
THE FORTIFICATION OF MALTA, 1530 - 1798: THE IMPACT ON THE MALTESE

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In the course of the two hundred and fifty years following their arrival from Rhodes in 1530 the knights of St John transformed Malta from a poorly fortified outpost of the Sicilian kingdom into a showpiece of military engineering. The scale of the building programme was such that, to a greater or lesser extent, it touched the lives of all the inhabitants of the islands, native as well as members of the Order.¹ The Order in general held itself aloof from the Maltese and would not normally admit the local nobility to its higher ranks. In practice there was little social contact between the members of the Order and the native aristocracy, the latter withdrawing to their palaces in Mdina (at that time commonly called Notabile) well away from Valletta the administrative centre of the knights. But whereas in Rhodes the knights had lived in an inner citadel or *collachio*, segregated from the native population, in Malta, despite attempts to establish *collachios* both in Birgu (the first headquarters of the Order) and later in Valletta, the knights and the Maltese dwelt side by side.

When Charles V transferred Malta and Gozo to the Order its head, the grand master, assumed the former role of the Aragonese crown, as sovereign of the Maltese. Although the islanders had been assured that they would retain all their rights and privileges under the new ruler, very soon they discovered that any truly independent action on the part of the *Universit s*, the traditional governing bodies of the islands, was incompatible with the islands' new position as headquarters of an international aristocratic military Order. The knights governed Malta in the interests of the Order, but although not concerned with the ancient liberties of the inhabitants, did not altogether neglect their well-being, so that there can be little doubt that over the years the Maltese became more secure from the marauding attacks of corsairs and from the threat of invasion. It was however a privilege for which they paid heavily, for the contribution made in labour and taxes by the islanders was essential to the scheme of fortification, and, at times, appears to have been out of all proportion to their numbers and wealth.

1. For a detailed account of the building of these fortifications see: A. Hoppen, *The fortification of Malta by the Order of St. John, 1530-1798* (Edinburgh, 1979).

Before the Order's arrival the Universitàs of Notabile (or Mdina) and Gozo had borne certain defence obligations. In the fifteenth century the upkeep of the walls of Notabile was a major preoccupation but the Universitàs were also responsible for the construction and maintenance of coastal towers and for the provision of militia, comprising both coastal lookouts and mounted guards.² The finance came from locally raised taxation, either direct or indirect, and from the proceeds of judicial fines. Although the Universitàs retained certain rights, powers and duties after 1530, the overall responsibility for the islands' defence was assumed by the congregation of fortification and war, a subcommittee of the Order's ruling body the council. Defence was too important a matter to be left to bodies over which the Order did not have direct control so that, although in practice the Universitàs maintained the walls of Notabile and of the Castello in Gozo and some coastal towers, even in these areas the Order would intervene if it considered the overall defence of the islands was involved.³

In the sixteenth century one of the major problems facing the military engineer in Malta was the provision of an adequate labour force. Because of the way in which the Order financed its fortification schemes money was normally forthcoming only in an emergency.⁴ As a result, engineers were often under pressure to complete works in as short a time as possible, and practically the only way in which the rate of building could be increased was by enlarging the workforce. In Malta itself there was a limited amount of labour available, but with a growing population the pool of possible workers increased. It appears that the acute labour shortage experienced in the sixteenth century had passed by the middle of the next century, for during this time the population had grown from 20,000 in 1530 to about 50,000 in 1650.⁵

The scarcity of labour was such that when in 1552 an attempt was made to overcome the inadequacies of the existing fortifications by the construction of forts St. Elmo and St. Michael, workmen had to be imported from Sicily.⁶ The need to use foreign labour on this occasion may be explained in part by the death of many Maltese in the famine which followed the bad harvest of 1550.⁷ The siege in 1565 accounted for another fall in

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2. A Mifsud, 'La milizia e le torri antiche di Malta', *Archivum melitense*, IV (1920), 55-100.
 3. Hoppen, *Fortification*, pp. 103, 108 and 134.
 4. For details of the finances of the Order see: A. Hoppen 'The finances of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', *European studies review*, III (1973), 103-19 and Hoppen, *Fortification*, pp. 142-55.
 5. For estimates of the population see: B.W. Blouet. *The story of Malta* (London, 1967), pp. 89-92.
 6. G. Bosio, *Istoria della Sacra Religione Militare di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano*, 3 vols. (Rome, 1594-1620), III, 323.
 7. Blouet, *Malta*, p. 90.

population, both through death and emigration to Sicily, at the very time when an ambitious building programme was being undertaken. Indeed there was such a dearth of workmen in the autumn of 1565 that the clearing of the debris of fort St. E'mo (almost totally destroyed in the siege) could proceed only slowly, although the Order's claim that there were only 1000 fit men on the island was probably an exaggeration made in the hope of raising more aid from abroad.⁸ Attempts were made to hire Sicilians but, not surprisingly, these were unwilling to cross to Malta where the defences were in ruins and the Turkish armada was expected to renew its attack.⁹ Even threats and promises backed by the authority of the Sicilian viceroy did not persuade a single workman to come to Malta until several months after the siege.¹⁰ Sicilians were further discouraged by the fact that of the many Maltese who had fled to Sicily few, if any, had chosen to return to their own island.¹¹ This lack of labour was one of the reasons given for the delay in starting work on the new city (later to be known as Valletta) which late in 1565, the knights decided to build on strategically well-situated Sciberras peninsula. Once fortified, a city on this elevated site between the Marsamxett and Grand Harbour could be more effectively defended than the older defences of fort St. Angelo and Birgu which could readily be bombarded from neighbouring heights. The military engineer Francesco Laparelli in his report of 13 January 1566 explained that the building of this new city to serve as the Order's headquarters had not commenced because there were no workmen or tools.¹² This was also the excuse offered to Pope Pius V when he expressed surprise that work on this project had not begun immediately after the siege.¹³

Eventually it was decided to begin with those labourers who were available. Gradually more workmen began to arrive in the islands during the summer of 1566, especially after the harvest was in and as the Turkish threat grew more remote. Moreover, the word soon spread that the workers were paid and fed well and regularly.¹⁴ The Maltese were particularly encouraged to return from Sicily because their knowledge of local building materials and methods was invaluable.¹⁵ Despite this influx, Laparelli in supervising the building of Valletta was faced with a constant labour short-

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8. Archives of the Order of Malta, housed in the National Library of Malta (hereafter referred to as A.O.M.), vol. 430, f. 267 and 268v; Bosio, *Istoria*, III, 710.
 9. Bosio, *Istoria*, III, 715.
 10. A.O.M. 430, f. 268v; Bosio, *Istoria*, III, 716.
 11. A.O.M. 430, f. 267.
 12. Codex Laparelli (in the possession of the Countess Laparelli Pitti of Cortona and hereafter referred to as Cod. Lap.), f. 9.
 13. A.O.M. 430, f. 272, (1 February 1566); Bosio, *Istoria*, III, 736.
 14. Bosio, *Istoria*, III, 741, 750, 771, 78.
 15. Bosio, *Istoria*, III, 778.

age, so that in August 1566 he even undertook to hire 500 workmen himself.¹⁶ In a further attempt to alleviate the shortage the Order obtained a papal brief permitting work on the fortifications to take place on feast days and as late as 1575 members of the Order were not allowed to employ a building worker without a licence from the commissioner of works.¹⁷

The workmen employed in building Valletta received wages and rations. Normally they were paid each Sunday according to how much work they had done, but, in order to entice men from abroad, Laparelli contracted to pay the men whom he engaged a basic monthly salary in addition to a payment for each day they actually worked.¹⁸ Although many of the Maltese did receive wages, the pre-1530 obligation to perform labour service in the fortifications survived. This however amounted to only four days a year — clearly insufficient for the Order's purpose. It would appear, therefore, that if the Order was exacting such unpaid labour from the Maltese, it was also employing further forced labour for which it may actually have been paying, and local inhabitants were used in this way in 1552, 1645, 1651 and 1715.¹⁹ In 1645 the Maltese were ordered to give service far in excess of what was customary, and to work in the fortifications for one day a week, for which they would be rewarded with two loaves a day.²⁰ It would seem however that this amount of compulsory service was exceptional as its enforcement necessitated the enactment of a council decree.

Apart from the building of Valletta, when, if the historian Giacomo Bosio is to be believed, everybody toiled willingly, such forced labour was highly unpopular. The workers at Fort Chambray in Gozo in 1754 were so disobedient that a troop of soldiers (a sergeant, two corporals and twelve men) had to be sent to keep order.²¹ In addition, workmen absent without permission were threatened with six months labour in the public works if they did not perform their obligatory service.²² One could however escape the customary service of four days a year by payment of a tax, the *neuba*, and it was probably also possible for the well-to-do to pay a substitute to perform other forced labour. But the mass of the Maltese had no option but to set to work in the fortifications when required by the Order. On the other hand, it seems that the knights were prepared to initiate

16. Cod. Lap. f. 42.

17. A.O.M. 431, f. 279 (19 August 1566) and A.O.M. 94, f. 70v. (23 September 1575).

18. Cod. Lap. f. 42.

19. A.O.M. 88, f. 107v. and Bosio, *Istoria*, III, 323 (1552);

A.O.M. 257, f. 197 (1645); A.O.M. 258, f. 237 (1651);

A.O.M. 266, f. 129v. (1715).

20. A.O.M. 257, f. 197 and A.O.M. 258, f. 7 (1645);

A.O.M. 116, f. 6v. (1647).

21. A.O.M. 1012, f. 15.

22. A.O.M. 1012, f. 102 (1754-5).

building projects which would provide employment and relief for needy islanders. In 1742, for instance, Gozitans who had suffered from two bad harvests, were employed in the building of a mole at Marsalforn.²³

The slaves of the islands were another group of labourers on whom the Order could call if the need arose. The Order's galleys required between two and three hundred rowers each and the majority of these would have been slaves. If the work was sufficiently urgent the Order was prepared to put the galley crews to work in the fortifications even in the summer months when this would result in a restriction on naval activities.²⁴ In 1632 1284 slaves were employed in the six galleys,²⁵ but besides the galley slaves the Order had other slaves owned by the common treasury who were regularly employed in public works including the fortifications.²⁶ In exceptional circumstances the personal and house slaves of the knights and Maltese were also ordered to labour in the fortifications.²⁷ Beggars, vagrants and convicts could likewise be pressed into service in the various building schemes.²⁸

In the years after 1600 the Order seems to have been able to muster a sufficient workforce on the islands themselves and there was no further need to import men. It is not possible, however, to calculate with any accuracy the actual numbers of men employed on the fortifications. It is generally accepted that the large labour force at work on Valletta enabled the defences to be built in a relatively short time. Bosio claims that 8000 persons, skilled and unskilled, were normally working on the new city, but this is double the number which the engineer Laparelli assumed to be at his disposal, and indeed the only occasion on which Laparelli mentioned the figure of 8000 was when he dismissed a particular scheme because such numbers were not available.²⁹ Further evidence that contemporaries believed 4000 to be the maximum number of persons employed on Valletta is found in a brief of 1587 granting the secretary of the building works his salary

23. MS.O 1, entitled 'Notes on the fortifications of Malta' in the Library of the Order of St. John, Clerkenwell, London (hereafter referred to as Clerkenwell, MS. O 1), item 21.

24. A.O.M. 423, ff. 208 (December 1551), 216v. and 217v. (April 1552); A.O.M. 88, f. 121 (January 1552); A.O.M. 431, f. 266 (January 1567); A.O.M. 432, f. 231 (April 1568); A.O.M. 99, f. 120v. (December 1596); A.O.M. 431, f. 266 (January 1567); 1568); A.O.M. 99, f. 120v. (December 1596); A.O.M. 258, ff. 7 and 24v. (May and June 1645) and 237 (February 1651); A.O.M. 266, f. 207 (March 1716).

25. P. Earle, *Corsairs of Malta and Barbary* (London, 1970,) p. 169.

26. A.O.M. 288, f. 29 (1555).

27. A.O.M. 115, ff. 7v.-8 (January 1645); A.O.M. 258, f. 7 (May 1645); A.O.M. 266, f. 143v. (February 1715); Clerkenwell, MS. O 1, item 8 (1722).

28. A.O.M. 105, f. 42 (1614); A.O.M. 468, f. 154v. (1636); A.O.M. 738, f. 17v. (1646).

29. Bosio, *Istoria*, III, 781; Col. Lap. ff. 14 (30 January 1566), 47 (1567) and 49.

for life, which makes it clear that during his twenty-four years as secretary there had, on occasion, been as many as 4000 men working on the new city.³⁰ This was probably the largest number ever engaged on a single project. For instance, Pietro Paolo Fioriani, the designer of Floriana, envisaged that 2000, or at most 3000, men might be employed to execute his proposals made in November 1635.³¹ With the smaller total the front of Floriana could be in a state of defence by the following May or June; with 3000 the front and flanks would be ready. Judging however from the progress of Floriana, Fioriani grossly overestimated either the amount of work each man could do, or, more likely, the number of men the Order was prepared, or able, to make available.

There is no evidence that skilled craftsmen were expected to give their services free. They worked on a contractual basis, each master undertaking to complete a specified section at an agreed price. Payment depended on the satisfactory completion of work and each week careful measurements were taken by the Order's supervisors in order to calculate the amount of money due. The Order exercised strict control over the quality of workmanship and masters could even be expected to provide a ten-year guarantee against faulty work.³² The forced labour, Maltese and slave, was used to do the heavy unskilled work — to dig ditches, level terrapleins and clear the glacis (the open country in front of the ramparts). Although unskilled, they were essential members of the workforce, for the craftsmen found that they were unable to fulfil their contracts if too few labourers were at their disposal, and the Order bore the responsibility of supplying the gangs of workers. The Order's slaves could be assigned to work under a particular contractor, and in these circumstances the Order, to which a slave was a capital asset, had to ensure that the slaves were not overworked or ill-treated in the contractor's desire to make a profit.³³

As well as assisting in the construction of the fortifications, the Maltese were also expected to help to man the finished works. The Order enforced the ancient obligation, never popular among the Maltese, to perform militia service. Peasants were assigned to keep guard in lookout posts around the coast but in the seventeenth century these duties were taken over by professional soldiers and an attempt was made to raise a 4000 man strong militia regiment. It was claimed that these men, accustomed as they were to the local weather, would be worth 8000 foreign troops.³⁴ However the militia never achieved the high military standard that had been hoped for.

30. A.O.M. 443, f. 98 (1587).

31. A.O.M. 6554, f. 25.

32. Clerkenwell, MS. O 1, items 15 and 21.

33. Clerkenwell, MS. O 1, item 15 (January 1728).

34. A.O.M. 260, f. 31v. (1658) and A.O.M. 120, f. 213v. (1659).

Despite the growing population the Order had to rely on foreign troops to help to garrison the defences. To man the fortifications at their widest extent in the eighteenth century some 20,000 infantry with an appropriate complement of artillery men were required.³⁵ Even employing foreign mercenaries and militiamen the fortifications were chronically undermanned because the knights were unwilling, and indeed unable, to pay for sufficient troops.

Not only were the Maltese compelled to give labour and military service, they were also required to contribute to the construction of the fortifications through taxation. As with the forced labour, which the wealthy could avoid, the taxation fell particularly heavily on the peasants and labourers. It was not they, however, who initiated the protests against unfair taxation, but the parish clergy led by the cathedral chapter and the bishop. In May 1636 the clergy objected to paying a levy of 5000 scudi on their revenues, which, with 50,000 scudi to be raised from the laity, was to be used in the Floriana fortifications. But the memorandum which the clergy sent to Rome setting out their grievances was undoubtedly in the nature of a national protest rather than an attempt merely to protect the revenues of churchmen.³⁶ The clergy claimed that the fortifications were not essential to the defence of the island, that the Order itself was divided as to their worth, and that the knights themselves owned sufficient property and had already imposed sufficient taxes on the Maltese to be able to finance the fortifications. Moreover the Order with an annual income of some 2,000,000 scudi had decided to spend only 36,000 scudi on the fortifications, whereas the islanders whose annual income was barely 160,000 scudi were being asked to pay 55,000 scudi.³⁷ To make matters even worse the Order had excluded its own property in Malta and that of its members from the proposed tax. Finally the document declared that unless costs were shared in a more equitable manner, the Maltese would not contribute a single scudo towards the new fortification. The protest met with little sympathy in Rome. The pope, Urban VIII, supported the Order's project, having lent his own engineer Pietro Paolo Floriani to draw up the plans. Furthermore the papal representative in Malta, the Inquisitor Fabio Chigi, also supported the scheme. Chigi acted as mediator when Grand Master Lascaris, who had delayed the collection of the tax, perhaps anticipating trouble, finally decided to implement the papal briefs authorising the tax

35. A. Hoppen, 'The Knights Hospitallers and the defence of Malta', *Annales de l'Ordre Souverain Militaire de Malte*, XXV (1977), p. 35.

36. For details of the uprising see: V. Borg, *Fabio Chigi, apostolic delegate in Malta (1634-1639)*, *Studi e testi*, no 249, Vatican City, 1967), pp. 51-4.

37. The Maltese used the Sicilian scudo as a unit of account. The problems encountered in trying to estimate the Order's income are outlined in Hoppen, 'Finances of the Order', pp. 106-112.

in 1637. The tax collectors met with opposition and it began to look as if all the villages would rise in revolt.

The uprising began in September 1637 in Zejtun, the first village where collection was attempted. The leaders hoped to assemble the people of Malta at Marsa and to march on Valletta with a crucifix or statue of a saint at their head. There were even suggestions that they might be armed. Despite the initial lead given by the clergy in opposing the tax, the parish priest of Zejtun was naturally alarmed at these warlike preparations and informed the bishop who sent him to Chigi who, in turn, ordered him to go to the grand master. Eventually the grand master imprisoned the lay leaders of the revolt, and, although he suspected that some local priests were behind the uprising, acting on Chigi's advice, he never denounced them as agitators.³⁸ Resistance to the tax however remained fierce and although some money was collected, it was far short of the 50,000 scudi anticipated. Since Chigi regarded the 5000 scudi from the clergy as a subsidy tied to the amount forthcoming from the laity, he made no attempt to force payment from the clergy. The immediate object of the revolt had been secured: in effect this particular tax was not collected and the brief authorising it was later exchanged for one sanctioning an imposition of 50,000 scudi on eatables. Apart from the specific grievance of the new tax there is evidence that the villages were also objecting to the oppressive and autocratic rule of the Order in general.

A later attempt to impose a tax on non-movable goods in 1671 to help finance the Cotonera fortifications was similarly resisted. On this occasion too the clergy appealed to Rome in the hope that the papacy might protect their privileges, but their appeal met with no more success than that of 1636.³⁹ Official preparations for the implementation of the levy went ahead with the compilation of registers of property. These revealed that the value of non-movable property was too low to raise the 100,000 scudi required, so that another papal brief was procured authorising instead a customs levy, known as the *nuovo imposto*. It is not possible to say whether the opposition to the original tax played any part in its abandonment, for the decision to change to an import and export tax may have been made on purely financial grounds once a survey of property had shown the tax on non-movables to be impracticable.

Although the original intention had been that the *nuovo imposto* was to be levied only until 100,000 scudi had been raised, it soon became a permanent tax, so that by the early eighteenth century the Maltese were again

38. Borg, *Chigi*, p. 304.

39. A. Mifsud, 'Papi, fortificazioni e tasse nel passato di Malta' in *Archivum melitense*, III (1919), 399-430 at p. 425; National Library of Malta manuscript collection, vol. 438, memorandum of Canon Ristri to Clement X (1672) on this subject.

protesting against heavy taxation, in particular the *nuovo imposto*, through their usual mouthpiece, the clergy.⁴⁰ In July 1715 the bishop was pleading that they should be relieved of some of the burden, and the clergy once more appealed to Rome, but again the pope acceded to the request of the grand master who was allowed to levy another 100,000 scudi through customs dues. The pope also forbade the calling of a general chapter of the clergy which was the normal forum for discussion of their grievances. The pope, by this action, stifled the protests of the clergy, and through them the protests of the people. The appeals to Rome had been fruitless and the papacy seemed no longer able to act independently of the grand master in the interests of the Maltese. The eighteenth century saw the growing autocratic power of the grand masters at the very time when the influence of the papacy in the church as a whole was declining. The Maltese no longer had a protector outside the island to whom they could turn. As a result they showed signs of restlessness, such as the priests' revolt in 1775.⁴¹ But these were symptoms of increasing resentment of the Order's rule as a whole, and not specifically connected with the burdens placed on the population by the Order's military activities.

The building of the fortifications always involved a certain amount of disturbance for some of the population. People had to be moved from their homes and land to make way for new works. They received compensation either in land or money but at first the Order compensated only for loss of land, refusing to pay for buildings from which it derived no benefit. By the eighteenth century, however, this policy had been relaxed. Property was carefully surveyed down to the last cupboard to ensure that a fair payment was made.⁴² Probably inevitably, disputes arose over the amount and payment of compensation and many cases came to court for settlement. People also had to be removed from the area surrounding the fortifications so that the defenders would have a clear line of fire and the attackers would find no shelter. There were regulations to control the erection of buildings near the fortifications, but these tended to be relaxed in time of peace.⁴³ The Maltese would move into the fortifications, and (often with the permission of the congregation of fortification) would set up house in the archways and other convenient corners. This was especially true in Valletta where housing space was in short supply and the inhabitants gradually extended their dwelling up to the walls.⁴⁴ Such encroachment could harm the fortifications in several ways. Apart from damage caused by illegal use of the fortifications as a convenient quarry for building stone, the limestone which was the principal building material was decomposed

40. Mifsud, 'Papi', p. 427.

41. See. R. Cavaliero, *The last of the Crusaders* (London, 1960), p. 153.

42. Hoppen, *Fortification*, p. 152; Clerkenwell, MS O 1, item 24 (1757).

43. Petitions asking for permission to build can be found in volumes A.O.M. 1016-1025.

44. Blouet, *Malta*, p. 108.

by the heat of the fires which the Maltese were in the habit of lighting on the ramparts, while their other habits of keeping goats and dumping rubbish on the parapets caused further damage.⁴⁵ Because of the inconvenience brought about by closing the gates at night, the inhabitants made secret openings by which they could enter and leave at will, and in consequence the Order was for ever walling up such entrances in the interest of security.

What benefit, if any, did the Maltese derive from the fortifications which demanded their labour and their money, and which could cause considerable disruption in their way of life? It cannot be denied that they profited from the primary purpose of the defences: they were better protected than they had been in the past. Indeed the desire to be able to shelter the islanders was an important consideration in adopting the schemes of Pietro Paolo Floriani and Antonio Maurizio Valperga. The Order felt obliged to protect the Maltese (even those of no military use) and their animals and so constructed the defences of Floriana and later Cotonera. Gozo offers an excellent example of this concern. The island endured repeated raids by corsairs and the knights were anxious to protect the inhabitants without resorting to such a drastic measure as evacuation to Malta. Although the Castello was strategically placed in the centre of the island, it was far too small to shelter all the islanders, and the only effective way in which it could be enlarged was by enclosing the whole of its suburb, Rabat. An alternative solution was to build a new fort which could accommodate everyone and dismantle the Castello. The first decision, taken in 1643, was to build such a fort at Marsalforn, but this was resisted by the Gozitans who would have had to bear the cost, and also because of the inconvenience of the move. The tower which was eventually built at Marsalforn was not a refuge but merely a watch tower,⁴⁶ and the Gizitans had to wait until the next century before a fortified enclosure was built overlooking the port of Mgarr.⁴⁷ This fort, Chambray, did not attract dwellers away from Rabat and the site never developed into a fortified town. Probably by the mid-eighteenth century security had become a less pressing problem and in no way compensated for the inconvenience of such a transfer. Proposals to evacuate Notabile which, like the Castello, occupied a site which did not lend itself to modern designs of fortification, were similarly abandoned after resistance by the inhabitants.⁴⁸ Although neither the Castello nor Notabile could be satisfactorily fortified according to contemporary standards, the Order responded to popular pressure and, far from demolishing their walls, from time to time attempted improvements even

45. A.O.M. 1054, f. 5.

46. A.O.M. 257, ff. 143v. (21 June 1643) and 165 (7 May 1644); A.O.M. 259, f. 172 (9 June 1656).

47. A.O.M. 270, f. 202 (23 June 1752); Hoppen, *Fortification*, pp. 120-22.

48. A.O.M. 257, f.209v. (March 1645); Hoppen, *Fortification*, p. 101.

though it was realised that these offered no real solution to the basic defects of the forts.

Undoubtedly, as a result of the Order's activity the Maltese were, in theory at least, better protected than before. By the eighteenth century there were areas, such as Cotonera and Floriana, into which the people of the countryside could retire when an attack was threatened. But the benefits from the increase in fortified area were to some extent offset by the growth in population; in 1760 it is estimated that there were probably 100,000 in the three inhabited islands.⁴⁹ Despite the continual additions and improvements which the Order made to the defensive system, the remoter parts never became completely secure. The danger of a corsair attack persisted into the eighteenth century; people remained reluctant to settle in the northern part of Malta or around the coasts, and instead the large villages such as Qormi, Birkirkara, Zebbug and Zejtun grew up at the expense of smaller settlements. Above all, new towns grew up around the Grand Harbour and Marsamxett, close to, if not within, the encircling fortifications.⁵⁰ In Gozo, which suffered even more than Malta from raids, the development of rural settlements was delayed until the eighteenth century by which time the dangers of corsair attack had become less.⁵¹ Although the Order's strategy in the eighteenth century stressed the importance of defending the coasts and preventing a landing, it is unlikely that this changed strategy was of any direct benefit to the villagers. The increasing security of the country dwellers was the result of a general decrease in corsair activity rather than the fruits of the deterrent value of the entrenchments, batteries and redoubts built to repulse a landing force.

An immediately direct benefit derived by the islanders from the defence expenditure of the Order did exist in the money which it channelled into the local economy. Much of the income which reached Malta from the Order's estates in Europe was spent in the islands and provided the capital on which was based the economic development of Malta during the rule of the knights.⁵² The building programme not only attracted extraordinary revenue to the islands because of the way in which it was financed, but was also a home-based industry with much of the expenditure concentrated in the islands. Builders enjoyed one great advantage denied to all other war industries: their basic raw material, stone, was found locally, whereas the armaments industry and the trades which grew up to support the navy relied heavily on imported supplies. The Order employed local craftsmen to build and maintain the fortifications, and the arrival of the knights led to a rapidly expanding construction industry, in answer to both

49. Blouet, *Malta*, p. 92.

50. Blouet, *Malta*, pp.93-7.

51. Blouet, *Malta*, pp. 97-9.

52. Blouet, *Malta*, pp. 122-49.

civil and military needs. Because of their skill in working the local stone, islanders were employed whenever possible. Although, with the exceptions of Girolamo Cassar and Vittorio Cassar, the resident engineers were foreigners, the men directly under them — the foremen overseeing the workers — were Maltese. Many local architects better known for their civil and ecclesiastical projects, such as Lorenzo Gafà (1630-1704), Giovanni Barbara (1670-1730), Domenico Cachia (1710-90), Francesco Zerafa (active in the eighteenth century) and Giuseppe Bonici (1710-79), all enjoyed regular employment on the fortifications. Some Maltese, therefore, profited considerably from the many building contracts which the Order issued, and these building craftsmen were but one example of the growing numbers of Maltese who, under the rule of the knights, became engaged in non-agricultural trades and pursuits.

The schemes for fortification impressed themselves on the Maltese through two principal demands — for their money and their labour. The islanders did not submit without protest, but at times their resistance to the burdens imposed by the fortifications seems to have been symptomatic of a general resentment of what they considered the Order's high-handed methods of government. Without outside support this resistance failed and the Maltese were forced to rely on the paternalistic benevolence of the Order. The knights, however, were concerned primarily with the well-being of their own Order, and, while they did not exploit the Maltese ruthlessly, the needs of the islanders inevitably took second place.

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