

A 17th-century French traveller in Malta

Albert Jouvin de Rochefort was a 17th-century French traveller who visited several cities in Europe, Asia and Africa soon after the conclusion of the so-called Thirty Years War of 1618-48.

His largely forgotten *Voyage d'Italie et de Malthe* formed part of a six-volume work published in Paris in 1672 during the reign of King Louis XIV. Jouvin, accompanied by some friends, arrived in Syracuse in December 1663, where they managed to board a war galley of the Knights of Malta which was then berthed in the port of that city to participate in the festivities of Santa Lucia. Having safely reached the island, Jouvin remained in Malta for about four weeks, returning to France in 1665 where he was eventually appointed treasurer in the office of Limoges by the King of France.

The fascinating description of baroque Malta by Jouvin, based on travel notes written during his stay in a hostel in Valletta, is the subject of a recent book by Professor Denis De Lucca published by Heritage Books on behalf of the International Institute for Baroque Studies.

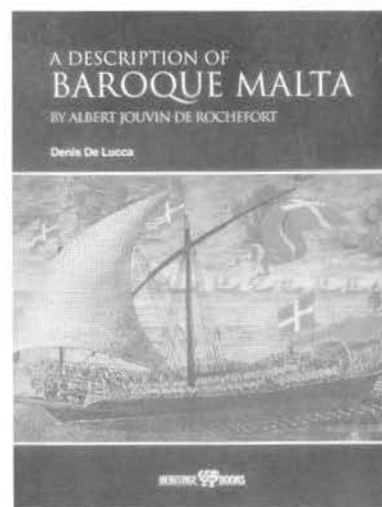
Jouvin gives detailed descriptions of Valletta and of the many beautiful buildings and gardens in 17th-century Malta. His notes give a revealing and personal account of Malta in 1663-64. Jouvin was mainly interested in all the changes that had begun to transform Valletta and other European cities into splendid baroque urban environments. These cities were now full of beautiful palaces and impressive artillery fortifications, forming a new concept of urban living marked by the lavish use

of straight avenues, spacious squares and exotic gardens.

The book is illustrated with the reproduction of several plans and old views including a 1633 plan of Valletta showing Albert Jouvin's itinerary and the location of the many buildings and urban spaces that he describes, including the palace of the Grand Master

where "there is also a large birdcage and a small garden containing shrubs and beautiful flowers, irrigated by the water of fountains and little springs that also serve to amuse the many beautiful birds of different plumage that roam around them", and the slaves prison where "there are also some Greeks who sell sorbet, coffee and chocolate".

The book concludes with a reproduction of the French text of Jouvin's description, reproduced from his memoirs kept in the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* in Paris.



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In his fascinating recent book 'Memento Mori', the researcher Dane Munro has painstakingly translated the inscriptions of the tombstones of the Knights into English, offering contemporary readers who are not familiar with Latin a unique insight into the thoughts, fears and aspirations of the Knights. Munro's text is accompanied by beautiful photographs by Maurizio Urso, and is published by MJ Publications.

MEMENTO MORI

