The city-fortress of Valletta in the Baroque age

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The Baroque age is generally considered to have begun in the last third of the sixteenth century and to have ended in the mid-eighteenth, covering the period of time between the Italian Renaissance (and its Mannerist sequel) and Neo-classicism. In Europe, the Baroque architectural expression was an integral component of an aristocratic culture incorporating art and architecture, religious and philosophical attitudes, political, military and social structures, geographical and scientific discoveries, literary achievements and ceremonial and theatrical displays. Towards the end of the sixteenth century these different aspects of human endeavour started interacting together to form the basis of a new Baroque lifestyle.

This happened at a time when Catholic Europe was vigorously reacting to the Protestant reformation and to the threat of Muslim infiltration posed by the Sultans of the Ottoman Empire, which reached its maximum expansion in 1606. In these troubled times, the islands of Malta, precariously positioned between Catholic Europe and Muslim North Africa, were not spared the turbulences that were shaking Europe. The Hospitaller Knights who arrived here in 1530 were soon faced by two Turkish attacks in 1551 and 1565. Pestilence, desolation of the countryside, acute water supply problems and the unexpected appearance of Protestant ‘heresy’ from southern Italy added to the woes of Malta in that unhappy century, the latter taking the form of a married priest called Gesualdo who, it is recorded, was publicly burnt at the stake in the main square of Birgu. Eager to apply to the book the militant spirit of the Counter Reformation, it was by no accident that the building of the magnificent city-fortress of Valletta, the new abode of the Knights “facing Jerusalem,” was undertaken just after the Great Siege of 1565 to create a heavily fortified focal point overlooking the Grande Porto di Malta, which contained the precious war galleys and arsenal of the ‘Religion of Malta’. According to the astrolabe of a mathematician from Siracusa called Giovanni Antonio Inferrera, the foundation stone of the new city-fortress of Valletta had been ceremoniously laid by Grand Master Jean de la Valette (1557-1568) at forty-two minutes to noon on 28 March 1566. This historic event had been held at the end of a long ceremony that had seen de Valette and his retinue of Hospitaller dignitaries leaving Birgu and advancing in a truly Baroque procession to the site of the present church of Our Lady of Victories where, it is recorded, a High Mass had been celebrated by Fra Giovanni Pietro Mosquet, when all the cannon mounted on the fortifications of the Grand Harbour had fired a royal salute during the elevation of the Holy Host. An emotionally-charged sermon delivered by the famous Augustinian orator Padre Spirito Pelo Angusciola and the blessing of the site of the new city-fortress of the Knights, had concluded the festive occasion.

This very Baroque ceremony had taken place within sight of a massive Turkish basilisk that had been abandoned by the retreating Ottomans and subsequently dragged into the main gate area as a victory trophy. After 1600, the arrival of Baroque in Valletta coincided with the aspirations of Grand Masters Antoine de Paule (1623-1636) and Jean Paul Lascaris Castellar (1636-1657) to introduce the new architectural and artistic attitudes that were then becoming so fashionable in
Europe. Baroque was perceived as a passionate expression of hope for the future, of great artistic achievements, of powerful rhetoric and of celestial inspiration ablaze with a blind faith in a triumphant Catholic Europe and a triumphant Catholic God.

Built amidst great fears of a renewed Turkish attack, the orderly gridiron plan of Valletta had been conceived in the same utopian spirit of Giulio Savorgnan’s Venetian outpost of Palmanova, of Baldassare Lanci’s Terra del Sole, of Biagio Rossetti’s Ferrara and of Pedro di Prado’s Carlentini in nearby Sicily. The Italian military engineers Gerolamo Genga and Baldassare Lanci had originally intended Valletta to have an Italian-type asterix plan hinged on a large central plaza. But Francesco Lapparelli, sent out by Pope Pius IV de’ Medici in November 1565 and subsequent pressures from Gabrio Serbelloni and from the Spanish Viceroy of Sicily Don Garcia de Toledo, had changed all this. As a result of the heated debates that followed Laparelli’s arrival, Valletta emerged as a city-fortress of gridiron streets anticipating the town-planning system which was formalised in the Real Ordenanzas para Nuevos Poblaciones issued by King Philip II of Spain on 3rd July 1573. Unlike previous settlements, Valletta was a place of new foundation designed to provide a cosmopolitan urban experience that had no precedent in Malta. In political terms, the city-fortress reflected the decision of the Knights to remain permanently in Malta. In post-tridentine religious terms, it evoked the resurrection of Rhodes and Jerusalem, providing a new ‘City of God’ which would enable the former crusaders to renew their sacred vows to resist the Koran.

In military terms, Valletta was intended to form the strategic hub of a defensive network calculated to protect the war galleys of the Knights berthed in the Grand Harbour, also to create a place of refuge for the entire population of the island. Well before the great siege of 1565, a delegation had been sent out
to Duke Guidobaldo II of Urbino to request the
services of Bartolomeo Genga to bring him to
the Maltese islands ‘where the Knights wanted
to build some very powerful fortifications as a
protection against the Turks and also two cities
so as to replace the many scattered villages
of the countryside with two strongly fortified
nodes’.

The artillery fortifications of Valletta were
subsequently elaborated by military engineers
who were brought to Malta for the purpose.
These ‘opere di perfezzionamento’ included
the building of an elevated cannon platform
flanking the ditch of St Elmo by the Grand
Prior of France Alexandre de Vendome in
1614; substantial height modifications to the S.
Andrea, S. Barbara and S. Cristoforo bastions
by the Knight Giovanni Battista Vertova in 1635-
1636; the addition of massive counterguards by
the Italian military engineer Don Giovanni de'
Medici in 1640; the addition of orillon batteries
to the landfront fortifications by the Comte de
Pagan in 1645; the deepening of the ditch in
1659; the building of a great girdle wall around
St Elmo by the Flemish military engineer Don
Carlos de Grunenbergh in 1687 and, finally,
the building of the ravelin of S. Maddalena in
front of the main gate, designed by Charles
Francois de Mondion in 1732. The ‘miraculous’
discovery of a fresh water spring in the area
of Strada della Fontana in Valletta in 1567 had
represented an early landmark in the efforts of
the Knights to provide their new city-fortress
with an adequate water supply which would
enable it to resist a Turkish siege for up to two
years. This was followed up by the regulated
 provision of an elaborate system of public
cisterns and private wells which became fully
operative towards the end of the sixteenth
century. The supply of water received a much
needed boost in the early seventeenth century
when water from the high ground of Rabat was
channelled to Valletta by means of an aqueduct
built by Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt (1601-
1622) on the advice of the Jesuit Tomasucci so
that ‘Grand Master de Valette gave to the new
city its body while Grand Master de Wignacourt
breathed life into it by providing it with fresh
water, so necessary for a fortified town.’

By 1650, most of Grand Master de Valette’s
new city-fortress had been built up. The
approach towards would have created very
much the same kind of pleasure as that derived
from reading a beautiful poem, of watching
the performance of a great actor or even
looking upon a marvellous sunset yet little
would one have realised that the very Baroque
spectacle created by lines and angles of the

Above, View of the main facade of the Auberge d’Aragon
in Valletta.
vast arrays of fortification walls resulted from complicated calculations using the knowledge of Euclid and trigonometry which was then being disseminated by so many Jesuit colleges all over Europe. A rare view of Valletta at this time was that provided in a plan annotated by the military mathematician Giovanni Battista Vertova. This plan gives us a clear idea of contemporary street names and the disposition of the principal administrative and religious buildings of the new city-fortress: a magisterial palace, a conventual church, eight auberges belonging to the different Langues of Knights, a slave prison, a munitions factory, a hospital and, finally, a ring of impressive fortifications stiffened by two cavaliers of an impressive scale.6

In 1624, Johann Freidrich Breithaupt recorded that: The Grand Master’s palace is a big and very distinguished building, the highest in the whole city, detached on all sides from other buildings. In front of it and behind it there are two beautiful squares, on each of which there stands a round fountain...Upstairs, among the many princely rooms and chambers, one finds a large hall where the Consilium Ordinarium is regularly held. There is here the Grand Master’s tribune including a throne with a crimson-brown canopy having a golden fringe. Here too, the great siege of the island of Malta by the Turks is painted on twelve different panels....At the back of the Grand Master’s palace and in a particular square, on every day one can see captured Turks and serfs being publicly sold, some for thirty, forty, fifty, some for one, two, three or more hundred crowns according to whether the captive is young, hard-working, healthy, good-looking and strong. These infidel captives are driven together like animals. For in Valletta there are Turkish slaves in almost every household where their job is to carry out all heavy duties for the owner of the house and his family, in particular to tend to the horses.7

In 1664, soon after the Jesuits started running a well-attended course in military mathematics in their Collegium Melitense in emulation of similar initiatives of the Society of Jesus in Spain, Portugal, Italy and France,8 Albert Jouvin de Rochefort described Baroque Valletta as “one of the best fortified towns in the universe” having “a position which is immensely strong because the peninsula which it occupies is a massive elevated rock resembling the faces of bastions, which are impossible to climb” to which “fortifications have been added on the highest parts, well equipped with an infinite number of huge cannons” not to mention “the invincible courage of the 2000 knights who live here and the ample provisions for waging war (on the Turks) on both land and sea” all this implying that “this place is so strong that it is invincible.”9

The gradual mushrooming in Valletta of new residential quarters in peripheral areas that had not been previously available for development in de Valette’s city, led to the appearance in the post-1650 period of the so-called Manderaggio, Ghetto, Arsenal, St Lazarus and St Anthony slums creating in the process a hitherto inexistent classification of the formerly unified urban landscape enclosed within the fortifications into ‘high’ and ‘low’ areas, respectively sporting architectural treatments which reflected the degree of affluence of their respective residents. The demographic situation in Valletta became so bad at the dawn of the eighteenth century that the Knights had to adopt a policy of building new residential suburbs outside them, such as that of Floriana. It was perhaps to balance the detrimental effects caused by emerging social problems that three architects, well versed in the fashionable Baroque idiom, were asked by the Grand
Masters to respond to the new winds of change with their embellishment projects. They were Francesco Buonamici, Mattia Preti and Mederico Blondel des Croisettes. They can be considered to have been the pioneers of the first Baroque architectural transformations that happened in Valletta after 1650.

A citizen of the town of Lucca where he was born in 1596 to Antonio Buonamici and Anna Pistelli, Francesco Buonamici arrived in Malta in September 1635 after studying at the famous Accademia di San Luca in Rome. He came to Malta as a ‘maestro di pennello’ in the entourage of the pope’s military engineer, Pietro Paolo Floriani. Well connected to Cardinal Francesco Barberini in Rome who had pushed his case to visit Malta, Buonamici had originally planned to stay here for only a few months but he ended up by staying on the island for nearly twenty five years as the resident engineer of the Knights. As such, he was largely responsible for introducing Rome’s Baroque architecture into Valletta and disseminating its magic all over the island through a number of Maltese apprentices employed in his Valletta office. Buonamici also seems to have been heavily involved in the early Baroque building of neighbouring Sicily, having visited that island on at least two, possibly more, occasions in the 1650’s. He here carried out extensive alterations in Bishop Giovanni Antonio Capobianco’s medieval palace in Siracusa and also found time to design the exquisite Cappella del Santissimo Sacramento in the adjoining Duomo and the church of S. Maria della Immacolata Concezione better known as S. Maria delle Monache. Buonamici was also involved in design activity in other Sicilian towns – the courtyard of the Jesuit Collegio Massimo in Palermo, the façade of the Jesuit church in Trapani and the interior of the church of S. Giovanni di Malta, attached to the priory of the Knights of Malta in Messina.

Buonamici was in 1637 asked by the Jesuits to continue supervising the large building operation involving their church and adjoining college in Valletta. These buildings had been damaged by an explosion of the Order’s polverista in 1634. The intention was to transform the dark and austere spaces of the Jesuit church into an illuminated contraption of vaults and domes betraying the opulence of the new Baroque style. The altar chancel was now deeply recessed to accommodate a beautifully designed altarpiece and a splendid facade was created to define the interface with Merchant’s street, then known as Strada S. Giacomo. Compared to the earlier Spanish flavour of buildings in Valletta before 1600, Buonamici’s façade presented a rich Roman Baroque flavour, displaying a superb form of carved decoration introduced at pre-determined points to highlight the compositional qualities of the façade and produce a rich chiaroscuro effect.

Not surprisingly, Buonamici’s Jesuit church, when completed in the late 1650’s, served as a model and a goad for the many subsequent Baroque transformations that happened in Valletta. Before leaving the island in 1659 to take up an appointment as architetto primario of his native town of Lucca to there re-model the interior of the Mediaeval Dominican church of San Romano and the theatre of San Gerolamo, Buonamici was commissioned by Grand Master Lascaris to design the layout, the entrance triumphal arch and the two Baroque fountains of his private garden overlooking the Grand Harbour. This garden was described by Albert Jouvin de Rochefort as ‘one of the most pleasant gardens in Malta since it contains
a large quantity of beautiful lemon trees, orange trees and other fruit trees which are evergreen.'

Other descriptions of this place mention the two fountains in this charming garden, the larger one of which had sculptures of mythological nymphs and satyrs blowing water from their musical horns on unsuspecting visitors while frolicking around a large statue of Europa being abducted by the God Zeus who here assumed the semblance of a bull – a favourite theme of representation at the Accademia di San Luca in Rome with which Buonamici had been so closely associated before coming out to Malta.

At this time the famous Cavaliere Calabrese Mattia Preti was engaged by the Knights to paint the truly wonderful fresco which transformed the barrel vaulted ceiling of nave of Grand Master de Valette’s Conventual Church of St John the Baptist into a fantasia of Baroque form and colour which must surely be regarded as one of the landmark contributions of Malta to European Baroque culture. Like Caravaggio before him, Preti was seduced to come to Malta from with the hope of bettering his position. It was for this reason that he gladly accepted the commission to transform the bland stone interior of St. John’s into a masterpiece of Baroque design. Preti lost no time to start working on the job which, to his credit, he managed to finish off within five years, between 1661 and 1666. The work seem to have moved forward at a rapid pace since in 1664, Rochefort was in a position to describe the interior splendour of the church of the Knights in glowing terms: ‘The floor of the church is of marble, the walls are gilded and the ceiling vault is decorated with the most beautiful paintings representing the life and beheading of St John the Baptist at the request of Herodias’ adding that the church was ‘beautifully adorned with paintings, gilding and ornamental chapels, not very large but having an architecture which is truly admirable.’

Preti also found time to supervise many Maltese and Italian artists and artisans who had been engaged to apply marble claddings, gilding and relief decoration soon transforming the bland stone walls of the church into a fantasia of polychromatic design, completed when that renowned ‘Principe’ of the Accademia di San Luca in Rome Giovanni Battista Contini was in the 1680’s asked to design the magnificent main altar. Marble intarsia tombstones marking the resting place of the flower of Europe’s nobility, magnificent altarpieces placed in the chapels of the Langues, majestic mausolea celebrating in grand style the feste funebre of illustrious Grand Masters, world-famous paintings by Caravaggio and fine Flemish tapestries were among the Baroque trappings that within a short time transformed the interior of the Conventual church of the Knights into a splendid Baroque
theatre, an indeed worthy stage setting to publicize that rare combination of temporal power and religious fervour symbolised by the famous ‘Religion of Malta.’ The powerful Baroque scenography that was introduced in St John’s church suddenly presented to a awe-inspired audiences was certainly intended to express the intense religious emotions that inevitably accompanied all Catholic liturgical functions of the Counter-Reformation – emotions that were unleashed by the celestial sounds of choir and organs; emotions that were intensified by the recital of the rosary, by incense, by impressive scenarios; emotions that were climaxed by the deep voices of trained choirs singing the Hosannah, the Te Deum and the De profundis. It was in this church that the joys, the anxieties, the hopes, the laments, the confessions, the contritions and the benedictions that formed such a central part in the life cycle of the Catholic community of Malta in the Baroque age, flowed through the ponderous vaulted spaces which, understandably, soon became a model and a goad for the development of sacred architecture in Baroque Malta. At this time, there were two firmly established cappelle of sacred music, one in St. John’s in Valletta as the seat of the Grand Master and the other in the Cathedral at Mdina as the seat of the Bishop of Malta. Outstanding musicians enhancing the glory of Maltese Baroque included Aloisio Mataron, Giuseppe and Domenico Balzano, Pietro Grixli and Gerolamo Abos, who in the next century also served as maestro di cappella in the cathedral of Naples. Several renowned painters like Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, Stefano Erardi, Pedro Nunez de Villavicencio, Giuseppe d’Arena, Gian Nicola Buhagiar, Francesco Vincenzo Zahra and Antoine de Favray also benefited greatly from the generous patronage of the Knights – one case that comes to mind involved the great Venetian painter Gian Battista Tiepolo who was commissioned to complete the Consilium in Arena painting depicting the admission into the ranks of the Order of Count Monsignor Antonio di Montegnacco. The honoured nobleman had obviously commissioned the famous Tiepolo to execute this exquisite painting which can now be admired in the castle museum of the city of Udine.15

Two key players entered the scene at the dawn of the eighteenth century. Romano Carapecchia,16 an architect, arrived from Rome in 1707 while Charles Francois de Mondion,17 a military engineer, arrived from Paris in 1715. Both reached the zenith of their achievement in Malta when Antonio Manoel de Vilhena (1722-1736), a Prince of Portugal, was elected Grand Master on 19 June 1722. The first phase (1722-1725) of architectural development during Vilhena’s principate was mainly concerned with upgrading the defences of Malta, this implying the ‘perfezzionamento’ by Mondion of the vast arrays of fortifications created in the previous century. The second phase (1726-1733) was marked by a lavish dissemination of elaborate ornamentation intended to shift priorities from military matters to considerations of adornment, amusement and social services. The third phase (1734-1736), just after Mondion’s death on Christmas day of the year 1733, was marked by Carapecchia’s interventions in the Conventual Church. These projects included the beautiful altarpiece of the chapel of the Langue of Italy and the two elegant annexes which were now added to mask, in a typically Baroque gesture, the unsightly appearance of the bland side walls of the building facing the two main streets of Valletta. Carapecchia also designed three marble tombstones and a magnificent Chapelle Ardente. An English traveller to Malta described the overpowering interior of the church of the Knights as ‘more overcharged with parade and ceremony than what I have ever observed in any Catholic country.’18 And ‘Fra Manoel de Vilhena, Grand Master of the Gerosolmitan Order who died in his Magisterial palace on 12 December 1736, was on the fifteenth day of that same month transported in a splendid cortege, according to custom, from the Magisterial palace to the Conventual church of S. Giovanni in the city of Valletta. As soon as the funeral procession arrived at S. Giovanni, the lifeless corpse of the Grand Master was placed in the Chapelle Ardente, raised from the floor of the church to a height of five steps, surrounded by innumerable candles. This Chapelle Ardente was placed opposite to the High Altar, in the centre of the nave. On the side facing the altar and on that facing the main entrance of the church, were placed the two coat-of-arms of the Grand Master, affixed on the upper side of the Chapelle Ardente. On the sides, were placed the two inscriptions. Surrounding the Chapelle Ardente were forty eight torches, each with four wicks.’19

The output of Romano Carapecchia after 1707 posed a fresh approach to the design
challenges of late Baroque Malta. Born in Rome in 1666 to Giovanni Antonio Carapecchia and Francesca Roveti in the S. Eustachio parish, Romano was a self-made man. Having received his architectural education in the studio of Carlo Fontana, he soon started practising in Rome where he is credited with the design of the church and nearby hospital of S. Giovanni Calibita, the Palazzino Vaini and the Tordinona theatre. In a Rome dominated by the presence of Queen Christina of Sweden, Romano also recorded the highlights of his education experience in a unique document entitled *Compendio Architettonico inventato da Romano Carapecchia* and drew up several projects for large urban schemes and fountains. He even designed a catafalque for Pope Alexander VIII Ottoboni. All these works collectively reflected the academic discipline and classicizing influences of the famous *Accademia di San Luca*, once described by the great King Louis XIV of France as ‘the fount and teacher of the many famous artists who have appeared during this century.’

Disappointed with the limited opportunities available in Rome at the turn of the century, Romano Carapecchia left the city in 1707 to eventually settle in Valletta where he soon managed, as a result of Pope Clement XI Albani’s intervention and recommendation, to find favour with Grand Master Ramon Perellos Y Rocafull (1697-1720). Within the context of the island fortress situated on what was still considered to be the very edge of European Catholicism, the newly-arrived architect soon drew up several brilliant projects which all reflected a total commitment to his profession to the extent that rarely has the spirit of the Baroque been more powerfully evoked here than it is in the work of this Roman architect who, according to Pascoli ‘disegnava a maraviglia.’

A firm command of a wide architectural vocabulary, an exceedingly pronounced integrative approach, flexibility of thought and a rare control of the design process presupposing the architect’s ability to think out every detail on the drawing board, represent the hallmarks of Carapecchia’s works in Valletta. All this can be seen in the churches of St. James, St. Catherine of the Langue of Italy, St. Catherine in lower Republic Street, the Pilar adjacent to the Auberge d’Aragon and St. Barbara in Republic Street. Carapecchia’s successes in Valletta can be best measured by his very detailed *Disegno della facciata o sia il Prospetto della Chiesa di S. Caterina*, which he prepared in connection with his project for the church of St Catherine of the Italian Langue to which he was proud to belong. The Baroque portico which he introduced here, reflected the good optical judgement and the primary-secondary elements relationship qualities that he had listed in the ‘Avertimenti’ section of his *Compendio Architettonico*. It was also the first projecting structure of its kind to be introduced into the urban fabric of de Valette’s city, in blatant contradiction to one of the main town planning regulations that had been drawn up by the *Officium Commissariorum Domorum* of the Knights in the sixteenth century - which had prohibited any sort of projections onto the streets since these had then been considered to be detrimental to the movements of troops and artillery in times of war. It was indeed a sign of the changed times, when the embellishment requirements of Venus now superseded the military dominance of Mars, that Carapecchia was allowed to introduce architectural features of mature sophistication and studied finesse that went a long way to transform the city-fortress of the Knights into an elegant urban experience.

In Valletta, Romano Carapecchia also designed the Municipal Palace, the facade of the Palazzo Spinola, the annexes of the Conventual Church, the armoury door of the magisterial palace and the Perellos fountain which graces its courtyard. Very important from Grand Master Vilhena’s point of view was Carapecchia’s involvement in the design of the Manoel theatre, this inspired by a treatise that
he had written about theatre design entitled Pratica delle machine de’ Teatri. For Valletta’s waterfront, Romano designed and built the Barriera stores which, although now destroyed, can still be admired in a 1707 drawing to be found in the architect’s album of drawings now kept in the Conway library in London. This project set a precedent for the Knights to transform the shabby waterfront of Valletta facing the Grand Harbour into an impressive Baroque scenario which towards the middle of the eighteenth century culminated in the building of the impressive Pinto warehouses and the two churches of Notre Dame de Liesse and the Flight from Egypt. Carapecchia had also been involved in at least four major projects in Sicily. In 1709 or thereabouts he accepted an invitation from the bishop of an earthquake devastated Catania to participate in a competition for the restoration on the Duomo of that city, for which purpose he seems to have prepared two sectional drawings which could have been later used by the selected architects of the building, judging by the close design similarities that exist between the present dome of the church and Carapecchia’s work in Malta. At some point in 1715, Romano Carapecchia again visited Sicily, this time to survey and draw up detailed restoration plans, elevations and sections for an old complex belonging to the Knights (including the two small churches of S. Giovanni and S. Antonio Abate) in the town of Marsala.22

The last flowering of Baroque architecture in Valletta occurred in the second half of the eighteenth century.23 One now finds Grand Masters Emanuel Pinto de Fonseca (1741-1773), Francisco Ximenes de Texada (1773-1775) and Emmanuel de Rohan Polduc (1775-1797) patronising with zest a full-blooded Baroque architecture that, together with the widespread use of wooden balconies of decidedly Turkish inspiration that had been first introduced in the mid-seventeenth century,24 added the final touches to Carapecchia’s transformation of Valletta into an elegant Baroque city-fortress. Among the many large-scale buildings that were erected at this time, one can mention the Auberge de Castille (1741), the Castellania (1748), the Palazzo Parisio (1750) and the beautiful small palace with its superb staircase which now houses the museum of Fine Arts in South Street (1761). Stefano Ittar’s fine Biblioteca building, evoking the post-earthquake architecture of nearby Catania and linked to the Magisterial palace - which was now fitted with two magnificent portals - closes the history of the Baroque architectural experience in Valletta. The achievement which perhaps came closest to fulfilling the Baroque ideal was the Auberge de Castille which can be described as the ultimate expression in Valletta of the spatial dominance, the ornamental magnificence and the communicative force of the Baroque age. It symbolised Grand Master Pinto’s great power and prestige, enhanced after his brutal suppression of a Muslim slave uprising. It was created by an unknown architect who was well skilled in the use of compositional principles, shadow play, perspective artifices and an elaborate ornamental vocabulary all calculated to create the dramatic vista effects so much loved by the Knights and the people that mattered.

The ‘Religion of Malta’ was rudely exiled by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1798. The coming of Alexander Ball in 1800 saw vigorous attempts to replace the Baroque architectural and artistic language of the Knights by the fashionable romanticist approaches inspired by British nationalism and by the re-discovered ruins of antiquity, best demonstrated in the several refurbishment projects that were made for the Magisterial Palace and other palatial residences in Valletta. Despite the powerful influence of Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton radiating from Palermo, the citizens of Valletta throughout the nineteenth century criticized the neo-Gothic and neo-Classical infiltrations that sometimes appeared in their beloved city-fortress. They continued cherishing Baroque as a loud expression of a ‘paradise lost’ and as a vivid reminder of the beautiful churches and palaces of Catholic Rome. Considered from this viewpoint, it is understandable that many were those who left no stone unturned to ensure the survival of the Baroque expression. As a result of their efforts, the Baroque of Valletta is still acclaimed by many as a form of expression associated with beauty and with a defunct Baroque aristocracy’s love of fine things. The poet Corrado Rizza not long ago wrote that ‘Il Barocco e’ un inno all’occhio e alla teoria della visione.’25 To my mind, there are no better words to succinctly describe the splendid perceptions of the city-fortress of Valletta that have been discussed in this contribution.
NOTES

1. Born in the Chateau de Labro within the fief of Parisot in Rouergue, the Grand Master signed his name in his native Occitan language as Jehan de Valéte, preferring to use his family’s Latin title of nobility in lieu of the more commonly used French title of de la Valette. For further details about the 28th March 1566 ceremony see Denaro, Victor., *The Houses of Valletta* (Malta: Progress Press, 1967)10 and Parker, Julia, Stafford, Elizabeth and Vella Bonavita, Roger., *Enarrant Caeli - An Astrologer at the Founding of Valletta, Malta* in ‘Casemate’ no. 74. (Great Britain: Fortress Study Group, 2005) pp.1-8.


10. The contribution of Buonomici to the architectural development of Baroque Malta is discussed in De Lucca Denis., *Francesco Buonamici – Painter, Architect and Military Engineer in seventeenth century Malta and Italy* (Malta: International Institute for Baroque Studies, 2006).


17. See note 4.

18. This English traveller was Patrick Brydone who recorded his visit to the Conventual church during the last years of Grand Master Emanuel Pinto de Fonseca’ principal in his book entitled *A Tour through Sicily and Malta in 1770*, subsequently published in London in 1773.


21. Ibid., 31citing Lione Pascoli’s *Vite de’ pittori, scultori ed architetti moderni* published in Rome in 1790.


24. The use of balconies in Valletta has been the subject of a study that was made by Malcolm Xuereb. His B.E. & A.(Honours) dissertation was entitled “The Maltese Timber Balcony: Past, Present and Future” (University of Malta: Department of Architecture and Urban Design, 2006).