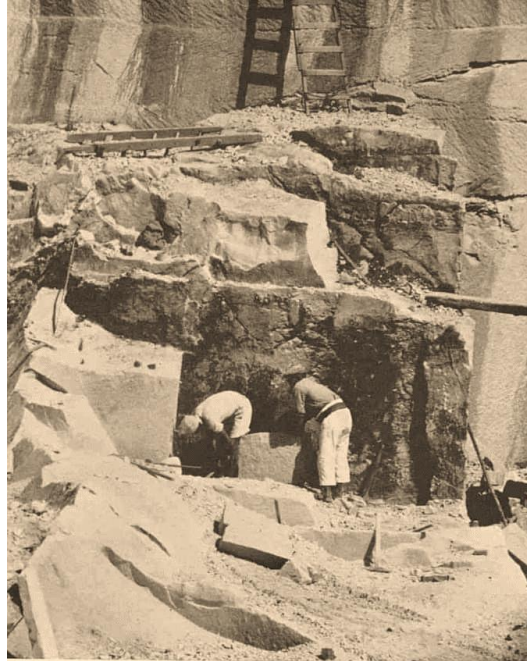


Fig. 15. An age-old trade, stone quarrying and cutting in the 1930s.
(Provenance unknown)

To facilitate matters, it was decided that additional material to build the fortifications was to be excavated from the sites intended to serve as the pen for the ships and the area earmarked for the *arsenale*. The excavations needed to be large and deep to reach well below sea level and with the techniques present in those days, this would be a significant engineering project that even the ditch on the land-front was not as deep. The workforce had only primitive equipment, and the work had to be done by physical excavation.⁵⁶ The cutting of the stone from the areas intended for the *Mandracchio* and the *Arsenale* are well described by Stephen C. Spiteri since the process used for the building of Fort Manoel and most fortifications was identical,

'The ramparts at Fort Manoel were largely cut out of the layer of lower Globigerina limestone found on site. Most of the building

l-acqua del mare per ridurre in esso le galere, accio starve protettero coperte, e sicure in tempo di di Guerra, e d'assedio', 832.

⁵⁶ Stephen C. Spiteri, 'Fort Manoel', ARX, (Occasional Papers, 4, 2014), 56-157. Retrieved on 14 Jan. 2024 from: https://issuu.com/arkitettura/docs/arx_occ_papers_4_2014.

material came from the excavation of the ditch, which was treated as a quarry to produce both the building blocks – the cantuni, smarrati and xulieli – as well as the rubble and debris required for the formation of the terrepleins and glacis'.⁵⁷

Thus, rock started to be cut and removed from these areas to form the scarps (French, *escarpe*)⁵⁸ of the fortifications, which took some five years to complete and enclose the entire peninsula. The decision to cut the stones from the end of these two valleys facilitated the transportation of rocks. By their very nature, valleys ended in the sea. Thus, the stone could be easily loaded on barges and taken closer to the sites of the ongoing building of the fortifications.

Neither was it overlooked that the harbour of Marsamxett, where the *mandracchio* and the *arsenale* were to be situated, is exposed to the strong *Majjistral* (North Westerly) weather. The way the camber was to be constructed, a big rectangular hole with a tiny entrance, was to be within the fortifications which would have further protected the ships from this adverse wind and inclement weather and any attack. Unfortunately, although Laparelli had planned according to the topography, such failures in the plans had not been detected. Technical problems also started to emerge during the quarrying of stone from these two areas, which Anton Quintano quotes V. Mallia-Milanes and confirms.⁵⁹ Giacomo Bosio also published a map of Valletta dated 1602, in which the area of the galley-pen or the *mandracchio* is still visible, and in which the key legend lists this area as '*10: Manderacchio Imperfetto*' (Fig. 16).

In this map of 1602, the breach in the curtain wall where the entrance was planned to be, had been practically walled off. Within the area of the *mandracchio*, Bosio shows just piles of rock and what possibly could be some initial dwellings within the quarried space. Spiteri adds that according to Bosio the reason that the *mandracchio* was never completed was because the quality of the stone that was being excavated made it such that it was too hard to quarry, while the *Porto Grande* could offer better berthing and other facilities to

^{57.} *ibid.*, 144.

^{58.} Stephen C. Spiteri, *Fortresses of the Cross: Hospitaller Military Architecture, 1136-1798*, (Malta, Valletta, 1994), 641.

^{59.} Anton Quintano, *The Order of St John's Sailing Ship-of-the-Line Squadron 1701-1741*, (M. A. dissertation, UOM, 1995, 101.

the ships of the Order.⁶⁰ Francesco Villamena reproduced this map of Valletta that was published in Bosio's book and was even issued in colour by Francesco dell'Antella⁶¹ (Fig. 17).



Fig. 16. Details from Giacomo Bosio - Bird-eye view of Valletta showing the excavated area for the arsenale and of the *mandracchio* (Marked No. 10).⁶²



Fig. 17. Coloured bird-eye view of Valletta by Francesco dell'Antella.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ A. Ganado, *Città Nuova*, 557.

⁶² Bosio, *Istoria della Sacra Religione di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano, Parte Prima*, (Rome, 1594), unpaginated.

Further confirmation that the *Mandracchio* commenced being built up is given in the map by Jean Baudoin. Baudoin translated Bosio into French⁶³ and published it in Paris in 1629. Baudoin shows the *Mandracchio* with a low wall around it, a short alley and some houses not in the same style as others in Valletta (Fig. 18). The curtain wall that once was the entrance to the quarry has since been completely rebuilt.

Early seventeenth-century maps give the impression of the presence of the shipyard and the pen for the galleys, showing that the Order was proceeding with its plan to have these areas designated as a camber or galley pen. While in those days, news and updates took time to reach map makers to upgrade their engravings, the map of Daniel Rabel of 1635 (Fig. 22) is revealing in that it shows the *Mandracchio* but does not show the *Arsenale*.⁶⁴ Should it be understood that the Order first abandoned the construction of the *arsenale* and then also the galley pen?



Fig. 18. The walled *Mandracchio* and houses in the 1629 book by Jean Baudoin.⁶⁵

The early seventeenth-century historian, Bartolomeo Del Pozzo further confirms that the *Arsenale* and the *Mandracchio* had been abandoned. When writing at the turn of the seventeenth century, judging from his words, not much

⁶³. Baudoin, *Histoire*, unpaginated.

⁶⁴. Daniel Rabel, *Valletta, c1635*, Antiquarius, Old Masters Prints (S40338), Retrieved on 12 Jan. 2024 from: <https://www.antiquarius.it/en/malta/8898-valletta-citta-nova-di-malta.html>

⁶⁵. *ibid.*, 560.

difference was made between the *arsenale* and the *camber* as they were referred to as the same thing. Del Pozzo states⁶⁶ that,

*'...to the Langue of Italy went the platform of Saint Andrew and of Saint Michael up to the mouth of the dock, which was then not built, either due to the difficulty of cutting the stone, which was found very hard on that site, or to avoid the bad air that would have been caused by the entry of the sea; or because in the end, it was suitable for the Fortification, and I call that site the Mandraggio. To the Lingua d'Alemagna went, the head of the Scissors from the mouth of the Arsenal to Saint Ermo, which Arsenal were likewise removed from there and moved to the Borgo, there seemed to be the most convenient place for the room, and for the Galley factory.'*⁶⁷

Early in the eighteenth century, the hole in the area of the *mandracchio* continued to be figured out in maps. This was the case of the map by Peter Vader. Around 1720, Vader published a map that gave important information about streetscapes in the *mandracchio*. The building featured in this area was presented as similar to that in the rest of Valletta. The only anomaly was that the street was not a street but followed the geomorphological curves of the valley. Due to the nature of this street, it started to be known in Valletta as Strait Street. However, given there was another straight street in the city, it began to be called *Strada di Zalzetta* to distinguish it from the other narrow streets. The word *zalzetta* is in Italian, standing for sausage. This name is recorded in an ecclesiastical record of 1751.⁶⁸ The winding nature of the street caused the residents to compare it to a sausage. Eventually, this street took the area's name and started to be called *Strada Manderaggio*. The name *Strada Manderaggio* was given to this street in the 19th century.

⁶⁶. Bartolomeo Del Pozzo, *Historia della Sacra Religione Militare, Parte Prima, Secondo Libro*, (Malta. 1703), 67.

⁶⁷. *'Alla Lingua d'Italia andava la piattaforma di Sant'Andrea e di San Michele fino all'imboccatura della darsena, che poi non fu costruita, vuoi per la difficoltà di tagliare la pietra, che in quel luogo si trovava molto dura, vuoi per evitare l'aria cattiva che sarebbe causata dall'entrata del mare; o perché infine era adatto alla Fortificazione, e quel luogo lo chiamo il Mandraggio. Alla lingua d'Alamagna la testa della forbici della bocca dell' Arsenal fin' a S. Ermo, il qual Arsenaleparimente su di là levato, e trasportato al Borgo, parso colà il luogo più comodo per la stanza, per la delle Galere'.*

⁶⁸. AAM, *Status Animarum, Maggio 1752*, 47(v).



Fig. 19. Early 18th-century view of Valletta with buildings being erected within the *Mandracchio*.⁶⁹

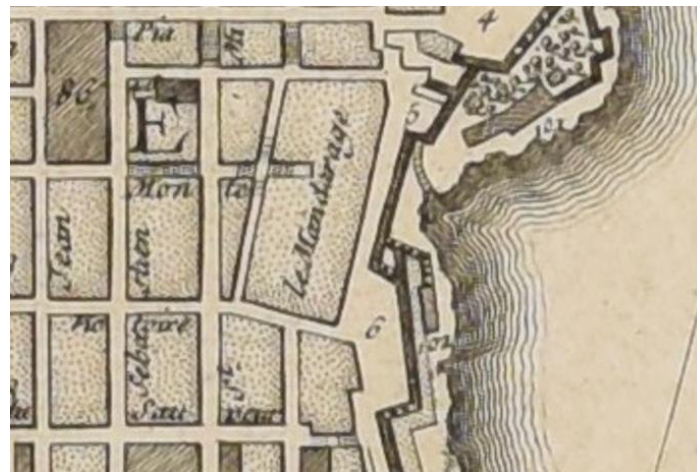


Fig. 20. The *La Mandarage* is shown as having a very short and stepped street entrance.⁷⁰ (Joseph Schirò)

What could be ascertained with certainty is that the first project to be abandoned was that of the *Arsenale*. Bosio shows that the hole cut, which can still be seen today, for the *Arsenale* was also the first area to be closed entirely and built up. The early maps, including the one already referred to by Bosio, show the line of fortifications built. By the turn of the seventeenth century, the project was no longer on the cards. This explains why the area where the shipyard was to be built was never known as the *arsenale* by the Maltese. Despite Del Pozzo's reference that this area might have been also referred to

⁶⁹. Peter Vader AA, *La Ville de Valette, Capitale de l'Isle de Malte*, Antiquarius, (c1720), Retrieved on 26 Jan. 2024 from: <https://www.antiquarius.it/en/malta/5996-la-ville-de-valette-capitale-de-l-isle-de-malte-disegno-della-citta-valletta.html>.

⁷⁰. De Palmeus Gervais, *Plan General de la Ville Capitale de Malte*. Extract from the 1757 map.

as a *mandracchio*, it had never come to be known under this name either. Instead, it started to be known as the *Due Balli*.

2.06 The Name *Mandracchio*, *Manderaggio* or *Mandraġġ*

What can be stated with certainty is that, during the early modern period, the area designated as the *Mandracchio* did not carry any negative connotations. The Maltese and Greek communities, who began settling in Valletta, continued associating this area with its original purpose as a ship-pen. Although the project was never completed, the inhabitants referred to the region as *Mandraki* or *Manderaggio*, reflecting its intended function.

The Order of Saint John first used the term for the pen in the harbour of Rhodes, their base, until 1522. The word originates from the Greek *Mandraki* (Μανδράκι). In Rhodes, this area housed the Order's galleys and facilitated shipbuilding and repairs, and it was known as the *Mandraki* Harbour. Similarly, *Mandraki* remains the name of the capital of Nisyros, an island in the Dodecanese group in Greece, which serves as both the largest settlement and the island's harbour. Over time, place names such as *Mandraki*, *Mandrachi*, and *Mandracchio* were Italianised into *Manderaggio*, from which the Maltese term *Il-Mandraġġ* evolved. This name has been documented in Italian since the late sixteenth century. In Italian, *mandra* is described as an 'enclosure for livestock',⁷¹ which likewise the Order had done for its ships.

Today, the Maltese word *Mandraġġ* is associated with the English term 'slum'. However, in Italy, slum areas are generally referred to as *bassofondi* and never as *Mandraggio*. This distinction confirms that the area did not have the connotation of a slum during the Order's period. At the time, Italian was a widely used language in Valletta, and much of the elite spoke Italian.⁷² If this area had been considered a slum, the Italian term *bassofondi*⁷³ would have

⁷¹ *Riverso*, Italian-English online dictionary, Retrieved on 23 Nov. 2023 from: <https://context.everso.net/translation/italian-english/mandra>

⁷² Rosaria Quartararo, 2006, 29.

⁷³ 'Bassofondo, plural *Bassofondi*: *Quartieri poveri – slums*', *Dizionario Inglese - Italiano / Italiano - Inglese*, 12th Edition, Malcolm Skey, (ed.), (Oxford University Press, Italy, 1989), 1067.

been used to describe it. Therefore, this distinction underscores that, at the time, *Mandraki* or *Manderaggio* had no connection to slums.

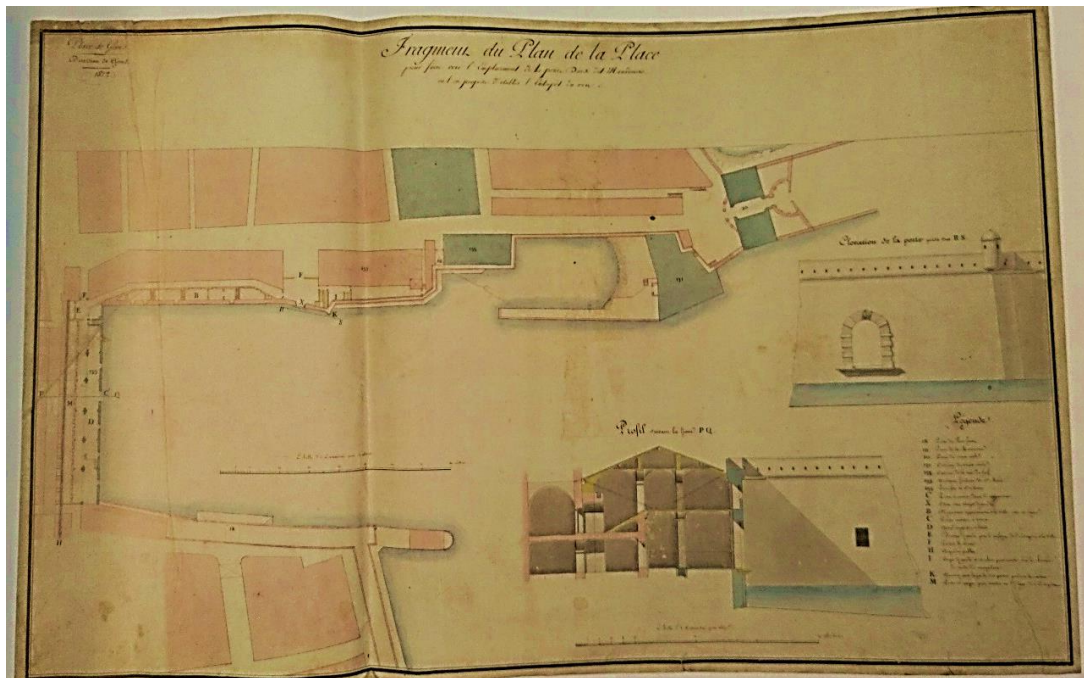


Fig. 21. Map that shows the *Mandraccio* at the port of Genoa, Italy.
(Stephen C. Spiteri)

What can be concluded with certainty is that, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the people of Malta understood the word *Mandraccio* or *Manderaggio* to mean a pen or safe-haven for ships. Furthermore, Malta was not the only place where the Italian term *Mandraccio* retained this maritime meaning. For example, during the same period, an area in the port of Genoa (Fig. 21) was referred to as *Manderaggio*. This is evidenced by a historical plan that describes it as a fragment of the plan of the location to show the small *Darse* called *Manderaccio*, where it is proposed to establish the wine warehouse.⁷⁴

Pietro Parisi refers to the streets of Valletta in his book about the plague epidemic of 1592 published in Palermo in 1603, but he does not include the *Mandraccio* or use it as a reference point within the urban texture of this city.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ C. Spiteri, et., *Lines of Defences*, 'Fragment du plan de la place pour faire voir l'emplacement de la petit Darse dit Manderaccio, ou l'on propose d'etablir l'entrepot du vin', 396.

⁷⁵ Pietro Parisi, *Aggiunta a gli Avvertimenti Sopra la Peste*, (Palermo, 1603).

Instead, he refers to this area when discussing the measures taken to curb the spread of the plague. When referring to the hygiene measures taken during the said plague epidemic, he states that '*many convalescent women and men used to go to wash themselves in the harbour of Marsamuxett, near the slaughterhouse which was situated by the gate of the Mandracchio*'.⁷⁶ This may be the first time why this area was recorded to be identified with this galley-pen. However, as was noted above, Pietro Parisi did not include it as one of the urban residential zones of Valletta, this area could have become a residential neighbourhood after 1592. The plague could be why these two projects had to be discontinued. Del Pozzo spoke about the stagnant water this pen could have created, and the associated it might spread disease within the city, which would have destroyed the concept of Valletta as a utopic city.

As already explained, both Bosio and Del Pozzo used this term, and Del Pozzo indicated that it was used about both the camber of the galley-pen and the one of the arsenale. A few decades later, this term is again recorded by Gian Francesco Abela. This time, Abela records this term in connection with a residential area.

When discussing the streets of Valletta, he states that *Strada Di Monte* commenced in front of the Convent of the Discalced Franciscan Minors, up to the *Mandracchio*. In other words, he was denoting what is today known as St John Street. This was not the sole street that led to the *Mandracchio*. Abela also states that *Strada S. Michele* commenced from the *Mandracchio* up to the area known on the other of Valletta as *Calcara* or kiln.⁷⁷ Parallel with *Strada Di Monte* was *Strada Pia*, which began from the curtain of the Bastion of St Peter and St Paul, underneath the *Auberge d'Italia*, up to the curtain above the gate known as *della Beccheria* or *Abattoir*.⁷⁸

^{76.} *ibid.*, 148.

^{77.} G. F. Abela, 10.

^{78.} *ibid.*



Fig. 22. Map of Valletta by Daniel Rabel (c1635), with walled entrance into the *Mandracchio* and the site of the *Arsenale* built up.⁷⁹

In the eighteenth century, the term *mandracchio* continued to hold a maritime meaning and was not yet associated with a slum area. In his *Damma* or dictionary, Gian Francesco Agius de Soldanis states that *mandaraggio* is the diminutive of *Mandrag*. Then, he resorts to Latin to describe its meaning, *receptaculum* or *receptacle*. De Soldanis then continues to explain the term during his time, stating that ‘one finds the name of *mandrag* [sic] in the city of Valletta, in the village of Gozo or Rabat and another in Vittoriosa. The latter is dug in the sea and is used for boats, and above which rose the temple of Juno, as it is written in Cicero against Verres’.⁸⁰

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the term *mandracchio* finds reference in Ciantar’s books *Malta Illustrata*. Ciantar uses it to describe the pen for boats in Birgu. He writes that ‘it is a pen for all the boats that ferry from

⁷⁹ François-Antoine de Naberat and Jean Baudoin, *Histoire des Chevaliers de l’Ordre de Saint Jean de Hierusalem*, (Paris, Thomas Jolly, 1659), 106.

⁸⁰ Rosabelle Carabott and Joanne Trevisan, *Damma Tal Kliem Kartaginis Mscerred Fel Fomm Tal Maltin U Ghaucin*, Rosabelle Carabott (ed.), (Malta Libraries, the Department of Maltese-University of Malta, Heritage Malta, National Council for the Maltese Language, the *Akkademja tal-Malti* and BPC International, Malta, 2017), 533.

the city of Vittoriosa and Senglea to the city of Valletta'.⁸¹ Beneath *Birgu*, the Order had cut a smaller rock-hewn camber or galley-pen between Fort St Angelo and the mainland of the *Borgo*, which still exists. It served as a moat to separate Fort St Angelo from the mainland of *Birgu*.

2.07 A brief description of the *Manderaggio*

Once the project was abandoned, the area planned as the *Manderaggio* came to be inhabited. It was bordered by four streets known today as St Patrick Street, St Lucia Street, St Mark Street and Marsamxett Road. Over time, the sides of these streets that abutted the buildings of the *Manderaggio* also started to be considered part of the area. Internally, the *Manderaggio* consisted of a main lane (which at a later date became known as *Strada Manderaggio*) which was not a street but more of a serpentine alley that bent and reached various corners of the *Manderaggio* and from which sprang other smaller alleys that did not have any official name (Fig. 23). These alleys or sections were mainly known either for what they may have contained within, their shape or just about anything that was connected to them and remained as a namesake. Such were *Trejġet il-Kanal* (Canal Street), *Iż-Żenqa* (the narrow stepped street), *Il-Kwartier* (the Barracks or Quarters), *Ir-Rokna* (the Corner), *Triq ta' Taħt il-Bastjun* (the street under [Marsamxett] bastion), *Il-Gandott* (the Gutter or Pit) and even *Id-Drenaġġ* (the Sewer). These were all narrow uneven alleys, swerving and with many short flights of steps, leading downwards to the lowest bowels of this labyrinth.

Entry and access into the *Manderaggio* was from three particular locations, either from the stepped St John Street (Fig. 20), from *It-Tomba* (the tomb) a short tunnel in St Mark Street (Fig. 24) or from a similar tunnel in St Lucia Street called *il-Mina taċ-Ċintura* (the tunnel of Our Lady of the Girdle) (Fig. 28), and always going down steps. The intersection of St Patrick Street with St Mark Street was known as *Il-Gandott* as this end of St Patrick Street

⁸¹. Gio Francesco Ciantar, *Malta Illustrata*, i and ii, 1, (Malta, 1772), 87.

was a sheer drop of about one storey below the level of St Mark Street. In 1852, the drop was converted into a slope which connected the two streets.⁸²

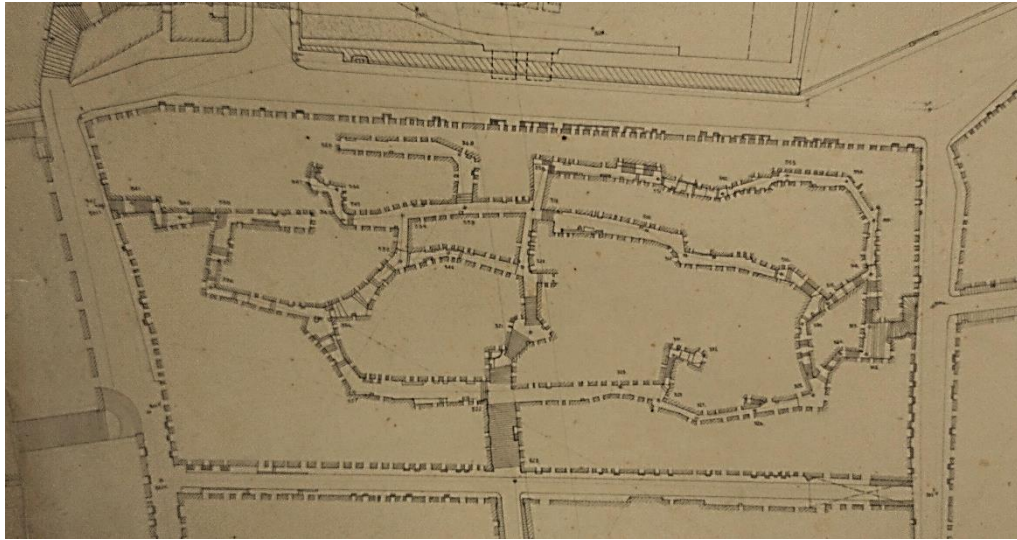


Fig. 23. Plan of the *Manderaggio* showing the serpentine alleys and the three entrances.⁸³



Fig. 24. *Mina tač-Ċintura* (Tunnel of Our Lady of the Girdle)
(A. Critien)

2.08 Knights of the Order and the *Manderaggio*

Further evidence that the term *Mandracchio* did not carry slum connotations during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is provided by the notable figures who resided in the area at the time. Historical documentation

⁸². AWD, Copy of deed on plan signed by notaries Giuseppe Metropoli dated 21 Apr. 1852 and Giuseppe Gera dated 30 Apr. 1852, Folio 11, Plan 33.

⁸³. AWD, Folio 11A, unpaginated.

confirms that, contrary to assumptions that the residents of *Il-Mandraġġ* were exclusively poor or of low social status, this district also attracted individuals of considerable standing, particularly along its perimeters (Figs. 25 and 26). Among these was the renowned Calabrian artist Mattia Preti.

In his book *Arts and Artisans in St. John's and Other Churches in the Maltese Islands, ca 1650–1800*, John Debono provides detailed accounts of Preti's properties in the *Manderaggio*. On January 31, 1668, Preti purchased a house in the upper part of the *Manderaggio* from Francischita Martinot, daughter of the late Captain Antonio Garsin, for 1,550 scudi. The property was described as a sizable residence with an entrance hall, seven rooms on the ground floor (including two overlooking the public street, one facing a central courtyard, a kitchen, and three others on the *Manderaggio* side), a basement with two rooms, three additional rooms on the first floor, a water closet, a courtyard cistern for collecting rainwater, and a staircase.⁸⁴

In 1660, Pope Alexander VII approved Preti's appointment as a Knight of the Order of St. John.⁸⁵ Known as *Il Cavaliere Calabrese* (the Calabrian Knight), Preti chose to purchase this house, located along the periphery of *the Manderaggio*. The price paid was substantial, and the location was not remote or hidden from public view. The house's appeal likely lay in its sea and country views, overlooking the Marsamxett Harbour area.⁸⁶

Preti expanded his holdings in the area two decades later. On March 5, 1687, he purchased another property from Graziulla, daughter of the late Jacobo Grech, with the consent of her son-in-law, Baptista Balzan. This second house, located within the *Manderaggio*, included a courtyard with a room, an underlying cellar, a well, a closet with a room above it, two additional small rooms, and a staircase. It was adjacent to Preti's first property and bordered to the east and north by public streets and to the west by property owned by Marcello Torrenzi.

⁸⁴ John Debono, *Art and Artisans in St John's and Other Churches in the Maltese Islands, Ca. 1650-1800: Stone Carving, Marble, Bells, Clocks, and Organs, Additional Documents on Mattia Preti*, (self-published, Malta, 2005), 104.

⁸⁵ Keith Sciberras, *Mattia Preti: Triumphant Manner with a Catalogue of his Works in Malta*, (Malta, Midsea Books, 2012), 91.

⁸⁶ John Debono, 106.

Alfonso Frangipane references Preti's will, dated December 28, 1698, which mentions additional properties in the *Manderaggio* area. Preti left a 'small house' on the bastion facing Marsamxett Harbour to Loreto (Giacchino) and gave his 'big house' to the Chapel of the *Madonna del Philermos*.⁸⁷

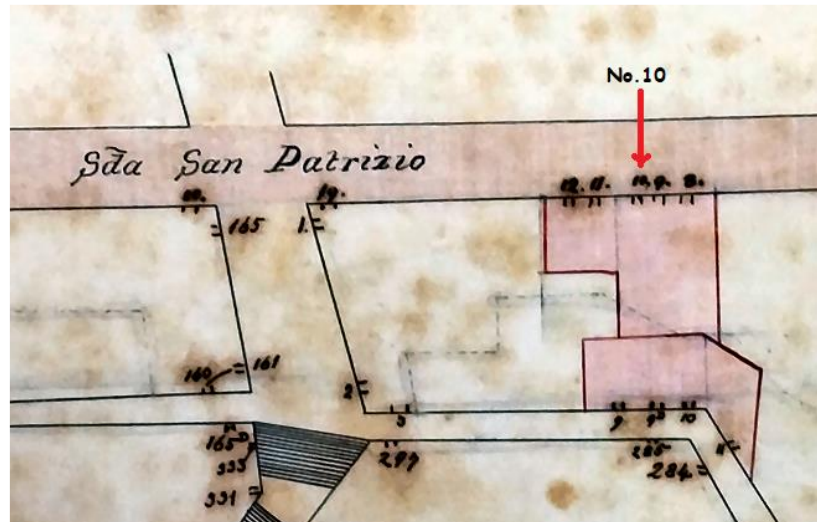


Fig. 25. Detail from a plan of the *Manderaggio* and No. 10 *Strada San Patrizio* (arrowed).⁸⁸

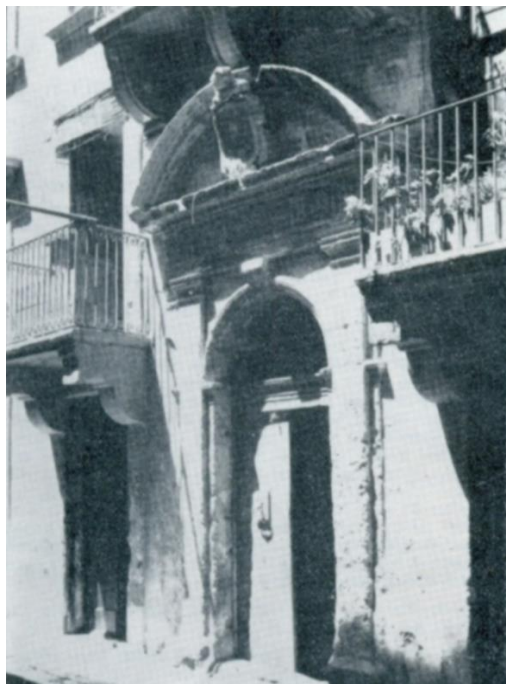


Fig. 26. No. 10, St Patrick Street, home of Mattia Preti, demolished in c1948.⁸⁹



Fig. 27. House in Old Theatre Lane allegedly belonged to Mattia Preti.

⁸⁷. Frangipane, *Mattia Preti*, xiii, 154.

⁸⁸. AWD, *Valletta*, 11A, 44, 9 June 1883, (Ministry of Works and Planning, Floriana, Malta).

⁸⁹. Victor F. Denaro, 'More Houses of Valletta', *Melita Historica*, iii, 3, (Malta, 1962), 45.

Debono is not the only scholar documenting Preti's association with the *Manderaggio*. Judge Giovanni Bonello, in his article in *Art in Malta: Discoveries and Recoveries*,⁹⁰ also explores Preti's properties in the area, noting discrepancies in name spellings and additional details in Debono's account, including translations of Preti's will. Bonello raises questions about the total number of properties Preti owned and their precise locations, particularly regarding a third house reputedly facing the San Salvatore Bastion.⁹¹ This house, accessible via *Sqaq it-Teatru l-Antik* (Old Theatre Lane), overlooked much of Marsamxett Harbour and is believed to have been one of Preti's residences (Fig. 27).

The properties Preti owned were either on the boundaries, within, or adjacent to the *Manderaggio* and were effectively considered part of the neighbourhood. This suggests that Preti, a prominent artist and knight, was either untroubled by any negative perceptions of the area, found the location advantageous, or lived there before the neighbourhood acquired a lower reputation. It is difficult to imagine that Preti would heavily invest in a district that was considered inferior or shameful to live in. Moreover, the descriptions of these houses do not depict them as hovels but rather as fully developed and functional residences.

Abela furnishes the next proof that the poor or ruffians were not taking up this area. In the seventeenth century, it was the general practice to associate streets or areas with illustrious residents. As Malta was under the knights, it was the custom to associate zones with eminent members of the Order. This is what Abela did when referring to the *manderaggio*. He stated that two priors of the Order resided in the *mandracchio*, Prior Mazzinghi and Prior Malaspina. Malaspina had lived in the area before Mazzinghi because Abela noted that he had passed away, but the residents continued associating him with the area.⁹²

Chantelle Buttigieg provides historical evidence to support Abela's perception that the *Mandereggio* was not a poor area during the time of Prior Malaspina. Buttigieg based her conclusions on petitions sent to the Grand

⁹⁰. Bonello, 69.

⁹¹. Bonello, 70-71.

⁹². G. F. Abela, 1647, 10.

Masters in the 17th and 18th centuries. These petitions support the idea that *Manderaggio* was very unlikely to have been a shunned place as many authors describe it to have been.⁹³ Buttigieg quotes the request in 1632 by Fra Matteo Dubisson to build 'up to seven rooms in the Manderaggio', which request was granted (AOM 1184, f.,28).⁹⁴ She also refers to another supplication made by Francesco Pagliareschi, who in 1634 petitioned for a room either at St Elmo or at the *Manderaggio* for his family, although the request was later changed to one for a room within the fort.⁹⁵ Just like the will of Mattia Preti, these petitions shed light on persons at the time of the Order who owned property at the *Manderaggio*. Such references indicate that, at the period when this locality was given out for construction, the plots there were not sought by poor people but by members of the Order who sought to acquire property in this area for their in-laws.

Further evidence that the *Mandraġġ* was a habitable area and that the owners of properties in the area were persons of a certain level, is provided by Ganado who refers to a decision given by the *Officio delle Case*,

'On 13 February 1674, this tribunal ab antique had decided that one could only erect buildings in the Manderaggio (mainly, the built-up Mandracchio) sub certa forma and that a particular construction with a height of eight courses (filari) had been allowed ex gratia. In a court case "Nobile Francesco Chapelle vs Cononico Matteo Hyzler", the defendant, who owned some houses in the Manderaggio, submitted that the Officio delle Case, was a mere administrative department and therefore its decision should be ignored'.⁹⁶

Such references further confirm that when the decision was taken to abandon the building of the camber for the galleys, the area was designated to be filled by houses which would follow the grid system, and these were quite big for the period such that not everybody could afford them. The idea that the *Mandraġġ* followed the grid system was put forward by Christian Mifsud (Fig. 28). He bases his view on the map of 1723⁹⁷ by Romano Carapecchia and

⁹³. Chantelle Buttigieg, *Petitions to the Magistracy in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Malta*, (Unpublished B. A. Honours dissertation, UOM, 2011), 55.

⁹⁴. *ibid.*, 55-56.

⁹⁵. *ibid.*

⁹⁶. A. Ganado, *Città Nuova*, 224.

⁹⁷. Christian Mifsud, *A Historical Interpretation of Religious Architecture in Baroque Valletta*, (Unpublished M. A. dissertation, UOM, 2015), 116.

interprets the 'streets' of the *Manderaggio* as being essentially an extension of other streets in Valletta, or part of them. What was then *Strada del Monte* (later Saint John Street and now *Triq San Gwann*) and *Strada San Michele* (later *Strada Ponente*, then West Street and now *Triq il-Punent*), are both shown in the map reproduced by Mifsud as extending into the *Manderaggio* as part of the grid-iron pattern (AOM 1184, f.28).⁹⁸ In part, his interpretation appears consistent the description of the streets of Valletta by Gian Frangisk Abela.

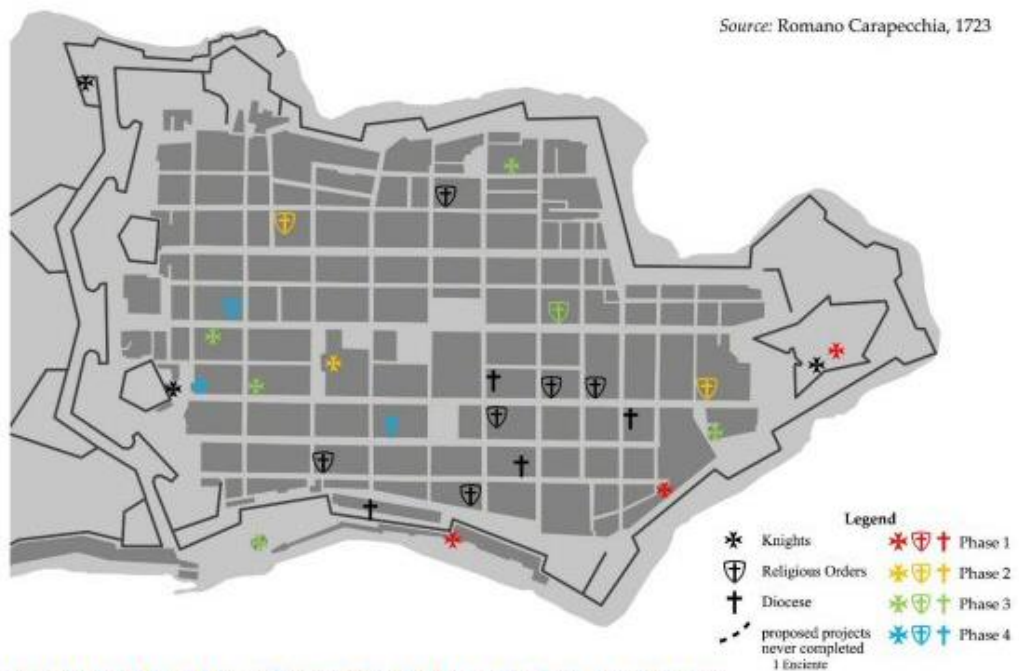


Figure 16. Plan of Valletta showing architectural interventions on churches from 1700 to 1749

Fig. 28. Plan of Valletta showing the iron-grid formation of streets and locations of churches from 1700 to 1749. (Christian Mifsud)

Despite certain modifications, construction work progressed rapidly.⁹⁹ Thus, even though Laparelli had originally intended for the *Mandracchio - Mandareggio* was not for a housing estate when this area was given for development in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the street evolved naturally as a continuation of the planimetry of the city.

In a map published in the second half of the seventeenth century, one finds the term *Mandracchio* used in connection with Cospicua. One must not

⁹⁸. *ibid.*

⁹⁹. C. Spiteri, *Great Siege*, 524.

forget that after the Order settled in Malta in 1530, it developed the inner part of the inlet between the peninsula of *Birgu* (Vittoriosa) and *I-Isola* (Senglea) into an enclosure for ships. This area in *Bormla* (Cospicua) became known as *Il-Mandraġġ ta' Bormla* (the *Manderaggio* of Cospicua),¹⁰⁰ which is indicated in some contemporary maps, particularly in detail in a map of Malta before the Great Siege by Antonio Lafreri of 1551.¹⁰¹ By the eighteenth century, this area in Bormla was not associated with a slum zone. On the contrary, rich families lived in the area and one family in particular had financial connections with France and was extremely wealthy¹⁰² They even recorded their residence as being in the Bormla *mandracchio*. Where a person of such standing in society prides himself on living in a *mandracchio*, it would be easy to presume that such a person does not consider the area a derelict or sub-standard place. When areas in Valletta and Birgu, known as the *Manderaggio*, started to be associated with a slum, this area in Bormla stopped being called the *Manderaggio*. Instead, it began to be referred to as *Is-Suq*, the marketplace. It was in the nineteenth century that the terms *manderaggio* and *Mandraġġ* assumed a negative meaning. The story of how this happened is the next subject of the chapter.

2.09 Water, the Lifeline of *il-Mandraġġ*

Evidence that the *Manderaggio* area began to be inhabited in the early seventeenth century comes from Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt's decision to extend Valletta's water system to this district. By this time, Valletta was defended by an expanded and heavily fortified Fort Saint Elmo, surrounded by an impressive system of fortifications and ditches that enclosed the entire peninsula. Valletta had become one of the most formidable and remarkable cities in the Mediterranean and people were flocking and taking up residence

¹⁰⁰. Quintano, 104.

¹⁰¹. François Collignon, *Esplicatione della Pianta delle Fortificazioni di Malta. c.1609-1687*, GMM C- 412, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, NMFA – 2954. Retrieved on 14 Dec. 2023 from: [Dehydration della pianta delle fortificatini vechie e nuove di Malta - Francesco Collignon - btv1b530 120436 - PICRYL - Public Domain Media Search Engine Public Domain Search.](#)

¹⁰². Simon Mercieca, *Commerce in Eighteenth-Century Malta - The Prepaud Family, Consolati di Mare* and Chambers of Commerce Proceedings of a Conference, (Valletta), 1998, 195.

in the city. It already had its distinct population, with some going already to the fourth or fifth generation of residents.

In 1615, Wignacourt directed water to Valletta, and since *Il-Mandraġġ* was located on low terrain, gravity allowed the water to flow naturally into a specially built cistern. This cistern supplied a monumental fountain erected in the area.¹⁰³ Decades later, a second fountain was added, a free-standing obelisk placed at the crossroads of present-day Triq San Patrizju (Saint Patrick Street) and Triq San Gwann (Saint John Street) (Figs. 29 and 30). The other fountain was further down set against a wall located in a wider section of *Strada Manderaggio* called *Il-Kortil*. Due to their locations, the locals differentiated the fountains as *Il-Funtana ta' Fuq* (the Upper Fountain) and *Il-Funtana ta' Isfel* (the Lower Fountain).¹⁰⁴ These fountains became the primary water sources for residents of the *Manderaggio* throughout its existence until the early twentieth century.

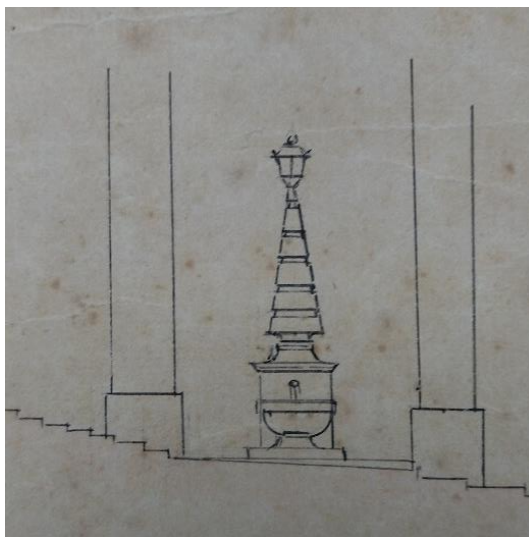


Fig. 29. Front elevation of *Il-Funtana ta' Fuq*. (AWD)



Fig. 30. Plan of *Il-Funtana ta' Fuq* at the crossroad. (AWD)

¹⁰³. Darmanin, *L-Istorja tal-Mandragg*, 6.

¹⁰⁴. Critien, 22-23.



Fig. 31. The *Funtana ta' Isfel* and adjacent hand pump. (A. Critien)

Research in the archives of the Works Department, formerly the Chief Draftsman's Office (CDO), uncovered detailed plans and elevations of these fountains in a large file labelled 'Valletta 11A'. These records provide illustrations and descriptions of both fountains.¹⁰⁵ The Lower Fountain, similar in design to the Wignacourt fountain near *Porta Reale* (Figs. 32 and 33), featured two escutcheons: one bearing the coat of arms of Grand Master Adrian Wignacourt and the other displaying the symbol of the Langue of Auvergne, a *Dauphin houriant* or 'upright dolphin'. This fountain was sculpted in 1697 by Master Giuseppi Casanova and constructed by Grezzju Imbroll and Indri Farrugia, along with their assistants and enslaved workers.¹⁰⁶

The Upper Fountain, positioned near a carpenter's shop with door number 297, is believed to have nearly disappeared by the early twentieth century but remains documented in the archival records (Fig. 31).¹⁰⁷ Together,

¹⁰⁵. AWD, Plans, 11A-690II/4.

¹⁰⁶ Critien, 24.

¹⁰⁷. Darmanin, *L-Istorja tal-Mandragg*, 5.

these fountains illustrate the infrastructure and attention to public amenities that defined *Il-Mandraġġ* during its early development.

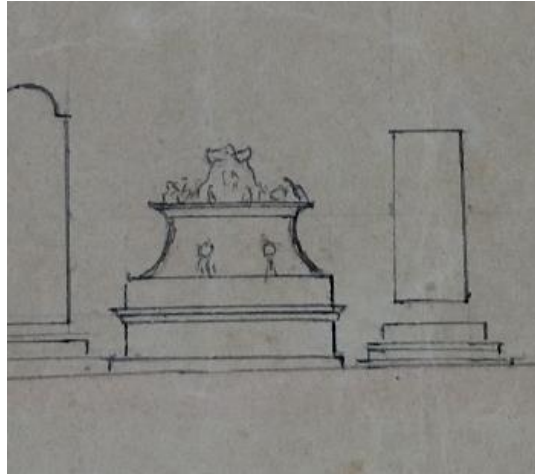


Fig. 32. Front elevation of *Il-Funtana ta' Isfel*. (AWD)

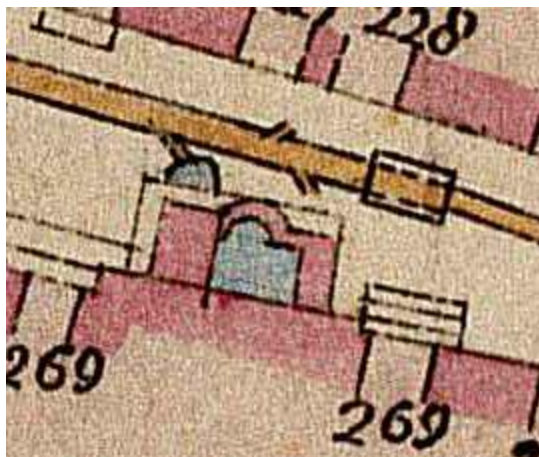


Fig. 33. Plan of *Il-Funtana ta' Isfel* in *il-Kortil*. (AWD, 11A, 148)

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter established that Valletta's geographical layout and urban development were instrumental in shaping the district within its city walls, known as the *Manderaggio*. Initially conceived as part of the strategic and defensive necessities of the Order of Saint John, this area was earmarked for marine facilities that would bolster the Order's maritime power. Its geographical features made it an ideal location for a galley pen, while another nearby area

was designated to serve as an arsenal for shipbuilding and repairs. However, despite the architectural brilliance of Francesco Laparelli, the realisation of these plans proved unfeasible. Instead, these two sites became quarries from which stone was extracted to construct the city's fortifications. While the envisioned maritime facilities were never completed, the areas transitioned into residential zones. The *Manderaggio*, however, retained its original maritime appellation, continuing to signify its intended function.

During the seventeenth century, the *Manderaggio* developed into a distinct urban fabric that housed residents from various social classes. The geographical features of the area influenced its socio-economic stratification: wealthier individuals occupied sections with views of the bastions and exposure to the pleasant sea breeze, while those with fewer resources settled in the lower-lying parts. However, this diversity in social composition did not diminish the area's standing. Members of the Order of Saint John, including prominent individuals, lived within the district, indicating that it was not associated with urban decline or social marginalisation.

Scholars such as Christopher R. Friedrichs¹⁰⁸ and Richard Mackenney¹⁰⁹ have noted that in early modern fortified cities, the poor and the wealthy often lived in close proximity, facilitating interactions among different social strata. Valletta was no exception. As Simon Mercieca observes,¹¹⁰ this district exemplified such coexistence, with no evidence of urban gentrification, which only emerged later when fortifications lost their military relevance due to advances in warfare.

Even during the eighteenth century, the *Manderaggio* retained its status as a respectable residential zone, marked by its socio-economic diversity. The district adapted to changing urban needs by accommodating various classes, providing housing and essential amenities such as fountains that supplied

¹⁰⁸ Christopher R. Friedrichs, *The Early Modern City 1450–1750*, (Routledge, 1994), 214-242

¹⁰⁹ Richard Mackenney, *The City-State, 1500–1700: Republican Liberty in an Age of Princely Power*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, U.K., 1998), 317.

¹¹⁰ Simon Mercieca, 'Spazi pubblici e controllo sociale: uno studio di alcuni aspetti demografici e urbanistici a la Valletta', *Istituzioni, assistenza e religiosità nella società del Mezzogiorno d'Italia tra XVIII e XIX secolo*, Giovanna Da Molin (ed.), 1, (Italy, 2009), 108-109 and 116.

running water and ensured a level of hygiene for its inhabitants. Significantly, historical records suggest that the area was not overpopulated during this period, underscoring its functional adaptation to the needs of the time.

The nineteenth century, however, marked a significant shift. Demographic, political, and socio-economic transformations in Malta led to the emergence of conditions commonly associated with slums, as defined by modern standards in the Oxford Dictionary. This decline, however, was not a product of the Order of Saint John or their era but rather a consequence of nineteenth-century developments. These changes and their underlying dynamics will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 3 - The 19th-century transition from a *Mandracchio* to *Il-Mandraġġ*

3.01 Introduction

J. Barry Cullingworth states that '*poverty is relative lack of command over resources and access to opportunity. It is, therefore, much more than an issue of money, important though it is*'.¹ This quote fits precisely with the situation in *Il-Mandraġġ* from the 19th century onwards. This statement does not imply that there might not have been poverty in this area before, but from the 19th century onwards, this space became synonymous with deprivation. From this century onwards, people living in this area started to be associated with destitution. However, this did not commence immediately after the British took Malta in 1800.

Cullingworth emphasises that living in poverty is not always a question of choice. It is a question of circumstances. These individuals are victims of circumstances and values practised at the time, including liberalism which dominated politics in Britain in the nineteenth century. At the time, many would have labelled the situation 'fate', of which, although not explicitly mentioned, Cullingworth seems to be accepting.

However, it would be completely untrue to say that the Maltese were victims of liberalism. The economic circumstances changed in the 19th century. Up to the first decades of the 19th century, cotton was the primary agricultural product of the island, and this industry employed entire families. Other than the use of cotton in the textile industry, the plant served as food for animals and by-products for many local families, particularly the farmers. The boll produced seed that was fed to cows and oxen. Leftovers and stalks were fed to goats, mixed with manure² when tilling the fields, and even used for cooking fuel. There was little waste, if any.

With the arrival of the British, the local cotton industry began to change. This is not to say that the British administration was directly responsible for this

¹ John Barry Cullingworth, 'The Social Content of Planning, ii, (England, Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1973), 21.

² John Chircop, 'Maltese Cotton Manufacture under the British Imperial Rule: A Story of Decline and Extinction', *Bank of Valletta Review*, xv, (Malta, Bank of Valletta, 1997), 49.

or had to take measures to counteract the decline of cotton production in Malta. Still, the decline in the cotton industry was facilitated by the environment these measures had created.³ Rather than growing and cultivating cotton, the Maltese farmer was enticed to have plant substituted by potatoes, a crop which, along with cows for milk and meat, were introduced in Malta and sufficed as part of the diet of the British garrison, and which the Maltese can learn to eat as part of their staple diet, as fodder for their animals, and a cash crop.⁴

However, the potato crop was not enough to alleviate poverty. Many peasants and other people inhabiting rural areas could not make ends meet. Studies on the social history of the early 19th century show that pauperism increased in Malta. Michael Refalo quotes from *The Malta Standard*, 28 February 1890, that, '*Of course London has its paupers, but it is no exaggeration to say that more mendicants are seen in the streets of Valletta, in one day, than in London in a month*'.⁵ The concept of being poor ceased being associated with rural areas but became a feature in the urban environment.⁶ This does not mean that there were no urban indigents before the 19th century, however, society started to be more conscious of the existence of poverty in the cities.⁷ The romantic vision that the countryside could guarantee a living for people experiencing poverty started to be proven to be incorrect.⁸ People in need sometimes had no other option but to flock to the city, which guaranteed them some form of survival and support. Those with no one to support them had no choice but to seek refuge in the town.⁹

It was within these new social and economic realities, in particular after the end of the Napoleonic wars, that living in what would eventually be defined

³. John Chircop, 'Maltese Cotton', 51-52.

⁴. George Cassar and Noel Buttigieg, *British Colonial Malta: A Melting Pot of Culinary Diets, 1800-1900 Institute for Tourism, Travel and Culture, Biennial Report, January 2018-December 2019*, (Malta, M.T.A., 2020), 38 and 46.

⁵. Michael Refalo, 'The Discourse on the Problem of Begging and Almsgiving in Late 19th-century Malta', *Bridging the Gaps: Sources, Methodology and Approaches to Religion in History*, (Joaquim Carvalho ed.), (Italy, Plus-Pisa University Press, 2008), 202. Retrieved on 19 July 2024 from: [11-libre.pdf \(d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net\)](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351111111)

⁶. *ibid.*, 192.

⁷. W. A. Charlton, *Trends in the Economic Geography of Malta since 1800*, A Dissertation presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, (University of Dublin, 1960), 230. Retrieved on 18 July 2024 from: https://etheses.dur.ac.uk/8360/1/8360_5362.PDF.

⁸. *ibid.*, 232.

⁹. *ibid.*, 175-177.

as slum areas started. Usually, people who had no other option but to live in such regions became stigmatised by society. This is what would happen to this area in Valletta. But what happened here was not unique. Similar processes occurred in other Valletta zones and regions of Birgu and Senglea. In Britain at the time, it was not difficult for someone to depart the lowly area where they lived and move to work in a more promising location. Still, London had its slum areas, and these areas would be in the back of the minds of the British rulers in Malta when they came to assess the local situation.

The British administration was accustomed to such situations of poverty in big cities since during the first half of the 19th century, Jacob's Island in London offered a worse scenario than *Il-Mandraġġ*. From the 19th century, foreign and local authors began to compare these situations in England and Malta. Such comparisons did not help matters. Realistically, the probability that people living at *Il-Mandraġġ* would find the means to elevate themselves to a better economic and social level was minimal. The principal consolation for the residents was religion. Some pursued the possibility of better opportunities through migration and others sought to enlist in the Royal Navy. A few residents did manage to improve their financial position through hard work. Others though had to resort to crime to survive or turn to luck. Liberalism created the welfare society, which should not be confused with the concept of the welfare state. In other words, private citizens, including women, were encouraged to gather resources to help the poor outside state or religious structures. In the 1830s, Sarah Austin was one of the first promoters of the social society principle in Malta.¹⁰ It was only during the twentieth century that the welfare state was created.

Before going into the history of *Il-Mandraġġ* any further, it should be noted that by the time Malta came under British rule as a result of the Treaty of Paris in 1814, Valletta was already unofficially divided into several quarters and sub-

¹⁰. Simon Mercieca, 'L-Istrina and the Welfare Society', *The Malta Independent*, 26 Dec. 2014.

quarters. These were *il-Kamrata*,¹¹ *I-Arċipierku*,¹² *il-Fossa*,¹³ *il-Biċċerija*,¹⁴ *Due Balli*¹⁵ and *il-Mandraġġ*. However, *Il-Mandraġġ* remained without a planning system from when Malta officially became a British possession in 1814 up to when the Development Planning Act was introduced in 2002. As Dr Godwin Cassar put it: 'There was no significant new planning legislation until the 19th Century, when measures parallel to the development in Britain were enacted'.¹⁶ The fact that *Il-Mandraġġ* lacked the planning framework that the rest of Valletta had, together with the overpopulation that Valletta went through, was the cause of the addition of more buildings (and hovels) without any form of official control.

3.02 Status Animarum

The arrival of the British led to a population movement towards Valletta. The Grand Harbour was always a forest of masts of the ships that arrived and departed daily. This commercial activity increased during the British rule. Despite the depression that hit Malta after the Napoleonic wars, the island

¹¹ The *Camarata* (Maltese, *Kamrata*) has its origin in 1593, and for a few years from 1629, it became the official residence for Italian, Spanish and French knights, with each *langue* separately quartered. Years later, the building served as the storage of linen used at the *Sacra Infermeria*, the Order's hospital. British authorities demolished the building in the 1880s and rebuilt it in specially sized stone. It served as a Royal Naval Barracks for many years. It was relinquished to the Maltese government in the 1960s and transformed into social housing apartments.

¹² The name *Arċipierku* likely derives from the archipelago (Italian, *arcipelago*), an area neighbouring and overlooking the Grand Harbour. It is likely a term that had once denoted the entire headland of Valletta but remained to refer only to this particular area. The area was originally where the slave prison of the Order of Saint John was located, demolished and rebuilt as a primary school by British authorities until it was destroyed during an air raid during the Second World War. It was again rebuilt as a large block of government social housing.

¹³ *Il-Fossa* (English, the pit), located at the lower regions of Valletta on the Marsamxett Harbor side, combines itself with the area known as *il-Biccerija* (English slaughterhouse). Still, likely a corruption of the French *Boucherie* of the same meaning, The *Fossa* is primarily Jews Sally Port, a gateway leading from a natural alcove below the Curtain and French Curtain, once a very derelict area having a slight camber for local fishing boats and line with their lowly wooden shacks. It was the summer leisure area for residents of the *Due Balli*, now a much-frequented diving spot.

¹⁴ The *Biċċerija* is a large building that originated as a slaughterhouse, hence the name, but was converted into a bakery and a rookery in time. It is located adjacent to and above Jews Sally Port.

¹⁵ *Due Balli* (Maltese, *Diju Balli*), likely originated from an arch or a large building in the locality that had two sizeable ornate stone finials or cannon balls, or '*due palle*' in Italian. The other and more plausible is that two Grand Bailiffs (*Bali* was the administrator of a Bailiwick or Commandery) of the Order of Saint John lived there or in a particular building, and people referred to the area where they lived.

¹⁶ Godwin Cassar, *A collection of essays & other writings 1985-2008*, the author, 2009, 11.

nonetheless went through an economic expansion that greatly affected Valletta. The first decades of the 19th century saw Britain begin to develop Malta as a naval and military base, especially during conflicts and wars.¹⁷ First to be created were establishments for the Royal Navy within the Grand Harbour and the Admiralty became the largest employer. The construction of forts and coastal defences followed from the 1840s onwards.

All the economic activity therefore became centred around Valletta and its harbours. This meant an explosion of the city's population as many started to migrate to the city to find employment connected with the British armed services or trade. Numerous foreigners, businessmen and workers, many with their families, settled in Valletta with just a few ending up living in *Il-Mandraġġ*. Two versions of the *Status* were consulted, the ones at the Parish of *Porto Salvo* (Fig. 34) and the others at the Archives of the Archiepiscopal *Curia* (Fig. 35). The population records for the nineteenth-century only list one family living in the *Mandaraggio* bearing a foreign surname.¹⁸ The surnames in the *Status Animarum* of the mid-19th century are nearly all Maltese, although those of Anglo-Saxon origin began to appear. Thus, *Il-Mandraġġ* started attracting people who could not afford a decent living because of their social situation even from Valletta and from the countryside. This can be confirmed by the *Status Animarum* of 1833.¹⁹ These registers show that these people lived in rooms and a few families were listed as hosting another family, clearly relatives, as they carried the same surname in the same room.

This *Status* confirms the process known in urban studies as infilling. Population growth from migration and natural increase led to overcrowding, and existing housing started to be extended to accommodate more people. While this *Status* does not give the impression that the area was a slum during the 18th century, by the mid-19th century squatters, the unemployed, and individuals with economic difficulties started seeking refuge in this area, occupying spaces that may have been considered belonging to no one as it

¹⁷. Salvino Busuttil, *Malta's Economy In The Nineteenth Century*, Retrieved on 21 July 2024 from: [tps://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/39337/1/JFA%2C3%281%29-A7.pdf](https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/39337/1/JFA%2C3%281%29-A7.pdf), 54.

¹⁸. APS, *Status Animarum, 1835, Manderaggio*, xxi.

¹⁹. AAM, *Status Animarum, 1832-1833 - Porto Salvo*, Box 25B, i-xii, *Valletta 2513/11*.

Nome	Cognome	Età	Prof.	Pre. Natali	Patina
Carmelo	de' Spad	21	Calp.		
Anna	de' Spad	28	mog		
Paolo					
Vincenzo	Nagy	20	Baral		
Catarina	un'fand	16	mog		
Giovanni	Colleja	4	marito 2		
Benedetto	Hella	114	Galraj		
Teresa	Grech	114	ved. mog		
Carmelo	colleja 1.º bto	18	Frax		
Felice		15			
Costanzo		14			
Giacoma	2.º bto				
Martina					
Rosario					

Fig. 35. Page from the *Status Animarum* for the *Manderaggio*, 1835.²¹

3.03 Epidemics - The Plague and the Cholera

In 1813 the population of *Il-Mandraġġ* was around 3000.²² In that year, Malta had its last severe outbreak of plague that lasted until 1814; 4,600 perished,²³ and 97 were from *Il-Mandraġġ*. Based on this figure, Carmel Cassar concludes that the area of *Il-Mandraġġ* was already one of 'the poorest habitation quarters' in Malta. After the plague, this area experienced a decline in population and the original level of inhabitants will never be reached again.²⁴

Judging from the material published by the British administration during this period, the authorities did not consider this area a high-risk locality for diseases. The truth is that, during the time of the epidemic, no connection was made between the living conditions of this area and the plague. The link between the two would only be made many decades later. The first person to connect the two was the medical officer Burrell in 1854²⁵. Burrell wrote a report on the plague of 1813 in which he featured a map (Fig. 36) of Valletta detailing

21. SA, *Porto Salvo*, 1835, 28 (v).

22. Malta Census 1881.

23. Carmel Cassar, *A Concise History of Malta, Chapter 1, The Land and its People*, (Malta, Minerva Publications, 2000), 15.

24. Paul Cassar, *Medical History*, 330-331.

25. W. H. Burrell, Appendix V. to the Second Report on Quarantine: *Report of Dr W. H. Burrell on the plague of Malta in 1813*, (England, 1854), 35.

all the cases of the plague of 1813,²⁶ where they occurred, the door numbers, the type of habitation and the number of infected and deaths in the particular block. This specific attention to the situation in *Il-Mandraġġ* confirms that by the middle of the 19th century, the area was already overcrowded. However, what made the British administration conscious of the connection between urban squalor and disease was the first cholera epidemic of 1837.

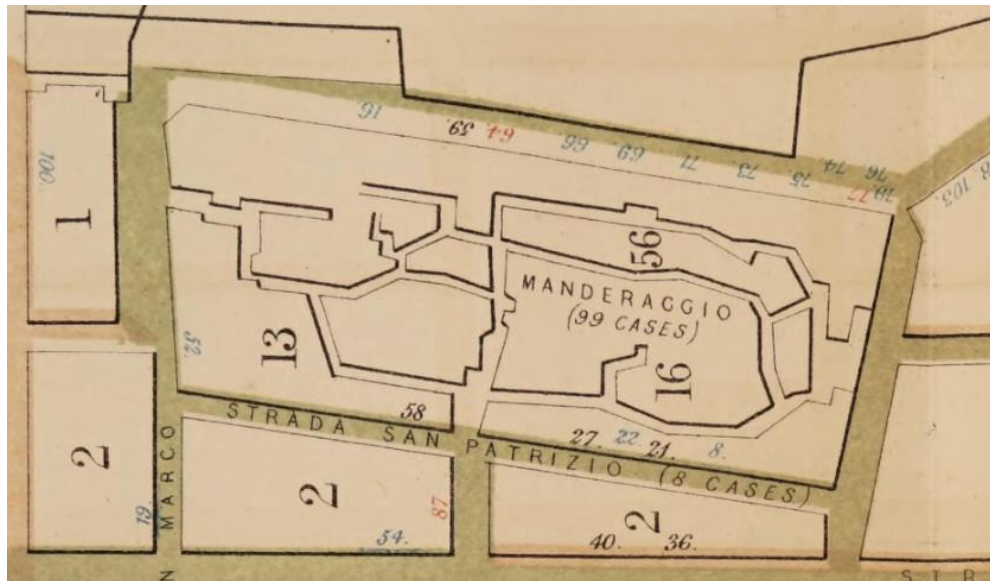


Fig. 36. Extract from the plan of Valletta indicating door numbers and cases of the plague of 1813 in the *Manderaggio* and associated areas. (W. H. Burrell)

Dr Carmelo Testa states that 4,000 persons had perished during this outbreak of cholera.²⁷ Cholera reached Malta after having already struck London in 1830, leaving high numbers of deaths in the slum district of Jacob's Islands. It spread to Sicily, and by 1837 it had claimed its first victims in Malta. Because of this cholera experience in 1837,²⁸ the British administration became conscious about highly densely populated areas, hygiene and disease. By then, the same administration was primarily regarding Malta as a naval base and a fortress and the well-being of the troops was high on their agenda. Moreover, Valletta was the island's sole capital and administrative centre, after the three cities had lost their status as part and parcel of Malta's

²⁶ *ibid.*, opposite 34.

²⁷ C. Cassar, 36.

²⁸ Saviour Pisani, 'The Malta cholera epidemic in 1837'. Roger Ellul Micallef (ed.), *The Saint Luke's Hospital Gazette* v, 2, (Malta, 1970), 151.

capital conurbation. The authorities could not afford to have a hazardous situation that could lead to the spread of deadly diseases within the walls of the cities.

This is again confirmed by George French Angas. French Angas visited Malta in 1841 and collected his thoughts in the book *A Ramble in Malta and Sicily, in the Autumn of 1841*. In Chapter 18, while describing his departure from Malta, Angas wrote that,

'I... went to see the "Manderagio", or lower part of the town, which is quite a curiosity. The streets are composed of winding stairs only a few feet wide, forming a complete labyrinth; and the houses on each side are so high, that the light of day is almost entirely excluded. Many of the poorer classes in this part of the town are employed in plating straw hats and making cigars'.²⁹

With this description, Angas confirms that by the middle of the 19th century, this area was inhabited by the poorer members of society, although he was more fascinated by the structure of the place and makes no reference to dirt and squalor as was erroneously credited to this author. In fact, in no part of his texts does Angas speak about substandard inhabitants. He did not enter into issues regarding hygiene as he was more curious about the urban features of this locality, the high buildings and the narrow streets.³⁰

A primary worry was the lack of education of the inhabitants which was leading to poverty and deprivation, a concern that was expressed by an Augustinian monk who eventually became Bishop of Malta. Ġulju Bonnici states that on the insistence of the Augustinian Provincial Gaetano Pace Forno and following approval by P. Angelucci, the General of the Order, in 1848, the Augustinians opened the first free school in Valletta to cater for the poor children of the locality. Bonnici further quotes the newspaper *Il-Portafoglio Maltese*,³¹

²⁹. George French Angas, *A ramble in Malta and Sicily in the autumn of 1841: illustrated*, (England, Smith, Elder, and Company, 1842), 71.

³⁰. Said Zammit, 161.

³¹. Ġulju Bonnici, *Grajjiet Agostinjani f'Malta*, (Malta, Provinċja Agostinjana, 1990), 136-137, *'Fit-twaqqif ta' din l-iskola, il-Patrijiet Agostinjani man kellhomx ñag'oñra quddiem għajnejhom ñlief il-ġid komuni u partikolarment ta' dawk il-kapjoet ta' familji li minñhabba n-nuqqas tal-finanzi ma setgħux jagħtu lil-uliedhom it-tagħlim biex isiru ċittadini xierqa u nsara tajba.'*

'By establishing this school, the Augustinian Friars had nothing else in front of their eyes except the common good and particularly of those heads of families who, due to the lack of finances, could not afford basic education for their children to become proper citizens and good Christians'.

While *Il-Mandraġġ* fell under the spiritual care of the parish of Porto Salvo, the area was within the convent of the Augustinian friars, whose convent was set up, as already explained in the previous chapter, to take spiritual care of those who were destined to live and work in the *Manderaggio*. When the area became residential, the friars took a particular interest in the locality and several male children from *Il-Mandraġġ* started attending this school. This initiative confirms the general situation in *Il-Mandraġġ* and some of its neighbourhoods.

Between July and September of 1854, there were various outbreaks of cholera amongst the British garrison, on incoming ships³² and also amongst some civilians. But again, *Il-Mandraġġ* is not designated as a particular area or harbinger for the spread of the cholera disease. The German scientist Koch³³ had not come out with this aspect in his study. Perhaps there was a suspicion that lack of hygiene, overcrowding and lack of water were vehicles for the spread of Cholera, but the association, even though suspected, was not being asserted concerning such localities.

In 1854 W.H. Burrell referred to the social conditions in *Il-Mandraġġ*. Burrell was interested in infectious diseases and other maladies for which individuals living in *Il-Mandraġġ* were considered as being more prone to infection than inhabitants of other areas. Burrell describes his visit to the area as follows,

*'I will first attempt to describe some of the localities most affected by the plague. First on the list is the Manderaggio, which has been frequently alluded to by travellers as containing within a small space, a poor and wretched community'.*³⁴

³² Walter Bonnici, *The Army Medical Department and the Garrison in Malta*, Retrieved on 15 Mar. 2023 from: [The Malta Garrison 1865 \(maltaramc.com\)](http://maltaramc.com).

³³ Paul Cassar, *The Study of Cholera and Max Von Pettenkofer's Visit to Malta in 1868*, The St Luke's Hospital Gazette, iii, 1, 22 and 28. Retrieved on 24 July 2023 from: [Study of Cholera and Max von Pettenkofer's Visit to Malta in 1868.pdf \(um.edu.mt\)](http://www.stluke.mt/Study_of_Cholera_and_Max_von_Pettenkofer's_Visit_to_Malta_in_1868.pdf)

³⁴ Burrell, 35.

Yet in the same report, Burrell contradicts this earlier statement by stating,

'Here many of the poorest amongst the population reside; and squalor, filth and wretchedness meet one at every step. Damp, dark and cheerless, with an atmosphere at all times noxious and stagnant, here is everything promotive of disease, and we can only attribute exemption at any time from mortal sickness to that power of habit which enables the human constitution to resist such deliberate instances'.³⁵

Carmelo Galea quotes G. Faure, according to whom smallpox broke out in Malta in 1855 and, since *Il-Mandraġġ* was so close to Marsamxett Landing, it caused havoc in the area.³⁶ Cholera also revisited the island in 1865. For statistical purposes, the sanitary authorities noted the rate and figures of infection at *Il-Mandraġġ*, as well as in other parts of Valletta. The first case of Cholera at *Il-Mandraġġ* was registered on 8 July 1865. It concerned the death of a girl aged 19 months whose parents lived at 223, *Strada Manderaggio*.³⁷ The day which, according to the government documents, saw 'a *great and sudden increase of the disease*' was 20 July 1865. On this day, 'Valletta contributed 10 cases, three in the Manderaggio, one in Marsamuscetto, two in Strada Reale, one in Strada Fontana, one in Strada Federico and one in Strada Fianco'.³⁸ This meant that at *Il-Mandraġġ*, the rate of infection was not that alarming if compared to the other areas within the city where the infection was also registered.

In 1867 John Sutherland wrote a report on the sanitary conditions of Malta and Gozo concerning the cholera epidemic that had struck Malta years before. This time around, the cholera epidemic was relatively mild. According to Sutherland, there were 20 deaths at *Il-Mandraġġ*.³⁹ What is even more revealing in the report by Sutherland is his view of the area. Sutherland considered it 'one of the worst localities in Valletta'⁴⁰ and described 'The

³⁵. *ibid.*, 36.

³⁶. Carmel Cassar, *Medical History of Malta*, (England, Welcome, 1964), 256.

³⁷. John Sutherland, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of Malta and Gozo with reference to the Epidemic Cholera in the year 1865*, (England, H.M.S.O., 1867) 23.

³⁸. *ibid.*, 27 and in NAM, *Despatches from Secretary of State 64* (Jan.-Dec. 1867) Malta, GOV 2/1/64.

³⁹. *ibid.*, 30 (n).

⁴⁰. *ibid.*, 23.

Manderaggio' as 'a populous district of miserable lanes and houses'. He further claimed that such misery had existed before the British took over Malta. This appears to be the first written attestation describing the area not only as a slum but worse and indicating that it had been a slum since its origin. Sutherland was not necessarily factually correct regarding the time when *Il-Mandraġġ* had become a slum, and maybe he was comparing its poor and unhygienic living conditions to those in England. The proposal that this district '*should be rebuilt entirely*' was in this context,⁴¹ however, this reference is highly debatable as social status and the classification of *Il-Mandraġġ* as a slum came to be in the early years of the British era, as previously described and will be further on.

The publication of this report and how the area was described stimulated a particular interest in the German Professor of Hygiene at Munich University, Max von Pettenkofer (1818-1901), to make it a point to go and visit it. In 1868, von Pettenkofer arrived in Malta and was particularly interested in the cholera epidemic but when visiting *Il-Mandraġġ*, he was more concerned with the poverty of the people than issues of hygiene. He found it suffocating which he describes as,

'I could only reach the Manderaggio down some steps as if descending underground. The first time I wondered there was in broad daylight but quite alone. Among these houses, in the gloom of the place, among these people, I began to doubt whether I was in the right spot. I tried to turn back quickly I did not succeed in doing so because I could not make out from which direction I had entered. I could not ask, as I do not know a word of Maltese. The residents of the Manderaggio, apart from their Arabic mother dialect, could not speak any English or Italian. I was spoken to and questioned a lot, but I do not know what the people said. I was happy at last to come to some steps again which led me outwards, and I breathed once again more easily as I stood in Strada San Giovanni'.⁴²

Although von Pettenkofer did not refer to the squalor at *Il-Mandraġġ* it does not mean that it did not exist!

⁴¹. *ibid.*, 45.

⁴². Paul Cassar, 'The St Luke's Hospital Gazette', 26.

3.04 A Slum Is Born

The first to consider *Il-Mandraġġ* as an actual slum was Samuel Plimsoll, a British politician who visited the area around the 1860s. Being a British parliamentarian and social reformer, Plimsoll asked the Governor to visit places in the capital city inhabited by people experiencing poverty. The Governor at the time, Sir. John Gaspard Le Marchant (1858-1864) and the Secretary to Governor Victor Houlton, had accompanied Mr Plimsoll on his visit to *Il-Mandraġġ*.⁴³ This visit led him to publish a paper in 1879 entitled *The Conditions in Malta* wherein he references the housing conditions of *Il-Mandraġġ*.

The epidemics in Malta started to be associated with sub-standard housing. This was the reason why housing in *Il-Mandraġġ* began to catch the attention of politicians. These housing conditions were not ideal, starting with the size and location of each abode. Tap water and proper sewerage were of great concern given these two services are closely linked to hygiene, which was a health issue of importance at the time. The lack of water in the houses meant that drinking water had to be brought from public supplies and were not always hygienic, leaving the inhabitants susceptible to any disease or epidemic. Regarding the water situation at the time at *il-Mandraġġ*, Kieth Buhagiar states, '*The inhabitants of the Manderaggio area in Valletta received less than fourteen litres per capita a day*'.⁴⁴ In 1866, Malta had its first report where it was clearly stated that a drainage system should replace the pits that were until then used for the collection of drainage in Valletta,⁴⁵ and the plans started to be drafted during the 1870s.⁴⁶

The sanitary situation in Malta, particularly drainage, could not remain in the dire state that it had existed for so long. On their part, the Maltese could not meet any significant financial requirements as their budget was low, and they held no majority in the Council. Despite this limitation, the first important

⁴³. Charles Casolani, *The Sanitary Question in Malta*, (Malta, 1880), 27.

⁴⁴. Keith Buhagiar, *Malta and Water (AD 900 to 1900) Irrigating a Semi-arid Landscape*, (England, Oxford, 2016), 57(n).

⁴⁵. Edward Tonna, 'Appendix to the Project', *The Project of Edward Tonna of Malta for the Formation of Charitable and Educational Institutions*, (Malta 1866), 3.

⁴⁶. Dominic Fenech, *Endemic Democracy: 1919-1930, i: Responsibility and power in inter-war Malta*, (Malta, Publishers Enterprising Group (PEG) Ltd., 2005), 9.

attempt at sustainable housing ensued. A large and unused building of the knights, the *Camerata*, was demolished in 1860 and rebuilt in sustainable social housing. In itself, choosing the *Camerata* and not an area in *Il-Mandraġġ* for the development of social housing is a further indication that although the authorities were conscious of the situation at *Il-Mandraġġ*, the area was not on any agenda. The electoral register of 1860 lists four persons eligible to vote and have an address in *Strada Manderaggio*, but this does not necessarily mean that they lived there but that they owned property in *Il-Mandraġġ*.

What can be ascertained is that by 1870, the number of listed voters from *Il-Mandraġġ* decreased to two. As Henry Frenco had observed, in 1868, the Duke of Buckingham had reminded the 'official members of legislative councils' that they should vote on "government questions" at the governor's discretion'.⁴⁷ At the time Malta did not yet have political parties to react which would eventually make a difference. Politics still relied on individual politicians; men like Salvatore Cachia Zammit, Sigismondo Savona and Fortunato Mizzi.⁴⁸

With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 Malta benefitted from more commerce in other sectors and made Malta a more strategic position in the Mediterranean Sea, particularly with a significant increase in shipping. Due to its strategic position the Suez Canal brought new technologies, increased maritime commerce and made the islands more sensitive to diseases originating in the Far East.

In addition to the plague and cholera, from 1870 to 1873 Malta suffered from other infectious diseases including diphtheria which was common between 1867 to 1873. Local reports mainly refer to drainage and sewer matters related to the civilian population and reference to the British military and naval presence on the island is only included when there is a threat to their well-being. Although improvements were made and new drainage lines installed, sewerage discharge was still directed into the sea, especially in Marsamxett or Quarantine Harbour as it was also called. The excreta of thousands of sailors on both naval and merchant ships in the harbours ended

⁴⁷ Henry Frenco, (Ed.), 'Party Politics in a Fortress Colony: The Maltese Experience', Second Edition, (Malta, Midsea Publication, 1991), 6.

⁴⁸ *ibid*, 23.

up being poured into the sea, which especially when the sea was calm, became large cesspools, particularly where the sewer outlets were located in the enclosed inlets⁴⁹. This was even washed ashore during storms. Given that *Il-Mandraġġ* was close to the sea, residents (including children) would swim there, even though drainage from this part of Valletta was dumped into the sea in the same area.

Besides the lack of a proper drainage system, *Il-Mandraġġ* also lacked an adequate supply of good running water. Any water lines bypassed this area (Fig. 37) and as previously stated, the only freshwater came from the fountains that dated to the Order.⁵⁰

The 1871 Census carried a detailed feature on *Il-Mandraġġ*. In this Census, the situation in this zone was outlined and this area was 'officially' described as a slum for the first time, a subject discussed more in detail in other sections of this dissertation.



Fig. 37. Map of Valletta indicating the passage of the water lines in red but bypassing the *Manderaggio*.⁵¹

⁴⁹. *British Army Medical Services and the Malta Garrison 1799-1979*, 'Morbidity and mortality of the Malta Garrison 1816-1909', Retrieved on 17 Dec. 2023 from: [https:// www. Malta.ramc.com/Articles/contents/ mortality.html](https://www.Malta.ramc.com/Articles/contents/mortality.html).

⁵⁰. Critien, 23.

⁵¹. WSC, 'C 302/1- 14/8-22, 'Plan of Valletta Showing Water Distribution Pipes.

The area of Valletta experienced a relatively high death rate between 1873 and 1874. This led the governor of the day, Sir Charles Thomas van Straubenzee, to pass legislation to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. However, this legislation and similar schemes received a lack of response from Maltese politicians due to the expenses involved. The British had abandoned the Cardwell principle of giving weight to the views of the Maltese on internal issues. Instead, like his predecessor, Straubenzee, continued with the policy of disregarding this principle and how the majority decided in Council was what prevailed, as the elected Maltese were in the minority.⁵²

This increase in mortality was reported in the local press and, for the first time, a connection was made between the excess in mortality and the conditions in *Il-Mandraġġ*. As early as August 1874, *The Malta Times* featured a report on the poor or non-existing sanitary conditions in *Il-Mandraġġ*. The editor refers to cases of *enteritis* in slum and poverty-stricken areas of Malta, especially in *Il-Mandraġġ* of Valletta. Once again, this area is being identified and associated with a slum. The editor continues to refer to the deterioration of the Maltese people in general and which such deterioration was not restricted to just physical but mental as well. For this reason, the editor quotes the Governor who said,

'The Maltese must, if they continue much longer indifferent to their own lives and the lives of others, be made to improve the sanitary conditions of the island. 'It can be done and England will do it'.⁵³

This statement expresses the view that since the governor had expected the Maltese to act and improve the sanitary conditions and yet they were objecting, the British administration would have to undertake these reforms.

3.05 A Ray of Hope – Views, Plans and the Reality

Editorials and even letters to the editor in the press only promoted the political views of the colonial administration and of those power wielders who supported

⁵². Robert Holland, *Blue-water Empire: The British in the Mediterranean since 1800*, (England, Allen Lane, 2012), 214.

⁵³. Editorial, *The Malta Times and United Service Gazette*, 8 August 1874, 2.

these ideals in the two Houses of Britain. In reality, very little was done and was only years later, that a serious and productive incentive was made regarding drainage and water supply.

The Italian-language newspaper *Il Portafoglio Maltese* also contained an article about the excessive number of deaths in 1874 under the heading of '*L'attuale crescente mortalità*'⁵⁴ or 'The current growing mortality'. Like *The Times*, *Il Portafoglio Maltese* made specific reference to the situation in *Il-Mandraġġ* and included a strong message to the authorities, proposing the demolition of this whole zone,

*'To do this, however, the government should commission a study for a demolition project of the Manderaggio. This area is a horrible scar in the middle of our elegant city. For this reason, it is essential to study the best plan to begin (this project) even if necessary, employing public money for such a well-understood project to create housing for the poorer classes. This is a good cause already studied and adopted in the main capital cities and everywhere it was employed.'*⁵⁵

The *Portafoglio* also referred to the detailed report on *Il-Mandraġġ* that featured in the 1871 Census.

Articles and letters in the *Portafoglio Maltese* and the *Malta Times* had emphasised the need for public funding for a well-planned project of affordable and proper housing for this poorer class of the inhabitants of *Il-Mandraġġ*, based on similar projects undertaken in various other European capital cities. Although the parties behind these newspapers were somewhat politically opposite and from different perspectives, they both carried the same message. The language problem in Malta frequently placed political supporters at loggerheads, yet both newspapers justly supported their arguments and they were clear on what was required at *Il-Mandraġġ*. The financing of such projects in Valletta was raised on 23 January 1880 by the Crown Advocate, Sir Adrian Dingli, when he 'proposed that dwelling, for the

⁵⁴. NLM, *Il Portafoglio Maltese*, 18 August 1874, 2.

⁵⁵. '*Per fare ciò, pero', il governo dovrebbe mettere a studio un progetto per la demolizione del Manderaggio, che' in orrore in mezzo alla nostro elegante città: a tale fine e' maestri studiare il miglior piano per iniziare, anche occorrendo a pubbliche spese sopra un modello ben inteso, abitazioni nelle ed economiche per la classe povera, tema gusto studiata già sufficientemente nelle grandi capitali ed ovunque adottato.'*

labouring classes and poor should be built at the public expense and administered by Government'.⁵⁶

It was more like the case of, 'Yes, we know the situation, we know what is required, but it is up to you to plan, find the money and execute the job'. What happened in these years was a precursor to and would be repeated in the years that followed, with the social situation in *Il-Mandraġġ* debated and discussed each time. There was much talk, but nothing was done, with all the plans and reports left to line the drawers!

The newspapers would continue to show keen interest in the area over the years. Unfortunately, the administration did not take the situation as seriously as it should or take the action so badly needed to be taken concerning sewerage and water. Whatever the motive, but likely more political, any push towards better sanitation, wherever, is rightfully justified. The truth was that there was no real plan regarding the issue of an increasing population in Malta.

The publication by Samuel Plimsoll in 1879⁵⁷ mentioned above created social awareness about the shocking and deplorable state of this area and the desolate situation of its inhabitants.

Michael Edward Hicks Beach,⁵⁸ the Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1878 to 1880, was quite concerned about the situation exposed by Mr Plimsoll. He wrote a sensitive four-page letter from Downing Street in London to Sir Arthur Borton, the governor of the time, about the locality.⁵⁹ Since Hicks Beach considered that the letter by Plimsoll was unfounded and that he could not be legally reprimanded, he urged the governor to change the law to deal with such situations.⁶⁰

⁵⁶. Casolani, 33 (†).

⁵⁷. Samuel Plimsoll (1824–1898) was a British politician and social reformer, who was elected as the Liberal Member of Parliament for Derby in 1867. Retrieved on 14 Feb. 2023 from: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Samuel-Plimsoll>.

⁵⁸. Michael Edward Hicks Beach, 1st Earl St Aldwyn, PC, DL (1837–1916), Baronet from 1854 to 1906 and Viscount St Aldwyn until 1915. Retrieved on 14 Feb. 2023 from: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sir-Michael-Edward-Hicks-Beach-9th-Baronet>.

⁵⁹. NAM, 'Despatches from Secretary of State 76 (Jan. - Dec. 1879) Malta 187, 21 May 1879', *Report relative to a pamphlet by Mr S. Plimsoll on the Manderaggio in Valletta.*

⁶⁰. AWM, GOV, Dept. 49, Report - 2556/1876.

The Chief Secretary to the Governor, Victor Houlton, dismissed Plimsoll's allegations about *Il-Mandraġġ*. He did not consider the area a social case and not as bad as described by Plimsoll. In the Council, he reminded the members that he had visited *Il-Mandraġġ* with Mr Plimsoll when the latter visited the area 20 years before. After Plimsoll published his pamphlet, the Chief Secretary to the Governor decided to revisit the area, this time with the President of this Council. This happened not many days before this debate in Council on 11 February 1880 and he said that he found enough to satisfy him about the situation to the extent that he went on to claim that the description by Plimsoll was highly colourful and somewhat exaggerated, intended on purpose to present a fearful picture which is entirely incorrect.⁶¹

However, despite the desperate attempt by the Chief Secretary to dissuade the Council Members, they could not ignore Plimsoll's criticism. Therefore, the census held the following year, in 1881, again took particular interest in the area. The publication of the census figures of 1881 contains multiple tables and statistics which give ample detail on every aspect of life on the islands of Malta, including particular attention to the situation in *Il-Mandraġġ*. Valletta had a population of 24,854.⁶² According to this census, 1,568 lived in 685 rooms.⁶³ The number of abodes inside *Il-Mandraġġ* is given as 370, which means that over 1,000 persons were living on the outskirts of *Il-Mandraġġ*.

The Census gives a clear indication of *Il-Mandraġġ* being densely inhabited. It states that when measured by the Superintendent of Public Works,⁶⁴ the lowest land level within the confines was only 14 feet⁶⁵ above sea level and that its area was 0.004⁶⁶ of a square mile or 2.56⁶⁷ acres (Fig. 38). This census even included a map of *Il-Mandraġġ* as well as a list of cases infections in Valletta, of which 31 cases were in the Marsamxett area and 99

⁶¹. Casolani, 27 (*).

⁶². Malta Census 1881, 4.

⁶³. *ibid.*, Table VI, Area – Number of Dwellings and persons enumerated on the 3rd April 1881 in the Manderaggio, unpaginated.

⁶⁴. *ibid.*, Indexes, 'Density of the Population', 4.

⁶⁵. Approximately 4.27 meters.

⁶⁶. Approximately 0.0065 kilometres.

⁶⁷. Approximately 10360 square meters.

cases were in *il-Mandraġġ*, which is reasonable to understand due to the habitat in the locality. What was concluded in the Census triggered concern for the regeneration (and possibly for the demolition and regeneration) of *Il-Mandraġġ*. In 1881, outbreaks of undulant fever, dengue fever and enteric fever were reported amongst the British troops, particularly those stationed in Valletta,⁶⁸ however, records of these cases affecting *Il-Mandraġġ* were not traced.

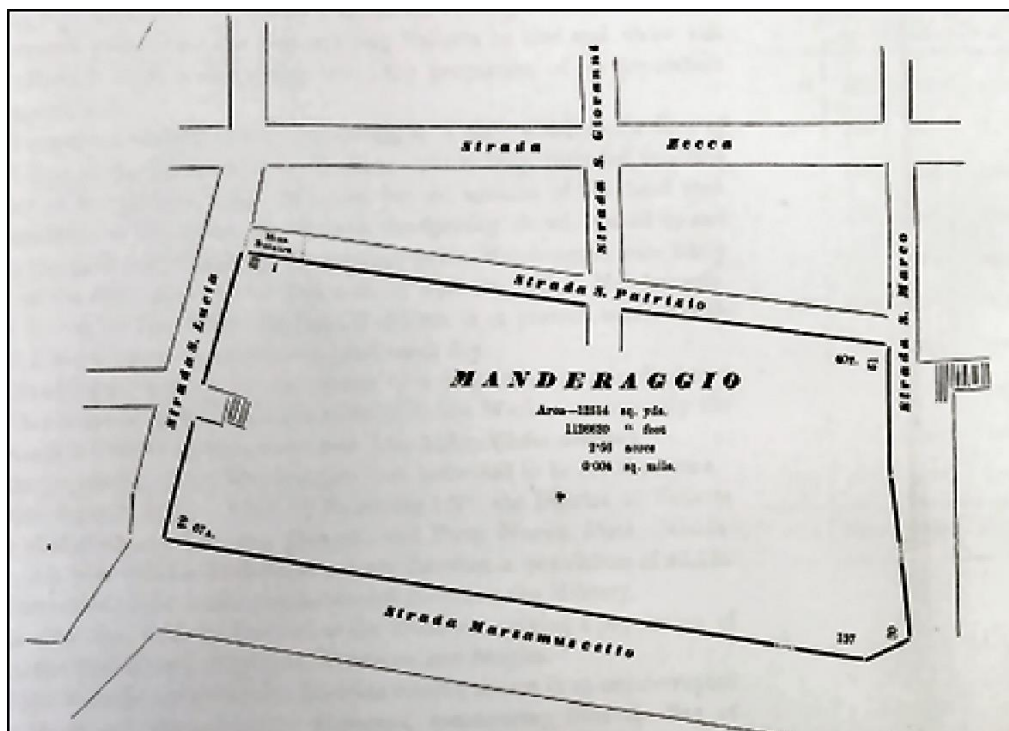


Fig. 38. Plan of the *Manderaggio* showing the adjacent streets and listing statistics related to the area.⁶⁹

During this period the island was visited by Jules Verne. Indeed Verne visited the island twice, once in 1878 and again in 1884. Verne did not leave a diary but he had made it a point to visit *Il-Mandraġġ* to the extent that he included a description of the place in his epic novel about a Mediterranean adventure, *Mathias-Sandrof*. While the narrative remains a novel and therefore there is a strong element of literary licence and exaggeration, the description by Verne is not too different from the one given during this period by Sutherland, von Pettenkofer and Plimsoll,

⁶⁸. *The Malta Garrison – 1881*, Retrieved on 22 June 2024 from: https://www.maltaramc.com/regsurg/rs1880_1889/rmo1881.html.

⁶⁹. *ibid.*, Table VI.

*'The Manderaggio runs along under the ramparts with narrow streets where the sun never shines, high yellow walls irregularly pierced with innumerable holes, which do duty as windows, some of them grated and most of them free. Everywhere round about are flights of steps, leading to veritable sewers, low gateways, humid, sordid, like the houses of a Kasbah, miserable courtyards, and gloomy tunnels, hardly worthy of the name of lanes. And at every opening, every breathing place, on the ruined landings and crumbling footpaths, there gathers a repulsive crowd of old women with faces like sorceresses, mothers dirty and pallid and worn, daughters of all ages in rags and tatters, boys half naked, sickly, wallowing in the filth; beggars with every variety of disease and deformity; men, porters or fisher folk of savage look capable of everything evil, and among this human swarm a phlegmatic policeman, accustomed to the hopeless throng, and not only familiarised but familiar with it!'*⁷⁰

This however was the first time a visitor gave a physical description of the inhabitants. The image portrayed is not a positive one and one of great concern. Jules Verne was also the one to first describe the residents of *Il-Mandraġġ* as rascals. When in the same novel Verne comes to describe the villain Carpena, he uses the depiction of the residents of *Il-Mandraġġ* as the model for comparison. He wrote that,⁷¹

'The precocious young bandit who became so intimate with him, who took the lead of all the rascality in the Manderaggio, and boasted to have already such a history that every page of it would bring him the rope in Malta, the guillotine in Italy, and the garrote in Spain, who looked with the deepest contempt at the poltroons whom the very sight of a policeman rendered uneasy'.

This description of the poor from the *Manderaggio* as being lawbreakers and criminals would stick as part of the identity of the locality. While it is true that in such an environment children were taught to fend for themselves from a very young age (and possibly to bring home a penny or some bread to share) and a time when most workingmen carried pocket knives. In this novel, the villain Carpena was given as living in *Il-Mandraġġ* at *'the bottom of the barrel'*.

⁷⁰. Jules Verne, *Mathias Sandorf*, iii, 5, 1885, 391-392.

⁷¹. *ibid.*, 404.

The Lieutenant-Governor Sir Walter Francis Hely-Hutchinson, Vice President and Chief Secretary to Government, referred to the '*unsanitary state of the Mediterranean*' and to the fresh outbreaks in Malta and the situation of sewers in various areas of Valletta, particularly at *Il-Mandraġġ* and *Strada San Giuseppe*, both being slum areas⁷² in a debate at the Council of Government on 24 February 1886. Such a reference expresses the colonial consciousness and reaction to what was stated at the time about this area in the international press. This social consciousness became even more vociferous after the 1887 cholera epidemic, the dwellings of those infected were being disinfected and the isolation of patients remained on the cards. Such measures found resistance among the inhabitants of *il-Mandraġġ*, however, the authorities succeeded in enforcing discipline and regulation.⁷³ At the same time, the authorities sought to diminish the negative impact such an event could have had on Malta. Even though the Report on the Cholera Epidemic of 1887 stated, '*there were few cases in the Manderaggio*', special attention was still given to this locality because the same medical professionals that compiled this Report recognised that 'their number represents one-fourth of all the casualties which occurred in Valletta'.⁷⁴ Thus, in terms of density, the rate of death was considered disturbing.

Such degrading and distasteful depictions, in both English and French publications which were read internationally, raised concern about the situation of *il-Mandraġġ*. Still, there was no political will to act. In 1887 Malta was hit by the cholera epidemic⁷⁵ again and there was a consensus that the epidemic had started in India. In any event, cholera spread to Europe with the movement of people and commerce, which since it was also happening in Malta, reached the island and became known as the Asiatic Disease. Therefore, this discussion was expressed in the local and foreign press from the early 1880s onwards.

⁷². NAM, *Debates of the council of government of Malta in the session 1876-77, Volume 8, Sittings 38 to 58, (1885-86)*, (Malta, Government Printing Office, 1887), 267.

⁷³. Arpa, 24.

⁷⁴. NAM, S. L. Pisani, *Report on the Cholera Epidemic 1887*, (Malta, Government Printing Press, 1888), GMR313, 13.

⁷⁵. Carmelo Arpa, *Final Report by the President of the Cholera Central Sub-Committee*, GMR316, 16

Keeping these problems in mind, to understand the infrastructure of the proposed project, reference is to be made to a plan in the Archives of the Works Department at Floriana, previously known as the Chief Draftsman's Office (CD Office). The department holds records of works concerning interventions in *Il-Mandraġġ*. Unfortunately, due to its age, the quality of the material and discolouration, the handwriting on this plan is slightly blurred but remains legible.⁷⁶ The legend reads,

'Sketch plan of the Manderaggio, showing in dark red the approximate extent of the property to be acquired for the formation of streets and the erection of new buildings, and in light red the property (housing extensions from the Manderaggio and lying under the buildings having their entrances from the outer street entrances of the Manderaggio) which will be buried under the new level of the ground'.

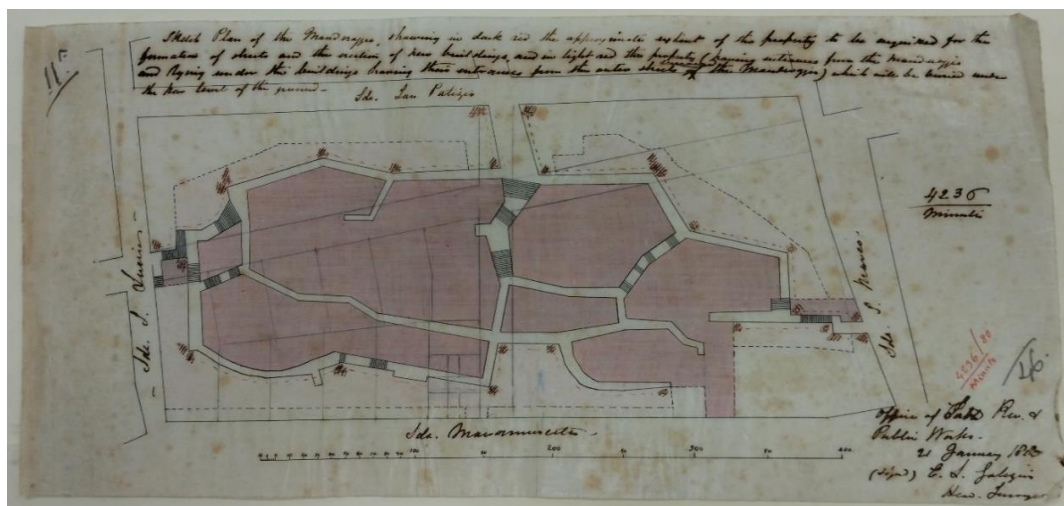


Fig. 39. A plan dated 1880 showing the proposed crossroad dividing the Manderaggio indicated in pencil.⁷⁷ (AWD).

Further below is 'Minute 4236/80' in red ink, signed on 21 January 1880 by 'E. L. Galizia, Head Surveyor, Public Works'. The new roads were intended to link West Street from St Lucia Street on the right with Biagio Steps from St Mark Street on the left, and St John Street was to cut straight through to Marsamxett Road. While this plan by Galizia did not materialise, this idea continued to be aired in government circles in the following years.

⁷⁶. WDA, Folder 11F: 'Valletta', Sheet No. 46.

⁷⁷. Folio, *Valletta*, 11A/46, AWD.

The 1887 cholera epidemic led to the report in which the notion that *Il-Mandraġġ* needed to be demolished was expressed for the first time. The reason given was a repetition of what had been stated before on the sanitary conditions in the location following the previous cholera outbreak in Malta.⁷⁸ The compiling of the report was left in the hands of a commission made up of Professor Saviour L. Pisani, L. Colahan, C. Arpa, and Osbert Chadwick. In their preliminary report, it was stated that,

'The Manderaggio is one of the principal places which in our opinion is unfit for habitation, which cannot be improved. At least, it requires such a radical alteration, that expropriation of almost the whole property is necessary. Situated in Valletta, crowded with a poor population, it is liable, at any moment, to become a focus of disease, so long as it continues in its present condition. We recommend, therefore, that the attention of the Government be specially called to the paramount necessity of improving the Manderaggio. The first step will be to provide new dwellings for the people, who now inhabit the Manderaggio. We suggest the neighbourhood of Blata-el-baida near Hamrun, as favourable for this purpose. It is not inconveniently far from the Harbour, which supports a larger number of the population if dispersed...'

The Commission concluded *that*,

'The condition of the Manderaggio is so serious, and its complete improvement so extensive an operation, that we recommend that, as a tentative measure, the interior be opened up by the demolition of certain buildings on the side of the Marsamuschetto bastion and, opening two cross streets'.⁷⁹

Reference to *Il-Mandraġġ* is found again in the final report which published the findings, under the heading '*Final report, Malta Cholera Central Sub-Committee*'. Carmelo Arpa was the Chief Government Medical Officer⁸⁰ and the Civil Engineers Osbert Chadwick and Dr Constantino Giorgio Schinas were entrusted with studying and designing the proposal of the cross streets and making it fit in the gridiron street pattern of Valletta⁸¹ (Fig. 39). The concluding report recommended the demolishing of a section of *Il-*

⁷⁸. Dianne Spiteri, 29.

⁷⁹. S. L. Pisani, *Report submitted to the Governor*, 3.

⁸⁰. Arpa, 16.

⁸¹. Malcolm Borg, 125.

Mandraġġ by forming two significant crossing streets to 'bring more sunlight and air into the area'.⁸² In his report, Arpa recommended not only the demolition of houses in the area but also the filling of the void and all that was below the levels of the adjacent street. This 'crossroad' would have been constructed in the centre of *il-Mandraġġ*, which is at the area's lowest point. The result would have been a mega-project practically involving the entire area of *il-Mandraġġ*, which would have been more reasonable than planning the demolition of the whole area. However, this project was not implemented due to the counterargument that the area would suffer a gross negative effect from such an intervention. First, the area was considered too deep and the recommended infilling was not adequate, such that creating a crossroad in the middle of the *Mandraġġ* would not have solved matters as the sun rays would still not have penetrated the lower areas. Secondly, there was the problem of where all the material for so much infill was to come from. Would the building rubble from the structures intended to be demolished be enough to infill this depth? This was not very likely. In those days, demolishing houses to be replaced by more modern structures was still unheard of. Moreover, the stones taken from demolished houses were reused because quarrying rocks was arduous. Furthermore, there were no mega projects at the time that could produce aggregate building material that could be used to infill the area. Such big projects would only start to materialise after 1901. Thirdly, there was the problem of where to relocate the residents and issues of social resistance, as not all the residents were keen on leaving the area.

Malcolm Borg discussed this proposal, which resulted from the reports by the Civil Engineers Osbert Chadwick and Dr Constantino Giorgio Schinas. Borg noted that the resulting plans fit in the gridiron street pattern of Valletta.⁸³ Borg also agreed that levelling the depressed ground of the *Manderaggio* would have required large quantities of material. This meant an expense that the government of the time did not have the means or willingness to meet.

⁸². Arpa, 24.

⁸³. Malcolm Borg, 125.

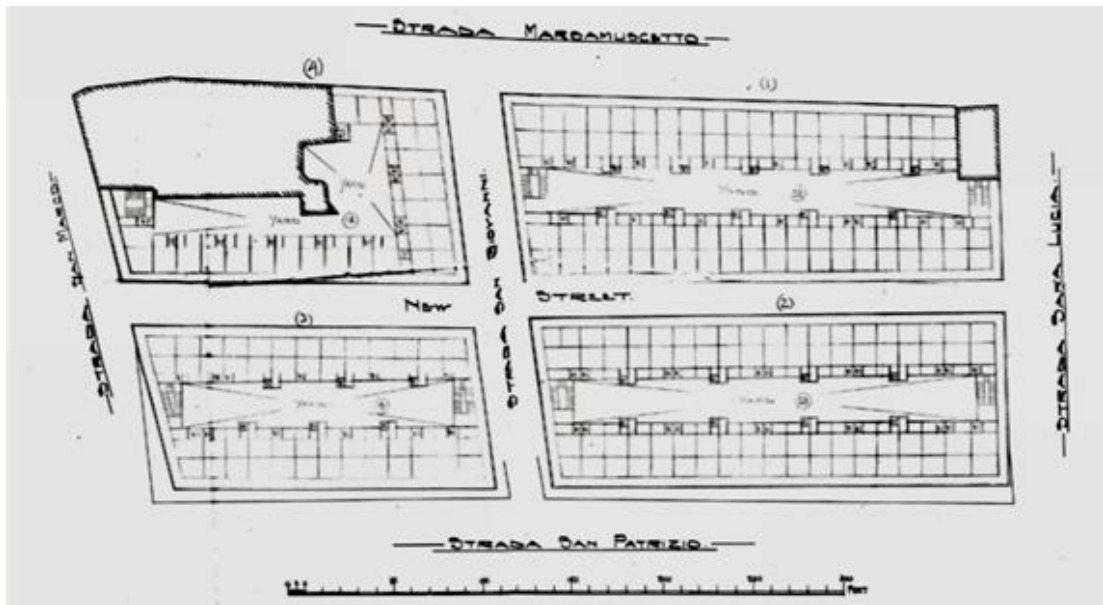


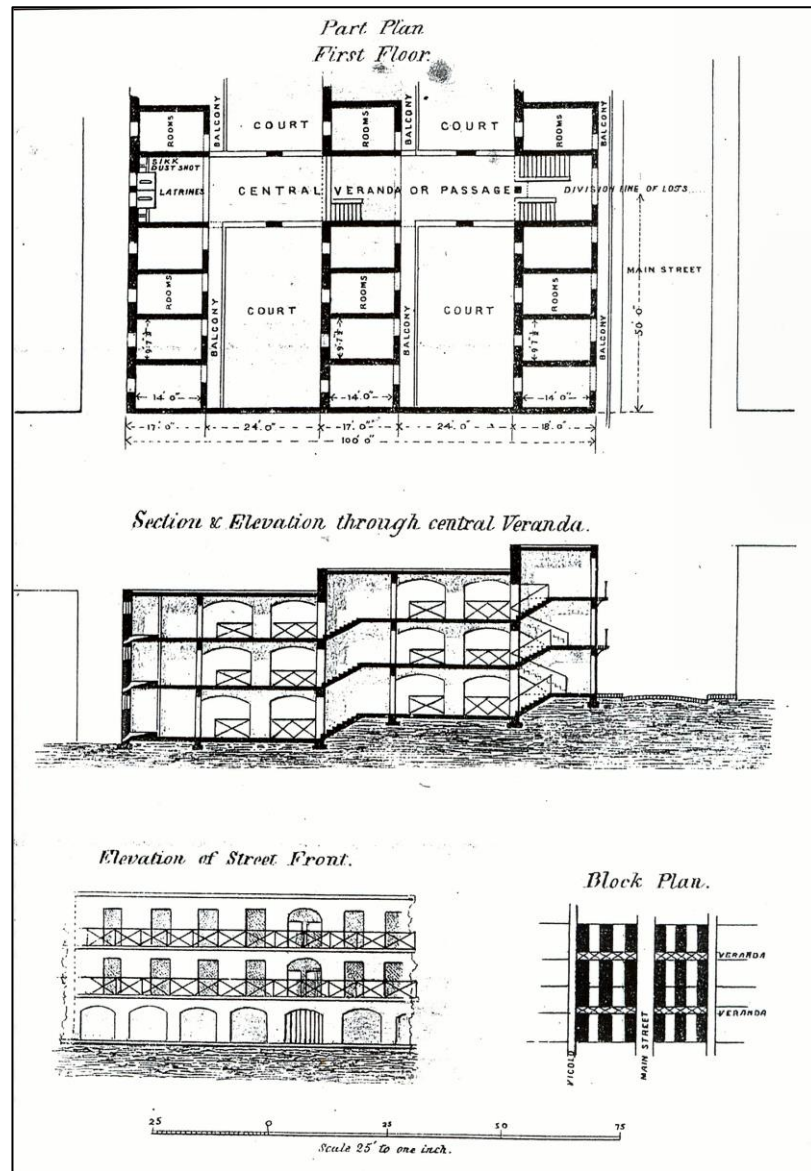
Fig. 40. The second plan for crossroad (*New Street*) and proposed new dwellings for workers set around a central courtyard. (AWD)⁸⁴

All these difficulties led to the formulation of a second plan. In this second plan (Fig. 40), there was a proposal to construct four new blocks to serve as a residential unit. These blocks were to be built around a typical internal yard. Unfortunately, only a cross-section of this second project has survived. Looking at this plan, one immediately notices that the proposed blocks resembled military barracks, which was the architectural idiom of the time.

The design for the blocks at the *Il-Mandraġġ* was based on the Victorian model⁸⁵ and, although not final, were similar to the dwellings suggested for Żabbar, Żejtun and Qormi (Fig. 41). Borg considered this proposal to have been do-able, and more importantly, it was in line with the sanitary theories of the time because they took into consideration light and ventilation. This project still did not go through because of difficulties related to the street patterns, as there was disagreement about whether the streets should follow Valletta's grid pattern or the curved contours of the land. Furthermore, Schinas and the sub-committee responsible for drainage agreed that there was difficulty in linking the area to the drainage system. Structural problems hindered any attempt to link the area to the sewage system, and thus, the whole project could not materialise.

⁸⁴. AWD, PW1159/36, no minute reference.

⁸⁵. Borg, 128.



3.06 Commissions, Infrastructure and *il-Mandraġġ*

In 1866, Edward Tonna showed the need for Valletta to have a proper drainage system, leading to the introduction of drainage in Valletta, Floriana and the Three Cities, *il-Mandraġġ* was not connected to the system. Perhaps this would be another reason this area started being associated with squalor. By 1885, Valletta would have its drainage system completed. Glazed earthenware pipes

⁸⁶. Malcolm Borg, 127.

linked the drainage of Valletta with the area known as *San Rocco* in Xgħajra, where it was discharged into the sea at a considerable distance from the two harbours.⁸⁷

The reasons why *Il-Mandraġġ* was omitted can be found in a debate in the Council of Government held in 1886. Referring to the words of the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, in the sitting of 3 March 1886, Dr Zaccaria Roncali of the *Partito Anti-Riformista* (Anti-Reform Party),⁸⁸ referred to the vote of £1,800, part of which was to be directed for sewer works at *Il-Mandraġġ*, the slaughterhouse (*Il-Biċċerija*) in St Christopher Street and Saint Joseph Street. Dr Agostino Naudi, a council member, supported the argument that the Colonial Government had to finance such a project and should not expect the Civil Government to cover the expenses. In his reply to Roncali and Naudi, Hely-Hutchinson remarked that *Il-Mandraġġ* and lower parts of Valletta would remain suffering from this nuisance and that '*we should not have paid special attention to this one*'.⁸⁹ Simply put, the Lieutenant-Governor admitted that the sewers at *Il-Mandraġġ* were never intended to be part of these plans (Fig. 42). For this reason, Dr Naudi insisted that the separate discharge points at *Il-Mandraġġ* polluted the entire Marsamxett side of Valletta and Saint Joseph Street, reflecting the gravity of the situation.

However, while admitting the urgency in remodelling the sanitary system at *Il-Mandraġġ* due to the prevailing health situation, Hely-Hutchinson informed the Council *members* that the new system was not on the project books because 'no military officer had made any reports that the sewers at *Il-Mandraġġ* require remodelling'. Thus, the drainage would continue being discharged into the sea at Marsamxett. Instead, Hely-Hutchinson conceded that the sum of £60 or £70 would be allocated for the repair of the bad pavements at *il-Mandraġġ*. However, he considered this money to be wasted since the sewers were to be remodelled later,⁹⁰ meaning that the pavements were to be excavated and redone anew.

⁸⁷. The Army Medical Department and the Malta Garrison, 1886, *Sanitary Reform*, Retrieved on 14 Mar. 2023: https://www.maltaramc.com/regsurg/rs1880_1889/rmo1886.html

⁸⁸. Frendo (Ed.), 23.

⁸⁹. NAM, *Debates, 1876-1877*, 278.

⁹⁰. *ibid*, 279.

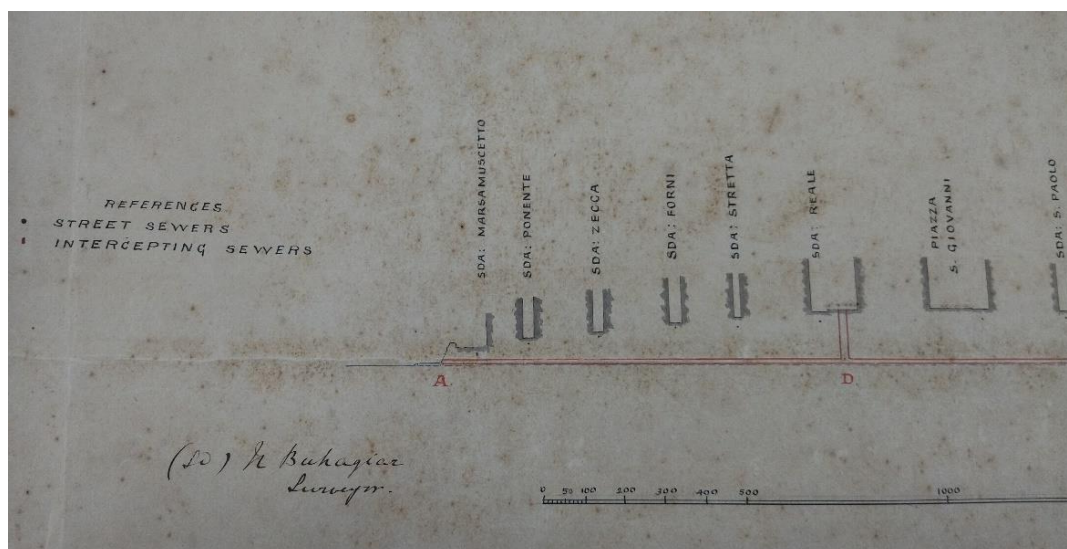


Fig. 42. Section from a chart showing the proposed sewer line not connected to *il-Mandraġġ*.⁹¹

It is difficult to ascertain whether it was *laissez-faire* by the British Colonial Administration, reluctance by Britain to finance the project or that there was not any urgency since it did not affect the garrison – though this last assumption would appear to be contradicted by numerous reports indicating that the troops and their dependents were always amongst the first to suffer in most outbreaks.

3.07 The Population of Il-Mandraġġ in the late 19th century

Malta of the 1880s was a prime military garrison and transit post and the presence of just the army in Malta, which at the time consisted of eight infantry regiments and three supporting corps that totalled some 8,800 men, 370 wives and 582 children,⁹² excluding the figures for the local troops and the Royal Navy. Regiments stationed in Malta would split their strength for space and sanitary reasons, having half of the soldiers billeted in barracks and half in tents. The navy had a similar approach, and sailors were billeted either in barracks or hulks, the latter being ships that were no longer active, demasted and anchored in harbours and served multiple purposes.

⁹¹. AWD, *Section of Valletta showing the proposed tunnel and shaft, Valletta*, Folio 11, Plan 40A.

⁹². NAM, *Monthly Returns of the Malta Garrison, January – December 1880*, WO 73/21.

Any potential relocation of the inhabitants of *Il-Mandraġġ* would not be simple. In later decades, when the garrison was reduced due to rotation or wars in different locations, the vacant military barracks would have been ideal, even if temporarily. The old forts and casemates within the fortifications built by the Order of St John, previously used by soldiers and their families, were unhygienic. St George's Barracks at the Pembroke Encampment, which commenced in 1860, was occupied and Mtarfa barracks were then still being planned,⁹³ The towns we know today were still villages then and the villages were as large as what is referred to today as the village core. The cities, mainly those around the Grand Harbour, were receiving a constant influx of villagers who came to work in the cities or with the British services.⁹⁴ Even religious convents were well-occupied at the time. Although a list for temporary rehoming was planned, it is also doubtful and improbable that the government would be prepared to construct new dwellings outside of Valletta to 'temporarily accommodate' the inhabitants of *Il-Mandraġġ*.⁹⁵

If this move of residents from *Il-Mandraġġ* was to be implemented, this was quite a large percentage of the population of this part of Valletta. Relocation was to be conducted very gradually and hopefully not to be problematic. Although these plans could be executed, one also had to consider the opinion of the residents. No matter what was said about the *Manderaggio*, most residents were happy living there. In her dissertation, Dianne Spiteri referred to the close-knit community of *Il-Mandraġġ* and the fact that they enjoyed this living even though it meant a lot of hardship. Her reference to families and even individuals who would help their neighbours, even if they held past grudges, is not an exaggeration, and neither had anyone ever died of hunger, even if food was short in any household. This fatalistic approach induced residents to express opposition to any project of re-allocation.

⁹³ Denis A. Darmanin, '*Pembroke, from a British Garrison to a Modern Civilian Town*', (Malta, Pembroke Local Council, 2010), 11.

⁹⁴ Said-Zammit, George A., *The Development of Domestic Space in the Maltese Islands from the Late Middle Ages to the Second Half of the Twentieth Century*, 1, Dissertation for Doctor degree at Leiden University, Netherlands, 2016, 138.

⁹⁵ *Final report, Malta Cholera Central Sub-Committee*, Carmelo Arpa, (Government Printing Office, Malta, 1888), GMR 316, NAM. (Additional references on the cholera and epidemics that included *il-Mandraġġ*).

It is also a known fact previously referred to elsewhere in this dissertation by the author and historians and authors in their work, that various renowned names in the confectionery, music, sports and catering business were from *il-Mandraġġ*. However, the main problem was not hardship but hygiene. It was obvious to the authorities that had the project come into effect, there would have been much objection and protest.

Carmel Agius shares the common understanding that by the end of the 19th century, *il-Mandraġġ* was not only overcrowded but one of the worst areas in Valletta. It was a slum that lacked sanitary facilities but still held the highest fertility rate in the parish.⁹⁶ *Il-Mandraġġiari*, as the residents of this area are called in Maltese, 'were living in an unhealthy environment in that area. Reports throughout the years bombarded the government to get rid of that disgraceful area but no one took the initiative'.⁹⁷ Agius also gives details about illegitimate births during this period born to women at *il-Mandraġġ*. Of particular interest are letters from Captains of ships of the Royal Navy to the Governor to inform the Government Chief Medical Officer of those particular sailors who had contracted venereal disease or syphilis from women at Strait Street and other locations in Valletta, inclusive of names and addresses, for which the Captains are citing under *Article 144 of the Station Order Book*, (Page 40). Prostitution was rife in the city due to the low standards of living and the many sailors of the Royal Navy who had money to spend when ashore.⁹⁸ However, *il-Mandraġġ* does not appear as a place for prostitution in these reports.

What can be stated with certainty is that the increase in the population of Valletta meant that more dwellings were added, and more rooms started to serve as the abode for more than one family. These hygiene issues and the lack of drinking water meant that, as noted above, drinking water had to be brought from public sources introduced in the area by the Order. However, this may not have been considered unclean because families had to resort to public fountains for water in many other places in Malta. Thus, these conditions were not seen as bad as they may appear today in our contemporary standards.

⁹⁶. C. Agius, 63.

⁹⁷. *ibid*, 50.

⁹⁸. NAM, CSG, 01-1879, 18:2551-2700.

What was problematic was the issue of overcrowding, which exposed the residents to different diseases and epidemics, such as measles and typhoid, but, at the same time, increased the immune systems of those who were either physically strong or lucky enough not to succumb.



Fig. 43. '*Mattia Preti Distributing Alms to the Poor*', Giuseppe Cali. (MUZA Collection, Malta)

The memory of the area as a place of elite residents did not die out. By the end of the nineteenth century, the memory remained that the area of *Il-Mandraġġ* was a place where dignitaries of the Order lived. At the same time, the residents had to reconcile this past reality with their current situation, where *Il-Mandraġġ* was seen as a place inhabited by poor people. The work of local painter Giuseppe Cali' encompassed both of these realities. Thus, Cali' represented one of the houses of *Il-Mandraġġ*, the palace inhabited by the renowned seventeenth-century painter Mattia Preti, combined with the figure of Preti giving alms to the poor (Fig. 43). Perhaps this painting represents the general perception created in the nineteenth century, of poor people who inhabited this area after the camber project was abandoned and then being converted for residential use. Segregation of the poor from the rich within the

cities is more reflective of the nineteenth-century than the seventeenth-century fortified city. Such a social stratification is a nineteenth-century reality where the elite advanced policies of confining the poor to particular sections of the town.⁹⁹

3.08 Other *Manderaggio* or *Mandraġġ*

This *Manderaggio* at *Birgu* (Fig. 44) had an earlier, but parallel history with the *Mandraġġ* of Valletta. What is particular about the topography of the *Manderaggio* at *Birgu* is that this is also a very low-level ground, even though the level did not reach as low as the actual sea level. Whether or not the *Mandraġġ tal-Birgu* was meant to be a camber, as was later intended for Valletta, both localities still shared the same namesake and stigma because of their lowly inhabitants and overcrowding, as can be attested from the designs of the houses. They were all houses rebuilt in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, with multiple floors and façade designs reflecting the typical style of the 19th century to accommodate population increase. Only the *Manderaggio* of *Bormla* did not go through this process, which resulted in the inhabitants stopping referring to this area by such a name. When the British intervened and made structural changes to this locality, by the second half of the 19th century it ceased to be called *Il-Manderaggio*. The intervention in *Bormla* was undertaken in the 1830s. By the end of the century, all reference to this term ceased as by then, this word started to stand for a slum area and this area in *Bormla* continued to be inhabited by the elite, and thus, had a vested interest not to continue being referred to by its original name.

The sanitary situation in Malta could not remain in the dire state of affairs that it had existed for so long. This problem would only be tackled more effectively in the 20th century. Until this happened, only standard basic precautions were taken, followed by endless reports and debates, but no concrete action, as evidenced by this analysis for the late 19th century.

⁹⁹. Simon Mercieca, 'Spazi pubblici e controllo sociale : uno studio di alcuni aspetti demografici e urbanistici a La Valletta', *Istituzioni, assistenza e religiosità nella società del Mezzogiorno d'Italia tra XVIII e XIX secolo*, i, (2009), 103-121.

and dwellings, particularly those at the lowest levels of the camber, lacked access to basic hygienic facilities due to the public drainage system's inability to reach these areas. This exacerbated the unplanned and makeshift urban development characteristic of this century. Despite calls for reform and ambitious plans for regeneration, particularly towards the end of the century, political inertia, logistical challenges, and social resistance consistently obstructed meaningful progress.

Nonetheless, *Il-Mandraġġ* serves as a microcosm of the broader transformations within Maltese society under British rule. Despite adversity, the 19th century reveals a strong community among its residents, with authorities gradually acknowledging their resilience against change. As *Il-Mandraġġ* transitioned into a slum, its name became a national symbol of deprivation, often used metaphorically to describe situations resembling or bearing the characteristics of a slum.

As conditions worsened and the population increased, political pressures mounted, highlighting the urgent need to address systemic inequalities. The next chapter will explore these issues and their implications for urban planning and governance.

Chapter 4: *Il-Mandraġġ* in the Political Discussion of the Early Twentieth Century

4.01 Housing, Hygiene, and the Political Situation

In his section of the book entitled '*Slum Clearance and Improvement*', J. Barry Cullingworth describes that the housing in many of the larger cities in Britain, just like in France and Spain, dates from the industrialisation period of the 19th-century urban growth and that most of the 'unfit houses' were built before 1919¹, although he states that 70% of pre-1919 dwellings were '*not unfit*'. The situation at *Il-Mandraġġ* does not appear to have been different. From all those buildings above street level, mainly the *kerreja*, only forty dwellings had a WC connected to the main sewer and eleven dwellings had water services. Those in the pit of the *Mandraġġ* had no sanitary services.²

Work on the *Marsamuscetto* sewerage pumping station commenced between 1906 and 1907. A 22BHP Engine and Pumps were installed at the cost of £380.³ The station is located in the corner below St Sebastian's Curtain and German Curtain, but *Il-Mandraġġ* was too distant and could not be connected at the time.

Cullingworth was not the only author who referred to slums and slum clearance in major European cities. In his introduction to the book *Slums*, S. Martin Gaskell gives a detailed description of the structure of a slum, which applies to the ones in Valletta,

'Slums were cheek by jowl with wealthy and respectable neighbourhoods. They were isolated and physically cut off from them in a way which reinforced their basic characteristics of terrible housing, foul drainage and inadequate sewerage, abundance of bugs and dirt, extreme unhealthiness and populations of transients, criminals and the unskilled living in extreme insecure and impoverished circumstances. The reality of such areas was to make

¹. Cullingworth, 69.

². Critien, 18.

³. NAM, PDE 0026-010-001-001, 'Information given to Colonel G.H. Hemming during his visit to Malta', Lorenzo Gatt, Private Deposit, *Statement of Drainage works showing costs to Govt. of Malta and Imperial Govt.*, Sheet 2, (1912).

them a 'problem' because they persisted as a source of shame within otherwise beautiful and improving cities'.⁴

When the word 'slum' is mentioned repeatedly, an ugly picture of the area and its inhabitants comes to mind, but rarely, if ever, is any thought given to how the inhabitants ended up there and how they 'really' lived. This picture is often based on our current quality of living or could be rooted in the perspective of these areas left by the higher levels of society.

At the turn of the 20th century, the British were more interested in continuing to expand Malta as a naval base and a military transit post and garrison than in looking at the general welfare of the Maltese nation. Less were they interested in the situation in *Il-Mandraġġ* and none of the housing projects for the workers that started in the early twentieth century factored *Il-Mandraġġ* into the equation. The British preferred to focus on urban expansion beyond the walled cities rather than indulging in the regeneration or redevelopment of Valletta and including *il-Mandraġġ*.⁵

The Maltese workers, in particular the day labourers, suffered from an economy that was not always stable. Many at the time worked on definitive contracts. It was common for workers on definitive or 'casual' agreements to work at the dockyards. The economy of Malta was heavily based on military and naval spending, and several people in Valletta depended directly or indirectly on military and naval expenditure. The people of *Il-Mandraġġ* were not an exception. Even though very few were directly employed by British services, they still benefited and based their earnings on this economic driver.

Then there was the construction industry. This flourished under British rule. Contractors were engaged in the building of many of the naval establishments, especially within the harbours and in the coastal defence program, where a series of forts and other strategic defensive inland lines were

⁴ S. Martin Gaskell (Ed.), *Slums*, (Leicester, England, 1990), 1.

⁵ Melvin Caruana, *An analysis of Public Works in Malta during the interwar period, 1919-1939*, (Unpublished B. A. Honours dissertation, U.O.M., 2009), 52.

erected, mainly overlooking the sea approaches to Grand Harbour and Marsamxett Harbour⁶ that were the lifeline of the islands.⁷

It is evident that *Il-Mandraġġ* was prone to diseases and epidemics due to being overcrowded and the dire living conditions. In the 19th century, the prevalent disease was cholera, while the disease of the early twentieth century became typhus and *Undulant Fever*, the latter also known as *Mediterranean Fever*. The cause was the consumption of unpasteurised milk from goats. When discussing the 'Deaths caused by contagious diseases', Marie Christine Bezzina quotes what Doctor R. W. Johnstone had written in the report *On the Sanity Circumstances and Prevalence of Mediterranean Fever in the Maltese Islands*,⁸

'That between 1899 and 1904, the apparent accumulation of cases in the Manderaggio, in Strada S. Giuseppe and in Strada Pozzi were due to the simple fact that such quarters were overcrowded. The district consisted mainly of common lodging houses, each containing many families. Moreover, an aggregation of cases of this fever in one place may be more infective than the same number spread over a large area'.

Bezzina continues to illustrate the density of habitation in *Il-Mandraġġ*. The population of Malta was around 170,000 of whom 2,544 lived in *Il-Mandraġġ*.⁹ Diane Spiteri calculated that on the eve of the First World War, the average number of inhabitants in the Manderaggio per room was 2.54.¹⁰ Spiteri relied on Critien for this figure which she included in a chart listing the inhabitants of Valletta. This meant an increase of 2.39 from 1881 regarding the average number of persons per room.¹¹

The same squalid situation, if not worse, was expressed in 'The Mediterranean: Its Storied Cities and Venerable Ruins',¹²

⁶ Stephen C. Spiteri, *The British Fortifications: An Illustrated Guide to the British Fortifications in Malta*, (self-published, Malta, 1991), 9.

⁷ *ibid.*, 11.

⁸ M. C. Bezzina, 25.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Diane Spiteri, 22-24.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 21.

¹² T. G. Bonney, et, 275.

*'...the Manderaggio, a quasi-subterranean district, mostly below sea-level, where the houses are often without windows and conveniences even more important; so that there is an unconscious grimness in the prophetic humor which had dubbed this quarter of Valletta 'the place of cattle'.*¹³

The expression 'place of cattle' reflects how this area was seen. Being a depressed area deep within the ground, it was seen as a pen where herds were kept. In Italian, the equivalent is *mandria*, which has even entered Maltese with negative connotations. The expression *tagħmel mandra* is equivalent to 'make a mess'. This expresses the level of squalor present in this area at the time, resulting from its overpopulation.

4.02 The First Two Decades

The years between 1910 and 1920 were a decade of great events in many ways. For many people in Malta, including certain families of *Il-Mandraġġ*, these years (particularly the First World War) were a godsend. Unfortunately for some families, they also had negative and sorrowful results.

Records show that some men from *Il-Mandraġġ*, even if only a few, succeeded in enrolling in the Royal Navy. One family had reason to grieve. In the Battle of Jutland, a naval battle fought in 1918, many Maltese seamen were killed in action. One particular sailor, Giuseppe Debattista who hailed from *Il-Mandraġġ* was a fireman-stoker in the boiler room on HMS *Louvain* and died along with many other shipmates when the ship was sunk.¹⁴ This family lost one of its members and breadwinners.

In 1917, a highly contagious epidemic known as the Spanish Flu broke out in Europe. Between 1918 and 1919, it also reached Malta. The first phase did not affect the local population so severely, but the two consecutive phases were quickly transmitted and more severe. Influenza also reached the people of *Il-Mandraġġ*, likely due to their connection to maritime activities and

¹³. M. C. Bezzina, 25.

¹⁴. MGG, 8501, 19 Nov. 1938, 1301, 'Died 20 January 1918, Age 33 years. He was a Stoker-Fireman on the Armed Boarding Steamer HMS *Louvain*, which was torpedoed by the German U-boat U22 in the Aegean Sea'.

overpopulation. The official police records for the deaths in Valletta during the epidemic were not located, however, it was normal practice that those who fell sick from infectious diseases were taken to the *Lazaretto* isolation hospital at Manoel Island and any deaths are registered at the Sliema police station. In the Police Occurrences Book for Valletta, Giuseppe Azzopardi was reported to have died at home at 66 *Strada Manderaggio*.¹⁵ He is recorded as having died from bronchial pneumonia, the main cause of death during this influenza pandemic.¹⁶ On a positive note, the overpopulation and previous exposures to different epidemics helped the residents of *Il-Mandraġġ* reach herd immunity. According to Lorraine Tripp, '*The only intrinsic factor operating in the Maltese islands was variation in host immunity as a result of prior exposure, isolation and rurality*'.¹⁷

In the aftermath of the cessation of hostilities, Malta suffered a surge in unemployment including at the dockyard. Since fewer ships, troops and commerce reached our harbours, Malta lost the boost that wars or conflicts usually bring. Once the war boom was over, casual workers were laid off from the Dockyard¹⁸ and other services. There was unemployment¹⁹ and a rise in the prices of food which brought poverty amongst the lower class,²⁰ including at *Il-Mandraġġ*. According to Ellul Galea,²¹ men from *Il-Mandraġġ* worked alongside him at H.M. *Dockyard* and were such excellent tradesmen that no

¹⁵. Pol. 1 - Valletta, *Police Occurrences Book*, Report 5142, (14 Oct. 1918), NAM.

¹⁶. Jeffery Taubenberger and David Morens, 'Bacterial Pneumonia Caused Most Deaths in 1918 Influenza Pandemic', Extract from: *The Journal of Infectious Diseases*, (19 Aug. 2008), Retrieved on 5 June 2024 from [Bacterial Pneumonia Caused Most Deaths in 1918 Influenza Pandemic, August 19, 2008 News Release - National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2008/s081918influenza.html)

¹⁷. Lianne Tripp, *Early Twentieth Century Infectious Diseases in the Colonial Mediterranean*, Unpublished Ph. D. University of Toronto, Canada, 2017), 97, Retrieved on 28 May 2024 from: <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1992776952?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true&Sourcetype=Dissertations%20&%20Theses>.

¹⁸. Morana Martin, 'The Sette Giugno Affair', *KLIEMUSTORJA; L-istorja u l-kultura tal-gżejjer Maltin bil-kliem u r-ritratti*, Retrieved on 13 Jan 2025 from: <https://kliemustorja.com/2024/06/05/the-sette-giugno-affair>.

¹⁹- Zarb-Dimech, Anthony, 'Malta During The Great War', *KLIEMUSTORJA; L-istorja u l-kultura tal-gżejjer Maltin bil-kliem u r-ritratti*, Retrieved on 13 Jan 2024 from: <https://kliemustorja.com/2024/08/06/the-great-war-malta>

²⁰. Zarb-Dimech, Anthony, *The Dockyard Benefit Society: The state of the economy during the late 1920s*, *The Malta Independent*, 6 Aug. 2023.

²¹. Karmenu Ellul Galea was the husband of my maternal aunt and my Godfather, and with whom I regularly discussed historic events and issues when visiting him.

one would have guessed that they hailed from either the *Birgu* or the Valletta *Mandraġġ*.

The main professions of other men from *Il-Mandraġġ* were lowly jobs.²² Those on the high-end jobs were fishermen, stevedores, sailors, labourers, and those who dabbled in contraband. The authorities tolerated the contraband trade. There was a sort of cottage industry within this confined space such as the rolling of tobacco and cigarettes by families at their homes, either for a company operating in Valletta or to sell as hawkers on certain streets,²³ offering another form of income. Others baked pastries or made sweets,²⁴ various pickled products, including small onions, olives and capers. At the lower end, there were the beggars and the scavengers.

Due to this post-war recession, prices began to rise, especially on essential commodities, significantly increasing the bread tax, which constituted the basis of the staple diet of most Maltese. There was the post-war rundown, and workers, especially the casual ones, were laid off from the dockyard. Others whose work was connected with the services also suffered with the departure of many ships, soldiers and other entities associated with the war effort. This led the Maltese to raise their voices and demand better rights. By 1918, ‘...many people were virtually living on bread alone’,²⁵ and protests started to follow. The famous Bread Riots of 7 June 1919, locally known as the *Sette Giugno* riots, resulted in the death of six Maltese. The people of *Il-Mandraġġ* shared and felt all of these social pressures to the extent that men from *Il-Mandraġġ* participated in the riots. The result was that one man from *Il-Mandraġġ* had lost his life, others were wounded, and others were arrested for looting from the ransacked buildings.

Although those who held steady employment received reasonable wages, large families with numerous children were greatly affected by the rise in the price of bread. Thus, it should be of no surprise that people from *Il-*

22. PW5519/36: *Report the dwellings, number of residents, gender and occupations of certain streets and those bordering, including scavengers and beggars as their occupations.*

23. Pol. 1 - Valletta, *Police Occurrences Book, A. Division - 1919-1920*, Report 1051, (10 Jan. 1920), NAM.

24. Critien, 16(*) and H. Ganado, i, 308.

25. Fenech, *Endemic Democracy*, 32.

Mandraġġ were among the mob identified to have ransacked the house of Colonel John Louis Francia, one of the leading wheat importers in Malta. Francia and other wheat importers were regarded amongst those held responsible and were accused of the monopoly that caused an increase in the price of bread.²⁶ One of the victims was the 39-year-old Carmelo Abela known as 'Il-Paddy', who resided at 75 *Strada Manderaggio*. He received a bayonet wound when inside the Francia residence in Kingsway, now *Triq ir-Repubblika*, on 8 June and died of his wounds on 15 June. Others were from the streets incorporated with *Il-Mandraġġ*.²⁷ The police reports indicate that many men from *Il-Mandraġġ* were involved inasmuch that the police later conducted a thorough search within the area and confiscated several stolen items, particularly those from the Francia residence.²⁸

4.03 *Il-Mandraġġ* during the Self-Government Period

References to the conditions of *Il-Mandraġġ* started appearing in parliamentary debates once Malta obtained Self-Government in 1921. Unfortunately, the political friction that developed on a party level failed to offer some remedy to the problems at *Il-Mandraġġ*.²⁹ Raymond Mangion states that on 30 September 1926, the Nationalist Government *Partito Nazjonalista* (Nationalist Party) proposed a vote of £15,300 for the construction of dwellings for workmen and development in areas around Valletta and Floriana, using '*special funds rather than the Consolidated Revenue Fund, thereby requiring the cumbersome formalities of Appropriation bills*'³⁰ This subject reflected the differences towards the implementation of the project of rehabilitation of slum

^{26.} *ibid.*, 36.

^{27.} NAM, GMR 745.25 – *Unregistered papers in connection with the June riots: 'List of Persons Wounded or Killed During the Riots of 7th to 9th June 1919'. Killed - Carmelo Abela, 'Il-Paddy', 39 years old of 75 Strada Manderaggio, Valletta. Wounded - from the Il-Mandraġġ and two from a bordering street; Emmanuele Zammit 'Ta` Meloni', 18 years old of the Manderaggio wounded by a bullet) and neighbours Antonio Mifsud, 25 years old and Antonio Drago, 24 years old (both received bayonet wounds) of 23 and 24 Strada San Patrizio, respectively. The others killed were not from Valletta.*

^{28.} NAM, Pol.1, vii, *Prosecution by the Executive Police - Valletta*, 15 June 1919.

^{29.} Raymond Mangion, *Constitutions and Legislation In Malta 1914 - 1964, i, 1914-1933*, (Oxford, England, 2017), 27.

^{30.} *ibid.*, 134.

areas, particularly of *Il-Mandraġġ* between the Constitutional Party and the *Partito Nazionalista*.

It is hard to understand the reason for the strong opposition by Sir Gerald Strickland (CP). Robert V. Galea, who served as a Minister of Health in the government led by the Constitutional Party from 1927 to 1930, labelled the proposal as 'non-viable' and electoral 'vote catching'.³¹ Such an accusation was not without any political basis. Slum clearance in England and the construction of new dwellings were perceived as good measurements for 'vote catching'. However, during this period, the clearance of slums was not seen as a pathway for vote catching, as most of the slum people of Valletta did not have votes. There were only a handful of owners of land within *Il-Mandraġġ*, so politicians were less concerned with the pleas of the inhabitants, as any reforms would not have earned them many votes. Instead, the people of *Il-Mandraġġ* were recruited by the main political parties of the time, that is, the conservative pro-Italian Nationalists and the Imperialist Constitutionalists.

Following the 1927 elections, the Constitutional Party of Lord Strickland won and Strickland formed a coalition government with the Labour Party of Michael Dundon. Strickland introduced legislation, similar to proposals by the Labour Party, aimed at improving the condition of the working classes. However, *Il-Mandraġġ* did not feature in this legislation.

The only improvement experienced was in 1918 when cast-iron hand pumps were introduced in Malta but it was only during the self-government period that they arrived at *Il-Mandraġġ* (Figs. 46 and 47) to supply the residents with better water facilities³². Until these hand pumps were introduced, as noted above the residences were being served by the waters of the fountains that had been installed in the area during the time of the knights.

By 1920, tap water was made available to many houses in Valletta. Again, a small number of dwellings in the *Mandraġġ* area, particularly those of

³¹. Professor Robert V. Galea was Minister of Health in the Constitutional Party from 1927 and 1930 and as one of the consultants to the Governor after the Constitution was suspended between June 1930 and June 1932.

³². MGG, No. 6,442, (Malta, 4 Nov. 1921), 320.

Marsamxett Street, could boast of this commodity (Fig. 45) since this part of the street was considered part of the *Il-Mandraġġ* area.

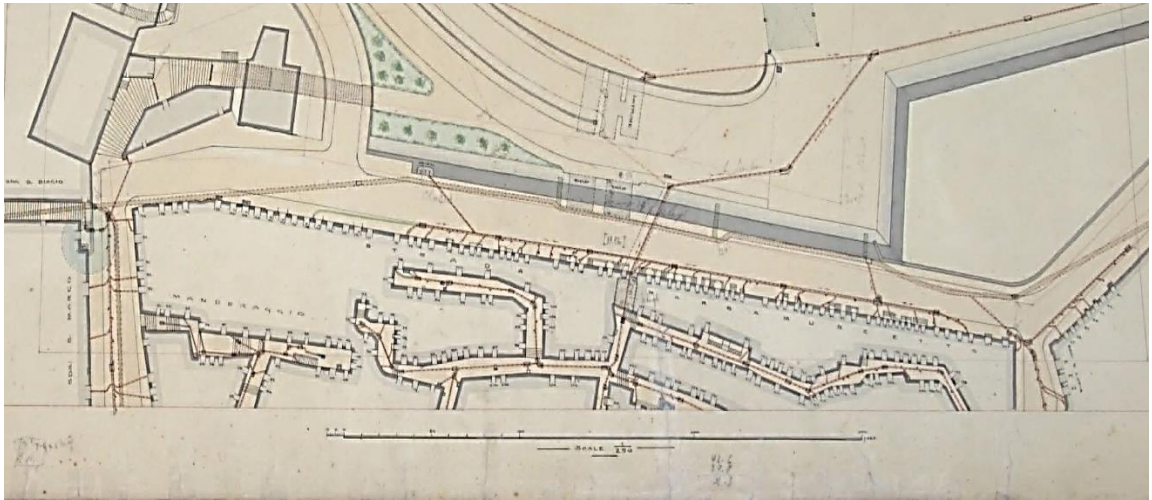


Fig. 45. Plan showing water lines within *Il-Mandraġġ* but only to a few dwellings, while supplying those residences along the abutting Marsamxett Road. (AWD)



Fig. 46. Children with a filled zinc tub at one of hand pumps. (Attilio Critien)



Fig. 47. A hand pump at the top of the stairway. (Attilio Critien)

Thus, despite the increase in population, the services still did not improve, and the sewers continued to remain the same, with small concrete closets in

the corners of certain alleys connected to the drainage passing through underground galleries beneath the buildings. The raw sewerage was flushed out into Marsamxett Harbour. The machinery to process raw sewerage could not be introduced because of the contours and low terrain until the mid-1880s.³³

4.04 The Scheme of 1937

At the time, Malta and Ireland had much in common as both were islands separated from the European mainland by the sea, predominantly Catholic, and part of the British Empire. Scotland and Wales had social problems, but Ireland was looked upon and treated much worse by the English. Even though Malta did not experience famine like Ireland, most Maltese were poor. Ireland became more destitute after the famine, which cannot be compared to Malta. However, certain living conditions, poverty, large families in single rooms, and lack of sanitation were common in both countries. In the case of Malta, these continued to feature in the census taken in the early 1930s. Whether there is a link or psychological conditioning on the British side to avoid the repetition of the Irish mistake in Malta, issues of hygiene and healthcare started to be linked to problems of political unrest. The combination of these issues caused the government to start looking again at what can be described as the *Il-Mandraġġ* problem.

In his article on the city of Waterford,³⁴ Dermot Power recounts that in 1924, just two years after the separation of Ireland from the UK, people in the city were living in the streets. This situation continued in the following decade because on the outskirts of the same town in 1933 ‘.....a man, his wife and eleven children had to sleep in a room seven-foot square and no sanitary

³³. MNL, Drainage Report on the Progress of Works During the Financial Year 1883-1884, (Malta, 1884).

³⁴. Dermot Power, ‘Filth Famine’, Decies Magazine, Waterford Archaeological & Historical Society, Co. Kildare, Eire, 4th page-unpaginated, 2018, Retrieved on 5 Oct. 2023 from: https://e72803b8-f016-42cb-b748-560f12b5f93c.filesusr.com/ugd/04a204_37ffbc519ed4aaab0b07_acc073b8_aad.pdf.

conditions in any of the houses'. Such a description is not much different from what the censors found in *Il-Mandraġġ* in the early 1930s.

The unsanitary conditions in this town continued throughout the following years. Even as late as 1936, twelve people lived in an unsanitary room on the same outskirts. Some 55,110 tenements were erected in the twenty-six counties of Eire, of which 650 tenements were at Waterford.³⁵ Power recalls that by 1939 in just two streets in one of the suburbs of Waterford, new housing consisted of 'seven three-storey tenement dwellings, and 14 single-storey shacks' that accommodated 163 adults and 106 children.³⁶ Therefore, it is not ironic that one of the priorities of the Irish free state was to elevate the dire living conditions of its poor and eradicate slum areas. In Malta, this priority was not expressed by the elected members of the Maltese parliament but by the British colonial authorities ruling the island.

Politics back then was highly inspired by Westminster. During this Self-government period, until this experiment was dissolved in 1933, Britain had its projects for rehabilitating sub-standard areas, which were extensively discussed in the book *Slum Clearance: The Social and Administrative Context in England and Wales*.³⁷ In it, English, Madigan, and Norman discussed introducing the *Housing, Town Planning, Housing, etc. Act of 1921*, explaining that this act did not result in the desired success. Another clearance scheme was the Housing Act of 1930.³⁸ A further scheme was introduced in 1933 but, once again, it did not go through due to the slow rate of their implementation and the outbreak of the Second World War.³⁹

These situations had conditioned policies towards slum clearance in Malta and made slum clearance part of the political agenda of the 1930s. As is

³⁵. *ibid.*

³⁶. *ibid.*

³⁷. John English, Ruth Madigan and Peter Norman, 'Slum Clearance: The Social and Administrative Context in England and Wales', ix, 2, *A Century of Slum Clearance; The Origin of Slum Clearance, The Inter-War Slum Clearance Drive 1930-1939*, (1978). Retrieved on 6 Jul. 2023 from: https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.rnals.um.edu.mt/oulib/ummt/reader_ejaction?pq-origsite=primo&ppg=19&docID=5103713.

³⁸. Housing Act of 1930, Retrieved on 6 July 2023 from: [tps://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1930/39/pdfs/ukpga_19300039_en.pdf](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1930/39/pdfs/ukpga_19300039_en.pdf).

³⁹. John English, Ruth Madigan and Peter Norman, 22.

explained further below, the result was that formal recommendations were made starting with the *Insanitary Areas Bill and the Land Acquisition Ordinance*. Thus, *Public Purposes Ordinance - Ordinance XL of 1935* was passed intended to begin the clearance of *Il-Mandraġġ*.⁴⁰

In 1935, the government passed an ordinance regulating the expropriation of private properties. However, the ordinance of 1935 had a caveat that would prove providential in future for implementing the demolition of *Il-Mandraġġ*. It replaced 15 articles of 1865 that, till that period, tied the government in the way it should implement the acquisition of private property for public use. Article 15 of 1865 stated, '*No person can be compelled to give up his property or to permit any other person to make use of it except for a public purpose and upon payment of a fair compensation*'.⁴¹ Thus, this article still allowed the government to take the property even if the owner was unwilling to give it up. Provided that there was a public purpose the government was required to pay the owner before the expropriation of property. This requirement for the government to first pay and then acquire the property was removed. Because of the new ordinance of 1935, the government could acquire the property first and pay after implementing the project. Once again, the new ordinance referred to 'upon payment of a fair compensation' but it did not enter into the merit of calculating how fair compensation was to be and when the actual payment was to be made.

According to Ray Mangion,⁴² this ordinance would two years later inspire Attilio Critien, the Chief Medical Officer, to pass to Governor Sir Charles Bonham-Carter, proposals for slum clearance in Valletta and the Three Cities for sanitary reasons and their replacement by proper housing. At least, the expropriation ordinance of 1935 had empowered the governor to demolish substandard dwellings and construct more adequate accommodations.⁴³

⁴⁰. R. Mangion, *Legislations*, 178.

⁴¹. *Book Second of Things, Part I of Rights Over Things*, Title II, of Ownership, Paragraph 321, amending Act VII of 1868 – Article 15. Retrieved on 11 Apr. 2023 from: <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/75318/78312/F1710705054/MLT75318.pdf>.

⁴². R. Mangion, *Legislations*, 178.

⁴³. *ibid*.

Thus, in 1937, legislation was proposed to change the social situation in those zones considered as slum areas. The Governor sought the advice of the Counsellor for Treasury and Public Prosecutor, Sir Philip Pullicino⁴⁴ before implementing the scheme. Pullicino advised the Governor to adopt the 1936 English Housing Act for the proposed scheme, to which the Governor duly agreed. The governor published the ordinance in The Malta Government Gazette (98284, 24ii,1937).⁴⁵ The intention of the Governor was not to implement these measures through an iron fist or by 'military statute', as it was thought 'inappropriate'. Although, after the revocation of the 1921 constitution, the Governor had the legal power to enforce such a scheme, he wanted to have an open and honest discussion not to create unnecessary antagonism while allowing this infrastructural project to be studied by the political powers of the time.

As is to be expected, *Il-Mandraġġ* in Valletta was at the centre of this legislation.⁴⁶ The legislative body thought of issuing a draft Ordinance to improve areas with substandard hygiene, with the *Manderaggio* being one of the designated areas. Through this legislation, the government empowered the administrative body with the right to appropriate properties and clear areas considered to be socially substandard. This was to be done in consultation with the Public Works Department.

4.05 The English Law that inspired the scheme

The 1935 and 1937 ordinances were inspired by the history of slum clearance in France and Britain. The idea went back to Britain in the 1890s. Considering the slum situation in London at the time, in 1890 Britain introduced the *Working-Class Act*, part of which contained much of the earlier *Artisans' and Labourers' Dwellings Improvement Act*, which was the work of Sir Richard Assheton

⁴⁴. Joseph A. Filletti, '*Presidenti tas-Socjeta, Soċjeta, 13 – Lewwel Parti: Sir Philip Pullicino (1943-1950)*', Feast Program, *Filarmonika Nazzjonalie 'La Valette'*, 2001, 12, Retrieved on 20 Feb. 2023 from: <https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/61234/1/SIR%20PHILIP%20PULLICINO%20%28%201943%20-%201950%29.pdf>

⁴⁵. R. Mangion, *Legislations*, 178.

⁴⁶. 'Reports on the Workings of Government Departments, (Malta, 1935-1939)', *the Government Gazette*, March 1937 and *Supplements to Malta Government Gazette*, 1937: i and ii.

Cross. Cross was a British statesman, a member of the Conservative Party under Benjamin Disraeli from 1874 to 1880 and under Edward Smith-Stanley from 1885 to 1886 as Home Secretary and held various other prestigious positions.⁴⁷ The 1890 act aimed to demolish slum areas and replace them with suitable workers' housing. This came to be known as the *Cross Act*.

In reality, many workingmen who lived in these slums could not afford the rent intended to be imposed on the new abodes once they were completed. This Act was projected to compensate the current landowners of these slum areas. The government planned to clear the land and sell it to private owners to build new estates, therefore this slum clearance was not precisely a social measure; it was more of a business arrangement intended only to rid London of its slums and disperse the poor and undesirable people all over the city and into the suburbs. At the same time, the government sought not to impose financial burdens on the inhabitants and the owners of these properties. The idea was to prevent the inhabitants from seeking refuge in other slums due to poverty. Therefore, the liberalism of the age sought to propose a profitable investment scheme for both the government and the developer. The aim of Cross's initiative was simply motivated by issues of hygiene. Cross was a Conservative and openly stated that the Act was not meant to solve long-standing social issues. 'It is not the duty of the Government to provide any class of citizens with any of the necessities of life.....(but)....no one will doubt the propriety and right of the State to interfere in matters relating to sanitary laws'.⁴⁸ Consequently, Cross's project was branded a copy of the earlier Haussmann project in Paris.⁴⁹

⁴⁷. Richard Assheton Cross, 1st Viscount Cross, British statesman and Conservative politician. Retrieved on 21 Feb. 2023 from: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Richard-Assheton-Cross-1st-Viscount-Cross>.

⁴⁸. Stilwell, Martin, 'Housing the Workers in London Housing Legislation 1850-1914', *Housing Legislation in the 1800s-The Victorian and Edwardian Building Acts*, (United Kingdom, 2015), 3. Retrieved on 22 Dec. 2024 from: https://stilwellhistory.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/london_housing_early_legislation.pdf.

⁴⁹. Antoine Paccoud, 'Planning Perspectives', xxi, 3, *Planning law, power, and practice: Haussmann in Paris (1853-1870)*, 2016, 341-361. Retrieved on 22 Feb. 2023 from <https://www.tandfonline-com.ejournals.um.edu.mt/doi/full/10.1080/02665433.2015.1089414>.

4.06 Implementing the 1937 scheme

Decades later, the Cross Act could have served as a template for enacting the 1937 scheme. No slum clearance action could start without a prior program that catered for the appropriation and purchase of the properties from the private owners and the provision of alternative accommodation to the residents earmarked to be displaced. The Governor, Sir Charles Bonham-Carter empowered the Director of Public Works with the issue of either a *Demolition* or a *Compulsory Purchase Order*. The governor agreed to empower the Land Arbitration Board 'to make compensation assessments under the Expropriation Ordinance'.⁵⁰ At the same time, the governor sought to bring the private owners of the dwellings on board, committing them in favour of the project.

The plan was to replace the substandard blocks with modern accommodations bordering the four streets: *Strada Marsamuxetto* (*Marsamuxett* Street) on the North-West, *Strada Santa Lucia* (Saint Lucy Street) on the North-East, *Strada San Patrizio* (Saint Patrick Street) on the South-East and *Strada San Marco* (Saint Mark Street) on the South-West.⁵¹ The abutting buildings on Saint Lucia Street and those on the corner of *Marsamuxetto* Road and Saint Mark Street were not part of the project. They were not interfering with the development of the area, especially since they were built close to the end of the 19th century and were not as old as the rest of the *Mandraġġ* buildings. Moreover, these buildings were not considered 'unsanitary'.⁵²

The planning process started with careful surveying of the surroundings, consideration of the gradient and the descent of the terrain. As this quarter was developed in a hollow area, it had to be filled with rubble to retain a new level at the same height as the upper part of the bastions and the surrounding streets. It should be remembered that the knights closed the gap in the fortifications (afterwards named *San Salvatore* Curtain) towards the beginning

⁵⁰. NAM, LG3538/1937, *NARMLGO*, Lieutenant-Governor's Office.

⁵¹. During this period, streets were mainly named and known in Italian, and it is interesting to note that many in Valletta today, particularly those over 50 years of age, still refer to most of the streets of Valletta in their Italian names or their Maltese variation.

⁵². AWD, WD1159/36, *Letter by Governor Boham-Carter to Malcolm Macdonald MP*, 31 May 1938, unpaginated and *Memo 56* of report dated 20 Apr. 1938, 2 (1).

of the seventeenth century and thus created a passageway along the parapet of the curtain. Eventually, this was developed into the street that today forms part of the ring road around Valletta.

The project also envisaged the creation of an open space to give light to the new buildings. In truth, the buildings in the lower areas were not going to be fully demolished and used as coffered to retain the fill. Only those above the required level, which rose higher in relation to the adjacent streets of Saint Mark and Saint Lucia, were to be entirely demolished. Any new buildings along the ring road or *Marsamuxetto* Road were to be constructed from this new level and be equal in height to the retained corner buildings. Moreover, this open space was to be about 80 feet⁵³ in diameter and remain clear, with connections to the bordering streets visible from specific higher points on this side of Valletta.

The scheme was intended to raise six residential blocks around this open space. It also considered the widening of Saint John Street and Saint Patrick Street. However, despite all the demolition works being envisaged, it was calculated that not enough debris would be acquired from the demolition to fill the space. The calculation was that around 39,800 cubic yards⁵⁴ of material were needed to level the area with *Marsamuxetto* Road.

It was estimated that the number of persons intended to be moved out of the *Manderaggio* was somewhere between 1,000 and 1,200, roughly 5% of the population of Valletta.⁵⁵ Relocation was to be conducted gradually and planned so that the inhabitants would be compelled to leave 'without any serious hardship'.⁵⁶

Although these plans appeared quite capable of being executed, the opinion of the residents had to be considered. No matter what was said about *Il-Mandraġġ*, most residents were happy living there. The government intended to publish quarterly lists of the available vacant buildings in the villages and

⁵³. Approximately 24 metres.

⁵⁴. Roughly 30,430 cubic meters.

⁵⁵. Said-Zammit, 85,

⁵⁶. AWD. PW1159/36, Letter from Senior Engineer to Director of Public Works, '*Maderaggio Scheme (Evacuation of)*', 23 Sept. 1939, unpaginated.

suburbs such as Gżira, Pawla,⁵⁷ Hamrun, Birkirkara, Marsa and the Three Cities. Around 800 empty properties were identified, belonging to private owners, for the rehoming of the displaced people of *Il-Mandraġġ* (Fig. 48). However, this number was insufficient. To counter this deficiency, the government even repurposed vacant military establishments and barracks, as it had intended in the 1880s, to house the displaced residents.

List of private buildings in the Central District that can be made available for occupation by people cleared from the Manderaggio area.

<u>Locality</u>	<u>Person to accommodate</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
<u>Attard</u>	<u>50</u>	
<u>Lija</u>	<u>30</u>	
<u>Balzan</u>	<u>105</u>	
<u>Birkirkara*</u>	<u>158</u>	<u>*Including in an old tower</u>
<u>Zebbug</u>	<u>90</u>	
<u>Qormi*</u>	<u>293</u>	<u>*Including in an old boys' school</u>
<u>Naxxar</u>	<u>75</u>	

Fig. 48. List indicating private locations and number of persons for rehoming.

Even the casemates of the *Cottonera* fortifications were included. The reasoning was that since these people lived in substandard housing, they would accept and adapt. A consultation was also made with the military authorities for the homing residents of *Il-Mandraġġ* at the *Camerata* and Lower Saint Elmo Barracks at Valletta and Verdala Barracks at Cospicua and even Żabbar Gate (*Notre Dame*) were being considered (Appendix 4.2). In a Minute

⁵⁷ *Pawla* refers to *Casal Paola* (Maltese, *Raġal il-Ġdid*), as place names were known in Italian in the south of Malta. *Casal* is short for the Italian *Casale* (English, town), and named after Grand Master Antoine de Paule (1551-1636), founder the town. In Maltese, *Pawla* is the female version of (*Pawlu*) Paul, which until circa the 1950s, was also unofficially passable when referring to Paola in text.

by John Lewis Gatt,⁵⁸ Director Public Works, part of the *Lazzaretto*, the former isolation hospital, was added to the list of likely locations and where they would 'be segregated from the remaining portion of the *Lazzaretto*' (Fig. 49).

List of alternative locations which can be made available for relocating residents of the Manderaggio area.

<u>Locality</u>	<u>Persons to accommodate</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
<u>Lazzaretto</u>	<u>500</u>	<u>In Divisions I, II, III & IV.</u>
<u>Birkirkara</u>	<u>168</u>	<u>Workmen's Dwellings (Uncompleted)</u>
<u>Camerata</u>	<u>200/300</u>	<u>Valletta</u>
<u>Lower St Elmo Barracks</u>	<u>200/300</u>	<u>Valletta</u>
<u>Zabbar Gate Married Quarters</u>	<u>72</u>	<u>Cospicua</u>
<u>Verdala</u>	<u>20 families</u>	<u>Cospicua (40 Barrack rooms)</u>

Fig. 49. List of alternative locations and number of persons for rehoming.

Had this project materialised, there would have been objections and protests.⁵⁹ It was not easy to persuade and remove people who were born and bred at *Il-Mandraġġ* for generations, living in close-knit families and neighbourhoods and dispersing them around the island in environments different from what they have known all their lives.⁶⁰

This was evident from the fact that when the project was rekindled after the war, it encountered renewed opposition from the residents. Accounts from the late architect Michael Ellul highlight the tensions during this period. Ellul

⁵⁸. AWD, PW1159/36, *Minute 34*, extracted from LGO666/36.

⁵⁹. Fabian Mangion, Appreciation: Michael Ellul, *The Sunday Times of Malta*, 18 March 2018.

⁶⁰. At the time, Mr. Michael Ellul was a member of the Heritage Advisory Committee at the then Malta Environment and Planning Authority.

frequently recounted how, during a field survey conducted along with fellow university students studying architecture shortly before the commencement of relocation and demolition, they were met with hostility from the residents.⁶¹ The students were reportedly insulted and pelted with empty tin cans and occasional eggs. This reaction can be interpreted as an expression of resentment and protest against the impending fate of both the residents and the historic district of *Il-Mandraġġ*.

The authorities expected resistance from some residents to being moved out from the area, particularly by those whose work and livelihoods depended on or were linked to the Marsamxett Harbour. Fishermen and boatmen were to be located in areas nearby on the premise that they would be returned once the project was finalised. However, no similar provision was taken regarding the rest of the inhabitants. There were no plans for those who would have been displaced to be returned to the area as in reality, the authorities had intended to rehabilitate the area with middle-class families.⁶² The Director of the Public Works Department drew up a lengthy memo that lists 21 points regarding various aspects and requirements associated with the intended regeneration of *Il-Mandraġġ*. Under the heading *Types of Buildings*, when referring to the particular block to be constructed, the Director of Public Works stated, '*...and I suggest that the type should be the first type with up-to-date conveniences suitable for middle-class occupation*'.⁶³

4.07 Correspondence and Newspaper Articles

The Government Gazette dated 24 March 1937 featured the contents of the draft ordinance on improving areas with substandard hygiene. However, the debate in the local press had already started before the publication of this ordinance and in clear anticipation to influence or support the legislators in what they wanted to do. In fact, on 19 March, the pro-government newspaper *The Chronicle* featured articles on the lack of hygiene in *Il-Mandraġġ* dwellings.

⁶¹ This anecdote was personally recounted by Michael Ellul to the author of this dissertation.

⁶² PW1159/36, *Expenditure Estimate reports* - 'Alternative Schemes B' and 'D' both feature an estimate cost for the 'Erection of Middle Class blocks'.

⁶³ *ibid.*, Minute (4), dated 22 Sept. without year and unpaginated.

Under the heading of 'It Never went Upstairs',⁶⁴ a reader wrote about health, hygiene, rubbish and rodents that infested *Il-Mandraġġ*. This particular reader even diminished the problem of *Il-Mandraġġ* to a lack of a proper system for collecting the garbage. He thought that by setting up a modern refuse collection system, the situation of *Il-Mandraġġ* would be over. Thus, in his opinion, setting up such a system was even more critical than demolishing the *Manderaggio* or reorganising the electricity supply.⁶⁵

Another reader titled his letter *Centralisation – The Manderaggio Clearance*⁶⁶ in which he discussed the lousy living conditions at *Il-Mandraġġ*. The last three articles featured in the *Chronicle* all had the heading *Slum Clearance*.⁶⁷ Each of these commenced with *Il-Mandraġġ* and expanded to the Three Cities and other slum areas around the island. Again, all these letters discussed hygiene matters related to overpopulation. One reader described the residents living in 'rabbit warrens', an allusion to the type of dwellings they were living in and the fact that they had many children.

The English readers of the Maltese press linked health with overpopulation. Many readers considered that overpopulation, lack of hygiene and squalor were good reasons to justify its demolition. Dr Henry Sacco had strong words that *Il-Mandraġġ* was not even fit for animals since there were people crowded in a single dark and damp room and sleeping in the same beds with sick persons with infectious diseases such as pulmonary tuberculosis.⁶⁸

Like *The Chronicle*, *The Times* also featured articles about hygiene and overpopulation. It listed the many known grievances connected with *Il-Mandraġġ*, mainly of the squalor, that the residents were cramped in damp and unhygienic dwellings and the area was rat-infested overcrowded.⁶⁹

Similar messages covering social issues appeared in *Il-Berka* newspaper which was a version of *The Times* in Maltese. All the articles that appeared in

⁶⁴. Henry Sacco, 'The Manderaggio', *The Times*, 18th March 1937.

⁶⁵. 'It never went Upstairs', *The Chronicle*, 19 Mar. 1937.

⁶⁶. *ibid.*, 22 Mar. 1937.

⁶⁷. *ibid.*, 24 Apr. 1937.

⁶⁸. Sacco, *The Times*, 18 Mar. 1937.

⁶⁹. *ibid.*, 27 Mar. 1937.

Il-Berka were social, confirming the type of readership of this newspaper. Being in Maltese, the majority of its readers were of a working and low middle-class background and supported the Malta Labour Party.

The first letter, '*It-Tagħarif tal-Gvern dwar il-Mandraġġ*', dated 29th March 1937, referred to the number of residents in *Il-Mandraġġ*.⁷⁰ According to the writer, 1,500 inhabitants would be affected by the scheme. They lived in 368 residences, of which 18 were rookeries. The writer was mainly concerned with the dire living conditions of the residents and shared the same opinion that many inhabitants lived in dark, humid and foul-smelling rooms. He wholeheartedly supports the government's initiative of not allowing such living conditions to continue.⁷¹ Of the same opinion was another author under the nom de plume *Il-Problema tal Mandragg* who entitled his letter *Bzonn li sostnejna kabel haddiehor*.⁷² The author refers to the Ordinance in the Government Gazette of 24th March. He concurred that the area was unsanitary and supported its demolition. It lacked the concept of proper living, especially for the young.⁷³

The issue of hygiene appeared even in the local press in Italian. However, this issue was not at the centre of the discussion. Instead, the conversation was focused on the issue of rehabilitation. At the time, the Italian press in Malta was the voice of the opposition. For this reason, one would expect to find articles opposing the project. What was astonishing in these letters of opposition to the project, was that the writers were not afraid to show their names. Giovanni Sammut and Rosario Frenco Randon were two readers who strongly opposed the project. They shared their opinions in the local *Malta Quotidiano Nazionalista* newspaper. In his first letter, *Il Progetto pel Risanamento Edilizio* (The Building Redevelopment Project),⁷⁴ Sammut criticised the rehabilitation scheme. He did not mention *Il-Mandraġġ* by name but continuously referred to it for its low standards and poor inhabitants. He agreed that the sewer and water systems were unhygienic or non-existent. Like

⁷⁰. *Il-Berka*, 29 Mar. 1937.

⁷¹. Anthony D'amato, *The Times*, 'A *Lucrative Investment*', 14 Apr. 1937.

⁷². *Il-Leñen is-Sewwa*, Editorial, 30 Mar. 1937.

⁷³. *ibid.*

⁷⁴. *Malta, Quotidiano Nazionalista*, 10 Apr. 1937.

some of the previous readers, who expressed their views in *The Chronicle*, he was more interested in the issue of compensation. Expropriation and compensation issues were sensitive matters that caused conflict between the Government and landowners, sparking a heated discussion in the local newspapers. Objections featured in the local press between late March and April 1937 as letters to the editor. Owners were questioning the issue of compensation because this ordinance was calculated on the total rental value of the property, which did not necessarily reflect the actual market value of the property. After all, by then, the government had already regulated rent. Mangion rightly argued that the government was inappropriately estimating the value of properties.⁷⁵

There is reason to believe there was little dialogue between the government and the stakeholders and likely none at all when the project was in its planning stage. In his second letter, *Per Proteggere la proprietà' edilizia* (To Protect Building Property),⁷⁶ Sammut continued his attack on the authorities regarding the concerns of the property owners for compensation rights. Sammut carried a strong argument regarding compensation since the government acted quasi-dictatorially. Sammut published a third letter⁷⁷ where he referred to the *Camera di Commercio* and the *Camera degli Avvocati* about legal issues concerning the low estimates in the valuation of the properties of *Il-Mandraġġ*.

It is understandable that due to the anti-British colonial nature of the newspaper, Dr Rosario Frendo Randon,⁷⁸ a *Nazionalista* and an Italian sympathiser, used the *Malta* to express his feelings. Frendo Randon, who first signed his surname as Frendo Azzopardi,⁷⁹ was dragged into this issue more by his interests than because of his anti-colonial and pro-Italian sentiments. It does not seem that he had properties in *Il-Mandraġġ*, but he was worried about the application of the 1935 ordinance. Being one of the leading landowners in Malta, the 1935 ordinance was not considered to be in the

⁷⁵. R. Mangion, *Legislations*, 178.

⁷⁶. Giovanni Sammut, *Malta, Quotidiano Nazionalista*, 12 Apr. 1937.

⁷⁷. *ibid.*, 17 Apr. 1937.

⁷⁸. Rosario Frendo Randon, *Malta, Quotidiano Nazionalista*, 7 Apr. 1937.

⁷⁹. *Times of Malta*, 18 Mar. 1937.

interest of the Maltese landholders. In his article, *Scopi Giustimale Applicati* (Purposes Legally Applied), he lashes out at the fact that before any relocating, alternative accommodation close to the city should be provided since various residents worked close to home. Although the relocation of the residents was already planned, Frenco Randon accentuated that any rehoming should be directed towards the centre of the island (Appendix 4.3).

His next attack was on the design, a matter that was expressed by many and which had failed to reach acceptable standards set in by the criteria of what had to be a workmen's dwellings. Then, Frenco Randon went to the crux of his argument. He criticised how the project was intended to be financed and questioned where the money was to come from or by whom. It was followed by the expropriation ordinance of 1935, particularly regarding the rights of private property owners and the concessions to British firms to carry out the construction project. In the same letter, Frenco Randon even 'blasted' Lord Askwith in his speech during the sitting of the House of Lords of 5 May 1936 regarding the (Malta) Letters Patent Bill,⁸⁰ in which Lord Plymouth, Lord Strickland, Lord Strabolgi and Askwith discussed and debated the Bill. Frenco Randon stated,

'We have no need for certain exotic imports, also because, as Lord Askwith attested to the House of Lords in the session of 5 May 1936, we have skilled jurists, who do not need the help or, even worse, the interference or surveillance of Downing Street officials'.⁸¹

What is of interest here is that Frenco Randon is referring to a debate in the House of Lords,

'.....the Second Reading of the Bill to remove the limitation of His Majesty's power to revoke or amend the Malta Constitution Letters Patent and to declare the validity of certain Ordinances of the Governor of Malta',⁸²

⁸⁰. 'Order of the Day for the Second Reading: (Malta) Letters Patent Bill', 5 May 1936, Retrieved on 23 August 2023 from: <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1936/may/05/malta-letters-patent-bill-hl>

⁸¹. *'Noi non abbiamo bisogno di certe importazioni esotiche, anche perchè, come attestò Lord Askwith alla Camera dei Pari nella seduta del 5 Maggio 1936, noi abbiamo giuristi di polso, che non hanno bisogno dell'aiuto o, peggio ancora, della ingerenza o sorveglianza dei funzionari di Downing Street'*.

⁸². 'Order of the Day for the Second Reading: (Malta) Letters Patent Bill', 5 May 1936.

for replacing the 1921 self-government constitution with a new constitution that reintroduced the concept of a council of government. Therefore, this debate had nothing to do with *Il-Mandraġġ*. However, for the Nationalists, this was an important debate because their nemesis, Gerald Strickland, opposed this measure in the House of Lords. On his part, Lord Askwith supported the Undersecretary of State, tortuous arguments of the Earl of Plymouth to justify the definitive removal of the 1921 Constitution and its replacement by reintroducing the Council of Government. At this point, what was being debated became relevant to the debate that existed in Malta at the time about *Il-Mandraġġ*. Askwith and the Earl of Plymouth argued that the 1921 constitution failed to bring forward what he defined as liberal and progressive reforms. In their opinion, it only served to create a parliament of lawyers where court acrimonies were brought forward in the discussions in parliament. In the view of the colonial office, the 1921 constitution led the Maltese political regime '.....to become stagnant and reactionary' to the needed social and infrastructural reforms. The underlying reading was that with such a constitution, the removal of slum areas was not possible as these were not of interest to the elected lawyers who dominated the local parliament.

The Earl of Plymouth explained that the existing administrative system was heavy, with five governing bodies. Thus, he wanted a new constitution, which he described as progressive and liberal, that, among other things, would help the island develop into a tourist destination. He showed his preoccupation that the island was heavily dependent on agriculture. In the case of the tourist industry, the undersecretary 'hoped that the construction of a first-class modern hotel will shortly be undertaken'.

Therefore, for the British, the 1921 constitution did not fulfil the aspirations of the Maltese. Without being mentioned in this debate, any health measure or a slum clearance could not come to fruition with Malta's type of political regime. Without saying it, they implied that any backwardness or delays in pushing forward health reforms were partly due to the 1921 Constitution. It deprived or reigned in the colonial government from interfering directly in the matter. At the

same time, the Maltese representatives were not interested in such reforms as they were only concerned with legal disputes.

D. De Brincat echoed this debate when, at the peak of the public discussion of the demolition scheme, he wrote a letter to *The Times* under the heading *Slum Clearance*⁸³ where he blamed the dire conditions at *Il-Mandraġġ* on past governments. However, it was not only readers of the English press who were informed about this heated debate in the House of Lords; it even reached the readers of the Maltese press. A short article in *Il-Berka* titled *Tagħrif u Tifsir*, welcomed the news of the demolition of *Il-Mandraġġ*.⁸⁴ The concern was that this would be all talk and no action. It referred to the project involving the demolition of the old Order's bakery, this vast building was vacated in the early 1930s and aimed to be turned into social housing. Then, there was the issue of the new hospital, the project for which had begun but there were uncertainties about when it would be completed.

What can be added is that *Il-Mandraġġ* would be identified as the place where a first-class hotel was to be built to boost Malta as a tourist destination and, at the same time (killing two birds with one stone) would eliminate what was considered a blemish and a health hazard to the population. These views found support in the press.

In contrast with the letters published in *Malta* and in line with its support of the colonial administration, *The Times of Malta* published a string of articles on the subject. The first article, titled *The Mandraggio*, put forth the same arguments raised in other newspapers on the intended demolition of the area, that the owners are to bear the costs of the work and the lack of transparency on where the inhabitants are to be rehomed. This reader called the scheme 'very ambitious', but lacking dialogue and explanation. Another reader raised the funding for the project under a letter to the editor entitled 'The Loan Question'.⁸⁵

^{83.} *Times of Malta*, 18 Mar. 1937/28 Apr. 1937.

^{84.} *Il-Berka*, 29 Mar. 1937.

^{85.} *ibid.*, 27 Mar. 1937.

This was an aspect that created preoccupation among a specific readership. The preoccupation was not the loan itself but the lack of clear information about how the government would raise such a loan. What is of interest is that such a preoccupation was strongly expressed in Maltese newspapers. About a month later, a short article was again published in *Il-Berka*, on 24th April, titled *Self ta' Flus u l-Mandraġġ*.⁸⁶ As the title shows, the concern was related to the loan the government intended to raise for this project. The problem was the lack of information provided by the government. The government must precisely declare that the loan is to go towards the *Mandraġġ* project. Hence, he implored the government to show haste in implementing the project, as thousands of people will be removed from their dwellings, whether they are hovels or not. The writer wanted their suffering to be minimally limited with consideration given to the rising cost of living and that the masses continued being paid a pittance⁸⁷. Therefore, the author insisted that the public could endure more taxes on essentials, particularly bread, along with others. He reasoned that such a sacrifice would be justified if the money was used to finance the demolition and the rehabilitation of *Il-Mandraġġ*.

The second concern was related to the relocation of the residents. This was also strongly expressed in newspapers published in Maltese. One of the readers insisted that before the residents were ordered to evacuate their homes, they first had to be relocated. The writer expressed concern that the government had not stated how it intended to implement the project. This raised fears that the government would acquire properties without first giving an alternative home to the residents. The fear was that because Malta did not have a proper parliament at the time, the government, and by the government the writer meant the colonial authorities, would ride roughshod over the inhabitants while failing to explain how the allocated money would be spent. In simple words, this infrastructure project would end up as a means for speculators to make money through corruption over the backs of the poor people.⁸⁸ Another column featured in *Il-Berka* expressed concern regarding

⁸⁶. *ibid.*, 5 Apr. 1937.

⁸⁷. Michael A. Sant, 'Sette Giugnio 1919, Tqanqil u Tibdil', (Malta, 1989), 199-204.

⁸⁸. A. D'amato, *The Times*, 14 Apr. 1937.

the relocation of the residents, affirming that many of *Il-Mandraġġ* residents were poor and could not afford to pay high rents. This was another element this reader implored the government not to forget before starting this project.⁸⁹

What should be stated is that if, on a cultural and political level, the newspapers *Malta* published in Italian and *The Times* in English disagreed, their readers seem to find convergence on the issue of compensation for the property owners of *Il-Mandraġġ*. The property owners, irrespective of whether they were pro-British or pro-Italian, found common ground as can be ascertained from a letter to the editor by D. De Brincat entitled '*Slum Clearance*'.⁹⁰ Brincat found faults with this draft ordinance. Likely being a property owner, he considered the expropriation matter unjust. Another reader from Rabat, using the same heading and writing under the pseudonym G.B.⁹¹ expressed his feeling of being 'deeply shocked' when learning of the conditions at *Il-Mandraġġ* and favoured slum clearance as long as the government financed the project, the property owners were compensated and the residents were offered a suitable new home. D. De Brincat replied⁹² to the letter by G.B. to express his agreement that property owners be properly compensated and that 'Bolshevism in Malta should not be encouraged!' This expression was likely used because property owners, on their part, considered that these schemes tampered with their property rights and preference was given to the poor dwellers, who were being associated with the Russian proletariat at the expense of the owners' rights. He argued that government schemes should not give rise to an increase in the expectations of the workers that go beyond their means.

Ironically, this attack against what might be described as the worker's aspiration appeared in a newspaper that aligned with the Labour Party during the 1920s. This was countered by the argument that '.....abolishing the slums would be an effective barrier against the inroads of Communism'.⁹³ This should not be taken as a direct attack against the Labour Party but more of the fact

⁸⁹. *Il-Berka*, 7 Apr. 1937.

⁹⁰. D. De Brincat, *The Times*, 28 Mar. 1937.

⁹¹. *ibid.*, 6 Apr. 1937.

⁹². *ibid.*, 15 Apr. 1937.

⁹³. D. Power, '*Filth Famine*'.

that this newspaper gave space to what may be considered diverse opinions. More importantly, it expressed the editor's fear of the Russian Revolution.

At the height of this public debate, in April 1937, the Chamber of Commerce aired its concerns and viewpoints in a letter titled, *Insanitary Areas – Views of the Chamber of Commerce*⁹⁴ written by its President A. Cassar Torregiani. The letter asks the government to seriously review compensation to owners and other financial matters connected to the expropriation laws. Additional letters in the same newspaper quoting similar arguments were by Daniel J. Arkell, *Against the Scheme – An Enormous Hole in the Middle of the City*,⁹⁵ and by Dr Henry Sacco, *The Insanitary Areas Ordinance 1937*.⁹⁶

Opinion vouched for the preservation of *Il-Mandraġġ* as a unique characteristic of Valletta. The lawyer Giuseppe Pace also shared this idea. Pace was the man behind the initiative of building Paceville, who stated that it should be preserved for its historical importance and be restored so that *Il-Mandraġġ* would be an attraction to tourists and visitors.⁹⁷ Similar in opinion was Anthony Amato, who suggested that the whole area of *Il-Mandraġġ* can have other alternative uses besides housing. One of his suggestions was to build a hotel, reflecting the House of Lords debate mentioned earlier. Another suggestion was to turn it into an industrial park.⁹⁸ Even Daniel J. Arkell from Rabat thought that the area should be preserved. In his letter entitled *Against the Scheme*, Arkell argued that there were areas in the U.K., like Notting Hill, Hoxton or certain parts of London, which were more unpleasant than *Il-Mandraġġ*. While granting the squalor and overpopulation, Arkell considered these factors insufficient for the area to merit demolition. Instead, he also suggested that the houses at *Il-Mandraġġ* should be renovated and local industries introduced.⁹⁹ The last contribution came from a reader who noted that the slums resulted from economic conditions that required to be improved otherwise slums would continue to exist no matter how the people concerned

^{94.} *ibid.*, 15 Apr. 1937.

^{95.} *ibid.*, 21 Apr. 1937.

^{96.} *ibid.*, 22 Apr. 1937.

^{97.} *ibid.*

^{97.} *Il-Berka*, 29 Mar. 1937.

^{98.} *Times of Malta*, 14 Apr. 1937.

^{99.} Daniel J. Arkell, *Times of Malta, Against the Scheme*, 10 Apr. 1937, 14.

are housed.¹⁰⁰ These economic and sanitary considerations nailed the argument that preserving the picturesque should not influence or preclude the government from implementing a slum clearance policy. This discussion helped educate the readers and increase public awareness about town planning and the need for rebuilding areas inhabited by residents lacking adequate housing conditions.¹⁰¹

The government would react to this criticism in the press. Following the general praxis as outlined in the Maltese laws, the government published amendments to the scheme as a *Supplement to the Government Gazette of 1937*.¹⁰² The ordinance departed as an amendment to the *Second Sanitary Law, 1900 (Ordinance No. XVII of 1901)*¹⁰³ dated 16 August 1937 and transmitted to England on the 20th of the same month. This ordinance was the fruit of the surveys and reports by Dr Critien and Architect Galizia about the unhygienic conditions at *Il-Mandraġġ*.

4.08 The men behind this scheme - Attilio Critien

What had most likely kindled the 1937 legislation was the report made by Dr Attilio Critien. Critien produced this report in a book form in which he accentuated the subject of *Il-Mandraġġ* through its legal, demographic and social aspects. In the early 1930s, Dr Critien conducted surveys in *Il-Mandraġġ* with the hope that action would be taken on the situation and living conditions in the locality. However, Critien began his work before the 1930s, primarily since he had written that he had taken the photos in 1913. Critien then published this report as a book in 1938, most probably in response to the fact that this scheme was finding resistance in the press.

In this book, somehow, Critien gives the impression that the authorities were dragging their feet to implement the 1937 scheme. Critien even expresses his reservations about this scheme, doubting whether it would be

¹⁰⁰. The Daily Malta Chronicle .*Slum Clearance*, 24 Apr. 1937,

¹⁰¹. *ibid.*

¹⁰². MGG, *Ordinance XXVI of 1937*, 367-378.

¹⁰³. *ibid.*, *Supplements of 1937: No. XXXVI*, 1093-1097.

enough to lessen the population density of *Il-Mandraġġ*. In a striking passage, he writes,

*'Even if the shrinkage, however, were to be intensified and accelerated, so that to bring down overcrowding on area to what might be considered moderate proportions and were the remaining population to be housed in such a way that the number of persons occupying each room shall conform to floor, space and other statutory standards intended to counter the evil effects of overcrowding in dwellings, the Manderaggio problem would not be solved. The Manderaggio would still be a submerged area...'*¹⁰⁴

The author includes a detailed description of the streets surrounding *Il-Mandraġġ* and the various alleys within, with precise reference to their locations, dimensions, habitation, and even their condition and usage. He credits his findings and statistics to his 'house-to-house inspection' of the area in 1931.¹⁰⁵ Still, he also includes the surveys and inspections made earlier by Emanuele Luigi Galizia¹⁰⁶ based on the 1881 Census.¹⁰⁷ This monograph is a significant work that various researchers, writers and academics have used as a primary reference.

While Critien was not writing a detailed history of *Il-Mandraġġ*, he gave a short story about the area, which started with the birth of Valletta. Critien propagated the wrong idea that *Il-Mandraġġ*, as a slum area, knows its origins in the times of the Knights.¹⁰⁸ The first twelve pages were about the camber, the quarry, the failures and how the area evolved into a slum. Critien even referenced stepped alleys and what he calls the *mini* (tunnels), which were more arcades than tunnels, as well as a reference to a bridge.¹⁰⁹ However, a reference to the bridge in any maps or documents currently available for

¹⁰⁴. Critien, 38.

¹⁰⁵. *ibid.*, 14.

¹⁰⁶. *ibid.*, 14 (‡). Chevalier Emanuele Luigi Galizia, P.A., F.R.I.B.A., M.I.C.E., (1830-1907), was the Superintendent of Land Revenue and Public Works and a renowned Maltese architect and civil engineer who designed outstanding many buildings, churches and works. *Vide*: Conrad Thake, 'Emanuele Luigi Galizia (1830-1907): Architect of the romantic movement', *Treasures of Malta*, vii, 3, (Malta, 2000), 37-42.

¹⁰⁷. 1881 Census, 'R - Population' (R1-4), The Malta Blue Book, December 1881.

¹⁰⁸. Simon Mercieca and Mark Cauchi, *Laudemus Viros Gloriosos, Patrijiet Agostinjani li għamlu isem*, (Horizons, Malta, 2019), 381.

¹⁰⁹. *ibid.*

consultation was not found, nor do survivors or their offspring remember its existence. He gives the numbers of each dwelling and the measurements of streets and alleys. Cellars, the number of people living on each street and dwelling and their age groups were also on his agenda. He includes lists of the shops and their business activities and even gives tables and graphs. This helped Critien to conceive of what a place a slum can be, not the actual building but the density of the population. Despite this recognition, Critien still pushes and supports the scheme for the complete demolition of the whole area.

Consequently, this book is more than a demographic and sanitary report and survey of *Il-Mandraġġ*. One of its advantages over any other publication is, commencing from the front cover, the wealth of unique photographs by Critien¹¹⁰ which show just about every alley and corner of *Il-Mandraġġ*, many of the inhabitants in their daily routine, the fountains and public water taps, the multi-level and haphazard dwellings and even what he refers to as 'w.c. closets'. These closets at floor level in alleys resembled boxes where all the human waste was disposed of in the main sewers.

Through this publication, Critien wanted to give an accurate account of the living standards of the inhabitants who lacked proper hygiene. They lived in a close-knit community and cared for each other. They faced hardships and stigma together. This brought him to compare the demographics of this area with the increasing population in various parts of Malta. One gets the impression that Critien supported the scheme of demolishing the buildings in this area rather than renovating them, which was suggested in certain quarters at the time. He was sceptical about the density issue of the population, thinking that if the scheme were reduced to renovating and rehabilitating the existing buildings, in a brief time, the area would return to a slum situation. For these reasons, Critien concludes that *Il-Mandraġġ* should be completely demolished and rebuilt and its residents dispersed.¹¹¹ This would permit an open area to bring sunlight into the new dwellings. However, this project was bound to fail if

¹¹⁰. Critien, '*The snapshots of Strada Manderaggio reproduced here were taken by me at the time, in early afternoon when the light was at its best*', 14 (+).

¹¹¹. *ibid.*, 38.

the accommodation of the evicted residents and the proper compensation to the landowners were not concluded beforehand.

Once again, Critien helped to widen the discussion about the demolition of *Il-Mandraġġ*. Considering the problems and even looming threats on the international horizon, it was inconceivable for the Government to concentrate on such projects as all the financing was needed to support the military effort. As a reader correctly stated in one of the letters, it should also be remembered that dark clouds arose over Europe and Britain. The local authorities started to be more preoccupied with the threat of war, which was the reason for all the delay in the commencement of the project. Although the Government had the power to introduce and enforce these ordinances, the role of Malta as a fortress would have the upper hand over sanitary considerations, the government continued to seek the consensus of all the stakeholders.

4.09 The Future of *Il-Mandraġġ*

In 1939 another controversy arose when the Government requested owners of properties at *Il-Mandraġġ* to register with the Land Registration Office what properties they owned. The registration was not limited to the respective names of the owners but also included the names of the tenants, where the property was rented. The tenants were recorded together with the respective amount that they paid for rent.¹¹²

That same year, the Government passed another ordinance to build dwellings for the workers. Once again, a significant part of *Il-Mandraġġ* was earmarked for demolition (NARMCD-Bonham-Carter/Macdonald 30v. 1939).¹¹³ This was the last Ordinance on this topic to be passed before Malta entered the war in 1940. It was issued when Britain was already at war with Germany. Therefore, it served more as propaganda to appease any political agitation among the working classes, rather than to implement the project and

¹¹² Diane Spiteri, 32.

¹¹³ Mangion, 187.

give the impression that life in Malta was continuing as usual. Mangion confirms that,

'Since the Governor and official majority were in numerical advantage over the voting and decision-taking process within the legislative, all Ordinances were passed accordingly to set agendas. No difference of origin, whether War Office, Colonial Office, or Government. Only a few delays in enactment, such as the Ordinance to rehabilitate il-Mandraġġ'.¹¹⁴

Therefore by then, the implementation of the project was impossible and the authorities were not at fault, as Europe was at war.

What appears to have induced the Government in Malta to take this action was that in the previous year, the British policies for slum clearance, the demolition and rebuilding of dwellings for the workers had already come into force. Thus, in 1938, demolition was at 90,000 units a year. Contrary to Malta, not all the houses cleared in Britain had low-priced dwellings. Since in 1938 Britain was at war with Germany, these demolition projects had also ceased.

However, was the war the reason this project did not go through in Malta? The answer was already in the legislative assembly debates when the scheme was being planned into law. One of the members of the legislative council, Sir Philip Pullicino, had recommended to the Governor to adopt the English Housing Act (1936), to which, quoting Mangion,

'.....there had to be an additional mechanism to empower the Director of Public Works to issue a Demolition or Compulsory Purchase Order subject to gubernatorial confirmation. Sir Charles Bonham-Carter agreed to empower the Land Arbitration Board to make compensation assessments under the Expropriation Ordinance.'¹¹⁵

Pullicino hit the nail on its head. As the letters to the press would confirm, Pullicino was right to forecast that conflict would be created as this bill became law and its section concerning the expropriation of land or the purchase of the land in question would be strongly criticised. Indeed, this aspect generated a

^{114.} *ibid.*, 305.

^{115.} *ibid.*

conflict with the landowners of the dwellings at *il-Mandraġġ*, on which Mangion¹¹⁶ is cited in the following sub-chapter.

Furthermore, the newspaper *Malta* expressed the official position of the *Partito Nazionale* when publishing letters about who should carry the burden of this project. Mangion shows that the *Partito Nazionale* was not so keen that the Government should bear all costs for the demolition clearance of *il-Mandraġġ*.¹¹⁷ The Nationalist Party was against money being deducted from other projects to be used for the clearance of *Il-Mandraġġ*. The Nationalist Party considered it all a political ploy¹¹⁸ and emphasized that the English Government should be financially responsible for any building demolition and clearance of such areas. (NARMLGO-996/1937)¹¹⁹ In other words, the *Partito Nazionale* was driving the message that the onus for such projects should be on the Colonial Office. The problems were sanitary, and the British were worried primarily due to the health of the army and their personnel. Finally, the political argument would go that the Colonial Administration never bothered to remedy the situation at *Il-Mandraġġ*. It had been there for over a century. So why should it now be lumped from the money allocated to Malta for public expenditure? This led the *Partito Nazionale* to argue that the Government was displaying its bad administration and financial policy through these measures.¹²⁰

When comparing the 1935 legislation with that of 1937, Mangion remarks that the Government managed to implement the Soil Clearance Act of 1935 but was slow in handling the Slum Clearance Bill.¹²¹ Britain may have found the 1937 legislation financially demanding.¹²² Indeed, the Government's priorities had shifted to defence efforts. As supported by Desmond Zammit-Marmara, two of the three British services were more preoccupied with a

¹¹⁶ R. Mangion, *Legislations*, 178.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, 179.

¹¹⁸ Joe Xerri, *The First Years of Self-Government: Politics in The Maltese Press 1921-1930*, (Unpublished B. Ed. Dissertation, UOM, 1987), in Abstract, unpaginated.

¹¹⁹ R. Mangion, *Legislations*, 179.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

¹²¹ *ibid.*, 182.

¹²² *ibid.*, 183.

looming war rather than any social issues.¹²³ Considering how geographically close Malta was to Fascist Italy, Britain had an excellent reason to focus all their finances on the military defence of the islands.

4.10 The Government Loan

As the letters to the press have shown, the main problem for the Government and even the people was how the authorities would finance such a project. It happened at a time when the parliament was replaced by a Council of Government and a rise in the cost of living. This was not a simple project which involved over 1,500 residents and around 380 dwellings! At least there was one consensus between the authorities and the general public; that taxes should not be increased.

For this reason, the idea was expressed that the Government should not rely on the Consolidated Revenue Fund, that is, the money that the Government was meant to save year after year.¹²⁴ The Government seems to have shared the same idea because it proposed to raise a loan.¹²⁵ The estimate was that this whole project was going to cost £140,000.¹²⁶

However, raising a loan also brought questions and discussions. As was expected, the first question was whether the calculated sum was enough to cover the whole project. Professor A Bernard, the Chief Government Officer for Health, seems not to have been adequately consulted. At least one of the readers stated that Bernard did not supply any figures related to the Manderaggio Project.¹²⁷

Then, there was the issue of the interest rate. One of the readers of *The Times* expressed the idea that the interest rate should not exceed 3%. He based his argument on the fact that this was the rate given for a similar loan raised for a housing project by the city of Manchester. Even the Port of London

¹²³. Desmond Zammit-Marmara, *Malta's Role in the Second World War – A Review of the Literature*, (Unpublished B. Ed. Honours, UOM, 1991), 6.

¹²⁴. The Times of Malta, 27 Mar. 1937, *The Loan Question*.

¹²⁵. *ibid.*, 18 Mar. 1937, *The Manderaggio*..

¹²⁶. *ibid.*, 13 Apr. 1937

¹²⁷. *ibid.*, 18 Mar. 1937.

Authority opted for a public loan to finance electricity infrastructural projects. Thus, the Government's reason for raising a loan appeared to be the solution for those who knew the matter (The Times, 27th March 1937 - *The Loan Question*). The issue was not the loan *per se* but the purpose behind the loan.

What the Government sought to avoid was the loan leading to financial speculation. Some owners had already taken advantage of the situation, and once the scheme was made public, they started to demand more than an equitable share. Besides the total value of their properties, some insisted on being paid for the demolition cost; some even asked for alternative housing. This brought a negative reaction from Mrs P. Allen of Sliema, who spoke against all these pretensions. She even went a step further and suggested that once the project was finished, the total sum of the annual rent planned for the new properties should be capped between twenty and twenty-five years without interest, which would be more appropriate.¹²⁸

Others believed that the money would be better spent on developing the infrastructure of electricity, education, emigration and public health and not wasted on some visionary scheme for the *Manderaggio* (The Times, 27 March 1937 - *The Loan Question*). The opinion of George Toggett from Rabat was that the money would be better spent on excavating gas, bomb and shell-proof shelters as Malta would soon go to war (The Times, 13 April 1937). In his letter in *The Times* titled *Manderaggio Slums*,¹²⁹ he called for the government to justly use the loan of £140,000 intended for slum clearance to build air-raid shelters instead of the slums as there is a smell of war and Malta is also nearer to it.

^{128.} *ibid.*, 21 Mar. 1937, 'A New Broom Sweeps Clean'.

^{129.} *ibid.*, 13 April 1937, 'Manderaggio Slums'.



Fig. 50. Model of *Il-Mandraġġ* - View from the corner of Saint Lucy Street and Marsamxett Road. (Heritage Malta Collection)



Fig. 51. Ruzar Calleja (Diane Spiteri).

As part of the intended '*Manderaggio* Scheme', in 1938 the Museums Department commissioned Ruzar Calleja (Fig. 51) to produce a detailed scale model of the entire *Mandraġġ* (Fig. 50) within the borders of Saint Patrick Street, Saint Lucy Street, Saint Mark Street and *Marsamxett* Road¹³⁰. The model is on a 1:16 scale and took Calleja nine months to build. It is very detailed and shows every alley, window, door, and doorway, discrepancies in

¹³⁰. Claire Bonavia was the to first show me this model in 2007 during my research for the two booklets on the Valletta *Mandraġġ*.

height levels of the buildings, and all other relevant details, including the Marsamxett Landing area and part of Great Siege Road. On completion of the model, Hanibal Scicluna, who was Director of Museums, in a letter to the Secretary to Government dated 15 September 1939 (Minute 1), sought authorisation to pay Calleja the sum of £50 for making the model, which was to be charged under 'exploration, preservation and acquisition of antiquities'.¹³¹ Today, the model is exhibited at the Museum of National Ethnography at the Inquisitor's Palace at Vittoriosa.

4.11 Relocation and Rehoming of the Residents

The problem of relocating the residents was intended to be handled by the chief engineer in charge of the project (Appendix 4.1). The documents do not give his name. He compiled a report and handed it to the Director of Public Works, suggesting that one block at a time would be built out of the proposed four dwellings to make the apartments available to the residents once the new block was ready. Then, the next block will be built, and the same process will be repeated in the 3rd and 4th blocks. The area earmarked to be demolished had 143 'dwellings', of which 32 were unoccupied. The number of people living in this area was estimated to be 370. These comprised 102 adult males, 89 females and 179 children under 18. Thus, the chief engineer sought to minimise the problem related to the evacuation of residents.

The chief engineer did not only consider the age and social status of the residents but also their occupation. A scrutiny of the type of work of these residents led to the belief that the majority could, without any severe hardship, 'be compelled to depart outside of *Il-Mandraġġ* on their own'. By this he meant that their profession was not tied to *Il-Mandraġġ*, their work would not be affected and perhaps accept to leave. On the contrary, many residents of *Il-Mandraġġ* worked in Valletta or earned their living from the sea and did not consent to live elsewhere. However, the chief engineer contemplated a

¹³¹. NAM, GSCO1, 3304/1939, *Request for payment*.

disturbance allowance and persuaded the government to pay them compensation for the disturbance, particularly those who lived in a rented property, to find a new lease. For the most problematic cases, he suggested that a bonus as an inducement for leaving should be considered.

By mid-1938, the decision on where exactly to relocate the residents of *Il-Mandraġġ* was still unsettled. There was no official commitment with the lessees. In early June, the Lieutenant-Governor's Office wrote to the Director of Public Works stating that the Governor was waiting for an update regarding alternative accommodation. He was still in the dark about the estimates of the rent intended to be paid for these accommodations. Moreover, the Chief Government Medical Officer was still to be informed regarding their sanitary situation.¹³² Expropriation was being linked to sanitation. Was the chief Government Medical Officer given the operative to expropriate properties that he deemed were sanitary? An unpaginated rough note in the WD1159736 lists some 'sanitary houses' on the *Il-Mandraġġ* side of Saint Patrick Street, Saint Mark Street, Saint Lucia Street and Marsamxett Road, which were to be expropriated. The remainder were deemed unsanitary.

Although these plans can be executed, one has to look on the opposite side, that of the residents. Had this project been executed, there would have been objections and protests.¹³³ It was difficult to persuade and remove people born and bred for generations, living in close-knit families and neighbourhoods, and disperse them around the island in environments different from what they had known all their lives. The authorities envisioned the internal resistance of some residents to move from the area, particularly those whose jobs and livelihoods depended on or were linked to the Marsamxett Harbour. Fishermen and boatmen were to be located in areas nearby with the premise that they would be returned once the project was finalised. However, no similar provision was taken regarding the rest of the inhabitants. There were no plans for those who would have been displaced to be returned to the area. The

¹³² AWD, LGO 666/36, 'Confidential' letter dated 2 June 1938, copy in WD1159/36, unpaginated.

¹³³ Fabian Mangion, *The Sunday Times of Malta*, 18 March 2018.

authorities intended back then to rehabilitate the area with middle-class families.¹³⁴

4.12 Implementation of the Manderaggio Scheme

In 1939, a new *Ordinance XXXV (1939)* concerned property construction work and aimed to construct 'luxuriant' dwellings for the workers'.¹³⁵ This Ordinance authorised the demolition work and the filling of the whole of *Il-Mandraġġ*. In terms of construction works, it was estimated that 60,000 cubic yards of additional material was needed to fill the pit of *Il-Mandraġġ*.¹³⁶ The idea was to get extra material from the demolition of the old bakery, which was earmarked for demolition to be replaced by blocks of flats. Other material was to come from the rock cutting and debris from the new Phoenicia Hotel just outside of Valletta. Various minutes in PW1159/36 offer successive lists of costings, the first estimates being the cost of the demolition and filling with existing material given as £6,000 and filling with material not available on the spot at £4,500.

Estimates of the four new blocks of dwellings in *Strada San Patrizio* were £1,676.¹³⁷ Considering that the planning phase of the scheme dragged on for some four years and each list differed according to the time, more accurate estimates on costings were made by mid-1939, as in the list by PWD Director J. L. Gatt detailing the preliminary expenditures (Appendix 3.A). In a successive minute by Gatt in reply to an enquiry by the chief engineers about the project's requirements and costs,¹³⁸ Gatt estimated that the volume to be filled within *Il-Mandraġġ* amounted to 59,700 cubic yards, of which a third was to be provided by the demolition of buildings on the four sides of *il-Mandraġġ* (Appendix 3.B). However, by June 1937, another 39,800 cubic yards of fill were to be provided from other sources.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ AWD, WD1159/36, Memo 4: '*Types of Buildings*' by Director P. W. D., 29 Sept. 1938.

¹³⁵ R. Mangion, *Legislations*, 37.

¹³⁶ AWD, WD1159/36, *Minute* 32.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, *Minute* 48.

¹³⁸ NAN, LGO666/36, *Minute* 34, copy in WD1159/36, unpaginated.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*

A revised estimate based on the draft Law for Insanitary Areas included:

1. A provision for one lift in each block.
2. The construction of chutes to deal with refuse.
3. Washrooms on the roofs.¹⁴⁰

Given the period, the introduction of lifts was an advanced proposal at the time.

Additional estimates were based on calculations of the rental income that the new building will render once completed and occupied.¹⁴¹ These estimates were likely compiled to justify and balance the expenditures planned for the project (Appendix 3.C). An additional estimation related to the annual rent that was expected to be received on letting the new flats at *Il-Mandraġġ*. The final estimate concerned the government's yearly rent and profits from this project (Appendix 3.D).

From the various memos and notes in the file,¹⁴² it is possible to produce a step-by-step list of the procedures of the proposed works at *il-Mandraġġ*. It is also clear that certain building materials were to be salvaged or reused. The method commences with the extraction of all timber doors and window frames, and the walling up of doors and windows underground in the blocks of buildings that are not to be pulled down. Roofs in the lower levels would be knocked down and beams removed. The houses on the corner of Saint Patrick Street with *Strada Manderaggio* would be demolished, as would the houses at both ends of the new street running parallel with Saint Patrick Street (now part of West Street) and the houses where the proposed prolongation of Saint John Street runs into Marsamxett Road. As to the adjacent blocks that would be retained, instructions for the demolition works were for doors and apertures at basement levels to be blocked and shored to strengthen their walls.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, Minute 48, 1.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*

¹⁴² AWD, WD1159/36, various pages.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, The file contains several unpaginated reports and memos by the Director of Public Works, the Chief Engineer and others involved in the planning of the scheme. To particular pages, the first is a hand-written estimate from P.W.D. to S.E., presuming to be the Senior Engineer, which refers to the costs involved for these works. In another list, type-written and also unpaginated, Item 11, '*Walling up doors in the underground of the blocks of buildings which it is not (sic) to be pulled down*', and Item 12, '*Effect all necessary alterations to these blocks and make good to the damages caused to the walls through the demolition*'.

The next step was for material to fill the spaces between the foundation walls to form a passageway for trucks so that along with the general material from demolition, there would be intermixing with the loose material brought by trucks. Moreover, the project envisaged the installation of a pumping plant. The idea was to sprinkle seawater on the dumped debris to press and condense while helping fine debris seep into the cavities. The process needed the installation of the necessary pipes.¹⁴⁴

Stormwater culverts were also to be constructed. These were to be linked to the already existing culverts in the area and thus were to become a continuation. The plan also included the installation of air shafts and "stone posts", the latter being a construction term used in the 1930s for pillars made of stones built in the pit over which the new buildings were to be constructed. Once the stone pillars were level with the surrounding debris and reached the intended height, a platform made from reinforced concrete beams was to be fabricated. Thus, the height of the pillars was to be eight feet or 2 metres and 40 centimetres below the required height of the platform. This gap was to be filled by the concrete beams.

Timber casing or shutters for the concrete grillage were to be laid under the proposed building blocks, to which expanded metal bars one inch in diameter and mild steel stirrups were to be fixed in position with the timber casing. The proposed concrete comprised a one-inch hard stone spall, well washed, with sand and cement mixed in the proportion of 4: 2: 1, respectively. This was to be poured into the timber casing. Once this process is ready, the ground around the reinforced concrete beams will be filled with loose material and allowed to rest for several days. After twenty days from concrete pouring, the casing/shutters would be removed.

4.13 Conclusion

The history of *Il-Mandraġġ* during the first forty years of the twentieth century reflects a complex and multifaceted chapter in Malta's historical

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, On the same second list, Item 13 reads, 'Install a pumping plant and lay the necessary piping for pumping water from the sea'.

narrative. During this period, its development intersected with colonial policies and urban neglect, while its inhabitants engaged with and contributed to the socio-political dynamics of the time. Despite facing significant challenges, including overcrowding, poverty, and public health crises, the residents demonstrated remarkable resilience and a strong community spirit characteristic of densely populated urban environments. Their socio-economic situation remained unchanged from the 19th century, underscoring the enduring hardships faced by this marginalised community. The political debates surrounding slum clearance initiatives, although ostensibly driven by a vision of improved living standards, revealed deeper tensions regarding governance, property rights, and societal priorities during the interwar period.

Ultimately, the story of *Il-Mandraġġ* serves as a poignant reminder of the need to balance urban development with respect for cultural and historical identity. While the demolition and relocation of its residents marked a turning point in this ongoing debate, the area's marginalisation has continued to shape discussions about this district. For policymakers of the wartime era, *Il-Mandraġġ* represented not only a challenge of urban regeneration but also an opportunity to envision a future that transcended its past, aspiring to create a space that could reflect modern aspirations rather than its historical burdens.

Chapter 5 - Aspects of Social life in Il-Mandraġġ in the first decades of the Twentieth Century

5.01 Slums and Slum Clearance (19th & 20th centuries)

There were numerous slum areas in England particularly in the London district, but none were ever as famous as those of Jacob's Island in Bermondsey, on the banks of the River Thames in south-eastern London. Many referred to it as the 'Capital of slums of Victorian England' but credit to its fame must be attributed to the novel '*Oliver Twist*' by Charles Dickens¹. It was Dickens who discovered Jacob's Island, the hellhole of poverty which Robert Mighall describes as '*...the blackest, filthiest, strangest, most extraordinary place, inhabited by the roughest and poorest of a peculiar caste of people*'².

Charles Dickens was not the first English writer to be interested in the social situation within the slums of Jacob's island. In his fictitious novel *Alton Locke*, Charles Kingsley³ gives a description of Jacob's Island in the 1850s,

'It is not surrounded by running water but by a stagnant, filthy ditch, into which the Thames is introduced about twice a week. This carrier of disease and death is the source of water for drinking, cooking and washing. A place where it is safer to drink gin than water.'

These novels or works of fiction were based on facts. In *Slums and Slum Clearance in Victorian London*, J. A. Yelling cites J.H. Dyos, who describes its slang origin as, '*A room in which low goings-on occurred..... from which the modern meaning of the word had developed to include whole houses and*

¹ *Oliver Twist* was a novel written by Charles Dickens and Illustrated by George Cruikshank, first published as a serial in *The Morning Chronicle* in London between 1837 and 1839.

² Robert Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares, From Udolpho to Spitalfields*, Oxford University Press, England, 1999, 44. Retrieved on 20 Feb. 2023 from: <https://books.google.com.mt/books?id=IALGYRHmqycC&pg=PA44&dq&hl=en&sa=jacob%27s+Island=X&ved=2ahUKEwiysd6BsKT9AhWIVaQEHasmDNYQ6AF6BAgKEAI#v=onepage&q=jacob's%20Island&f=false>

³ Claudia Durst Johnson and Vernon Johnson, *The Social Impact of the Novel: A Reference Guide*, Europe, England, 39: *Alton Locke* by Charles Kingsley (1850), Greenwood Press, London, 2002, 89. Retrieved on 20 Feb. 2023 from: https://books.google.com.mt/books?id=XA3ct_HebxsC&printsec=frontcover&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false.

*districts*⁴. He adds that a famous passage by Cardinal Wiseman published in 1850 had helped to promote the term when describing areas around Westminster Abbey as '*labyrinths of lanes and courts, and alleys and slum, nests of ignorance, vice, depravity and crime*'.⁵

Nor were these conditions present only in London, as Paul M. Hohenberg and Lyn Hollen Lees describe the conditions in early Roubaix,⁶

*'Two houses were built on the narrow façade of each lot, with a narrow alley reaching back down the middle as much as 500 feet. The alley was lined with tiny two-storey, two-roomed houses. A store and cabaret on the street, a nearby water tap, and a common latrine at the back of the dead-end lot where the services available to some 50 to 300 inhabitants of a courée.'*⁷

These authors continued that the persistent problem of overcrowding and other shortcomings in low-standard or poor private housing existed in Germany and Spain. Yet the owners were not favouring the expense of upkeeping these properties or any investment owing to the low rents.⁸

But it was through the works of Dickens and after him Jack London that the Victorian and Edwardian society of the time became conscious of these particular areas within cities. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that the Maltese *Mandraġġ* was compared with Jacob's Island and particular interest started to be given to the life and conditions of the residents of this locality. The impoverishment, squalor, overcrowding, crime and the lack of sanitation were equal to each other, even though *Il-Mandraġġ* had running clean water which Jacob's Island did not so the residents of the latter had to rely on the polluted water of the Thames River. Nor was this social predicament unique to Malta or England but was to be found in many other European cities. Since

⁴ James Alfred Yelling, *Slums and Slum Clearance in Victorian London*, Chapter 2: A New Policy against the Slum, *Cross's Act in its London Context*, Allen & Unwin, London, England, 1986, 19. Retrieved on 11 Oct. 2023 from: <https://books.google.com.mt/books?id=OFAr4wv6pbEC&pg=PA157&dq=slum+cle+arance,+Jacob+Island&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewikptqot6T9AhXNUKQEZHZToCRUQ6AF6BAGJEAI#v=onepage&q=dynos&f=false>.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Hohenberg and Hollen Lees, *The Making of Urban Europe, 1000-1994*, (Harvard University Press, U.S.A., 30 Jun 2009), 133.

⁷ A *courée* - a depressive working-class area in the heart of the industrial Estaque in Marseille and other French cities like Lille, Roubaix and Tourcoing. Retrieved on 21 Dec. 2024 from: <https://dictionnaire.lerobert.com/en/definition/couree>.

⁸ Hohenberg and Hollen Lees, 352.

Malta was then a British Crown possession, the slums of London, the capital city of England, are an appropriate comparison.

Until 1882, Valletta had not fared badly as fresh water was conveyed to the city through the aqueduct that Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt had commissioned in 1615. Luckily, due to its low contours, the *Manderaggio* was one of the last locations in the city where the water moved by gravity into a cistern of some 300,000 litres to supply two fountains⁹ that also date to the same era and overflowed into the sea. The irony is that, even though the exact number is unknown, only a few dwellings scattered around *Il-Mandraġġ* likely depended on rainwater catchment to fill their wells and cisterns if they had any! By 1918, water hand-pumps were installed at *Il-Mandraġġ* and by 1920 tap water was made available to many houses in Valletta. Still, only a handful of dwellings in *Il-Mandraġġ* which could boast of such a luxury.

These literary scenes of the social conditions of people living in slum areas inspired 20th-century authors to write about *Il-Mandraġġ* which featured in travelogues and scholarly works. It had already acquired a notorious connotation and international reputation. Whether in fiction, travelogues or autobiographies, the reader is presented with the same grizzly picture.

As rightly observed by Carmelina Gugliuzzo in her *Cosmopolitanism and Colonial Urban Strategies*,¹⁰ people living in deprived areas were easily labelled as being vindictive, addicted and jealous; some of the labels that the people of *Il-Mandraġġ* earned over the centuries. Gugliuzzo quotes that at the turn of the nineteenth century, Louis de Boisgelin,¹¹ spoke about the various good qualities that the Maltese inherited from their colonizers and the foreigners who came to settle in Malta. Boisgelin was reacting to the negative criticism linked to the theories of race that had started to creep into learned

⁹ Denis A. Darmanin. *L-Istorja tal-Mandraġġ tal-Belt*, St Augustine's Youth Group (SAY), Malta, 2008, 6.

¹⁰ Carmelina Gugliuzzo, "Cosmopolitanism and Colonial Urban Strategies: two faces of a same phenomenon", The European Association for Urban History, Urban Europe in Comparative Perspective, Papers presented at the Eighth International Conference on Urban History, Stockholm 2006, unpaginated.

¹¹ Louis de Boisgelin, *Ancient and Modern Malta*, (Midsea Books, Valletta 1989) Facsimile edition.

articles and which the Maltese began to become victims. In the nineteenth century, certain American and Anglo-Saxon scholars attributed the Maltese North African features as though jealousy, vindictiveness and addiction to thievery were only present among Arabs.

Writing half a century after Verne, Evelyn St John Waugh refers to *Il-Mandraġġ* in the chapter that he dedicated to Malta in his book *Labels*, a journal of his journey in the Mediterranean. This famous author visited Malta during a pleasure cruise in 1929. His descriptions of Malta, particularly Valletta, are so detailed and thorough that his words effectively paint pictures of all the locations he visited in Malta. But the picture he painted of *Il-Mandraġġ* could not have been uglier,¹²

'Until quite recent years it was a place where the police could offer no protection; since it has been scoured clean of its more militant criminality and it is about as safe as the Vieux port of Marseilles. It is wise to go with some kind of escort... Not a single street of the Manderaggio is accessible to wheeled traffic. Most of them are narrow passages in which two can barely pass without brushing against each other; many of them are mere tunnels and flights of steps, roofed over with dwelling houses; half of them are blind alleys leading through infinite deviations, round hair-pin bends and up and down precipitous inclines to a dead stop; houses are jumbled, literally, on top of each other and densely populated; some of them are caves cut into the face of the cliff, some are poised on buttresses over a drop of a hundred feet; some are cellars approached by steps from the level of the gutter; needless to say that the dirt and small are overpowering. As in the case with most slums, the population seems to consist of extremely young and the extremely old'.

Writing towards the end of the twentieth century, the description that Herbert Ganado gives of *Il-Mandraġġ* was one that he witnessed when volunteering with a Christian Society the aim of which was to assist the poor. This Society was known as the one of St Vincent Ferreri.¹³

'In Il-Mandraġġ, I had seen a lot of cases of the Mutual Society of St. Vincent. I saw old men in bed in that darkness of their hovels, who refused to be sent to the old people's home known as Imgieret because," as one woman told me, 'you go there to die and here, good or bad, you eat and are visited and are told who was born and who got married...'

¹². Waugh, 809.

¹³. H. Ganado, 307.

'In Il-Mandraġġ, I saw families with an unemployed husband, families abandoned by the father, underdeveloped children and youths living in dark corners, people who became poor because of gambling and drinking, people who got sick, which deprived them of their strength and people who with a little bit of assistance could get back on their feet'.¹⁴

Vincenzo Maria Pellegrini was another Maltese intellectual who, like Ganado, militated in the Nationalist Party in the 1930s and was struck by the social situation in *Il-Mandraġġ*. But while Ganado reflected on an area that no longer existed, Pellegrini left a vivid account of what he witnessed and heard while giving private lessons in a room in one of the boundary streets of *Il-Mandraġġ* (Appendix 1).

Without showing any form of bias, Vincenzo Maria Pellegrini wrote a twelve-page *short story* titled 'Life in the Manderaggio, A short story spitefully dedicated to all those who will dislike it'. In this work, which was never published and remained in letter form, Pellegrini described *Il-Mandraġġ* as he had personally experienced it during the 1930s.¹⁵ It is an unfiltered piece of argumentative work. In the first page of his 'letter', Pellegrini lashes out at the authorities regarding the situation at *Il-Mandraġġ* for omitting matters of importance and leaving the area in total neglect. Pellegrini believed this was why living in this locality was so miserable and problematic for the inhabitants.

Then, he proceeds to briefly introduce the state of the locality, followed by a story that he had witnessed. The story is quite simple. A young lady sings about her misfortune in love, which evolves into a quarrel between two persons and even a third person. Subsequently, the plot continues with the sad story of the girls and their families, the fiancé and even an actual aggravated physical quarrel in which the police are involved. Whether a real-

¹⁴. *Fil-Mandraġġ kont rajt ħafna ta' San Vincenz. Rajt xjuħ fis-sodod f'dak id-dlam tat-terrani, li ma kienux isiru l-Imġieret, "għaliex hemm", qatli waħda, "tmur biex tmur u hawn, tajjeb, jew ħażin, tiekol u xi ħadd jitwawal, jarak. u jgħidlek min twieled u min iżżewweġ... Rajt fil-Mandraġġ familji bir-raġel bla xogħol, ħajjithom mill-mill-missier, tfa' u zgħażaġħ mhux lokalizzati fl-irkejjen, nies li ftaqru bil-logħob jew bix-xorb, nies li għewhom marda u tnaqqis fil-kumpaniji li jistgħu jiksbu. ta' ftiit għajjnuna biex iqumu fuq saqajhom."*

¹⁵. NAM, Vincenzo Maria Pellegrini, *Life in the Manderaggio, A short story spitefully dedicated to all those who will dislike it*, Private Deposits (PDE) 0029-004-02: 048.

life coverage or just a short novel based on some personal experience, Pellegrini recounted an everyday occurrence in *il-Mandraġġ*. Arguments like these were prevalent in most congested habitats and amongst the working class, especially when women were washing the family clothes at one of the fountains or supposedly cleaning the house with open doors and windows. They would sing rhymes with ambiguous messages to mock a neighbour or someone they had quarrelled with, which mainly resulted in name-calling, insults and even fights.¹⁶ It was a form of gossip in which the lyrics of the serenader would disclose all she knew about the individual. Unfortunately, reference to this phase of past folklore is not comparable to *għana* or *taqbil*, as such songs would be sung in *Il-Mandraġġ* and elsewhere were largely used as a means of insult by women within such areas. It appears some of these women were liable to confront each other much like two cats about to fight, shouting the usual abuse of highlighting any known defects or revealing secrets of the other.

A person who shared these views was Ġuże Orlando Smith. Orlando Smith harboured a socialist inspiration and was one of the founding fathers of the workers of the Labour Party. What made his written views of *Il-Mandraġġ* interesting and innovative is the fact that he did not express them in the form of a letter through the press nor as a manifesto, but did so in the form of a novel, entitled *L-Ibleħ*.

The significance of Orlando Smith's narrative caught the attention of historians, literary critics and social analysts. Roderick Livori used the description by Orlando Smith when studying out-migration in Valletta.¹⁷ When reflecting on the narrative by Orlando Smith Olivier Friggieri, stated that,

'A family that had two rooms in Il-Mandraġġ was considered lucky, and those very few who lived in two rooms and a raf [sic]¹⁸, or three rooms counted themselves as those rich who live in the

¹⁶. John Chircop, Oral Tradition and Historical Source: The Maltese *Għannejja*, Oral History, xxi, 1, *Ethnicity and National Identity*, Spring, 1993, 63. Retrieved on 8 Mar. 2023 from: <https://www-jstor-org.ejournals.um.edu.mt/stable/40179317?sid=primo>.

¹⁷. Livori, 34.

¹⁸. A Maltese corruption for 'raft' but likely referring to a garret.

branch of il-Mandraġġ. Il-Mandraġġ is a stain not only for the main city of Malta but for the whole nation'.¹⁹

George Said Zammit was another who considered Orlando Smith's description of the location and the inhabitants as correct and highly compelling.

'The last extract by Guze' to be reviewed is "Il-Mandraġġ" (The Manderaggio), authored by Orlando Smith. The relevance of this novel lies in the details that the author uses to describe everyday life in the Valletta common tenements. He describes these dwellings as "il-qabar ta' nies ħajja" (the grave of living people) to remind us of the difficult life that the dwellers of these common tenements had to endure. The author also refers to the lack of hygiene, adequate ventilation, lighting and individual privacy by which these houses were characterized.²⁰

Another writer, who like Orlando Smith had personal experience with the plight of the working classes and was deeply involved in their movement, was Karmenu Ellul Galea.²¹ In the first volume of his book about the history of Trade Unions in Malta, Ellul Galea²² describes the situation at *Il-Mandraġġ* of Valletta and Vittoriosa in some detail.²³ He shares the opinion of his time that squalor, health, criminality and illiteracy resulted from the problems brought by poverty. He insisted that these even featured in the Censuses's reports. Ellul Galea referred to families living in one or two fly-infested rooms, at most having two beds and with numerous sacks spread on the floor and little furniture much of which is broken.²⁴ That these habitats were dark, without proper ventilation, running water and even sanitation, are the same degrading conditions that were referred to by all who wrote on *Il-Mandraġġ*, whether in official reports, studies and even novels, too many to list here. Ellul Galea concurs that the authorities had left the inhabitants of *Il-Mandraġġ* as if they were of a different race and living in a secluded corner of Valletta.²⁵ He went

¹⁹. Oliver Friggieri, 61-62; *'Familja li fil-Il-Mandraġġ kellha żewġ ikmamar kienet tgħodd ruha xxurtjata udawk il-ftit ħafna li kienu jgħixu f'zewġ ikmamar u raf, jew tlett ikmamar kienu jgħoddu ruħhom bħaladawk l-għonja li jgħixu fil-frugħa tal-Il-Mandraġġ. "Il-Il-Mandraġġ huwa tebgħa mhux biss għall-belt ewlenija ta' Malta iżda għall ġens kollu'.*

²⁰. Said Zammit, 154.

²¹. Karmenu Ellul Galea, narration.

²². Karmenu Ellul Galea, *It-Trejdunjonizmu f'Malta: I-Ewwel Volum, (Publikazzjoni Indipendenza, Malta, 1993).*

²³. *ibid.*, 131.

²⁴. *ibid.*

²⁵. *ibid.*

on to state that the rich were a class of their own and could not be bothered about the lesser mortals. The author gives some demographic statistics in support of his claims.²⁶ He goes into the types of habitation and the conditions of the residents. Although a statement greatly repeated by other authors, he showed a preoccupation with the sanitary conditions and sicknesses because the locality lacked an adequate drainage system.²⁷ Moreover, Ellul Galea shared the 19th-century vision that *Il-Mandraġġ*, was *Malta taħt l-art*, or an underground settlement²⁸ Furthermore, Ellul Galea recorded the fact that political candidates from both the Nationalist and the Constitutional Party recruited thugs from *Il-Mandraġġ* during the 1920s and 1930s to be part of their troops during election times. Today they are referred to as ‘bodyguards’. In truth, they acted as agent provocateurs, which did not help the reputation of the people of *Il-Mandraġġ*.

In his book, *L-Istorja tat-Tarżna*, Karmenu Ellul Galea speaks about the presence of tradesmen at the H.M. *Dockyard* who hailed from *Il-Mandraġġ*. He was a person who associated with and knew these people, particularly those who worked alongside him. In the words of Ellul Galea, ‘*they were excellent tradesmen and no one would have guessed that they hailed from the Birgu or the Valletta Mandraġġ*’.²⁹ In part, there was also reasonable truth in that the people of *Il-Mandraġġ* were not the rogues that sometimes were described as in literature.

A writer who shared this same opinion was Sir Harry Luke. He referred to *Il-Mandraġġ* in his work entitled *Malta, An Account and An Appreciation*. Besides being a keen traveller, Sir Harry Luke was also the Lieutenant-Governor of Malta which meant that he had a closer relationship with Malta than other British officials.³⁰ His book, first published in the 1930s, was a great success and was published in several editions. What is different in Luke's perception of *Il-Mandraġġ* is that it was not the worst place on earth,

^{26.} *ibid.*, 136.

^{27.} *ibid.*, 135.

^{28.} *ibid.*, 136.

^{29.} *ibid.*, 134. During our various discussions with Ellul Galea, he mentioned that men from *il-Mandraġġ* were already working at the dockyard when he commenced working as a Junior Recorder, even asking whether any could have been related to my wife's family.

^{30.} Noel Grima, *Sir Harry Luke: benefactor or ruthless despot? - A look back at a colonial officer who ruled Malta*, *The Malta Independent*, 28 Sept. 2014.

nor were its inhabitants the ruffians and criminals that they were thought to be in the popular perception of the time. Consequently, his description of the locality illustrates a different reality. In his opinion, the situation was not as bad as it was depicted and not as bad in the slums of England and the European continent,

*'People who have never seen the Manderaggio sometimes speak of it as "underground Malta" and as a region which cannot be entered with safety except with the most stringent precautions. Such descriptions are completely fanciful. The fact is that the Manderaggio is a "depressed area" in the literal sense of the words, a densely populated district of about two acres lying at a lower level than the surrounding quarters. Its inhabitants are mainly boatmen and watermen, who are no different from the inhabitants of the rest of Valletta except that they are rather poorer. It is a slum whose disappearance has been decreed but in the meantime it is as safe and accessible as any other part of the city.'*³¹

During the Second World War, John Gerald Cutajar Beck published an article entitled *Malta Calling, The 'Manderaggio'*.³² In his writing, Cutajar Beck tells of life in *il-Mandraġġ*, possibly as it was before the war. His narrative appears unbiased and is in the same rhythm as Luke's. Like most authors, he commences with the origin of the name and its history, the cramped habitations and sanitation and even mentions the animals that lived in close quarters with humans. Yet, the location is noted as one of the least stricken in most epidemics. The author also argues that not all the residents were poor, some even owned property outside Valletta. He states, *'They live there because they were born there, their fathers lived and died there, their children will grow up and stick to the old roost'*.³³

Cutajar Beck discusses hygiene and family life, particularly mothers who regularly bathe their children. He talks about the fact that women washed their clothes in the fountains. He details the physical configuration of the alleys, including their various levels, depressions, and multiple steps. However, just like Pellegrini, Cutajar Beck brings to light the menace of arguments between residents and even with outsiders and the consequences

³¹. Harry Luke, 64.

³². Cutajar Beck, 26.

³³. *ibid.*

that may be endured.³⁴ This notion, that not everything was terrible in *Il-Mandraġġ*, was shared by Sir Harry Luke.

Perhaps one may argue that both Luke and Cutajar Beck held positive views because they were imperialists and sought to avoid conveying criticism that could be interpreted as seditious during times of war. This positive perspective later evolved into nostalgia, as evidenced in research conducted in 2008 while preparing a booklet on *Il-Mandraġġ*. Interviews with senior residents who had spent their childhood in *Il-Mandraġġ* during the 1930s revealed a nostalgic sentiment. Transcripts of conversations with two particular residents, who lived to a venerable age but have since passed, indicated that they described their younger years in *Il-Mandraġġ* as 'happy and joyful'.³⁵

When comparing the comments made by a former resident of *Il-Mandraġġ* and the findings of Jon P. Mitchell about the people of the *Arcċipierku*, another depressed zone in Valletta, the similarity is striking. When interviewing a particular resident of the *Arcċipierku* for his article, *One Family, One Household*,³⁶ the resident told Mitchell that the locality was so close-knit that they lived '*qisna bitfha waħda*' (like one courtyard) and that their relationships were such that they were '*bħal familja wahda*' (like one family).³⁷ Mitchell adds,

'Both expressions convey the message that although the area consisted of many households, many dwellings, it was really only one, with one courtyard boundary, and one set of insiders. This was partly dictated by the physical structure of the most common type of housing in I-Arcċipierku: the kerrejja'.³⁸

A contemporary, Daniel J. Arkell from Rabat had the same ideas and thought that the people of *Il-Mandraġġ* were close-knit, and even though the area was overcrowded, they were happy and lived as one family.³⁹

³⁴. *ibid.*, 27.

³⁵. DVD, *Jien mil-Mandraġġ*, WE, 2008

³⁶. Mitchell, 87.

³⁷. *ibid.*, 88.

³⁸. *ibid.*

³⁹. Arkell, *The Times*, 10 Apr. 1937.

As late as the early 1970s, individuals from Valletta who lived in these environments were still airing these same views. In a preliminary report conducted by the government before the demolition of old structures in the area of the *Due Balli* in Valletta,⁴⁰ the residents interviewed were more concerned that their old habitats and lifestyles were soon to end rather than with the actual demolition. This was the same sentiment expressed by the residents of *Il-Mandraġġ* when faced with the government demolition schemes. The sense of resentment brought by the proposed changes was also noted by architect Michael Ellul when visiting *Il-Mandraġġ* as a university student.⁴¹

The conclusion expressed by Harry Luke and other writers that the people of *Il-Mandraġġ* were not hardened criminals is confirmed by police reports. People from *Il-Mandraġġ* were reported in the police Occurrences Books and although they were petty crimes they were reported because the law and its enforcement at the time were quite strict. What follows is just a glimpse of the police reports of the early decades of the 20th century for Valletta, only the first three months of the 1920s are being quoted here. Most reports were like those of the 14-year-old Vincenzo Falzon⁴² and Giuseppe Borg known as *tax-Xelin*⁴³ of *Il-Mandraġġ* who were caught selling tobacco and matches in *Strada Reale* (present-day Republic Street) without a police permit.⁴⁴ In the 1920s, Borg was in his early teens and being the eldest son of eleven offspring, he engaged in this illegal trade to help the family. There was also a case of a man from *Il-Mandraġġ* who found a wallet with money in the interior corridor of the court and returned it to the police,⁴⁵ but there were also cases of insults,⁴⁶ even in groups⁴⁷, disturbances,⁴⁸ and disobeying police

⁴⁰. 'Rapport Preliminari dwar x'jahsbu n-nies ta l-Arcipierku fuq it-Tigdid li sa jsir fieh', Slum Clearance Commission, Public Works Department, (Malta, 1972), 6.

⁴¹. Information given personally to the author by Michael Ellul.

⁴². NAM, *Police Occurrences Book*, Pol. 1, Valletta, Report 5213, 18 Oct. 1918., 'Hawker w/o licence'.

⁴³. The family background of Giuseppe Borg is quite known to me as he was one of my wife's uncles.

⁴⁴. *ibid.*, Report 1325 1 Feb. 192.

⁴⁵. *ibid.*, Report 940, 'Malta Police Receipt 643 - Lost Property', 31 Dec. 1919,

⁴⁶. *ibid.*, Report 1087, 'Disturbances by fighting,' 12 Jan. 1920 and Report 1229 'Complain', 21 Jan. 1920.

⁴⁷. *ibid.*, Report 4218, 29 Aug. 1918, 'Disturbing the Peace in Stda. M'Raggio'.

⁴⁸. *ibid.*, Report 5183, 16 Oct. 1918.

orders,⁴⁹ which together with petty fights,⁵⁰ similar to the one described by Pellegrini in his narrative. One cannot exclude cases of physical violence against women,⁵¹ but there were also cases of women who were aggressive towards their husbands.⁵² There was nothing extraordinary in such cases that were common to Valletta and towns and villages all over Malta.

5.02 The Women of *Il-Mandraġġ* in the 1930s

These recollections of people who had either lived or witnessed *Il-Mandraġġ* in the 1930s are a testament to the lively and ongoing community bonds that can grow from a hole in the ground, a labyrinth of narrow alleys. While physically, this area remained different from the rest of Valletta, the status of the women of *Il-Mandraġġ* was not significantly different from those of other deprived areas⁵³. Nor was their role any different from what was expected from women during that time; to fulfil the role of a wife and mother.

As is usually the case with close-knit communities, the inhabitants shared a particular mentality and reasoning and did not trust people outside their borders. They mingled with others from Valletta only because they were close to them or for necessary reasons, like work. However, it was different within its confines and they would help each other, particularly in times of need unless some differences had arisen or there was a family feud, in which case their dark side showed.

Many families were related through marriage but marriage was not confined to partners within *il-Mandraġġ* and some did marry beyond its borders. If a suitable mate could not be found for a daughter, it was common for one of the girl's parents to seek the services of *il-ħuttaba* or a marriage broker. The use of marriage brokers was still practised regularly in *Il-Mandraġġ* up to the 1950s, as told to me by my wife's parents. In many cases, the *ħuttaba* was a middle-aged woman.

^{49.} *ibid.*, Report number smudged/illegible - '*Transgressing Police Orders*',? Jan. 1920.,

^{50.} *ibid.*, Report 1293 ii, '*Disturbances (Fighting)*', 19 Dec. 1919.

^{51.} *ibid.*, Report 986, '*Complaint of Insanity (threatening husband with knife)*',? Dec.1919.

^{52.} *ibid.*, Report 1164, '*Threats & striking (by husband)*', 18 Jan.1920.

^{53.} Mitchell, Jon P., 85.

Many women at the *Il-Mandraġġ* were illiterate and most had limited aspirations for their children or to better themselves, since their principal concern was for their offspring to be fed and clothed. Others aspired to send their sons to school to be able to read and write while keeping the girls at home. Boys from the families at *Il-Mandraġġ* were fortunate as in 1848, the Augustinian friars in Valletta had opened a school within the convent offering free education to boys of Valletta. Some of the children of *Il-Mandraġġ* were fortunate enough to benefit from this opportunity to attend school.⁵⁴

Even the way women spoke contained an ambiguity. Two common phrases were '*Hawn qalbi*' and '*Għidli ruħi*', both referring to the other person as being someone close or dear.⁵⁵ But in some cases, their inner thoughts may well be different.



Fig. 52. Washing day. Filling water from a common street tap at the *Mandraġġ*.
The Maltese artist Joseph Galea is wearing a coat and hat.
(Pierre Galea)

⁵⁴. Ġulju Bonnici, 135-137 and *Il Portafoglio Maltese*, 23 Oct. 1848. Note: My father-in-law, Vincent Borg, was one of the boys from *il-Mandraġġ* who attended this school.

⁵⁵ DVD, 2008.

Children of *Il-Mandraġġ* would likely have been classified into two categories: those whose parents worked and received decent earnings, and those who were poor. Such a category does not represent anything particular or peculiar to the area. On the contrary, it follows one of the many categories by which children living in poor regions usually are studied. In most cases, children inherit or share clothes handed down to them by charitable persons or institutions. It was customary for the children of *Il-Mandraġġ*, as the rest of the island, to be scantily dressed in threadbare clothes. However, most mothers did their best to keep their children clean using water fetched from the fountains or hand pumps (Figs. 52 and 54). The fate for the girls was even worse. They were victims of the stereo-typification of the time and their primary aspirations were marriage, having children and generally raising a family. Thus, girls would have been taught how to help in the house and even run some errands when still children, while the boys would have frequented the streets at an early age to either learn life on the roads or help run errands for shops or businesses at Valletta and bring something home. In their way, the parents were expected to struggle with life's hardships. Then, after a hectic day of tending to her family, the mother and some of her children would sit and talk with relatives or neighbours by the threshold of their home until it was time to put herself to bed (Fig. 53). What made this situation peculiar was the number of children living in such an enclosed area as *Il-Mandraġġ*. In terms of density, this area had the highest number of children confined in a space that English writers of the nineteenth century, such as Charles Dickens, would qualify as street urchins.



Fig. 53. Women of *Il-Mandraġġ* on their doorstep.
(Private collection)

Unfortunately, some women suffered the wrath of their violent husbands. As noted by Ganado and previous reports to the police, some families fell victim to the alcohol and gambling problems of their husbands.⁵⁶ Again, this was not a situation present only in *Il-Mandraġġ*. However, for various reasons, the situation in the area caught the attention of contemporaries because of population density. Some husbands were known to have abandoned their spouses, and in some instances, they emigrated without sending money or any information about their whereabouts to their estranged wives. *Il-Mandraġġ* being a secluded area, such cases were socially manifested more than in other places.

Although women were responsible for running the household at most times their influence did not extend beyond their homes. This explains why women of *Il-Mandraġġ*, like many other mothers at the time in Malta, wished to bear males. It was not only a case of the survival of the family's surname, but in the eyes of women male offspring had a less challenging life. Their main preoccupation was to procure money for the family.⁵⁷ As already discussed above the boys were taught to fend for themselves quite early and were expected to bring something home to help in case their sisters needed a dowry.

⁵⁶. H. Ganado, i, 310.

⁵⁷. Personal narration by my late father-in-law, Vincent Borg, who was born in 1926 and a product of *il-Mandraġġ*.

Such a social description is depressing, but at the same time, there is nothing in particular about it that one would not find in other areas in Malta. This explains why the authorities of the period did not attribute much importance to the poverty level of the people of *Il-Mandraġġ*. However, what made this area different from others was the dense population in such a small depression of land that was a hovel, which turned the place into a health hazard. This health issue was a recurrent problem and a central theme to discussions of this area, distinguishing it from other areas in Malta and explaining why the authorities in the 1930s started to think that immediate action was required.

An unnumbered map of the *Il-Mandraġġ* dated 1938⁵⁸ itemizes the streets, door numbers, residents and occupations. There's even a shop owner whose wife is listed as a writer. Other women from *il-Mandraġġ*, particularly single women, unmarried or widows who needed to support themselves or their families are listed as dressmakers, laundresses or maidservants. It is quite likely that these women worked with wealthy families and in venues that catered to British servicemen, particularly in bars and lodgings. However, other women are listed as beggars.



Fig. 54. A typical washing day at the *Mandraġġ*.

⁵⁸. WDA, PW1159/36, unpaginated.

5.03 The Carmelite Devotion

Although falling within the parish of *Porto Salvo* and until the new parish of St Augustine was added in 1968, the people of *Il-Mandraġġ* held the church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel as their unofficial parish church. Thus, in the nineteenth century, the inhabitants commissioned the local artist Vincenzo Dimech (1768-1831)⁵⁹ to make a statue of Our Lady, known as *Il-Madonna l-Mandraġġara*.⁶⁰ This statue was taken out in procession three days before the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, celebrated on 16 July. The Maltese expression *Il-Madonna l-Mandraġġara* is a construct state for *Il-Madonna tal-Mandraġġara* or *Our Lady of the inhabitants of Il-Mandraġġ*. Despite their poverty, the inhabitants even collected money to enrich the church. The titular and processional statue of the *Madonna tal-Karmnu* (Our Lady of Mount Carmel) was the subject of votive offerings especially jewellery and other rich decorations. When serious problems were encountered, *Il-Mandraġġari* sought divine intercession from *Il-Madonna tal-Karmnu*. These facts have been consistently recounted over the years by family members, acquaintances and by Fr. Martin Schembri O.C., particularly to those living in the area.

Children born in *Il-Mandraġġ* and others in the vicinity of the Carmelite church were given names associated with the Madonna and Carmelite saints. Children with names such as Carmelo or Carmela, Maria, Xmun after St Simon Stock, Elijja after the Prophet Elijah and patron saint of the Carmelite Order in Malta, Giuseppe, as the feast of St Joseph was celebrated at this church and others, could be heard being called by their mothers, particularly at *il-Mandraġġ*, and more than one voice would reply. There is no need to look far, as the names within one family from *Il-Mandraġġ* illustrate this point: Maria Carmela (the mother), the eldest brother Elija and the others, Vincent, Xmun and Giuseppe, along with a sister, Carmena, sharing a name with

⁵⁹. '230-year-old Statue restored to its former glory', *The Malta Independent*, 30 June 2012.

⁶⁰. Personal narration by my late father-in-law, Vincent Borg or *Ċensu x-Xelin*, who, along with some of his brothers, were the bearers of the statue for many years. The eldest brother Elijah was the statue's custodian for decades until the mid-1980s.

another family member, Carmen. Additionally, their relative Elija Borg Bonaci, a renown confectioner and also from *Il-Mandraġġ*, exemplifies the practice of marriage within the community.

5.04 Emigration and *il-Mandraġġ*

Like many of the young generation of the time, several boys of *Il-Mandraġġ* sought greener better abroad. While migration is generally associated with the post-war period, it was already taking place amongst the people of *Il-Mandraġġ*. A selective survey of passport applications from persons residing at *Il-Mandraġġ* between 1910 and 1920⁶¹ (Fig. 55).

<u>Destination</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
Tunisia	12	2	14
U.S.A.	6	-	6
England	3	-	3
Egypt	4	1	5
Algeria	-	1	1
Italy	2	-	2
Canada	2	-	2
Gibraltar	1	-	1
Russia	1	-	1
Turkey	-	1	1
Libya	1	2	3
Total applications	32	7	39

Fig. 55. List of passport applications; gender and destinations (MT NAM MFA-01).

These figures indicate that emigration by residents of *Il-Mandraġġ* was not reserved to just males, but females also emigrated, although it is uncertain whether any travelled for a holiday. These figures complement the general trends of migration patterns in Malta at the turn of the twentieth century. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the people of *Il-Mandraġġ*, like the rest of the population, preferred to migrate to countries of North Africa. Then, in the rolling 1920s and 1930s, the distant lands of the British Empire started attracting the attention of those who wished to migrate,

⁶¹. NAM, Subseries - *Passport Applications of 1907 to 1920*, MT NAM MFA-01, various dates.

and countries like Australia and Canada began to become places of interest. At the same time, Tunisia in North Africa,⁶² chiefly remained a destination of interest as the job opportunities there, particularly as waiters and field labourers, were still promising. What the passport applications show is that the people of *Il-Mandraġġ* preferred Tunisia over other regions of North Africa that were receiving migrants at the time, such as Tripoli and Alexandria. While Gozitans tended to prefer Algeria, the people of *Il-Mandraġġ* were more likely to migrate to Tunisia. This choice was most likely because, at the time, the maritime connection between Valletta and Tunisia was regular and frequent. This proximity facilitated a person to reach this country in just one day of travel. Travel was not restricted to just males, as women from *Il-Mandraġġ* also travelled, mainly to North Africa.

5.05 The 'Streets' of *Il-Mandraġġ* in the 1930s

⁶². Simon Mercieca and Aaron Buttigieg, 'When women had fewer opportunities to marry: Gozo's General Marriage Rates in the 19th Century', *La donna, il matrimonio e la famiglia Aspetti sociali dal XVI al XX secolo*, Giovanna Da Molin and Angela Carbone (eds.), *Centro Interuniversitario di Ricerca "Popolazione, Ambiente e Salute"*, (Bari, Italy, 2022), 233.



Fig. 56. Map of the western side of the *Manderaggio* indicating residence in streets or alleys labelled A, B and C.⁶³

Although parts and zones within *Il-Mandraġġ* have already been covered in the previous chapters, in this chapter, particular reference will be made to a survey that contains a plan of *Il-Mandraġġ* (Fig. 56). What makes this survey different from those already discussed and done before is that this survey, conducted in the 1930s (Appendix 4.5), divides *Il-Mandraġġ* into sections and lists the occupations for three bordering streets. It also gives a detailed description of the number of dwellings, houses, flats and rookeries, the number of male and female residents and their children within *Il-Mandraġġ* and the principal alleys and the streets.⁶⁴ During this period, the surrounding streets were known in Italian as *Strada San Marco* (Saint Mark Street), *Strada San Patrizio* (Saint Patrick Street), *Strada Santa Lucia* (Saint Lucy/Lucia Street) and *Strada Marsamuxetto* (Marsamxett Street).

⁶³ *ibid.*, PW1156/36, plan 'A, B and C'.

⁶⁴ WDA, PW1159/36, unpaginated.

Interestingly, many people in Valletta today, particularly those over 50 years of age, still refer to most of the streets of Valletta in their Italian names or their Maltese variation.

The part of *Strada San Marco* overlooking *Il-Mandraġġ*, contained 31 residences, one of which had two interconnecting and two others sub-divided. The door numbering commenced from number 41 up to 48.

- Number 41 was sub-divided into No. 41 and 41A, Nos. 42 and 46 were flats, No. 42 had 12 residences, two of which were interconnected, and No. 46 had 11 residences, of which one was subdivided. Nos. 43, 44, 45 and 48 were single residences.
- Six residences were unoccupied, details on two others were not listed and one residence, No. 43, is listed as 'Not existing'. Three properties are listed as grocery, tailor, and coffee shops, while a resident in one of the flats is recorded as 'living abroad'.
- There are 18 male residents, 16 female residents and 24 children living in this part of the street. One family had 10 children, which was not unusual if the family could afford to support them during this period.
- The occupations of the males ranged from labourers to boatmen and shopkeepers. There was one tinsmith, two were sailors, one a soldier and one listed as a beggar.
- Occupations of the females also varied, but most were laundresses, then maidservants, dressmakers and two were beggars.

Unlike *Strada San Marco*, although on the outskirts *Strada San Patrizio* was considered part of *il-Mandraġġ*. It commenced from *Strada San Marco* and continued horizontally, going along the periphery of *Il-Mandraġġ*, bisected in the middle by *Strada San Giovanni* which stopped just within *Il-Mandraġġ* and continued to the stepped arch connecting to *Strada Santa Lucia*. In this survey, the door numbers are from 5 to 20; numbers 5 to 18 are on one part, and numbers 19 and 20 are on the other section of the street. Although this street is the last street on the iron-grid layout of Valletta, judging

from the employment of the male inhabitants, they were all working-class, and there were no white-collar workers amongst them.

- The dwellings were 11 single housing units, although Nos. 5 and 6 were listed as one residence. Nos. 10, 16, 18 and 19 were flats or multiple homes, with No. 10 having seven units, No. 16 with 11, two in No. 18 and 7 in No. 19. Of interest is that No. 10 was the reputed residence of Mattia Preti.⁶⁵
- The residents in this part of the street totalled 37 males, 37 females and 91 children. This street had the most married couples and the largest number of children, of which two families share the same number: six offspring.
- There are no entries for four dwellings for which one was confirmed as 'unoccupied'. Two others are confectionary shops, one a carpenter shop, and another is a store.
- Occupations of the males vary; 12 were labourers working in Valletta, another working with the Public Works Department and another at Cospicua, two were waiters and four were shopkeepers. There was a policeman, two boatmen, a baker, a printer, one shoemaker, two motor drivers, one shopkeeper, one hawkers, a cook, a cigarette maker, and a scavenger,⁶⁶ all of Valletta. Two were listed as working at H.M. Dockyard, another at H.M.S. *St Angelo*⁶⁷ and one was unemployed.

The indication is that most women in this street were housewives and raising their families, as the column for the occupations of the females is blank, with only two entries, one a laundress and the other a writer. The latter is quite an unusual description and depends on what was in the mind of the

⁶⁵ Victor. F Denaro, 'Still more houses of Valletta', *Melita Historica*, iii, 3, (Malta Historical Society, 1962), 45-46 and John Debono, *Arts and Artisans in St John's and other Churches in the Maltese Islands, ca 1650-1800*, (self-published, Malta, 2005), 104.

⁶⁶ In those days, garbage was collected from door to door, although it is doubtful if the same system had applied to *il-Mandraġġ*. Scavengers made a living by selling discarded metal to scrap dealers and any food scraps were either fed to animals or converted into manure. It is likely that at *il-Mandraġġ*, scraps of food served to feed any animals that they kept or used as fishing bait.

⁶⁷ Until 1934, H.M.S. *St Angelo* was formerly named H.M.S. *Egmont* and the Headquarters Mediterranean of the British Royal Navy in Malta. Most locally enlisted Maltese sailors were deckhands, cooks, domestic (stewards), stokers, and carpenters. At the time, very few Maltese had the opportunity to become Petty Officers due to their nationality.

person who wrote the entry. She was likely the person to whom most illiterate persons from *Il-Mandraġġ* would seek to have a letter written for them or even to have any received by read to them.

Where the end of *Strada San Giovanni* converges onto the outskirts of *Il-Mandraġġ*, two residential units located at the end of this street were also included in this survey. They are numbered 1 and 2 but were one unit and served as a confectionery shop for the area.

As already explained, *Il-Mandraġġ* also confined on *Strada Marsamuxetto*, which served as the ring road that went around the bastions. The survey does not give details of the dwellings on this outer street, *Strada Marsamuxetto*, because the buildings along it were on a high point, aired, and had a panoramic view of Marsamxett Harbour and Sliema. Existing photos and a painting show that many of these premises had short flights of stairs leading to their doors (Appendix 5.2, 3 and 4). Other photographs (Appendix 5.5 and 15) also show that in this area, there were what can be described as apartments 'modern' for the time since being built to replace older buildings during the late 19th century. One of these two blocks was on the corner of Saint Lucia Street and the other was on the corner of Saint Mark Street, where they both still stand today.

Then *Il-Mandraġġ* had its main thoroughfare, which was known as *Strada Manderaggio* and which many locals referred to as *iz-Zalzetta* (the sausage), with alleys and collateral 'streets' that had no name. In reality, they were alleys and only referred to as 'streets' in this survey. For this reason, the collateral streets or central major 'streets' were labelled as 'A', 'B' and 'C'.

5.05.01 Street Letter* 'A': (*in reality an alley)

For some reason, and according to the plan, the door numbering system of this street, which is the longest of the three, is erratic, starting from a two-digit number and then jumping to hundreds. This is likely because the numbers shown as being in Street 'A' do not follow the actual door numbering system of *Il-Mandraġġ*, and those missing in between are either located in Streets' B'

and 'C' or in those other alleys that are not covered by the survey. Door numbering in Street 'A' commences at No. 3 and runs up to No. 25, then it continues again at No. 309 up to No. 325. The total number of dwellings or units was 46, of which 24 were listed as single units or rooms, and eight were of two or three units or rooms each. Eight units or rooms were unoccupied, particularly one unit of No. 319 is listed as having four rooms and possibly a rookery and one, No. 320, lacks any details. No. 324 was a store.

- Street 'A' had as residents 27 males, 19 females, and 35 children, most of whom were married couples.
- Three of the males were listed as being labourers. The others were listed as following: one with the Public Works Department, two as hawkers, three cigarette makers, two as waiters, a whitewasher, a baker, a boatman, a fisherman, and two barbers, all at Valletta. One worked at H.M. *Dockyard*, another was a soldier, and two were unemployed.
- Only seven females had an occupation; five were laundresses, one dressmaker, and one beggar. At the time, begging was likely considered an unofficial occupation or activity.
- Of interest is that from amongst these inhabitants, two of the female laundresses do not have husbands but have two and three children respectively and two of the males, the Public Works labourer and the fisherman, each have seven children but no wife. It must have been a hard life for these single parents and the elder children likely had to fend for themselves and help the family, particularly the elder girls by looking after their younger siblings.

5.05.02 Street Letter 'B'

- This 'street' was the second longest of the three and contained 33 rooms. The door numbers commenced with number 334 and continued up to No. 345. There were seven listed as single units, two as double units and three larger ones of five and another. No. 342 is of 18 units, which indicates that these were rookeries. It is also

interesting to note that this 'street' tended to slope down to a low level as the map shows many steps and landings along its length. Four units were listed as 'unoccupied' and one, No. 337, as 'non-existing'. From amongst the unoccupied, there were units or rooms Nos. 8 to 18 of door number 324, which, with so many rooms, is a rookery.

- The inhabitants of this section consisted of 16 males, seven females and 16 children, of whom five were married couples and the remainder were single males. Two of the families had six children each.
- Six of the males were labourers. Five worked in Valletta and one at Cospicua. They were two boatmen, a billiard maker, a butcher, a hawker, and a confectioner. Two others were described as unemployed.
- Regarding the females, only one was described as employed, if one considers begging an occupation!

5.05.03 5Street Letter 'C'

- The 'street' marked as 'C' commences as part of the continuation of Saint John Street, although not marked as part of it, and continues to wind down all the way to below the fortifications. However, only the first part of this 'street' is included in this survey, and it didn't seem to have many dwellings. The numbers commence at No. 327 and end at No. 333, which was listed as 'unoccupied'.
- This section has seven married couples: seven males, seven females and another single female. The children totalled 14 and were divided into six of one family and 8 of another.
- Most male occupations were similar. Three were labourers, three hawkers, and a boatman, all working at Valletta, while a woman was listed as a beggar.

To conclude, the total number of people residing in these three sections of 'streets' or rather alleys 'A', 'B' and 'C' of *il-Mandraġġ*, are 102 males, 89 females and 179 children. This is a very small percentage of the real number of inhabitants of the *Il-Mandraġġ* at the time.

5.06 The *Okkelli*⁶⁸

Amongst the many unpaginated records in the File PW 1159/36, are nine pages that list door number, type of tenement, annual rent and the owners of the premises. A particular reference is to rookeries, the multiple tenements which the locals referred to as the *okkella*. Later, the name was replaced with *Kerreja*, (multiple lettings) in Maltese slang. What characterised them was not only the fact that they were single or multiple rooms inhabited by many people but also the fact that they were low-rent residences intended to offer shelter for as many people as humanly possible. The rooms were not necessarily laid in any symmetrical layout and some were parcelled rooms from a large residence.⁶⁹ There were 23 *okkelli* in *Strada Manderaggio*, the major 'street' in the locality which probably included minor alleys. These *okkelli* contained 124 units for residential purposes. However, when these 23 *okkelli* were graded according to their number of rooms, the figure was even higher since the record showed that they had 174 rooms and were either used as individual residences or formed part of a unit. Today, it is considered a small apartment with all the rooms serving as dormitories. The least number of units in each rookery was two. On average, each *okkella* had twenty rooms. The least number of rooms in each rookery was three, and the most was twenty-two. On average, most families lived in a single room, but a handful occupied two or even three rooms. Some rookeries even had cellars, which were used whenever possible to keep animals. According to Henry Sacco, some residents kept chickens in their single rooms and slept with them. Others kept dogs⁷⁰ and even dared to keep goats or donkeys. They appear to have been tolerated by the medical authorities.

⁶⁸. *Okkella* (English: Rookery), later also known as *Kerreja*, were a type of low-rent residence in a single building, not necessarily laid in any symmetrical layout, some being parcelled rooms from a larger residence and found in Maltese cities and towns around the Grand Harbour area.

⁶⁹. R. Mangion, *Legislations*, 39.

⁷⁰. Sacco, *The Times*, 18 Mar. 1937.

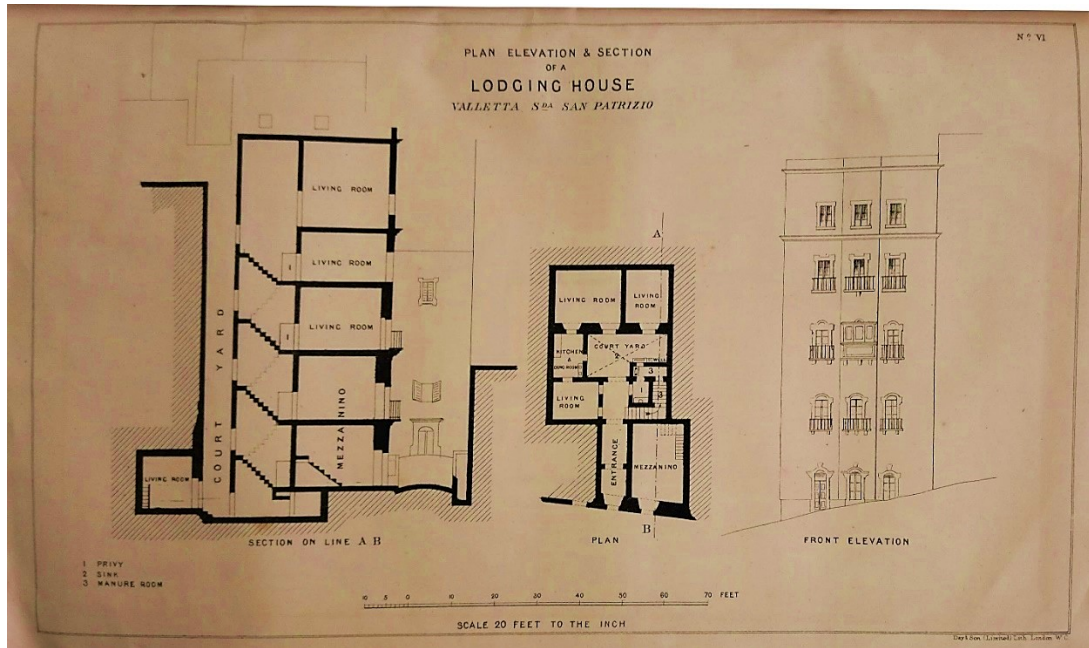


Fig. 57. Plan, elevation and section of a lodging house in St Patrick Street on the border of the *Manderaggio*⁷¹

The presence and keeping of animals of burden in *Il-Mandraġġ* went against sanitary conditions. Thus, those who broke these regulations were prosecuted in court. In 1939, Emmanuele Cachia, aged 28, who lived in a dwelling at *Strada Manderaggio* was arraigned before the Sanitary Court because he kept two animals of burden (*bhejjem*) in his dwelling. The term *bhejjem* was understood for donkeys, goats and sheep. It is not specified what these animals were in the file, but given their size, they were kept on the ground floor or underground level. Cachia was fined Two Shillings and Sixpence a day until these animals were removed. Cachia appealed the fine to the Lieutenant-Governor and pleaded for an extension until he could find an alternative location for the animals.⁷²

5.07 Dwellings and Other Buildings

Of the individual habitations at *Il-Mandraġġ*, there were 213 single rooms, seventy with two rooms, thirty-one with three rooms and four with four rooms. In addition, the same survey (Appendix 4.4) shows there were three

⁷¹. NAM, Plan No. VI, *Despatches (sic) from the Secretary of State, No. 64, 1st January to 26th December 1867*, GOV. 2/1/64,

⁷². NAM, GOV1698/1939.

residences or buildings and a *mezzanin*⁷³ with an unknown number of rooms and uses. Three other rooms were listed as empty without describing their previous use.

The survey lists seven stores, two grocery shops, one sweet manufacturing shop, one shop of an unknown genre and one carpenter shop. Herbert Ganado states that at *Il-Mandraġġ*, there were grocery shops, greengrocers, cafes and taverns, while pastries and local delicacies like *penit* and *xkumi* were manufactured in some rooms.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, the number of cellars was not given and shops and stores are not listed as having people living in them.

5.08 Rent

The survey also covers the annual rents paid by tenants of the dwellings and commercial outlets at *Il-Mandraġġ*. The lowest rent for one room was £1.00.0 annually⁷⁵ and the highest was £10.00.0, which was way too high for the time, although it could have been because of who resided there or its location. Rent depended on the number of rooms one occupied, but none were constant, not even those in the rookeries and of the same owner. Stores and shops had a higher rent than most dwellings, although not as a rule.

5.09 Property owners

While the residents were poor, the same could not be said for the owners of the properties in the area. The owners ranged from ordinary people to military officers, clerics, businesspeople, professionals, monastic orders, and religious confraternities. Most of the owners were residents of Valletta or connected to the city. A few owners preferred to remain in the area, occupying small residences.

⁷³. *Mezzanin* (Italian: *Mezzo*, English: middle or central). A term used in Malta for the middle residence usually in a two or three-storey building.

⁷⁴. H. Ganado, i, 308.

⁷⁵. Like several other British colonial possessions, at the time Malta used the old British monetary system of Pounds (£), Shillings (s) and Pence (d) which derived from the ancient Roman names of *Librae*, *Solidi*, and *Denarii*.

According to a survey by the Public Works Department,⁷⁶ ownership of property in *Il-Mandraġġ* varied with some owners owning a full *kerreja* or *okkella* while others owned just one room. Only two of the owners were not from Valletta. Ten of the rookeries had shared ownership; thirteen belonged to a single owner, four being the larger ones. One rookery is recorded to belong to a religious confraternity, likely an inheritance or an investment. There was a total of 297 residences at *il-Mandraġġ*, the '*kerreja*' included, belonged to 112 owners, plus another belonging to unknown owners. Of these owners, forty had their address in Valletta, although some were listed under their place of work in the city, while another thirty-three were permanent Valletta residents. One was the owner of four residences. The owners whose addresses were at *Il-Mandraġġ* totalled only eighteen, of which four residences belonged to the same owner with two different addresses at *Il-Mandraġġ* and two others in another street in Valletta. The other owner was a woman and owned five properties at *il-Mandraġġ*. Ownership of most properties of this period was also encountered but is not included here for various reasons.

Even some of the government-owned properties in *Il-Mandraġġ* were not always suitable for habitation and at times, were deemed dangerous. The presence of government properties can be attested from claims made by tenants to the government to effect repairs to the property. As the law stood at the time the onus of structural repairs and maintenance was on the owner. Thus, in this file, one finds a request for repairs of a wall which was in danger of falling due to an advanced state of decay, located on the upper level of government premises at *Il-Mandraġġ* at No. 146 *Strada Manderaggio*. In early 1935 the police had reported, including a sketch (Fig. 58), that how timber props were required to support the wall in an adjacent property were in an advanced state of decay and in imminent danger of collapsing.⁷⁷ The wall was shored up using timber beams by the Public Works Department but on 1 March 1935, the police reported that the work was not satisfactory and that an element of danger remained (*Minute 6*). This was a half-baked remedy, a

⁷⁶ WDA, PW1159/36, *Minute 19*, 9 pages.

⁷⁷ WDA, PW 220/35, Police 643/35: *Replacement of the wooden props of premises at No. 146 Strada Manderaggio*,

common practice even in the 1930s. Works on the wall were 'corrected' in May (*Minute 24*) and the police later reported that proper structural repairs were made. The door and windows of the building were walled up by August of the same year (*Minute 47*).



Fig. 58. Sketch of primary remedial works on a dangerous structure at No. 146 *Strada Manderaggio*, Valletta.⁷⁸

The sanitary conditions in these streets and alleys were not acceptable and were, in the 1930s, one of the main concerns of the Chief Government Medical Officer. The surviving reports show that the area was infested with rats. The reports refer to numerous ratholes, and instructions were given to the Rat Destruction Officer to remedy the situation by plastering and cleaning the area (*Minute 1*).⁷⁹ The problem of rats was so acute that reference to it was made in all the newspapers of the time. Various articles about *Il-Mandraġġ* in the English and Maltese press referred to the place as having been infested with rats.⁸⁰ This was a subject of grave concern. Appeals were made to both the owners and the health authorities to remedy the situation. A reader of the *Chronicle* thought that the burden of controlling and eliminating rodents should be placed squarely on the owners of these properties.⁸¹ Those

⁷⁸. *ibid.*

⁷⁹. NAM, PW1477/36, 170/PH/36,

⁸⁰. 'Bzonn li sostnejna kabel haddiehor', *Il-Berka*, 24 Apr. 1937.

⁸¹. 'It never went Upstairs', *The Chronicle*, 19 March 1937.

who put the onus on the authorities asked Professor Bernard, the chief medical officer, to remedy the situation.

There was certainly truth in the readers' preoccupation with rats *in Il-Mandraġġ*, so much so that a visit was carried out by Mr Reed (a technical advisor on rat destruction) and Sir Walter Johnson concerning health conditions. Afterwards, they had talks with Professor Bernard about the situation of rat infestation at *il-Mandraġġ*, and this was even linked to and referred to in connection with the proposed demolition.⁸²

5.10 Nicknames

This survey has also shed light on several nicknames, particularly those of the owners of the properties in the four, or rather three streets that border *il-Mandraġġ*. The working class and many Maltese were better known by their nicknames rather than their factual name or surname. When looking for a particular person, especially from within certain areas of the harbour cities **or** the villages, it was futile to ask for someone by name, as in most cases one would either get a shrug of the shoulders or '*I don't know him*'. The answer would be easier if that person is referred to by his or her nickname.⁸³

These are some of the common nicknames recorded at *Il-Mandraġġ* the 1930s, although some were not native to the area,

- *Ta' Malata* - A well-known family from lower Kingsway (now *Triq ir-Repubblika*, English: Republic Street) who intermarried with another family known as *Tal-Irish* (of the Irish). Other than the properties in *Il-Mandraġġ*, they owned property on Strait Street (*Triq id-Dejqa*) and the famous Malata Restaurant, accessible either from Strait Street or Saint George's Square (*Pjazza San Ġorġ*). The restaurant was family-run but leased some years ago and its name was changed. The nickname is still in use even beyond Valletta.
- *Il-Kixski* - Could not be traced.

⁸². 'The Manderaggio', *The Times*, 18 March 1937.

⁸³. *Żeppi* (Maltese), short for *Giuseppi* (English: Joseph), can also be addressed as *Żep* by those closer to him.

- *Ta' Balalu* - A nickname that is still known in the present day. *Balalu* in Maltese refers to someone gullible or slightly foolish. Descendants of the family still live in Il-Mandraġġ area.
- *Taż-Żebbugi* - Refers to someone who hails from Haż-Żebbuġ in Malta or iż-Żebbuġ in Gozo.
- *Tal-Fanal* - Possibly someone connected to a lamp or a lighthouse.
- *Ta` Demajo* - Belonging to the Demajo (surname) family.
- *Iz-Zagiz* - Could not be traced.
- *Tal-Mazzit* - Referring to someone who made blood puddings.
- *Taż-Żiż* - A common nickname as it was also a habit of calling someone whose name was not known.
- *Il-Badabum* - Could not be traced.
- *Tal-Fenza* - Could not be traced.
- *Tal-Massa* - Massa is a surname and is likely being referred to as belonging to that family.
- *Ta' Żanu* - Possibly short for Rossano or Nazzareno and the family still exists but now outside of Valletta.
- *Tal-Forn* - This nickname relates to someone who runs a bakery.
- *Tax-Xelin* - *Xelin* refers to One Shilling of the old British and Maltese currency.⁸⁴ It became the nickname for a family from the paternal side of a resident, as their grandfather and his brother transported heavy items on their cart (*karettuni* in Maltese, which is also a nickname associated with the *Il-Mandraġġ* area) and charged One Shilling for each job. The nickname has persisted through generations.⁸⁵
- *Ta' Fanali* - Another nickname associated with lamps or lanterns.

⁸⁴. One Shilling (*Xelin*) later became 10 Cent in the former Maltese decimal currency until the Euro was introduced on 1 Jan. 2008.

⁸⁵ The family in question is my wife's, Anna Darmanin nèe Borg.

- *Tal-Pjanijiet* - Another from the *Xelin* family who moved pianos on their carts and used a different nickname so as not to be confused with others of the family.
- *It-Twil (Curmi)*⁸⁶ - Meaning the 'tall person'. This nickname is from the village of *Ħal Qormi*.
- *Iz-Zirma (Curmi)* - Could not be traced and is from the village of *Ħal Qormi*.
- *Tal-Forn (Msida)* - Another referring to a baker and is from *Msida*.
- *Tal-Pajsa (Pieta`)* - Although being from *Pieta`*, a small town just outside of *Floriana*, the surname still exists in *Il-Mandraġġ* area and other locations of *Malta*.

5.11 Elections and Individuals from *Il-Mandraġġ* who had a right to vote

Although *Il-Mandraġġ* was reputed as an area occupied by people predominantly of low means, some residents featured in the electoral registers. This statement is made because in the past voting in elections in *Malta*, was not only restricted to males over the age of 24 (then lowered to 21) but was also subject to other qualifications based on income and literacy. Therefore, given the reputation that the people who lived in this area earned a very low or meagre income, one would not have expected to find residents listed as voters for local elections.

The Electoral Registers of *Malta* for 1900, 1920-1921, 1923, 1931, 1933, 1939 and 1947 were consulted for this study. These registers contain a wealth of information on who was eligible to vote, set by districts, street names, the voter's name and the residence name or door number. Other than streets, alleys and squares, the lists for *Valletta* included the voters in convents, forts, the Royal Opera House, the Police Depot, the Governor's Palace and similar properties, including the area of the Marina outside *Victoria Gate* up to *Crucifix Hill*. Irrespective of the number of voters, *Il-*

⁸⁶. *Curmi*, the Italianised name for *Ħal Qormi*, the village today the large town. It was also known as *Casal Fornaio* (Italian, the village of bakeries). *Curmi* is also a Maltese surname that originated from people hailing from *Ħal Qormi* and is common in the *Il-Mandraġġ* area. '*Ħal*' in Maltese is a shortening of the prefix *Raħal*, meaning village.

Mandraġġ featured in every register. Registers for 1922, 1934 to 1938 and 1940 to 1944 were not published.

The electoral registers cover the list of eligible voters for the Council of Government, the Legislative Assembly and the Senate between 1921 and 1932. The Amery-Milner Constitution introduced the Senate beside the Legislative Assembly having two electoral registers, one listing the voters for the Senate and the other for the Legislative Assembly. The voters for the Senate were smaller in number as there were even stricter qualification criteria. Notwithstanding expectations for *Il-Mandraġġ*, there were still male individuals eligible to vote for the Legislative Assembly. Eventually, individuals listed as living in *Il-Mandraġġ* were found also listed as voters for the Senate. All the voters from *Il-Mandraġġ* listed in the twenties and thirties as eligible to vote lived in the same street in this area, *Strada Manderaggio*, which was the main street in this quarter.

The criteria for eligibility to vote changed between the Council of Government and the Legislative Assembly and the requirements were widened following the grant of the Amery-Milner Constitution. Initially, the eligibility criteria were according to 'qualifications', which differed as a male had to satisfy at least one of these criteria to vote, that he had to have (a) a university degree, (b) pay rent or (c) receive income. The Amery-Milner constitution diluted the education criterion and based it on the ability of a male voter to read and write and broadened the rent and ownership qualifications. In listed eligible voters for the Council of Government, those eligible before the 1921 elections were property owners.

The first register consulted was for 1900. In the section titled 'Lists, subject to revision of persons entitled to vote in the election of Members of the Council of Government' in the 1900 Electoral Register, Valletta is divided into two parts, the *Primo Distretto Elettorale - Valletta Orientale* and the *Secondo Distretto Elettorale - Valletta Occidentale*. The first part, the *Primo Distretto Elettorale*, or the first electoral district, consisted of fifty-five streets. The number of voters in this section totalled 963. In the *Secondo Distretto Elettorale - Valletta Occidentale* or Western District, which consisted of 30

streets, alleys and squares, and the Bishop's Palace, there were 174 eligible voters. *Il-Mandraġġ* was part of this second 'district'. In this district, fourteen voters were listed as living in *Strada Manderaggio*.

A wider franchise accompanied the introduction of the single transferable vote for the 1921 self-government elections. The number of eligible male persons who could vote drastically increased, as in 1921 the number of male voters from *Il-Mandraġġ* rose, although some of the names are repeated! Therefore, it is evident that these voters were actually the owners of the properties and not necessarily living there but eligible for the 'one vote per property'. This means that the wider franchise had a significant impact on *Il-Mandraġġ*. The voters had to be either literate persons, owned property or paid a specific rent per year.

The '*Lists, subject to revision of persons entitled to vote for the election of members of the Legislative Assembly*' for 1920-1921 is also divided into two sections, the *Elettrale - Valletta Orientale* and the *Secondo Collegio Elettrale - Valletta Occidentale*. In the *Primo Collegio*, there were 2,375 eligible voters within fifty-two streets, which again included the area outside Victoria Gate up to Crucifix Hill and Fort St Elmo. *Strada Manderaggio* is included in the *Secondo Collegio* and had 50 eligible voters from the 829 voters within this section.

The Electoral Register for 1923, published in the 'Government Gazette', has two separate issues. The first is '*Lists of persons entitled to vote for the election of General members of the Senate – Primo Collegio Elettorale*', which does not contain the names of any property owner or residents of *Il-Mandraġġ*. The second publication has Valletta divided into two sections, the '*Primo Collegio Elettorale – Valletta Orientale*', covering several streets and areas and the '*Secondo Collegio Elettorale – Valletta Occidentale*' containing the remainder and featuring the '*Lists of persons entitled to vote for the election of Members of the Legislative Assembly*'. The '*Secondo Collegio Elettorale*', consisting of 33 streets, hosts 1,331 eligible voters, of which 78 are listed under *Strada Manderaggio*.

The number of eligible voters from *Il-Mandraġġ* continued to increase throughout the 1920s and early 1930s even including residents who were eligible to vote for the Senate, where the right to vote was further restricted. Three eligible voters for the Senate were listed in *Strada Manderaggio* in 1931: Bonello Antonio, Pace Giovanni, and Saliba Carmelo. The 1932 Electoral Register stated that 159 male residents of *Il-Mandraġġ* were eligible to vote in the Legislative Assembly, while only two persons were eligible to vote for the election of General Members of the Senate during the same year. The number of individuals listed as eligible to vote in the Senate was again three in the electoral register for 1933. These were Bonello Antonio, Mizzi Salvatore and Pace Carmelo di Paolo.

A notable change in the electoral registers of the 1930s is that the street names ceased to be listed in Italian and were changed to English instead. This reflected a broader British policy in Malta to reduce the level of *Italianita'* in Maltese society. What is of interest is that *Strada Manderaggio* was not translated as 'Slum Street', but as '*Mandraġġ* Street'. In other words, the British Administration acknowledged the linguistic innuendos behind this name and that *Mandraġġ* did not stand for slum but had a different meaning, a residential part of Valletta. Thus, on a socio-linguistic level, the colonial administrators expressed sensitivity and perhaps did not want to emphasise that this area was a slum.

The last register before the war was published in 1939. Although Britain was at war with Germany when this register was published, Malta was still not directly involved. This was the first register in English and Maltese. By then, the Amery-Milner constitution was taken away, and the system of the Council of Government was reintroduced. Thus the electors were listed, as in the previous registers, according to the residence in alphabetical street order. Valletta was split into three divisions. Section A was the Parish of St Dominic's, described as the Northern Part, the Parish of St Dominic's was Section B, defined as the Southern Part and Section C was the Parish of St Paul's. *Il-Mandraġġ* fell within Section B, which consisted of 31 streets, including the upper and lower St Elmo Section, with 1,126 eligible voters. The total number of voters at *Il-Mandraġġ* was 58. The Supplement for the

same year listed nine new persons who must have reached voting age or went to live in the area and were entitled to vote. Thus, the number of eligible voters from *Il-Mandraġġ* decreased. The decrease was not the result of changes in the eligibility criteria, as there were none between 1932 and 1939, so this must have occurred either because residents were leaving the area to go and live in better dwellings or due to the fear of war. This time, there was no list of the eligible voters for the Senate as it had been abolished and was never reinstated.

5.12 Overcoming Depression and Hysteria due to relocation

To the average person, the environment within *Il-Mandraġġ* was not pleasant to walk through, even less so to live in. It strongly differed from the rest of Valletta and had no precise equivalent elsewhere in Malta. It was somewhat of a mediaeval enclosure of uneven living spaces within a confined area which could be compared to *Ezbet al-Haggana* in Cairo, Egypt, as described by Mike Davis in his book *Planet of Slums*.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, for its inhabitants, it was the only world they knew. Yet it was a prevalent headache for the authorities to convince them to move out of such a habitat without encountering social resistance that could also lead to psychological and mental health issues.

While mental health issues were not taken into consideration in the schemes of the 19th century, they started to be considered and evaluated in the 1930s. Studies began to appear, listing the various problems that could result from such cases involving the relocation of residents. In an article written in 1939, Dr Frederick Thomas Thorpe, who at the time was the Senior Assistant Medical Officer at the West Riding Mental Hospital in Wadsley, Sheffield, England, precisely pinpoints the situation and effects,

'I have recently been impressed by the occurrence of a number of cases of depression in which the onset was clearly attributable to the unwilling expulsion of the patient from a lifelong home such as sometimes occurs under the compulsory slum-clearance scheme. It is doubtful whether local authorities fully realise that not

⁸⁷. Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, (Verso, London-New York, 2006), 32.

infrequently there is a profound emotional shock when elderly people are compelled to leave a residence in which they may have lived for twenty years or more. They are then rehoused in a new estate of lonely roads, where they find it difficult to overcome the initial feeling of the emptiness of life'.⁸⁸

His article relates to various forms of depression and melancholia, and he details multiple types based on cases and persons that he had encountered in his profession at the asylum between 1936 and 1947.⁸⁹ However, the two main factors which he related to the condition are 'hereditary' and 'reactive depression due to the environment'. The study consisted of many interviews, mainly with widows who had reached a critical period when significant changes in their lives occurred, which in this case was their translocation.

The inhabitants of *Il-Mandraġġ* in the 1930s were of various age groups including some elderly widows, most of whom were living with their children as was customary and uprooting them from their locality would have affected their mental health. Dr Thorpe's discussion about the risks and the responsibilities involved with the relocation and mental health problems of people living in slum areas⁹⁰ would be taken into consideration when the demolition project of *Il-Mandraġġ* was finally set into motion after the end of the Second World War.

5.13 Conclusion

The socio-historical examination of *Il-Mandraġġ* in the early twentieth century continues to reveal the complex interplay of poverty, community, and cultural resilience within a physically and socially marginalised urban enclave. Despite the deplorable environment, the area emerged as a microcosm of survival and cultural identity, with its inhabitants developing strong communal

⁸⁸. Frederick Thomas Thorpe, *Demolition Melancholia*, *The British Medical Journal*, 15 July 1939, 127. Retrieved on 19 Feb. 2023 from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2178527/pdf/brmedj04154-0030.pdf>.

⁸⁹. 'Obituary of Dr Thorpe', *Bulletin of the Royal College of Psychiatrists*, viii, 12, December 1984, 244. Retrieved on 19 Feb. 2023 from: <https://doi.org/10.1192/S0140078900001012>.

⁹⁰. *ibid.*, 128.

bonds, informal support systems, and a sense of belonging that transcended their socio-economic struggles.

Il-Mandraġġ distinct socio-economic reality attracted the attention of literary writers, critics, and historians, who were inspired by the stories of its people and their environment. The area was simultaneously vilified and romanticised, becoming a focal point for scholarly and popular discourse. Notably, none of the interwar period writers documenting *Il-Mandraġġ* were themselves residents of the area. While their accounts were often based on eyewitness observations, their external perspectives shaped narratives oscillating between stigma and sympathy, reflecting broader colonial and social dynamics.

The role of women and children in *Il-Mandraġġ* is central to understanding the district's social fabric. Though often illiterate and of simple means, most women played a crucial role in maintaining cleanliness and stability in their homes and community, even in the face of considerable adversity. While social problems existed, as in all environments, women were generally a source of stability, spending much of their time within the district while their husbands sought income outside. Many women balanced their roles as caregivers with contributions to the household economy, displaying remarkable resilience amid structural inequalities. Meanwhile, children bore the brunt of poverty, often engaged in informal labour or forced to adapt to the harsh realities of their surroundings.

Despite its challenges, *Il-Mandraġġ* cultivated a vibrant cultural and spiritual life centred on the residents' deep devotion to Our Lady of Mount Carmel. The church, located on the district's periphery, played a significant role as a spiritual sanctuary and a source of cultural entertainment through its rituals and festivities, reinforcing community cohesion.

On a broader social level, the interwar period failed to recognise the unique vernacular structures of *Il-Mandraġġ* as a form of cultural heritage. Instead, the district was predominantly viewed as a health hazard and a blemish on Malta's capital city, symbolising socio-economic disparity. This perception fuelled political and public debates advocating for the area's

partial or complete demolition. Although hostilities in 1939 stalled these plans, the groundwork laid during the 1930s, particularly under bureaucratic administration rather than political leadership, served as a foundation for the post-war government to push the demolition project to completion ultimately.

Chapter 6 – The Concluding Story of *Il-Mandraġġ*

6.01 Post-1945 - A new and modern *Mandraġġ*

Slums were present all over the Western World and to a certain extent. However, differing from one country to another, the common denominator was identical: poverty, inadequate or lack of proper housing, sickness and crime. But the blame also lies on the governments as they either were incompetent, closed their eyes or did not foresee the situation coming and lacked planning. However, in our case, the Governor and the authorities were not entirely at fault because the 1937 scheme could not come to fruition because of the war. After the war, the prevailing arguments favour demolition rather than preserving and rehabilitating *Il-Mandraġġ* for its picturesque characteristics. Even though Malta had other slum areas, including in places like Sliema and the Three Cities, the ones in Valletta were the biggest and most overcrowded. Thus, their clearance won over all other considerations. What remained was who would take ownership of the project.

According to Dr Henry Sacco, what was needed for a permanent solution to *Il-Mandraġġ* problem was not medical doctors but a practising lawyer, architects and civil engineers. In his opinion, Malta has had enough medical reports on the situation of *Il-Mandraġġ*. What was now needed were men of action who had to come from other professions. The man of action would come along after the war as a young architect and politician named Dom Mintoff.¹

Therefore, it is not a coincidence that the turning point in this situation came after the war. Valletta was in ruins, and the war had displaced many people. Due to the war's ruins, not everybody could return home as the war was declared to have ended. Some had to wait to have their home rebuilt. Others will never make it back home. However, even though the war in Malta ended in 1943 and officially ended in 1945, this scheme was still not implemented immediately. The project was only started roughly ten years after the last consideration of regeneration, implemented before the war to make it effective.

¹. Sacco, *The Times*, 18th Mar. 1937.

A Labour was elected to government In 1945 and Dom Mintoff was appointed minister of public works. Mintoff was the ideal choice to lead this ministry because he was an architect, who wanted to demolish and regenerate *Il-Mandraġġ* in his vision for change. Mintoff had the mind of an engineer and often, in his urge to change things, he rushed to implement his schemes. This is what he will do when it comes to the demolition of *Il-Mandraġġ*. However, what saved him was the fact that the spade work had been done in the previous decade. The Land Acquisition (Public Purposes) Ordinance of 1935 made it possible for him to acquire the property and land in *Il-Mandraġġ* even though most of it was owned by private individuals.² This ordinance even permitted the acquisition of private property without the government having an obligation to first pay indemnity to the owners before acquiring the property or the land in question. It did not stipulate when the government could pay the indemnity. Thus, even though the government did not have the actual cash to pay indemnity, as the money was needed for more pressing projects, the demolition process could still go through.

Furthermore, the 1937 experience helped the government to repeat the mistake of not promising the people of *Il-Mandraġġ* that once the building was going to be demolished, they would be given the option to return to the area where they were born and bred. This helped the government minimise all the antagonism that could be ascribed to this project.

Thus, in 1949, the Labour government launched the clearance of *Il-Mandraġġ*, and this project became part of a bigger scheme to build 4,000 residential units for homeless families.³ Much of the project was financed from the War Damage money Britain had allocated for the loss of public and private property and equipment.⁴ Thus the *Il-Mandraġġ* dissertation has established several plans, starting in particular from the late 19th century, for the rehabilitation of the area. Still, there was never the will to implement them. This will only come after the war, thanks to the presence of a politician, who, by his formation, was

² Legislation of Malta, Chapter 88, *Land Acquisition (Public Purposes) Ordinance*, 8th October 1935, as amended, 1, Retrieved on 11 Apr. 2023 from: <https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/88/eng/pdf>.

³ R. Mangion, *Legislations*, 229.

⁴ Anthony Zarb Dimech, *The War Damage Money*, *The Malta Independent*, 17 Mar. 2024.

not an advocate and knew the area as it was before the war when the family transferred itself to this area in Valletta. Although *Il-Perit* was from *Bormla* (Cospicua), his family had a strong connection with *Il-Mandraġġ*, inasmuch that the family had first lived in a small residence in Scotts Street (now *Triq Mikiel Anton Vassalli*), then moved to a larger house on the corner of *Triq San Mark* and *Triq Marsamxett*.⁵ During the war, the house suffered considerable damage from aerial bombings and was rebuilt which the locals still call *id-dar ta` Mintoff* (Mintoff's house). In the eyes of Mintoff, this location was a 'thorn' in Malta's side, but 'out of the Mandraġġ thorn sprang the loveliest Maltese rose'.⁶ These experiences in the area helped Mintoff to break the impasse. Despite all the discussions, the colonial administration was in the end, content with the situation and condition of *Il-Mandraġġ*. Finally, these conditions were not as bad as those of similar areas in London. Perhaps these were graded even better by the people of the Abyss, as described by Jack London in his firsthand account of the London slums.

After the Second World War, the discussion about slum clearance entered the political agenda. In 1947, Malta introduced universal suffrage and all the adult inhabitants of *Il-Mandraġġ*, irrespective of whether they were males or females, had acquired the right to vote. Therefore, there was now a political necessity for the government and political parties to act.

While the demolition of *Il-Mandraġġ* had been widely studied, judging from what had happened in the 30s, ideally, action should have been taken in conjunction with the landowners where applicable. This would have eradicated either the misuse of buildings or the demolition of all the old and decayed buildings because they were considered sub-standard. The density of people within it made some of the buildings substandard. However, as the literature and all the debate about the area has shown, the biggest worries were related to hygiene and health. These worries were not evident during the times of the knights. They became a real worry in the second half of the 19th century. Therefore, the only way such worries could be eradicated was by having this whole area demolished and filled so that the building in this part of Valletta

⁵ Montebello, 275 and 312 (15).

⁶ *ibid.*, 25 and 63 (15).

would be at the same topographical level as the rest of the buildings in the area.

What even decreased the problem related to the issue of land ownership was the fact that Malta had gone through difficult times because of the war, and there were issues about landownership of demolished buildings all over the harbours and cities. The government needed to act quickly because families lacked decent housing while the population was going through a baby boom. Thus, those living in slum areas were in their absolute majority, lower working class and the poor because of an even more unacceptable reality. Therefore, this explains why Labour had a particular interest in *Il-Mandraġġ* and the plight of these people and why Mintoff wanted to act as quickly as humanly possible.

The scheme started in 1948 after those residents who remained in the area began to be relocated. The demolition started in 1949, and work continued even though the Labour Party split that year. Mintoff became the leader of the Labour Party after ousting the old and incumbent Pawlu Boffa, keeping the Ministry of Public Works and Reconstruction. It is in this spirit that *Il-Mandraġġ* project would adopt elements of the report by Harrison and Hubbard.⁷ These views on how Valletta was to be redeveloped were shared by Harrison, Pearce and Hubbard and were added to the scheme and the actual project of the demolition of *Il-Mandraġġ*.⁸

Hubbard and Harrison were commissioned in 1945, just after the Second World War ended. The government commissioned these two professional planners to prepare, in detail, a report on the situation in Valletta, Floriana and the Three Cities to plan and build new dwellings and auxiliary buildings to replace those destroyed by the war. The report contains graphs, maps, plans and graphic descriptions of the intended works, relevant material related to *Il-Mandraġġ* from before the war and the plans and recommendations for the post-war regeneration project (Fig. 59).

⁷ Harrison and Hubbard, 73-74.

⁸ *ibid.*

Those responsible for the relocation took Dr Thorpe's advice on mental issues⁹ seriously and did their utmost to inflict the least psychological suffering and tried to prevent relocated inhabitants of *Il-Mandraġġ* from suffering from depression. Thorpe discussed instances of residents in the UK who had been relocated to new flats. They became agitated and depressed, living in unfamiliar surroundings around them. This is why the residents started to be promised that, if they wanted, they would be returned to their place once the building project was terminated. This sense of 'strong emotional attachment' was present among the residents as most of the residents would return to Valletta in the new flats that were eventually built as part of the reconstruction of *Il-Mandraġġ*. The irony is that even the new set-up appeared in an alien environment to some of the old residents who had lived all their lives in the allies of *Il-Mandraġġ*. The rehoming of the residents has been the subject of recent studies¹⁰. Although relocated residents have spoken about their experiences, the medical reports are still barred by confidentiality laws. Once the time bar is over, they can make an interesting study on the common symptoms of concern related to the relocation of residents inhabiting slum areas.

The adoption of Thorpe's 1930s studies would continue to be felt even in the following decades. Similar measures were adopted when other areas in Valletta were contemplated to be demolished as was the case of *Il-Camerata* and *Id-Due Balli*. The residents' opinions on the regeneration were considered in the preliminary report when the area of *Id-Due Balli* was to be demolished in the early 1970s.¹¹ The residents interviewed were more concerned that their old habitats were to be demolished. They expressed the exact words of resentment expressed by the residents of *il-Mandraġġ* decades earlier. They were offered the same assurances that they would be relocated into the new flats once the project was over.

⁹. Thorpe, *Demolition Melancholia*, 127.

¹⁰. Duncan Mifsud, *Valletta: Towards the Strategic Re-Use of its Vacant Properties*, (Unpublished M. Sc. Dissertation, UOM, 2014), 91.

¹¹. 'Rapport Preliminari dwar x'jahsbu n-nies ta l-Arcipierku fuq it-tigdid li sa jsir fieh', Slum Clearance Commission, (P.W.D., Malta, 1972), 6.

In implementing the post-war demolition of *Il-Mandraġġ*, the contents of all the data accumulated in the 1930s and discussed at length in previous chapters were highly convenient. File *PW1159/36 'Manderaggio Scheme'* contains a vast spectrum of information intended to make this project successful, Entire minutes, notes, communications, surveys, estimates, statistics, and reports needed to inflict the least psychological and physical damage to the residents and its inhabitants, offer any urban planner or researcher a step-by-step account of what was being planned for the project before any actual works are commenced.

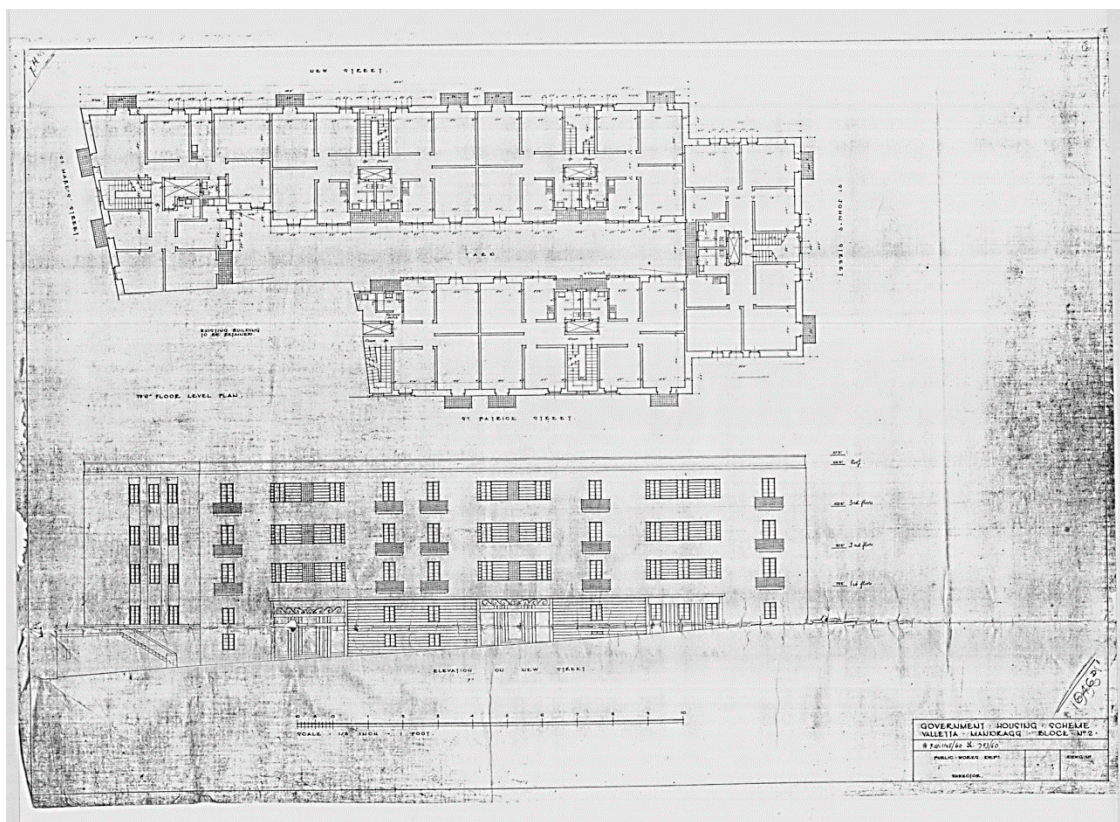


Fig. 59. Plan of Block No. 2, Government Housing Scheme, *Mandraġġ*, Valletta.¹²

Perhaps, if one needs concluding proof that the post-war project for the demolition of *Il-Mandraġġ* was inspired and led by the different efforts and studies carried out in the previous decades, this was provided by Professor C. Celerio. Coleirowasamedicaldoctorandusedthespaceofthenewspaper *Il-Berqa*, to express his approval for the demolition of *Il-Mandraġġ*. He published his article in January 1954 as part of the *Kummissjoni Studji Soċjali* section.¹³ His

¹². NAM, PW1148/60, 1H-646D.

¹³. *Il-Berqa*, 22 Jan. 1954.

article, *Id-Dar u s-Saħħa*, spoke about the social problems in Malta, particularly the housing conditions of the working classes and the degrading level in which their children lived. He emphasised that even a decade after the war had ended, there was still a need for more dwellings and proper sanitary facilities for the people. Coleiro continues to stress the importance of hygiene, good ventilation and space for families. He emphasised that the rate of sickness and deaths in places of squalor were, as expected, high due to these dire conditions. He states,

'Where there is not enough light, your heart feels sadden. Derelict houses cause children to wander the streets and delinquency increases. Where a whole family lives in a room or two in a rookery, living as it should be physically and mentally becomes impossible'.¹⁴



Fig. 60. Piazza Mattia Preti and the surrounding blocks of flats, 2020.

Requests for compensation did not cease, even after the demolition and rebuilding of *Il-Mandraġġ* (Fig. 60). In 1961, Mr Anastasi Pace sought compensation on behalf of two tenements.¹⁵ Coleiro singled out the conditions in past reports, concluded with a reference to '*il-Mandraġġ*' and praised the efforts made by the heads of the Department of Health and of the Public Works.

¹⁴ *'Fejn ma jkunx hemm dawl biżżejjed, qalbek thossha sewda. Djar imkissrin iwasslu lit-tfal jiġġerrew fit-toroq u d-delinkwenza tiżdied. Fejn familja kollha trid tgħix f'kamra jew tnejn f'kerreja, mhux possibbli li tgħix kif għandu jkun fiżikament u mentalment'.*

¹⁵ NAM, SEC-1637/1961, 'Request for compensation in respect of tenements 176,190 Manderaggio, Valletta. Mr Anastasi Pace', (1961).

The war had permitted the building of new dwellings where families could raise their children in a healthier environment for their bodies and minds.

6.02 *Il-Mandraġġ* and the Post-war Electoral System

However, the major reason how the government could implement the demolition scheme with greater facilities after the war was demographic. This can be surmised from the electoral register of 1945 and the one of 1947. As in 1939, the 1945 Electoral Register was published separately from the Government Gazette. Valletta was the First Electoral Division divided into three sub-sections. *Mandraġġ Street*¹⁶ was placed in Sub-section B, 'Parish of St Dominic - Southern Part.' This section comprises 33 streets, alleys, squares, and even the railway tunnel. The number of eligible voters in *Mandraġġ Street* is given as 81.

The most significant electoral change occurred in 1947. This was held under the principle of universal suffrage. Given that this was an election based on universal suffrage, all those 21 years and over had a right to vote. This meant that all women and men who previously did not qualify to vote had now a vote. Therefore, the electoral register of this election can give valuable demographic information about all the adult individuals living in this area on the eve of the implementation of the demolition project. This election was held between October 25 and 27, and once a new government was formed, the area's demolition began, beginning with the relocation of the residents.

In the electoral register of 1947, *Il-Mandraġġ* was included in the 'B - Southern Part'. As in the previous 1945 electoral register, this district continued to be made up of 33 streets and had 2,389 eligible voters, of which 181 were given as being from *Mandraġġ Street*. This number includes all the eligible voters aged 21 or over, both males and females, of which 95 women were over 21 years and eligible to vote, compared to 86 men over 21 years. This figure is a clear indication of the gender imbalance that existed in *Il-Mandraġġ*. There were more females than males. Thus, there must have been many widows and

¹⁶. Place and street names are reproduced as featured on the Electoral Register, some being in Italian, English, Maltese or a combination of both languages.

spinsters living in the area. The males either emigrated or sought to leave the place. This figure is based on those living in *Strada Manderaggio*. One needs to point out that *Strada Marsamxett* also crossed the upper part of *Il-Mandraġġ* however, for statistical purposes, it is not being taken into consideration as only a tiny part of this street was in *Il-Mandraġġ*, and the part that was in *Il-Mandraġġ* never qualified as delict or unhealthy to the extent that it would be spared from being demolished. Both in the plans of 1937 and those of 1947, this area was never entirely earmarked for demolition because part of it was not slum, and it is complicated to establish which houses listed in the electoral register were part of *Il-Mandraġġ*. Therefore, for statistical purposes, taking into consideration that in all, there were 181 individuals living in *Strada Manderaggio*, some of whom were beyond the childbearing age and that the families at this time were substantially large, the total amount of the individuals living in *Il-Mandraġġ* by 1947 must not have been more than 500 individuals. This figure considers the approximate number of individuals that resided in *Strada Marsamxett*; there must have been 50 to 70 persons living in this area. Thus, the population of *Il-Mandraġġ* experienced a perpendicular decrease. The war accelerated the exodus of people from *Il-Mandraġġ*, making it easier for the authorities to implement the slum clearance of the area.

6.03 What remains of the former *Mandraġġ*

While the actual project involved the entire razing of all the buildings that had made *il-Mandraġġ*, not everything was lost or raised to the ground. Some of the old structures and artefacts survived. This was confirmed in 2019 when a new project was planned to construct a vertical lift to carry passengers to and from the Marsamxett ferry landing below the fortifications. Mattia Preti Square was considered the location. Tests and inspections were then conducted in the square by Marsamxett Street. Manholes and old sealing flagstones were being opened and examined, and some pilot holes were drilled to establish what lies underneath. However for reasons unknown, the site was dropped, and an alternative location was considered. Before sealing off the pilot holes, the author of this dissertation took several photographs of what may be below the existing surface using an endoscopic camera. Surprisingly, the holes led to an

old rainwater run-off gallery (Fig. 62), another into an old sewer system (Fig. 63) and another into part of a demolished house (Fig. 61).



Fig. 61. Collapsed spiral staircase and doorway under Mattia Preti Square.



Fig. 62. Old rainwater gallery under Mattia Preti Square.



Fig. 63. Old sewer gallery under Marsamxett Street that once discharged into the sea.

Nevertheless, the underground features are not the only remnants of a bygone age. The two blocks at Saint Mark Street and Saint Lucy Street on the corner of Marsamxett Road and overlooking the harbour were maintained. These blocks were constructed in the 19th century, considered spacious, and had the necessary sanitary commodities. It was the space in between that was pulled down. Within and behind one of the apartment blocks, the one looking south-west, remain parts of old alleys from *il-Mandraġġ*. This block is at the corner of Saint Mark Street and Saint Lucy Street.



Fig. 64. Locations of the shaft and two internal yards.
(Google Maps)

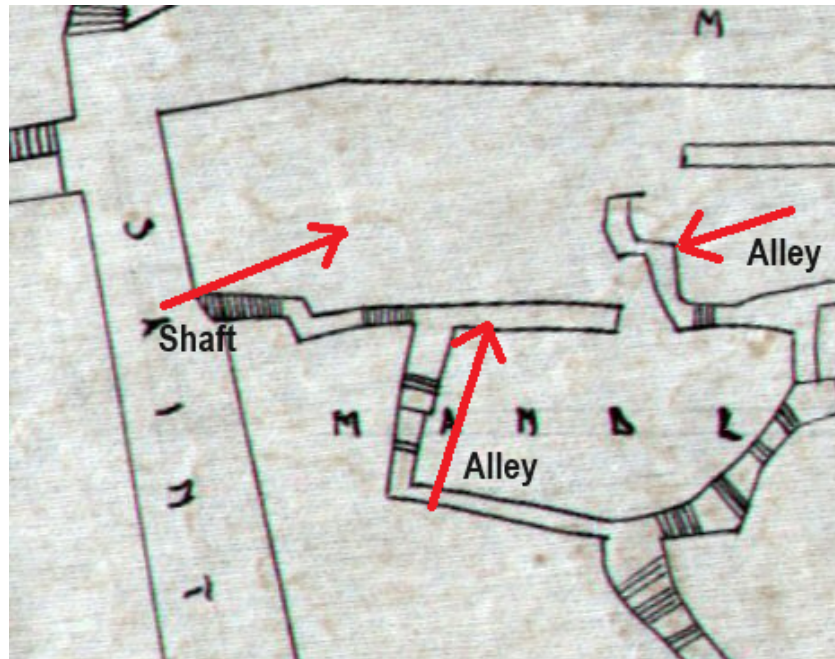


Fig. 65. Location of the shaft and yards in old *Mandragg*.



Fig. 66. The green metal door that leads to the old shaft.



Fig. 67. View of the shaft as seen from one of the buildings.



Fig. 68. The shaft from the opposite direction.

Three separate sections from the old alleys were transformed into the internal yards of this block (Figs. 64 and 65). In some cases, the residents of this block have no access to the grounds of these yards due to their depth, but these alleys were retained to provide light and ventilation to the building (Figs. 67 and 68). The smallest of these yards still spots an arched doorway, a roofless room, corbels from previous balconies, a timber beam and blocked fenestrations. Viewing this shaft is only possible from the windows of one of the abutting buildings, and the only access to this shaft is through a door on Marsamxett Street, which is always locked (Fig. 66). The other two are 27 meters and about 15 meters long, respectively. The latter one kept its serpentine formation.

Like all the yards in this area, a small yard in the rear of this old building provides air and light to the new buildings built as part of *Il-Mandraġġ* project. The grounds of the two other yards are also not accessible, and they were also kept to provide light and air to the new blocks of flats constructed on their perimeters.

Photographs of some of the alleys taken by Attilio Critien for his book show that corner statues¹⁷, street shrines¹⁸ and door plaques¹⁹ existed at *il-Mandraġġ*. Some show the souls in Purgatory, a particular niche has a small statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (Fig. 69), and another has the statue of Saint Paul on the corner of Saint Patrick Street and Saint John Street (Fig. 70). Some of these historical or religious items were salvaged. Others were lost. Among the religious effigies saved were the statues of Saint Paul (Fig. 71) and Saint Corrado (Fig. 72). Whether the statues dedicated to St Joseph and Our Lady of Mount Carmel had survived or their location is unknown.

17. Critien, 13.

18. *ibid.*, 28.

19. *ibid.*, 20.



Fig. 69. Shrine and door plaque in *il-Mandraġġ*.
(Photo: Attilio Critien)



Fig. 70. Corner statue of Saint Paul at *il-Mandraġġ*.
(Attilio Critien)



Fig. 71. Statue of Saint Paul at the Carmelite Priory.
(Ronnie Catania)

The exact location where the statue of Saint Corrado stood within *Il-Mandragġ* is not known. Workers of the Public Works Department had stored it safely in one of the department's warehouses. Eventually, the Valletta Rehabilitation Project placed this statue on the corner of West Street with Saint Lucy, overlooking what was once one of the entrances to *Il-Mandragġ*, as part of the rehabilitation works carried out in the late 1980s.



Fig. 72. Statue of Saint Corrado in its present location.
Corner of St Lucy Street with West Street.
(The author)

The remains of one of the two old fountains built in *Il-Mandraġġ* have also survived (Fig. 73). While the one with an obelisk had been removed during the British time, most probably when water arrived at *Il-Mandraġġ*, the one with the coat-of-arms of Wignacourt survived, as it was removed for safekeeping during the demolition phase. For many years, this fountain was believed to have been destroyed, and its remains were used as infill under the new *Mandraġġ*. It was by sheer luck that the author of this dissertation had attended the exhibition titled '*Valletta 1566 – Melita Renascens*',²⁰ to notice the remains of *Il-Funtana ta' Isfel* as part of the exhibits (Fig. 75).



Fig. 73. The remnants of the *Funtana ta' Isfel*.

However, what survived most were not these structures but their intangible heritage, as the people of this district still connect their current existence, even though they were not born in this pit, with the area's past. Its story is a powerful reminder of the challenges inherent in urban renewal and the enduring impact of such projects on communities and cities.

²⁰. *Valletta 1566 – Melita Renascens* was held by Heritage Malta in the Old Drill Hall at Fort Saint Elmo to commemorate the 450th anniversary of the laying of the first stone of the foundation of Valletta held between July 2016 and June 2017, to Valletta as the 'European Capital of Culture in 2018'.

6.04 Epilogue

This dissertation aimed to elucidate the structures, living spaces, people, and their positions in life in the decades and centuries preceding the demolition of this particular district in Valletta. In the process, it provided insight into the clearance and relocation projects from the perspective of the landowners and common people at large. It highlighted those various renowned individuals from particular walks of life originated from *Il-Mandraġġ*. While it is impossible to claim that every aspect of *Il-Mandraġġ* and its people was fully covered or that all facts presented were entirely free of inaccuracies; who could achieve such a standard? This dissertation represented an honest assessment of all the records and material examined during the research process.

As Professor Fenech, the dissertation supervisor, remarked, this study aims, 'Not about connecting the pieces that exist in this jigsaw puzzle, but it's about filling the lacunas that exist in the history of *Il-Mandraġġ*'. Although there was significant awareness of the existence of *Il-Mandraġġ*, any solutions were swept under the carpet for over a century. Outsiders expressed different feelings toward *Il-Mandraġġ*, some viewed it with dismay, while others adopted a more positive outlook. Then, there was the internal perspective of the people living there. Above all, what could they do about it? Yet, they bore the stigma. Despite this, as Mitchell noted, the inhabitants remained nostalgic for the times they lived in this hovel. However, the main issues were not the hardships themselves but the poor and challenging living conditions.

It demonstrated that, until the late 1940s, many of the earlier planned projects may have seemed futile. However, without those foundational efforts, the 1947 decision to demolish *Il-Mandraġġ* would not have been possible. Much of the groundwork had already been completed beforehand. The execution of the 1937 scheme was simply postponed, only to be implemented a decade later, and arguably with better results. Without the preparatory work of the *Manderaggio Scheme*, combined with the post-war project, the demolition of this entire area might never have occurred, leaving it in a very different state from what it is today.

No references, either covert or overt, were encountered regarding any plea for the demolition of this area during the period when Malta was ruled by the Knights of Saint John. The first considerations about the need to demolish this area emerged in the late 19th century and intensified, rather than diminished, in the 20th century. During this time, both the residents of Valletta and the educated elite began to take an interest in the area's multifaceted history, which subsequently attracted the attention of both local and foreign scholars. These scholars noted the area's unique urban setting. Following its replacement with modern apartment blocks, *Il-Mandraġġ* became a nostalgic chapter in Valletta's history, inspiring numerous studies and papers. However, as highlighted in the literature review, none of these analyses have thoroughly examined the interplay between urban development, socio-economic transformation and cultural resilience over four centuries. This study has traced the district's evolution from a strategic maritime hub envisioned by the Order of Saint John to a marginalised and overcrowded district under British rule, shedding light on the broader historical and societal forces that shaped its trajectory.

The demolition of *Il-Mandraġġ* was directly tied to the area's original, unfulfilled purpose as a maritime hub. Over time, this area adapted to serve as a residential zone, embodying the shifting socio-economic needs of the city. Post-war redevelopment aimed to modernise the space, transforming it into an urban area that reflected the requirements of the time. However, this history demonstrates that *Il-Mandraġġ* was not static; it continuously evolved, shaped by the diversity of its inhabitants and the socio-economic pressures of each era. This evolution included the 19th-century demographic pressures that led to a shift in the socio-economic profile of its residents, yet the district retained its vibrancy and adaptability, characteristics present even during the Early Modern period.

The socio-economic changes necessitating the area's demolition emerged during the 19th century under British colonial rule. The administrative and trade networks established during this time rendered the district's

structures inadequate, transforming it into a densely populated slum. The subsequent demolition aimed to impose an urban plan onto what was perceived as an unplanned development. In reality, the structures of *Il-Mandraġġ*, though unplanned by modern standards, were functional and imbued with a unique charm, reflecting the ingenuity of a largely illiterate population. The new structures, designed by professional architects educated in prominent institutions, represented the post-war European architectural ethos, modern but devoid of the communal soul that had defined *Il-Mandraġġ*.

Despite its perceived deficiencies, the organic structures of *Il-Mandraġġ* fostered resilience and resourcefulness among its residents, who built strong communal bonds and preserved their cultural identity amid structural inequalities. However, these structures fell victim to late 19th- and early 20th-century debates that framed the area as a slum. These debates, rooted in colonial policy and emerging urban ideologies, marked a turning point for the district, which was increasingly perceived as an urban black spot requiring slum clearance. Linguistic shifts further entrenched this perception, as the name *Il-Mandraġġ* became synonymous with poverty and degradation.

The changing discourse around *Il-Mandraġġ* also reflected a broader shift in Valletta's *raison d'être*. Once a fortified city designed to protect its inhabitants, Valletta's bastions had lost their military significance by the 20th century. As the fortifications ceased to offer protection, social inequalities within the city became more visible, prompting debates framed around improving living standards. These debates were further intensified by the emergence of political parties and the politicisation of Valletta's urban issues, including the fate of *Il-Mandraġġ*. The eventual demolition of the district not only erased a physical space but also obliterated a community's unique character and history.

What remained was the memory of a distant past. Over time, this memory evolved into nostalgia, partially reflecting and affirming the area's transformation and the vibrancy once associated with overcrowding, poor hygiene, and substandard housing. In this process, the term *Il-Mandraġġ*

appears to be shedding its deprecative connotation as a slum and gradually reverting to its original significance as merely a name for an area in Valletta. Unlike at Birgu (Vittoriosa) where a street was named *Triq il-Mandraġġ* within the same area of the Birgu *Mandraġġ*, unfortunately in Valletta does not exist.

This study highlighted the complexity of *Il-Mandraġġ*'s history, which could not be reduced to a simple narrative of decline. It served as a testament to the resilience of marginalised communities and the ways in which urban spaces reflected broader societal transformations. The story of *Il-Mandraġġ* was a reminder of the importance of considering the human and cultural dimensions of urban development, as well as the enduring impact of historical processes on the identity of cities and their people.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

An Experience as Encountered by Vincenzo Maria Pellegrini.

The article in Vincenzo Maria Pellegrini's hand was unexpectedly encountered while researching this dissertation. It has been copied as written by the author himself without changes to its original grammar, including underlines and strikethrough. The document is an account of what Pellegrini had overheard from one of the windows of the class that overlooked *Il-Mandraġġ*, where he was giving private lessons likely the then primary school on the corner of *Triq iż-Żekka* with windows in *Triq San Patrizju* overlooking *Il-Mandraġġ*. I consider it a unique testimonial.

The document:

Life in the Manderaggio, A short story spitefully dedicated to all those who will dislike it.¹

'It is common among us to say that since France to be France required a Paris, England a London and Italy a Rome, so also Malta to be Malta required a Manderaggio.'

I will not loose (*sic*) my time and yours in giving you an accurate description of this metropolis; I will not flare before your eyes its most splendidly dirty, dull, meandering narrow streets, nor its miniature porticoes, famous for their rainbow colours, which defy imagination, nor its unique fountains which furnish the mobility that live there with water, since they refuse to admit (owing to the increase in their daily expenditure) water communications in their darkling palaces, terribly hot in summer and almost frozen in winter.

I will not bother you in the least with such a description, but I will place before you, straight away, a scene or two of their daily life, from which, if you happen to be a fairly broad-minded individual, you will soon find out what, no pen could have better expressed.

¹ NAM, Private Deposits (PDE) 0029-004-02: 048.

With reference to the nobility of the *Manderaggio*, I would like to point out that, they are not a selected few, but the majority, so much so that you would be very much surprised, were you to be so much imaginative, as to go there and ask each one you meet who his ancestors were, for, unfailingly, you will receive the same answering that they are all of them descendants of some French knight of the Blessed Order of St John.

Well then, since I happen personally to be employed for an hour or two there, in giving private lessons to a couple of young men who have in them real noble blood, but unfortunately or rather fortunately not accompanied by a high tide in their money matters. I am pretty well versed in what I'm going to relate, for which reason you can rest assured that what you are going to read in the truth and nothing but the truth.

And it came to pass that some days ago, as I was explaining to my pupils the use of logarithms, the knowledge of which I have acquired from no man, a charming gentle voice, interrupted me in the midst of my eloquence with the following ditty:

*Ajma qalbi x'wahda grail!
Habbejt erba l-koll mituli;
Jekk hawn nisa gralhom bñali
Nitlobkom kieku tighduli.*

*Dejjem nafni sventurata
Lis-stess ommi qalituli.^{2*}*

* For translations of the Maltese dialogue, see the end of the document.

This of course was followed by many others, all beautiful in themselves but rendered more so by that limpid and clear voice; now since everyone knows how I go fascinated after our folkloristic songs, there is no need for me to state that I did not resume my platonic explanations till the song was heard no more.

I was just on the point of regaining my vibrating eloquence, when that same voice, which belonged to a young lady of no special beauty, who lived in the house opposite to that where my pupils lived, interrupted me again, rather

² See end of Appendix for a translation in English.

against my will, for now it jarred so upon my ears that I was not able to hear my own voice. Instantly, a second voice joined in the turmoil and from time to time a third one reechoed:

No 1 – *Tafx il għala tidhqu? Għaliex maħniex tal-glied.*

No 2 – *Mela f'darna ma mistgħux nidhqu.*

No 1 – *Kos m'għandekx biex tidhaq int!*

Aħjar tmur tistaħba.

No 2 – *Mur stahba int. Lilek min kelmek!*

No 1 – *Mur indifen, ghax jibdielek.*

No 3 – *Hallik minnha dik mignuna*

No 2 – *Mignuna int, ja ballottra.*

No 3 – *X'jien?*

No 2 – *Ballottra, iva ballottra.*

No 3 – *Ballottra bintek, ja ħaga kera l-int.*

No 2 – *Kera iva, imma ta l-unur.*

No 3 – *Ajma jommi.....semmewk laħħar darba gewwa iddjuballi.*

No 1 - *Imhatra tipretendi li int sabieħa!*

No 2 – *Isbaħ minnek.*

No 3 – *Ah! Ah! La ddaħħaqnix*

No 1 – *Oqoghd ballottra!*

No 3 – *W'int x'int? gattarell imqaghdejt.....³*

And so on for half an hour or so. Now it was more than natural that with such a rough my pupils did not get their lesson that day and consequently we all to the most original fight that ever was fought between three women, for the above *terzett* was no more no less than its prologue.

But before going farther with my narrative (*sic*) I had better apologise to those readers who unfortunately do not understand our language; in fact the above dialogue has been produced in its original form, because its effect is so simple and majestic that it does not admit of translation, as Sterne would have expressed it, for which reason I firmly believe that all such readers, will graciously forgive my impertinence: thank you.

“*Ehi, Zarenu*, what’s all this blunder about?” Asks an ?????? in miniature scanty, and to my relief I learned that the lady whose beautiful voice I had so much admired was betrothed (*sic*) to a tranter whose name was Toto`. Now

³ See end of Appendix for a translation in English.

it happened that this illustrious personage (one of those who pretend to be of noble descent) had insisted on getting ad litteram the promised dowry, which consisted in a creaking bed, five chairs, a table, four water colours of immense value, as the mother of the lady in question used to say (she had bought them, of course, as I after positively came to know for not more than sixpence), a few underclothes for the ^{exclusive} use of the bride and half a dozen jingling kitchen utensils, also a very old sideboard, which the mother did not at all intend to give since that same sideboard was her mother's, who had inherited it from one who it is said, had inherited it from a great grand mother who had received it as a wedding present from the Grand master De Rohan. But Toto`, who was famous for his hard head, having made up his mind to get it, threatened to break off the engagement..... which later on he did.

Naturally the young lady with a beautiful voice, was rather vexed at this and she went off crying, which weakness of course was after constantly laughed at from the next door (whose inhabitants felt a destined antipathy towards this unhappy lady, just because of her beautiful voice) giving rise at ^{last} to the fight which we had left in progress during this long digression.

Oh Mars, did ever your blessed egos look on a fight, so terrible? I see before me long tufts of lucent hairs flying about, teeth rolling down from bloodstained mouths, garments torn and white flesh exposed to the rays of the blazing sun, and eyes cries (*sic*) and yells I hear that pierce my ears and make my mind resound. But Jove be raised; at length the gods decreed that all should end in peace and without loss on either side or great casualties, and lo, a bobby at last appears and with a sorrow voice cries out:

*'Dawn xgharucasjiet huma? lilcom kieghet inghait, dawn xi frattariet uma? hatt ma itkellem, ara minn mandux xiaghmel jimxi! Ghawn int feinec, dahhal dac il gallinar gewwa....lilec ked inghaid taf!'*⁴.....at which command all go to their way not without grumbling something against the efficiency of the police, and while the combattants (*sic*) go inside to inspect the injuries received, a squeaking voice, some two or four doors further yell out with all her might:

⁴ See end of Appendix for a translation in English.

*“Dak ħanini kemm hu sbejjaħ
Tumbla lira tumbla le`;
Dak wiccu donnu tuffieħa,
Hbub ghajneiħ lewn il-kafe`.”⁵*

∴ ∴ ∴

About three weeks after the memorable episodes just related, as I was going to my publils' residence, I noticed in the street an unusual activity, and to my great astonishment I saw a beautiful bunch of roses being carried to the door opposite to that through which I was entering. Now, since flowers ^{at the} Manderaggio are an extravagance which those people there have no means to afford for, I concluded that something ~~unbelievable~~ unusual was on the eve of happening.

Our lady with the beautiful voice, soon after Toto's departure, had found out another suitor, and a better one too, by whom that famous sideboard was not in the least denied. In fact he had once said in the learning of his future mother-in-law that that kind of sideboards was no longer in vogue, and consequently he would not have it in his house; this was not at all time of course, and so he was prayed to have it, which he instantly did and to his heart's content.

Toto' on the other hand, in order to revenge himself on his former fiancé, soon found himself engaged with her who had a dented antipathy for our heroine, just because of her beautiful voice; and who had for dowry, besides all things necessary to fill up two rooms and a kitchen, ten pounds sterling – an enormous sum, as those who had never been owners of half its amount expressed it, not without envying Toto's good fortune.

How it came about no one can say exactly.

The day was a calm one and the sun was shining brightly. Sitting on a doorstep, the lady with a beautiful voice and she who had a special antipathy for her were seen chatting together, to the amazement of all their neighbours; and on very good terms they were since all of a sudden they fell in one

⁵ *ibid.*

another's arms, kissing each other passionately, not without shedding a tear or two.... and the result was that both their engagements were to be held on the same day and in the same house, that of her who had a beautiful voice, since the others' was dull and small.

∴ ∴ ∴

Yet in spite of all this mutual good-will, just a few days after the double engagement ceremony, another fight between the rival families broke out, in which poor Toto's lost his left eye.... [^]and so, out went the candle, and he was left darkling.

- 1930 -

V. M. Pellegrini'
(signed)

Translations

Footnote 2:

*Oh my heart what has befallen me!
I loved four and they all died.
Are there women with a similar experience
I pray that you let me know.*

*I've always been unlucky
My own mother told me so.*

Footnote 3:

No 1 – *You know why you laugh? Because we're not the fighting type.*

No 2 – *So we can't laugh in our own house.*

No 1 – *You have nothing to laugh about!*

It's better if you go hide yourself.

No 2 – *Go hide yourself. Who spoke to you?*

No 1 – *Go bury yourself. Before you change your mind.*

No 3 – *Don't worry yourself about her, she's crazy.*

No 2 – *You're who's crazy, you weasel.*

No 3 – *What am I?*

No 2 – *Weasel, yes a weasel.*

No 3 – *Your daughter is a weasel. You ugly thing.*

No 2 – *Ugly maybe. But I have honour.*

No 3 – *Oh my.....They mentioned you last time at the Due Balli.*

No 1 - *I bet that you pretend that you're pretty!*

No 2 – *Prettier than you.*

No 3 – *Ah! Ah! Don't make me laugh!*

No 1 – *Shut up weasel!*

No 3 – *And what are you? A cure dogfish.....*

Footnote 4:

What kind of shamelessness is this? I'm talking to you; what kind of disturbance is this? No one speaks, whoever has nothing better to do, moves on! Hey, you there, take that chicken coop inside....you're whom I'm talking to, you know!

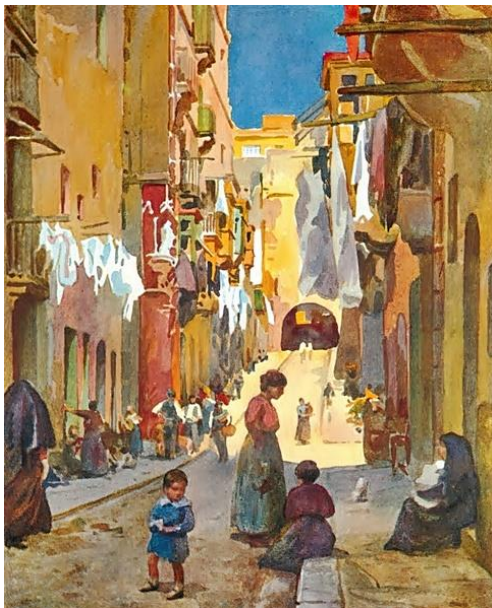
Footnote 5:

My darling is so good looking
Tumbla lira tumbla le`.
His face is like an apple,
And his irises the colour of coffee.

APPENDIX 2

Il-Mandraġġ in Art

Due to the stigma it carried, *Il-Mandraġġ* was not a subject for artists to paint. Until recently, the only painting of the area that was commonly known was of Saint Patrick Street, a watercolour by Edward Caruana Dingli (1876-1950). There is also the allegory of Mattia Preti by Cali' (Fig. 43). During research for this thesis, oil paintings of *Il-Mandraġġ* were encountered, painted in the 1970s or 1980s. Two paintings show the daily life in the alleys of *Il-Mandraġġ* and the other is also of Saint Patrick Street. The subjects were inspired by photographs in the book by Attilio Critien. The artist is Anthony 'Toni' Zammit, known as *Gabettu*, who was born in *Il-Mandraġġ* and lived his entire life in the area. According to my father-in-law, Toni was a quiet person who frequented Marsamxett and was a self-taught artist and a craftsman, who loved fishing and painting past scenes of Valletta.⁶ He died in 2021.



Saint Patrick Street by Caruana Dingli.
(Old postcard)

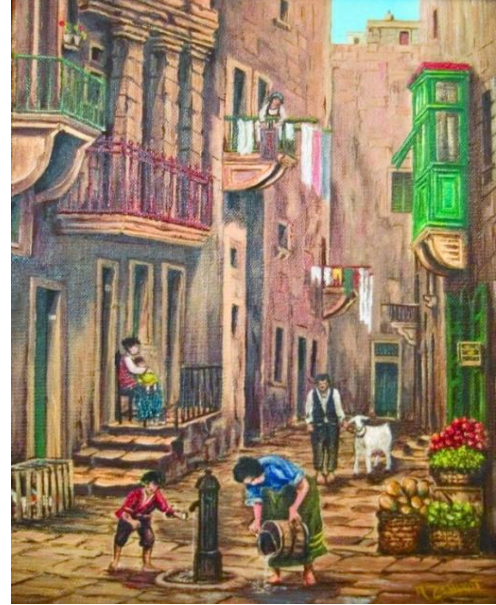


Saint Patrick Street by A. Zammit.
(From calendar)

⁶ Prints of the paintings of Valletta by Zammit were the theme of a calendar published by the Augustinian Community in 2008.



Disposal of wastes at *il-Mandraġġ*
by A. Zammit. (From calendar)



One of the water pumps at *il-Mandraġġ*
by A. Zammit. (From calendar)



Reproduction of a painting of the Manderaggio by A. Delia.
(Private Collection)

The old *Manderaggio* is depicted in a print produced by A. Delia, the grandson of Gio Batta Delia. Gio Batta Delia was a notable businessman who specialised in furniture, had a passion for art, and had a skill in painting. Gio Batta Delia was known for capturing Maltese scenes, with *Il-Mandraġġ* being one of the areas that particularly interested him. Through his work, one of the streets was immortalised with its distinctive characteristics. Delia's painting portrays a corner of one of *Il-Mandraġġ* alleys with steps leading to higher levels. At the corner and across the alley are two shops, indicating that local shops were essential to meet the daily needs of the residents. Above one of the shops is a sign, and above the opposite shop is a votive niche containing a statue, likely of Saint Joseph holding the infant Jesus. The print bears the label 'No. 2 – A. J. Delia – Valletta – Malta', confirming it as part of a series of hand-coloured prints made from photos of Gio Batta Delia's paintings, which A. Delia reproduced. This artwork is one of the earliest visual records of the old *Manderaggio*.

APPENDIX 3

List of some Estimated Expenditures and Returns of the '*Manderaggio* Scheme'.

Preliminary costings The ' <i>Manderaggio</i> Scheme'	
Requirement	Cost
Expropriation and Fees	£76,340
Disturbance of Leases	£2,000
Demolitions	£3,000
Filling of Foundation Levels	£2,385
Levelling open areas & formation of road	£1,000
Main sewers	£700
Allowance for subways	£2,000
Foundation wall to each block	£4,000
Total	£91,425
10% Contingencies	£9,142
Total	£100,567

List A. Initial estimated costs as of June 1939.⁷

⁷ AWD, WD1159/36, marked 'A', 28 June 1939, unpaginated.

Statement of Expenditure for the Exploitation of the <i>Manderaggio</i> Area	
Requirement	Cost
Part demolition of the buildings at Nos. 131 to 136, <i>Marsamxetto</i> Road, the building in <i>Strada Zecca</i> and <i>Strada San Patrizio</i> overlying the covered way (arch)	£440
Effecting alterations to the buildings above described rendered necessary by the demolition	£680
Compensation for loss of rent through alterations and disturbance of lease	£4,800
Dumping material in the depressed areas and raising walls to the height required	£6,500
Estimated cost of erecting seven new blocks of buildings inclusive of armoured concrete beams for foundations	£72,400
Constructing roads with pavements and stormwater culverts	£1,470
Total	<u>£86,290</u>
Contingencies	£8,629
Total	<u>£94,919</u>
Approximate total cost	<u>£95,000</u>

List B. Statement of Expenditure for the Exploitation of the *Manderaggio* Area

Additional estimates - <i>Manderaggio</i> area	
The estimated value of the houses which were not insanitary but which were to be demolished, based at the time on the rent totaling £2,394, after deducting 5% for maintenance and outgoings	£79,800
The value of the <i>Manderaggio</i> buildings which are considered insanitary biased on-site value and cost of materials as described in the Ordinance	£18,564
Total	<u>£98,364</u>
Cost of work (from the previous table)	£95,000
Total estimated capital required for the scheme	<u>£193,364</u>

List C. Additional estimates to the scheme.⁸

⁸. *ibid.*,.2.

Estimated annual rent to be received on letting of the new flats at the <i>Manderaggio</i>		
15 flats @ £30 each	£450	
50 flats @ £25 each	£1,250	
45 flats @ £22 each	£990	
145 flats @ £16 each	<u>£2,230</u>	<u>£5,010</u>
1 garage @ £60	£60	
3 garages @ £45	£135	
1 garage @ £40	£40	
1 garage @ £30	£30	
7 garages @ £20	£140	
65 garages @ £15	£975	
28 garages @ £12	<u>£336</u>	<u>£1,716</u>
Estimated rent to be realised on the new scheme		£6,726
Interest on £193,364 @ 3%		£5,800
Profit per annum by government		<u>£926</u>

List D. The estimated annual rents from letting of the new buildings.

APPENDIX 4

Intended Distribution/Relocation of Inhabitants of *Il-Mandraġġ* in 1937

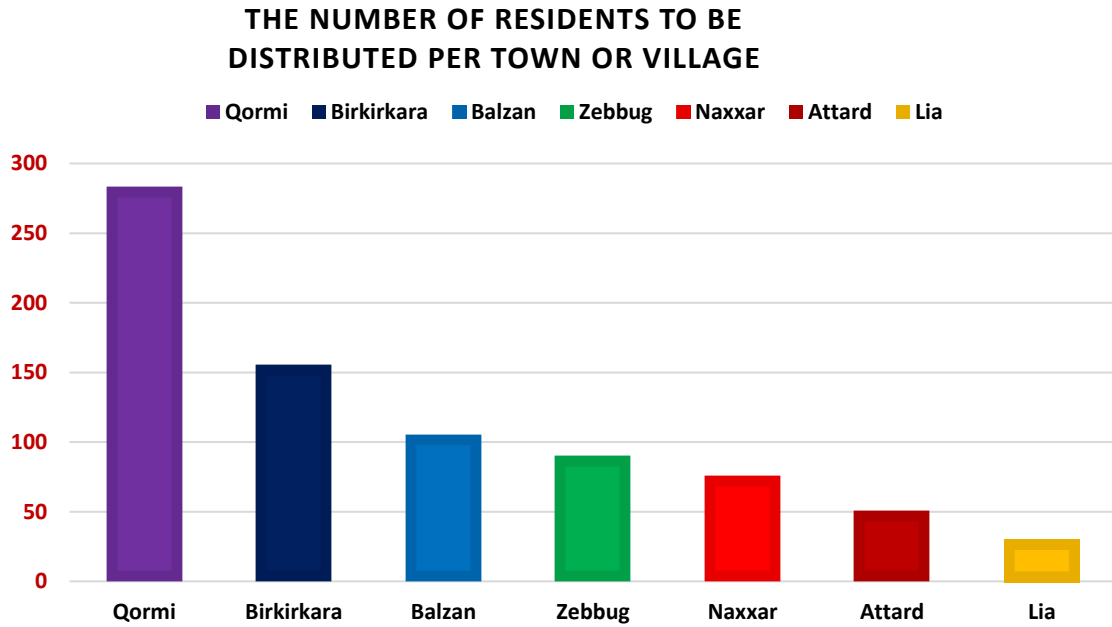


Chart 1: Number of residents from *Il-Mandraġġ* as intended to be rehomed in towns and villages.

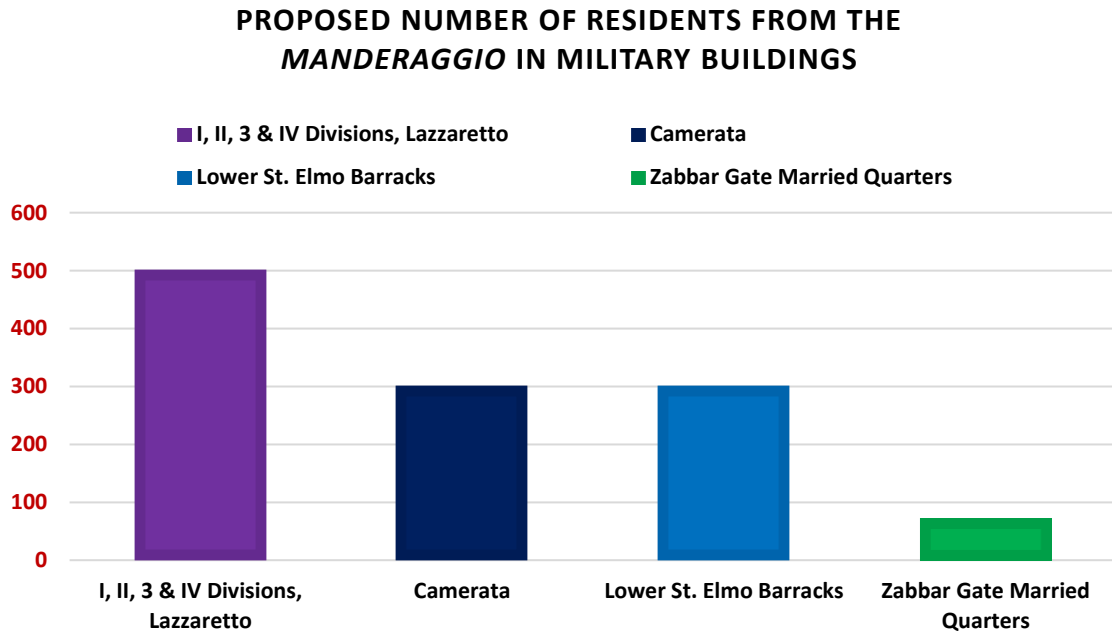


Chart 2: Percentage of residents from *Il-Mandraġġ* as intended to be rehomed in military buildings.

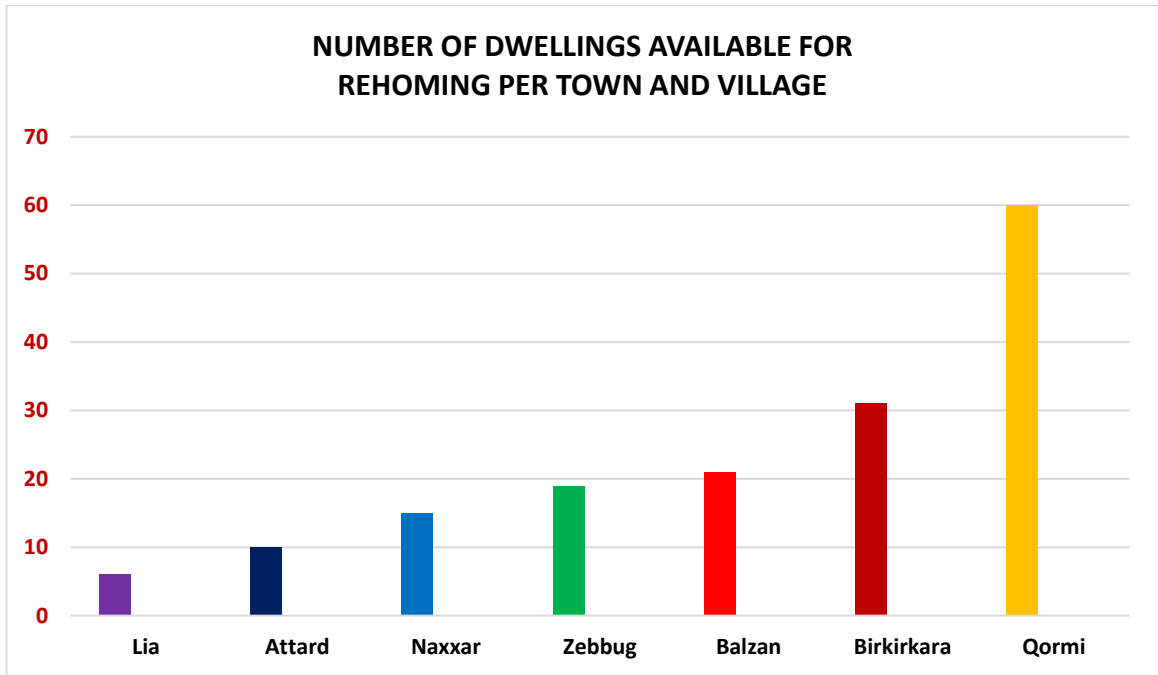


Chart 3: The number of dwellings available in towns and villages allocated for rehoming residents from *Il-Mandragġ*.

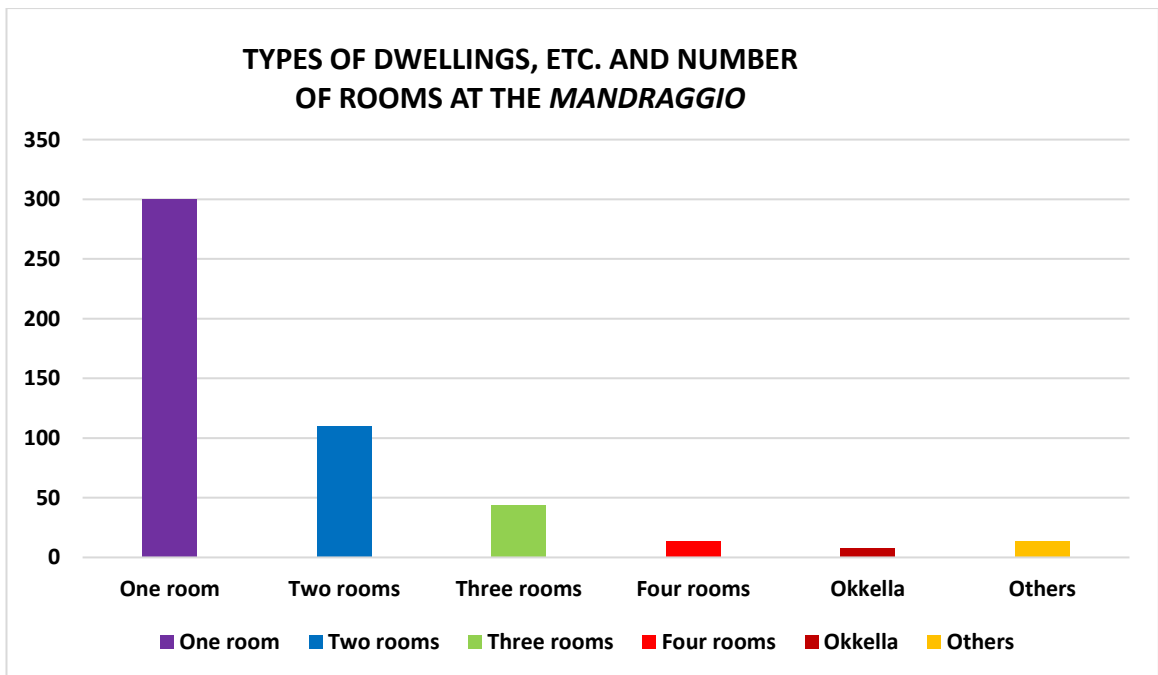


Chart 4: Types of dwellings and the total number of rooms at *Il-Mandragġ*.

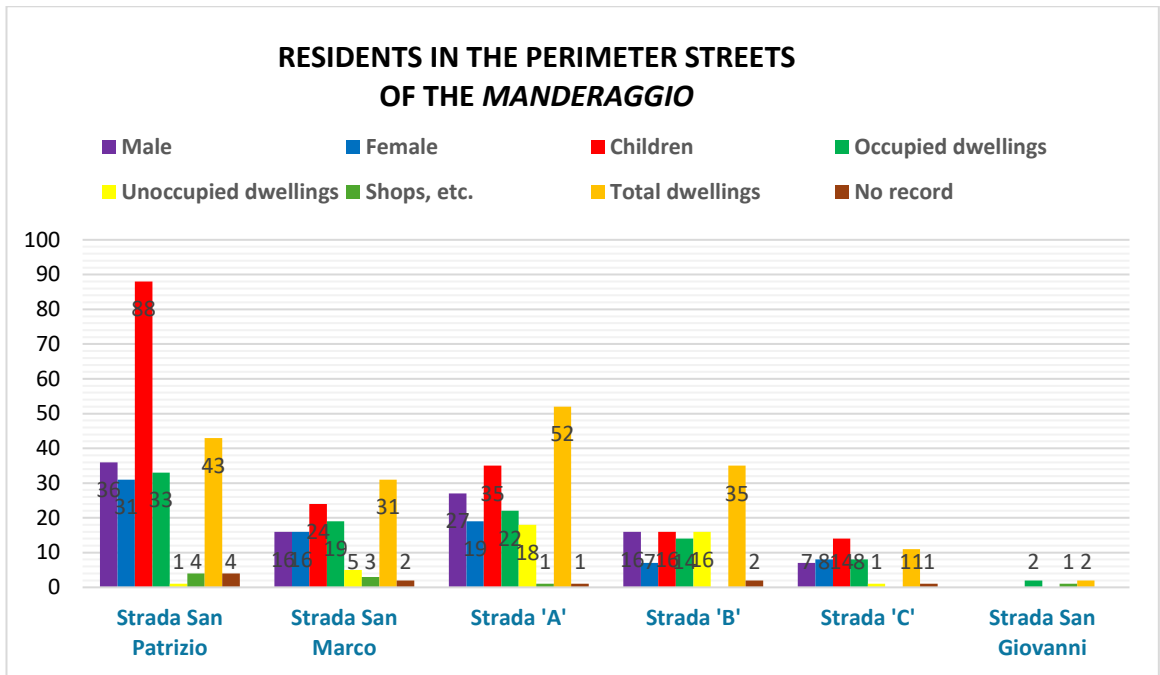


Chart 5: Number and gender of residents living in streets on the perimeter of *Il-Mandraġġ*

APPENDIX 5

Late 19th Century to Post-World War Two Photographs of *Il-Mandraġġ* and Bordering Streets.



Photo 1. View of the Marsamxett Landing with the buildings of Marsamxett Road above the fortifications, c1895. (Anthony Bugeja)



Photo 2. Goats in Marsamxett Road, c1935. (Saviour Grima)



Photo 3. *Strada Marsamushetto* (R. Ellis photo No. 139) (John Ebejer)

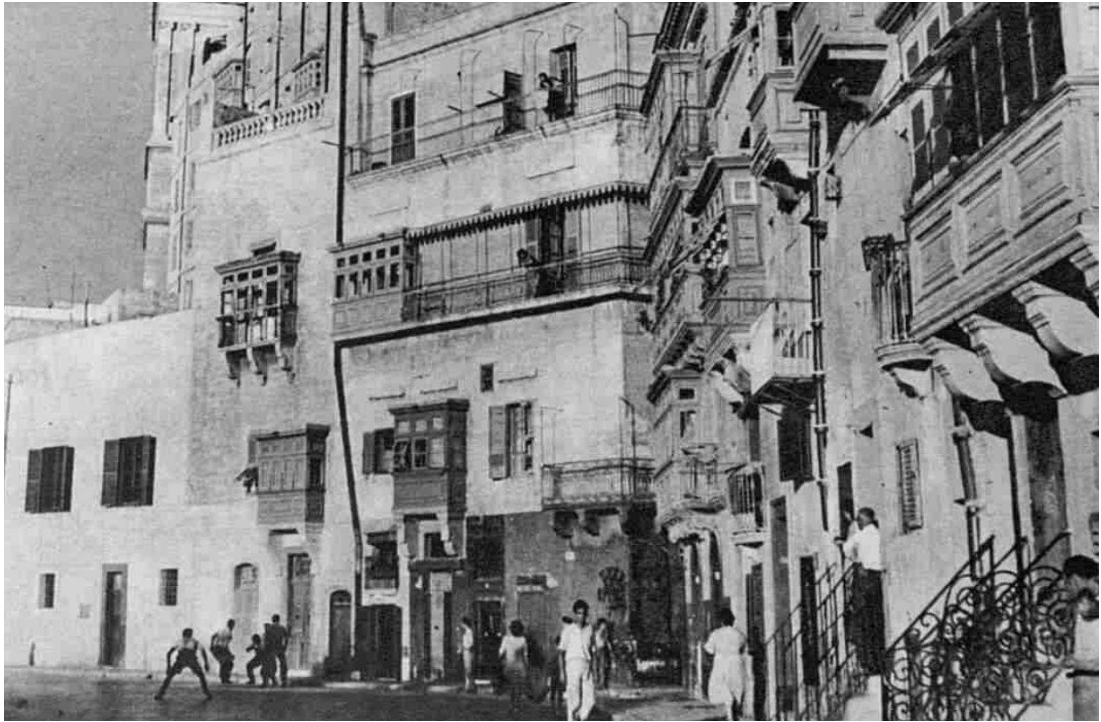


Photo 4. Youths playing football on the corner of Marsamxett Road and St Lucia Street.
(*The Sphere*, 17 September 1955), (Jesmond Bonnici)



Photo 5. Hawker at Marsamxett Road, with former military guard room to the left, 1930s.
(John Farrugia)



Photos 6 and 7. Two old postcards with different views of St Patrick Street, 1930s.
(Martin Attard collection)



Photo 8. *Marsamuxetto* Landing Place, Valletta c1880s, Horatio Agius Photo.
(Anthony Bugeja collection)



Photo 9. View of Great Siege Road and parts of the *Mandraġġ* buildings along Marsamxett Road, c1946. (St Augustine Parish calendar 2009).



Photo 10. Rooftops of the *Mandraġġ* and *Strada Manderaggio*, 1940. Note the height of the buildings along Marsamxett Road. (Victor Scerri)



Photo 11. A group of *Mandraǵgari* sitting along Marsamxett Road.
(Provenance unknown)

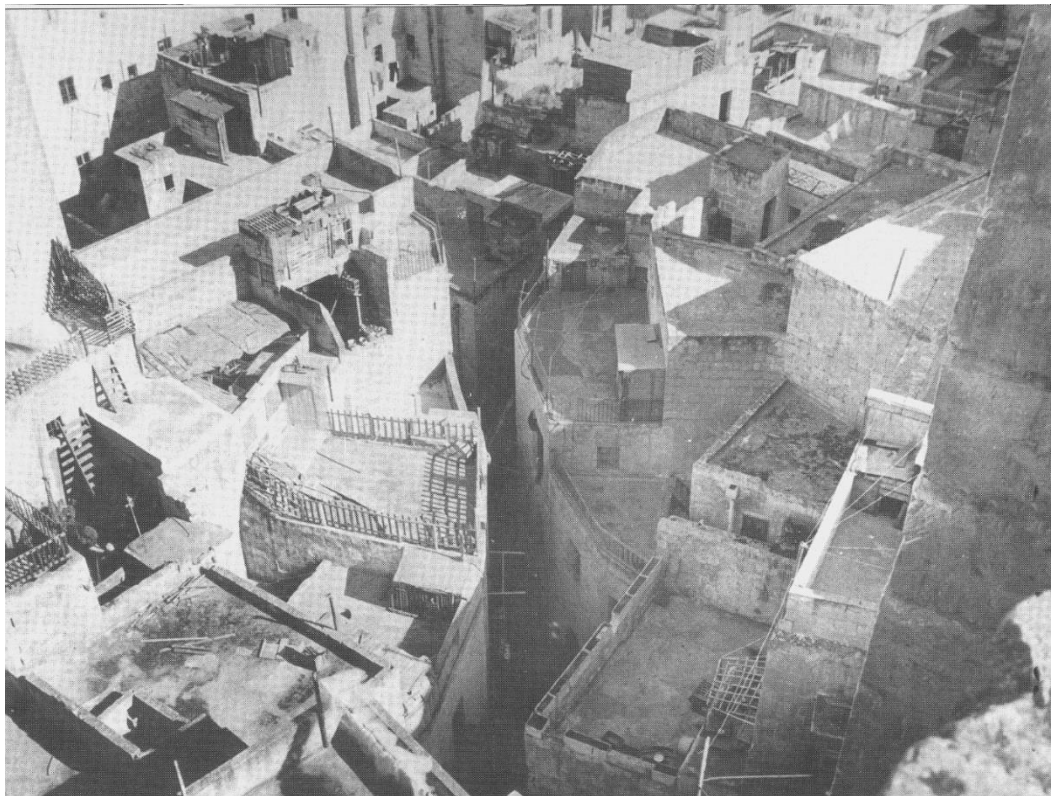


Photo 12. Rooftops and alleys of *Il-Mandraǵg*.
(Archives Works Department, unnumbered)



Photo 13. Washing hanging on rooftops of the *Il-Mandraġġ* and the rear of buildings along Marsamxett Road. (Jesmond Borg)



Photo 14. Aerial view of the *Il-Mandraġġ* and Marsamxett Landing, c1904. (Victor Scerri)

APPENDIX 6

List of Locations for Relocation in 1937 in the Central District of Malta

These lists contain the locations, streets, door numbers and the number of persons that can be accommodated in each private property or residence, extracted from the P W D file of 1936, PW1159/36, the 'Manderaggio Scheme' and are listed as written in the file.

List of private buildings which can be made available for occupation by people cleared from the <i>Manderaggio</i> area		
Sheet No. 1 - Central District		
Village	Address	No. of people to accommodate
Attard	7 <i>Strada Piazzetta</i> , Alley 2	5
"	30 St Dominic's Street	5
"	31 St Dominic's Street	5
"	32 St Dominic's Street	5
"	28 St Anthony Street	5
"	38 <i>Via Qormi</i>	5
"	13 <i>Via Zebbug</i>	5
"	<i>Via Notabile</i> (garages)	
"	<i>Via Notabile</i>	5
"	11 <i>Vicolo S. Paolo</i> (garages)	
"	38 St Anthony Street	5
"	69 St Anthony Street	5
Lija	58 <i>Sqaq Lia</i>	5
"	76 <i>Strada Reale</i>	5
"	38 <i>Strada Forni</i>	5
"	4 St Anthony St, Alley 4	5
"	Annibale Preca Street	5
"	9 <i>Strada Sant' Andrea</i>	5
Balzan	31 <i>Strada Idmejda</i>	5
"	51 <i>Strada Reale</i>	5
"	203 <i>Strada Reale</i>	5
"	205 <i>Strada Reale</i>	5
"	162 <i>Strada Reale</i>	5
"	127 <i>Strada Reale</i>	5
"	152 <i>Strada Reale</i>	5
"	155 <i>Strada Reale</i>	5
"	118 <i>Strada Reale</i>	5
"	126 <i>Strada Reale</i>	5
"	13 <i>Strada Mosta</i>	5
	Cf. Total	135

Sheet No. 2 - Central District		
	Carried forward	135
Balzan	14 <i>Strada Mosta</i>	5
"	15 <i>Strada Mosta</i>	5
"	Ex Railway Track	5
"	Ex Railway Track	5
"	1 Providence Street	5
"	2 Three Churches Street	5
"	2 Three Churches Street, Alley 2	5
"	3 Three Churches Street	5
"	225 <i>Misraħ Hall Balzan</i>	5
"	106 <i>Strada Reale</i>	5
Birkirkara	<i>Via Mannarino, Marlborough</i>	5
"	<i>Fleur de Lys, St Christopher</i>	5
"	<i>Fleur de Lys, St Ignazio</i>	5
"	<i>Fleur de Lys, Ester</i>	5
"	<i>Fleur de Lys, Helen</i>	5
"	<i>Fleur de Lys, St George</i>	5
"	<i>Fleur de Lys, St Joseph</i>	5
"	<i>Fleur de Lys, Jauni</i>	5
"	<i>Fleur de Lys, St Matthew</i>	5
"	<i>Fleur de Lys, Susy</i>	5
"	<i>Fleur de Lys, No. 132</i>	5
"	<i>Fleur de Lys, No.26</i>	5
"	Sacred Heart Street, No. 5	5
"	Don Filippo Borg Street, No. 5	5
"	Valley Road, No. 8	5
"	Valley Road, No. 79	5
"	Valley Road, No. 89	5
"	St Rocco Street, No. 3	5
"	Azzopardi Street, No. 10	5
	Cf. Total	285

Sheet No. 3 - Central District		
	Carried forward	285
Birkirkara	<i>Strada Fleur de Lys</i> , No. 234	5
"	<i>Strada Fleur de Lys</i> , No. 246	5
"	Braret Street, Dragona	5
"	Anglu Mallia St, Cristus Imperat	5
"	New St near Ang. Mallia St, Leo	5
"	New St near Ang. Mallia St, D.O.M.	5
"	Braret Street, Otello	5
"	<i>Strada</i> Mosta, Otello	5
"	<i>Strada</i> Mosta, No. 11	5
"	<i>Strada</i> Mosta, No. 58	5
"	Anglu Mallia St, <i>Christus Regnat</i>	5
"	<i>Strada Fleur de Lys</i> , Sam	5
Zebbug	No. 13 Bishop Caruana Street	5
"	No. 13 Bishop Caruana Street	5
"	No. 5 Bishop Caruana Street	5
"	13 St Mary Street	5
"	Nos. 301 & 298 <i>Strada Reale</i>	5
"	No. 4 <i>Strada Reale</i> , Alley 3	5
"	No. 45 <i>Strada Reale</i>	5
"	<i>Strada Reale</i> near <i>il-Knisja tal-Lunzjata</i>	5
"	41 St Anthony's Street	5
"	13 Mamo Street	5
"	84 Siggiewi Street	5
"	2 Siggiewi Street, Alley Y or 1(?)	5
"	66 Siggiewi Street	5
"	33 Siggiewi Street	5
"	2 Strait Street	5
"	28 Church Street	5
"	De Rohan Street	5
	Cf. Total	435

Sheet No. 4 - Central District		
	Carried forward	435
Zebbug	Hali Street, No. 14	5
Qormi	No. 5 Fremond Street	5
"	No. 29 St Roque Street	5
"	Nos. 74, 73 & 23A, Correa Street	15
"	Nos. 2, 3, Armier Street	10
"	Nos. 103, 216, 210 <i>Strada Reale, San Giorgio</i>	15
"	Nos. 56, 64, 5, 21 St Sebastian's St	20
"	Nos. 123, 119, 110, 137, 138, 125 & 9 St Bartholemew Street	35
"	Nos. 71, 17, 19, 20, 1 & 2 St Benedict's Street	30
"	Nos. 12, 17 St Raphael's Street	10
"	Nos. 209, 186 Alley 2, <i>Strada Sta. Caterina</i>	10
"	No. 29 Alley No. 3, <i>Strada Sta. Caterina</i>	3
"	No. 5 Bovile Street	5
"	Nos. 171, 180 Alley No. 2, Pinto Street	10
"	Nos. 47, 63 Alley No. 2, St Francis Street	10
"	Nos. 72, 78 <i>Strada San Pietro</i>	10
"	Nos. 52-57 <i>Strada San Pietro</i> , Alley No. 3	10
"	No. 16, Alley No. 1, Rock Street	5
"	No. 16, <i>Strada San Francesco</i>	5
"	Dom Mario Street, Nina, Aida, Vira, Toni, Leli, Luqa, Eden, Toia and No. 4	45
"	No. 16, St George's Street	5
	Cf. Total	705

Sheet No. 5 - Central District		
	Carried forward	705
Qormi	Nos. 12, 13 & 16 Bishop Scicluna Street	15
Naxxar	St Paul's Street	5
"	St Paul's Street	5
"	St Paul's Street	5
"	Road <i>Tal Bisiet</i> , behind Parish Church	5
"	<i>Ditto</i>	5
"	<i>Ditto</i>	5
"	<i>Ditto</i>	5
"	<i>Ditto</i>	5
"	<i>Ditto</i>	5
"	<i>Ditto</i>	5
"	<i>Ditto</i>	5
"	<i>Ditto</i>	5
"	<i>Ditto</i>	5
"	<i>Ditto</i>	5
"	Road <i>Tal Għaqba</i>	5
	Cf. Total	795

Sheet No. 6 - Central District		
	Carried forward	795
	Govt. Property	
		Est. rental value
Qormi	Old Boys' School at <i>Strada Reale</i> , Qormi	15 £20
	Old Tower at <i>Għar il-Ġobon</i> Street, B'Kara	3 £3
	Total	813
Workmen's Dwellings at B'Kara under the charge of E.D.W.		

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