MALTA

CULTURE AND IDENTITY

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Edited by

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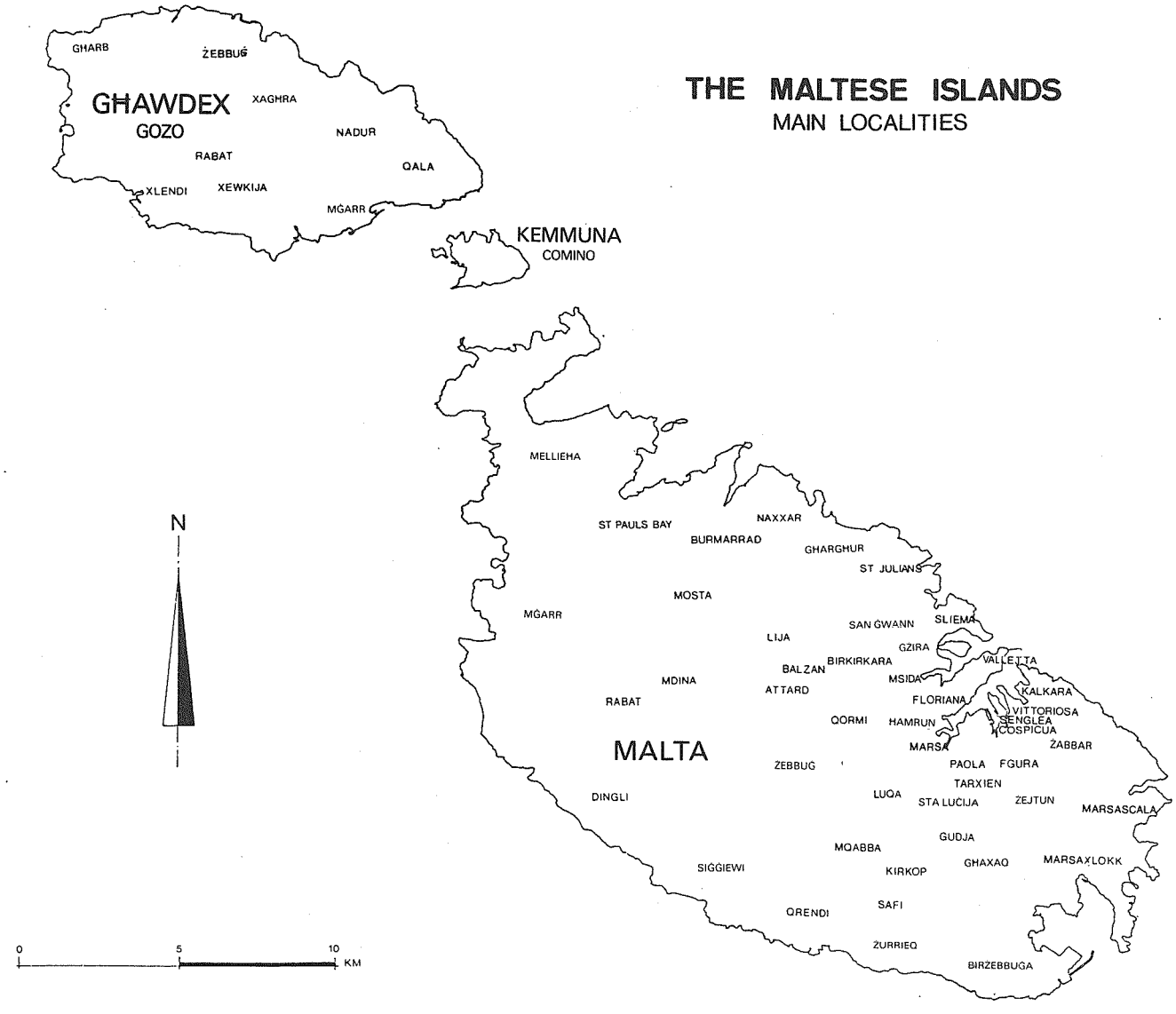
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Foreword

I am indeed privileged and honoured to have this most welcome opportunity to join some of the foremost personalities and experts in contemporary Malta in presenting to the reader this compact but highly informative profile of Malta and the Maltese.

In a climate where sentiments flashpoint quickly and unexpectedly, commissioning contributions in a language other than Maltese was not the easiest of decisions to take. The debate called for much heart searching, spectre chasing, the playing down of emotions and above all a rational realisation that an objective had to be achieved. It was not a question of preferring one language for another – of considering to trade in the Maltese language – so signal and determining an insignia of our cultural and national diversity – but an exercise in pragmatism, designed to attract the widest possible audience.

I make no apology as we consider ourselves fortunate that the course of history was such that we now benefit from the undoubted advantage of so many generations of knowledge of written and spoken English. We have chosen the medium which affords us the best opportunity to reach out. To dress up for the occasion and tell our story.

This publication is our 'billet-doux'. It covers the dry bones of a simple cryptic means of identification with that florid southern European flesh which gives us a distinct personality and highlights our true identity. It is also a labour of love. For however clinically precise and dispassionate one tries to be there is always that strain of deep patriotic bias lurking in the subconscious which sometimes emerges spontaneously with an intense Mediterranean humanity to breathe life and soul into the body. This is us, as we know ourselves to be. Maybe as we wish to be known and want others to see and to know us. A broad brush overview, with no claim to be a complete historical and social record of a country and its people. A dozen out of a myriad aspects which shoot like stars from a vaster hazier backdrop to the prominence of centre stage.

Our culture, our identity is not just this 'mélange' of what we believe to be good, beautiful, epic and praiseworthy, a choice dictated by a burning nationalistic love of country and people. We do not portray the 'chiaroscuro' let alone contrast the darker hues which sometimes hide undeniable truths and unacceptable realities amidst the gamut of social mores and moods of a society which evolved and developed over thousands of years. For even these unpalatable and possibly shaming nuances are part and parcel of our chequered patchwork past.

Three decades of independence, a mere fraction of the aeons of a people's march since the archipelago rose Venus-like at the dawn of some far off day in a long forgotten millennium, have quickened the pace. A new spirit of adventure, primed by this new found freedom, became a motive force exploding pent up energies of thought and talent to cascade bright lights from the skies and form a colourful mosaic of Malta and the Maltese. A kaleidoscope of pluses and minuses, the conventional, the odd, the enchanting, the ugly, the profane and the sacred that is us. Whether in motley plumes or tattered rags we wear our young nationhood with justified pride.

Hon. MICHAEL REFALO
Minister of Youth and the Arts

Editors' Preface

When first asked to prepare a book of this kind by the Ministry of Youth and the Arts, our objective was to present a serious and readable kaleidoscope of Malta's culture and identity. We sought to cover the main constituent elements of this uniqueness as it was moulded and as it evolved, to indicate what was changing and where these islands and their people were heading.

It was impossible to cover every aspect of life in Malta or to go into much detail: more attention could have been given to certain periods, localities and artistic genres. To make good for this inevitable deficiency in a general work such as this, we encouraged contributors to refer in their texts to authors, patterns, trends and schools of thought that have characterised their respective areas, and we also included key bibliographical data at the end of each section to permit the reader to delve further into any particular aspect. While we sought to give some order to the entries so that these would complement and supplement one another, each section is sufficiently self-contained and may stand on its own as a valid contribution to at least an aspect, a dimension of the Malta prism. We have tried to keep to our original overall brief in the knowledge that such a book would travel far and wide and make Malta known somewhat more intimately to many.

Several of the illustrations had to be specially photographed for this production by Mr Tony Mangion, whose work speaks for itself; others were available from libraries, archives, books and private collections. We are grateful to the directors, curators, librarians and staffs of, among others, the Fine Arts Museum, the Museum of Archaeology, the Maritime Museum, the National Archives, the National Tourism Organisation, the Department of Information, the national and university libraries and other sources. We thank the geographers J.A. Schembri and N. Vella who prepared an updated map of the Maltese Islands for this book, as well as history students Simon Mercieca and Ivan Grech and secretary Yvette Attard who assisted in the collation or xeroxing of materials. Last but not least we wish to express our gratitude and appreciation to the Minister for Youth and the Arts, the Hon. Dr. Michael Refalo, and to his predecessor, the Hon. Dr. Michael Frendo, for their unwavering support in the preparation of a work for which the need had long been felt.

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National Identity

Henry Frendo

It has been said that the smaller a nation is, the more its territory has the character of 'the natal soil'. Smallness retains integrity, facilities human contact, and is more likely to have natural boundaries. In the case of the closely-connected Maltese Islands in the central Mediterranean, the feeling of 'home' (*heimat* in German) could overlap with and evolve into the feeling of 'nation' (*patria*) with relative ease.

The Upper Barracca garden in Valletta on the former Sceberras peninsula has long provided a grand-stand view not only of the magnificent harbours busy with naval, maritime and passenger activity, nor simply of the defensive and aesthetically impressive network of massive fortifications surrounding it, but also an instant sense of Malta's people: of the whereabouts of a good part of the entire population of the country. On either side of Valletta, the old Three Cities in Grand Harbour and the relatively new Sliema district across from the almost parallel Marsamxett Harbour, are clearly visible from the capital. Here, and in the 'new' (sixteenth century) capital city itself, most of the native inhabitants increasingly lived or worked. More than any other single location or artery, Valletta's deep-water, well-sheltered and strategically-located harbours have been analogous to the picture-postcard: showing, in one view, a people in the making. These harbours have been the scene of fighting and of festivity, welcoming or chasing away visitors, for thousands of years. From that one historic geographical vantage point on the hill, we can already surmise a ready means whereby size, population, territoriality, hearth and home could be 'seen' to fuse and gradually come to life as one nation and state. The ancient Greek regard for the 'democratic' city state or *polis* was justly related to the sense of belonging and administrative manageability offered by a moderate spatial perimiter.

The land area of the Maltese Islands was (is) 122 square miles (246 square km), alongside which were several bays, creeks and inlets; hills and valleys but no mountains; few fresh water streams, no lakes or rivers; and in modern times, at least, not much vegetation or greenery. Windy but temperate, the climate was serene, the sea inviting, with rainfall mainly in winter-time, the soil sparse but intensely cultivated and protected in rubble-walled terraced fields.

The identification of people with a specific territory, with its habitat and attributes, has invariably played a dominant role in the history of nationality; even the dispersed Jews longed to go back 'home'. Malta certainly was no exception. In this long process of internalizing common traits, boundaries cease to be simply physical or visual: they become attitudinal: self-perceived and prescriptive in relation to 'others'. According to the Acts of the Apostles, when St Paul landed in Malta in the first century, the kind natives speaking their vernacular were 'barbarians' (*barbaroi*). But such incompleteness as these then inhabitants of Malta were perceived to have was merely a reflection of what the newcomers saw and defined by their own standards, just as the welcoming inhabitants themselves no doubt would have sized up and defined the strangers by theirs. Self-definition by reference and contrast to neighbours, visitors and strangers, has always been

an important measure of identity: a two-sided mirror or prism for individuals and groups.

Malta was at one time remote and central, depending on what role the Mediterranean, Europe or Empire played during one epoch or another. Malteseness was chisselled out in time by the over-lap of precisely these three supra-national dimensions. Geographically the southernmost tip of the Italian peninsula from which it was separated by a stretch of sea, for southbound travellers Malta usually interrupted the route to northern Africa, just as it frequently gave haven to travellers journeying from west to east or in the opposite direction.

The earliest known inhabitants in prehistory came from Sicily. The Phoenicians knew and used Malta well before the Romans arrived in the third century B.C. and made it a *municipium*. Very few remains have been found of the subsequent Byzantine and Arab periods by archaeologists and medievalists. From the coming of the Normans in the eleventh century to Aragonese rule from Sicily in the fifteenth, Malta's feudal history largely reflected that of southern Europe, especially of Sicily. The population was small, not more than 10,000 when the Normans arrived, and less before that. A document attributed to Al Himyari would question how far Malta was permanently settled during part of the period of Arab rule (870-1091). Although Malta has nothing at all like the Islamic treasures of Sicily or Spain, the Arabic-based language apparently inherited by the Maltese from those times, and some other funerary remains until the twelfth century, would definitely suggest an Arab presence. This is also recorded elsewhere. Maltese poets of Arabic inspiration were accredited to the Norman royal court in Sicily. For this whole time span until the fifteenth century A.D., however, far the most important and spectacular remains date back to the prehistoric temple cultures which ante-date Karnak in Egypt and Mycenae in Greece. These have been defined by leading world authorities, such as Renfrew, as the first free-standing monuments in stone: the first such temples known to man. One hypothesis is that Malta was *"l'ile sacree de la Mediterranee"*; but another would affirm the Malta prehistoric temple culture to be purely indigenous. What is beyond dispute is the importance of religion, of ritual and rite, and the artistic and architectural skills of the megalithic temple-builders themselves. A number of these extraordinary and mysterious excavated sites still stand to inspire awe and wonder.

From the Middle Ages too, by which time Malta had been fully christianized and probably (at least partly) re-christianized, it is the legacy of religion and worship that survives above all else. According to one source there were 430 Roman Catholic churches and chapels in Malta by the sixteenth century. According to another, who included privately-owned chapels, by the end of the fifteenth century there were over one thousand such places of worship. Scattered all over the Islands in villages and fields, several of these churches and chapels have survived. The most notable surviving exponent is a fifteenth century church, with its frescoes, at Hal Millieri. The overriding significance of Roman Catholic religious practices among the Maltese in medieval and early modern times emerges clearly from early descriptions of the islands and their people by Quintin in 1533, Dusina in 1575 and others.

Religion has been of the utmost importance everywhere in etching and marking out character and identity, both popular and national. Religion imparted solidarity to people: it became a symbol and a cause. A secular scholar once wrote that the spirit of Christ was 'the most powerful leaven in the development of ideals' and the church 'the greatest organizing factor in history.' Using vernaculars for communication and Latin for written record, monks were at the

forefront of knowledge, of its preservation and transmission. The monotheistic faith, predicated on redemption of the individual soul, male and female alike, was also indirectly an inducement to concentrate on higher ideals and to bring about change. After the crusades and the holding operation against Islam, in the Christian European world the association of religion with nationality, and sometimes with statehood, became pronounced with the Reformation: Luther, Calvin, Henry VIII. Nestled rather cosily in the shadow of the Rome-centred Latin church, to whom state patrons from the Normans on always professed allegiance, Malta had no Reformation. The Inquisitors kept themselves occupied but were never too busy. The influence of Catholicism was all the more redoubtable in the moulding of a Maltese identity. These people, noted Quentin, kept their Semitic language, yet their Christian sentiment was so intense. Although the ruling class – officials, garrison and clergy – were often Sicilians, probably by reason of that, certain inhabitants were conscious of being Maltese. Our 'being unlike the others' may already be seen by 1500 to have been sustained and pushed forward by three seminal complexes: in culture, language-religion; in nationality, foreigner-native; and in politics, ruler-ruled.

For much of the medieval period, Malta and Gozo enjoyed a degree of internal autonomy personified in their commune or *universitas*: the old city of Mdina served as the islands' capital, with aristocrats, jurats and other notables assembling there. In the first known open manifestation of determined Maltese opposition to feudal exploitation at the hands of Don Gonsalvo Monroy in 1427-1428, it was two Mdina ecclesiastical dignitaries, don Cathaldu Cusburella and don Gregoriu di Bunellu, whom the *"università"* delegated to plead Malta's case in Palermo.

Another important development was the arrival of various religious orders, who laid the foundations for their missions, monasteries, convents, charitable institutions, schools. Augustinians and Franciscans reached Malta in the fourteenth century, Carmelites, Dominicans and Benedictines in the fifteenth. By the following century the Jesuits had established a college for higher learning which developed into Malta's university of studies. Until 1492 when they were expelled, Jews had been relatively numerous and some, like doctors, well established in Maltese society. A convent replaced their synagogue.

Neither Muslims nor Jews, neither Sicilians nor Arabs, the Arabic-speakers and fervent Roman Catholics of Hispanic-Sicilian Malta slowly took shape during the Middle Ages. With the passing of time and the curtailment of direct contact with Arabs in Malta, Maltese began to evolve into a separate language, with an often fossilized classical Arabic increasingly influenced by Romance words, expressions and concepts. An incident which deserves more attention occurred in 1481: a protest by Maltese jurats asking the bishop to dismiss a foreigner, 'who did not know Maltese', from the post of Chaplain of the Cathedral at Mdina (Città Notabile). It would seem that already by that time Maltese had assumed the character of an in-group language and was in some way a core value of nationality, or at least of marked difference: a measure by which to distinguish the native from the foreign with a certain pride of feeling. Nor was such an attachment to the vernacular limited to commoners or peasants, because the protestors were jurats. The 1481 Maltese language incident about *'il Parroco della Cattedrale che non sapeva il Maltese'* was documented by the historian Alfredo Mifsud in 1918. It happened probably some years after the first known poem in medieval Maltese was written by Pietro Caxaro, another learned resident of the Città Notabile. Again indicatively, Caxaro wrote 'Maltese' in the Roman script. In a work published in Naples in 1582, a resident of Malta's sister island Gozo, Antonio Saliba, in identifying himself described Malta as *'nostra patria'*. In 1590 a Maltese geographer, Giovanni Myriti, described Malta as *'patria mea dulcissima'*.

Modern Maltese history really begins in the

sixteenth century. To that time we can trace the origins of modern Malta. With the coming of the chivalrous European Christian order of the Knights Hospitallers in 1530, we can lay our historical anchor deep in the rocks. The state came first. The nation followed closely on its heels.

The Knights 'of Malta' progressively changed the islands and their people in eight important ways.

Politically, the Knights made Malta into a small European state. Although in 1530 the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V gave Malta and Tripoli to the Order of St John, of Jerusalem and Rhodes, in feudal tenure, *de facto* Malta came to have most of the attributes of statehood; one that never reverted to its original owner. The yearly gift of a falcon to the Emperor was largely symbolic, even if the deed of cession, in seeking to maintain a rightful balance between the nationalities, sought to regulate certain important appointments, such as the episcopacy and the admiralty. After the English Reformation, the Order in Malta was represented by seven European *Langues*, or nationalities, each of which erected its *Auberge* in the new capital, Valletta[1]. By the eighteenth century the Grand Master behaved like a European monarch, and was more or less regarded as one. A distinguished English visitor and Fellow of the Royal Society, Brydone, noted the multi-cultural Europeanity of Malta as a result of the Order's presence. 'On getting on shore, we found ourselves in a new world indeed', he wrote in 1792; 'the streets crowded with well-dressed people, who have all the appearance of health and affluence; whereas at Syracuse, there was scarce a creature to be seen; and even those few had the appearance of disease and wretchedness.' After describing the popular events of mule and donkey races held 'four times every year' by the inhabitants, he continued thus about the Knights themselves:

> As Malta is an epitome of all Europe, and an assemblage of the younger brothers, who are commonly the best of its first families, it is probably one of the best academies for politeness in this part of the globe; besides, where every one is entitled by law as well as custom, to demand satisfaction for the least breach of it, people are under a necessity of being very exact and circumspect, both with regard to their words and actions. All the knights and commanders have much the appearance of gentlemen, and men of the world. We met with no character in extreme.

What most struck Brydone, however, was the composite and (it appears) rather harmonious effect of ongoing inter-personal relationships in the one government and country among the diverse nationalities living there. This effect challenged the national stereotypes in his own English mind (he also described Henry VIII as 'that capricious tyrant'):

> The ridicules and prejudices of every particular nation are by degrees softened and worn off, by the familiar intercourse and collusion with each other. It is curious to observe the effect it produces upon the various people who compose this little medley. The French skip, the German strut, and the Spanish stalk, are all mingled together in such small proportions, that none of them are striking... It is still easy to distinguish the inhabitants of the north and south side of the Pyrenees, as well as those of the east and west side of the Rhine; for though the Parisian has, in a great measure, lost his assuming air, the Spaniard his taciturnity and solemnity, the German his formality and his pride; yet still you see the German, the Frenchman, and the Spaniard: it is only the caricature, that formerly made them ridiculous, that has disappeared.

Such, at their best, were the ruling class of Malta for 268 years: an aristocratic well-to-do elite, Catholic, chivalrous and celibate, committed to principles and practices so elevated and noble that it would be less than fair to expect that they all or always observed them in their daily lives. These contingents of Knights, sometimes numbering up to six hundred or so, with their retinues, their inns, houses and haunts, regarded Malta as their home, or at least as a permanent base, for ten generations. They were only expelled by Bonaparte in 1798. In the meantime, however, they had largely made Malta into

1. Provence; Auvergne; France; Italy; Aragon, Catalonia, Navarre; Germany; Castille, Leon, Portugal.

a modern state, with a splendid Renaissance city which Sir Walter Scott compared to a dream. They laid the infrastructure of a state. By the time they left, Malta was more organized and better catered for. New towns, suburbs and villages were established, some carrying the name of the Grand Master originally founding them, such as De Rohan (Żebbuġ) or Pinto (Qormi). Famous Italian engineers, assisted and succeeded by Maltese architects of genius such as Girolamo Cassar, planned a comprehensive system of fortifications at least as elaborate and impressive as that in Rhodes. The Conventual Church dedicated to the Order's patron saint, St John the Baptist, was constructed in the heart of Valletta, superbly adorned inside with the finest art and skill, making it one of the more magnificent churches in Europe; and so it remains in spite of the looting by Bonaparte's troops. The ceremony and pageantry which such a centre of religious and semi-religious activity permitted were necessarily unprecedented, and became intertwined with the social and cultural history of Valletta. The Grand Master's Palace, further down the Strada Reale, was another gem; as was, too, the *Sacra Infermeria*, so much larger and more imposing than the previous hospital in Rhodes. These knights were doctors as well as sailors, bureaucrats as well as *literati*; Dolomieu was a great scientist. The hospital gave rise to a Medical School, just as the concentration of edifices in Valletta, religious and secular, made the city a thriving administrative centre. It became a market city and a place for commercial and financial affairs. Malta had a mint: its own 'national' currency. Malta had a navy: its own. As Malta was never self-sufficient in wheat, elaborate grain storage facilities were built underground. Malta's dockyard, the *arsenale* (from which the Maltese word 'tarzna' is derived), became a centre-piece of the maritime-based economy. By means of an aqueduct all the way down from the high ground around Mdina to Valletta, a more reliable water-supply system was devised, supplementing cisterns and wells. Were the Order less absolutist, Malta would also have kept her printing press, which was started in the seventeenth century but later stopped. Malta, or at any rate the Order of Malta, was diplomatically represented in some of the more important courts of European capitals. Soon enough, too, Malta had a University of Studies, a national theatre, a national library, gardens and fountains. The law courts, previously at Mdina, moved to Valletta, where town and gown mixed in a growing hustle and bustle of urban activity, with the ports nearby.

While Malta-born noblemen could not become knights, on the pretext that at law they would have been vassals, some managed to circumvent this restrictive practice by having their children born in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Others however entered the service of the Order and a few managed to climb more than one rung of the ladder. Like any government, the Order could not rule without the support of the ruled: hence it was inevitable that the native inhabitants themselves get involved in almost every aspect of the Order's – and Malta's – life. Unlike their often non-resident and cynical feudal predecessors whose task was solely to collect taxes from the people, and unlike their successors, who robbed churches or measured needs on a utilitarian calculus, the Knights 'of Malta' had estates on the continent and various revenues, individual and collective, with ready access. They were also aristocrats, and Europeans, with taste, style and verve.

Psychologically, in their view of the surrounding world, the Maltese could look ahead with greater confidence, in a more outgoing way, secure on their own ground in the knowledge that for the first time they had effective protection from adversaries on land and sea. The very move from hinterland to harbour, from the old-time fortified city on the highest ground in the countryside, Mdina, to the

new Renaisance peninsular city right on the water's edge, flanked by ports or open sea on three sides, was at one time real and symbolic. After the foundation stone was laid by Grand Master Jean de La Valette in 1566, building the city became priority number one, so that the Knights could move their quarters from Borgo (Vittoriosa) to the new site on higher ground on the other side of the harbour. Until the arrival of the Knights, the Borgo ('Birgu' in contemporary Maltese) had been a little fishing village which also absorbed such harbour activity as took place. The villagers would hardly have resisted any incursion from Barbary corsairs or other unwelcome visitors; in an emergency they would flee and hide as best they could. Fort Saint Angelo, which preceeded the arrival of the Knights, was the only defensive position in the harbour and not well kept or manned. The Knights did it up when they began preparing for all eventualities as soon as they arrived in Malta and set up house in the Borgo in 1530. Fort St Michael and Fort St Elmo were built and other fortifications restored, strengthened or constructed. Defence policy resumed with a vengeance after Malta's victory over the Turks in 1565, until Malta's bastions and fortifications, in Valletta and the Three Cities around the Grand Harbour, became a marvel. A deterrent in itself, Malta's defence network created an altogether novel atmosphere of stealth, a feeling of inner security which earlier generations of Maltese could not have experienced in their wildest dreams. No longer would helpless and hapless islanders go to sleep fearing plunder, rape and slavery. Mdina was to Valletta what the medieval was to the modern.

Administratively, the practices of government changed through more centralization from the urban metropolis and under the direct surveillance of the Order. This lessened or demolished the earlier communal autonomy centred in Mdina, and the role of the Maltese nobility and of the jurats, in supervising and managing internal matters. At the same time, it necessarily invited to its side and trained a novel, accommodating city-dwelling bureaucracy. Whereas earlier the emperor had been far away, only represented by frequently non-resident agents or sub-agents, now the Grand Master was on the spot, watching, with lieutenants at his beck and call, ordering people around. There was little room for dissent. The Hospitallers were after all also a military order. When an Mdina doctor, Giuseppe ('Mattew') Callus had a protest-letter to Barcelona intercepted by the Grand Master's spies, he was beheaded and his head exhibited in the main square for all to see and ruminate upon. Callus was protesting at the despotic behaviour of Grand Master La Valette, who was suppressing liberties traditionally enjoyed by the Maltese commune. The new government was also cautious with regard to traditional powers of the Catholic Church in Malta: militia captains now competed with parish priests for clients and favours. Malta became a centralized city state, ruled by foreigners from within, and rather exclusively too. In their gift, these 'kavallieri' had patronage, power, prestige, privilege and wealth. Some individual knights were erudite and philanthropic. Throughout the seventeenth century there were power struggles for status, patronage, sanctuary and jurisdiction, between the Bishop and the Grand Master and also the resident Inquisitor. In all this several took sides, but for the most part it appears that the population went on with their own prayer-and-work, family-centred lives, making ends meet and the best of an opportunity to shine, occasionally grumbling and resenting injustice or hardship as under Grand Master Ximenes. The most important Maltese attempt at a rising against the Order's degenerating rule was that led by Don Gaetano Mannarino in 1775 who briefly planted a Maltese banner on St James Cavalier at the entrance to Valletta.

Economically, the arrival of the Knights

immediately provided new work opportunities for the inhabitants, who alone had much inside knowledge of their islands as well as the *savoir faire* to service certain technical and social needs, to market and to tailor their produce and wares, and to adapt to new possibilities on offer, such as serving on the galleys or assisting in a variety of other ways in the administration of the islands. The Knights could import wealth rather than export it, distribute rather than scavange for it. Financially, they could be largely independent of local resources; they were *patrons*. They knew it, and they behaved accordingly. *Noblesse oblige*. This meant that new projects of unprecedented magnitude could be initiated, for which Maltese labour, know-how and expertise would be required; and which, in the process, provided apprenticeship and other learning experiences to those involved. This meant, too, that there was a resident consumer market for such production and manufacture as native skills and resources at one time or another could muster: olives, vegetables, cumin, sails, lace, filigree, blood oranges. A service industry became possible, indeed inevitable, meeting the daily needs and fancies of these wealthy and resident newcomers, swaggering and swashbuckling in their flowing cloaks. For many a Maltese, the Malta-based Knights provided 'a captive market'. Whether or not such reciprocities as ensued could be simply regulated by a vassal-lord philosophy, usually there was work, occasionally in abundance: in construction, using the Maltese quarries and stonemasons; on the galleys, using the Maltese sea-farers and seasoned hands; in palaces and knightly homes, the services and graces of painters and sculptors, attendants, assistants, cooks, stable-keepers and coachmen, suppliers, middle-men, protégés, servants. The Order's fortunes took a first blow with the Reformation but a second more serious one with the French Revolution: estates and revenues were soon lost, without which it became difficult to cope.

Religiously, Malta became a fief of the Lord, pressed on all sides by authorities more Catholic than the Pope. Under the Order, in fact, Malta was almost a theocracy; the frontier European Mediterranean power most opposed to the Arab advance was itself practically theocratic. Although the religious and the civil law were not one, there were the ecclesiastical and inquisitorial courts. The spiritual head of the Order, which governed the country, was the Pope; but to make doubly sure of goings-on after the Reformation the Pope also dispatched inquisitors. After their Malta posting, many of these became cardinals, two became popes. In addition, there was the Catholic bishop, in a long tradition, possibly uninterrupted since the time of St Publius, whom St Paul is held to have met and converted to Christianity in 60 A.D. Throughout the Order's period, the Bishops continued to be foreign, with possibly one exception, mostly Spaniards or Italians; these were frequently non-resident except when duty called. The hundreds of churches and chaples spread over such a relatively small space were indicative enough of the religious cults and devotions in practice at the time that the Knights arrived. New parishes came to have new, often bigger churches, as the population increased. Religious feasts and celebrations became more important and conspicuous: the country's patron saints were St Paul, St Publius and St Agatha. As in other Catholic countries, there was a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and saints such as St James or St Barbara. All told, not only did Malta not have wars of religion, it never had as much as a public airing of internal criticism or of denominational options or alternatives. To Maltese society under 'the Religion' – that is, the Order – Roman Catholicism was a monolith, an oath of loyalty, a state monopoly: a reinforced situation of what the islanders had inherited from their forefathers and readily accepted for their own purposes. Thus Catholicism continued

to play a central and unchallenged role in Malta's life right through and for long after Reformation and Revolution on the continent, evolving into a national ethos. While religious events could be popularized and paganized, the social calendar was almost entirely a liturgical one; contact between clergy and people was close and often had a social character as much as a religious one. The place of the large domed-and-steepled church at the centre of the town or village was similar to that it occupied in the daily lives of those huddled around the square and the adjoining alleys. For a son to take up the priesthood was and long remained a dear aspiration of the average Maltese family, not unlike that which sons of the aristocracy, or their parents, had to the membership of a chivalric order.

Socially and culturally, ten generations of a manifest knightly presence in such restricted confines – of Bavarians and Frenchmen, Spaniards and Italians – necessarily rubbed off on the Maltese. Everywhere people are influenced by what they see, hear, taste and touch. To be more mobile or useful socially, it is generally the subordinates who tend to be impressed by or to seek to conform themselves to roles and models practised or put forward by superiors and men of influence. While the Maltese generally kept apart from the rulers – they had their own vernacular and value system which no doubt differed markedly from that of the average Knight – nevertheless they could not have been and were not oblivious to what went on around them, sometimes inside their very homes or towns. In battle, Maltese and knights fought on the same front, in the same galley, risking life and limb together. On another social level, we know that a section of the more literate and better endowed islanders kept contact, heads high, with the ruling class. In general, therefore, Maltese were increasingly introduced to and made use of venues for instruction, entertainment and accomplishment which the Knights brought about or which emerged during their stay – the theatre, the library, the university, the salon, art and music, just as the lower classes engaged their skills in the navy or on construction sites, the wharves and docks, in *métiers*, crafts and services. New classes were groomed who were neither nobles nor peasants, neither wealthy nor labour hands; intermediate between the new and the old landed aristocratic hierarchies, these were clerks, artisans, supervisors, master-craftsmen, skilled labourers. Fashions and festivals, customs and manners, cuisine and leisure, education and public service were all touched, if not moulded, by the Order's long presence. Some customs, such as the pre-Lenten carnival, pre-dated the arrival of the Knights, and owe their origins to the Catholic tradition. Others started in or after the sixteenth century, or were popularised and extended. The feast of *Otto Settembre*, known to Maltese as 'il-Vitorja', celebrated the Great Siege victory of 1565. The feast of St Peter and St Paul, known as *Luminaria* (L-Imnarja), goes back as a popular festival to the period of the Knights. For example, the Knights played bowls, still a Maltese past-time today known as 'boċċi'. In the annals of history, boat and donkey races – even fireworks – similarly go back to that time, and may well precede it. Country-folk would have been less influenced than city-dwellers by the Order; here it seems that traditional dress rather continued as before, whereas in the cities there would have been more assimilation, as was to be expected. The common Maltese greetings 'bonġu' (from *'bon jour'*) and 'bonswa' (from *'bon soir'*) would date back to that time; the largest *Langue*, in number, was the French one. A word like 'missier' (Maltese for 'father') has been dated further back, to Norman times. For most practical and routine purposes of record, however, Italian, which already existed in Malta as the medium of formal education and communication, continued to be predominant throughout the Knights' stay,

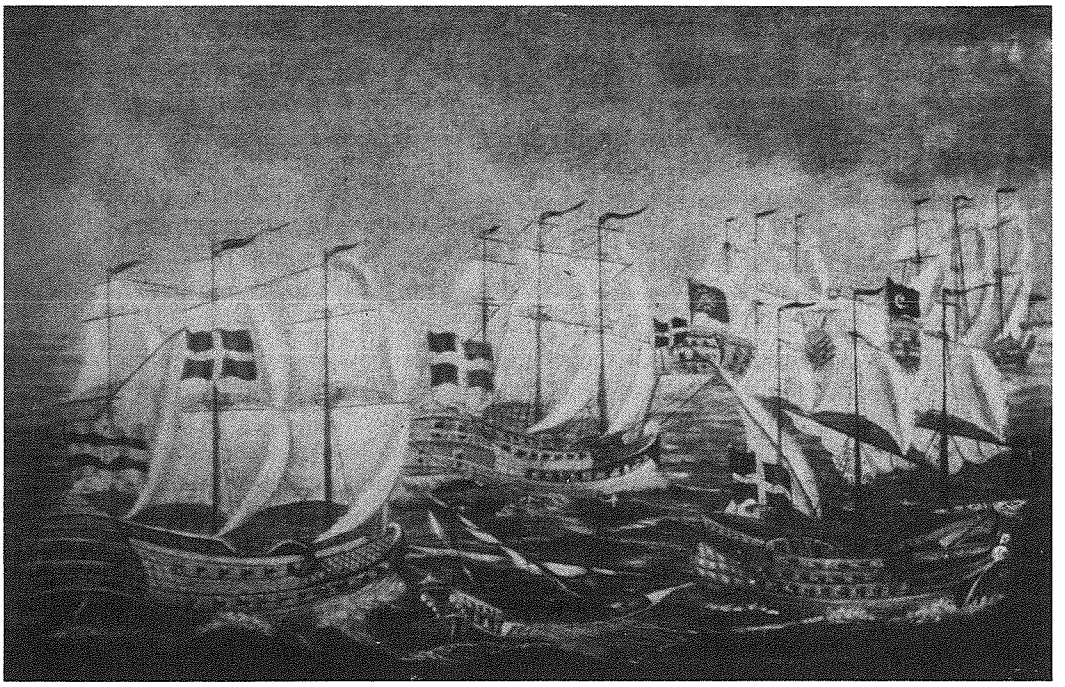
and thereby became a still more established 'Maltese' official language.

Ideologically, Maltese looked to Catholic Europe more steadfastly and consciously than ever before. Those who moved in government circles realised that Europe was more than just Rome, even if the Rome of popes and caesars, the closest major European mainland capital, continued to be the main focus. In the mainstream European effort to stem the Ottoman advance the Malta siege of 1565 was not as important as the Battle of Lepanto of 1571, in which Malta participated with her fleet; but for Malta the Siege was supremely important: it remained indelible in the memory and became legendary. The sociology of the Turkish siege of Malta is that it mobilized one and all, like never before, in a desperate fight to the finish between Cross and Crescent. Survival depended on the victory of the Christians against the Infidels, of the European against the Turk. Until quite recently in Malta many common people made little difference, if any, between 'Arabs' and 'Turks': those were the non-European Muslims. A chief standard-bearer of the European religion was Malta herself, raising high the eight beatitudes of 'The Religion' in the Malta Cross. As a consequence of this period, Moors were all too often slaves of the Christians; Malta sometimes had thousands of them. Several well-to-do Maltese kept slaves in their households. Christians, including Maltese and Knights, were enslaved by the Moors. The idea of Europe in Malta has its genesis as much in Roman Catholicism as in the centuries of fighting, fearing, enslaving and being enslaved by the Muslim 'Turks' or 'Moors'. These notions, sentiments and allegiances were crystallized under the Grand Masters.

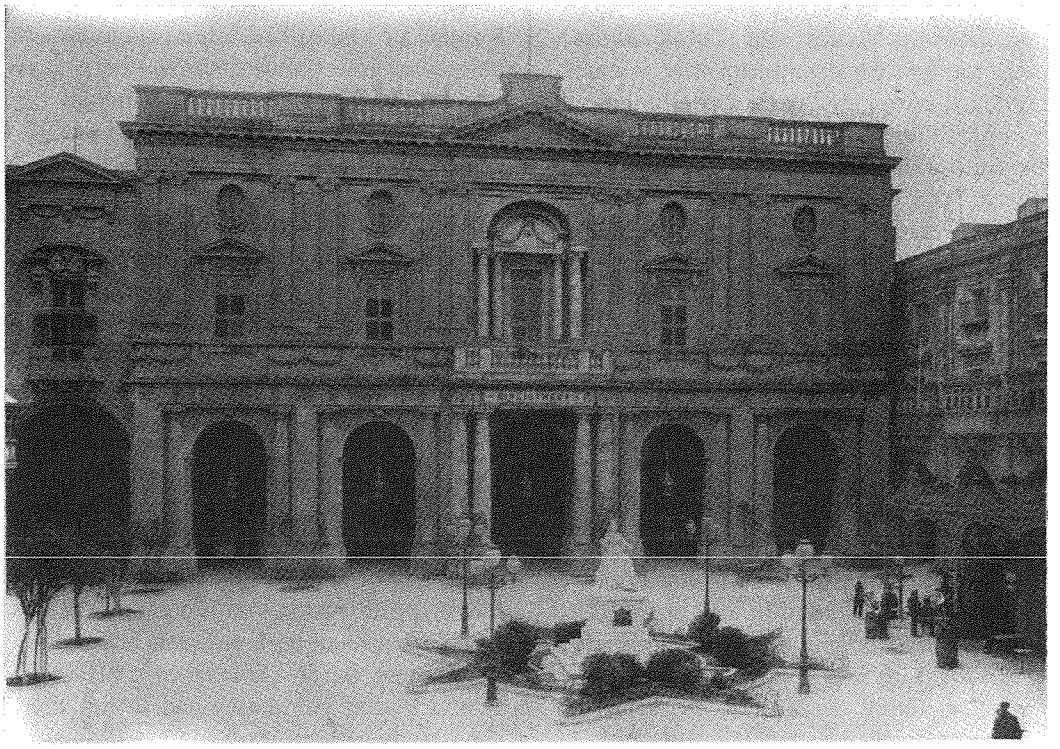
Finally, the population also changed. Ideas about ethnicity and nationality are often like kith and kin. Some visiting travellers found the Maltese 'fairer in colour' than their immediate northern neighbours. Dress, hygiene, manners, attitudes, aspirations, relations and standards were influenced by military or religious rigour, by social inter-action and by the facilities offered by the Order, such as the hospital and charities. The Normans already had brought personnel to service administrative needs, and during the succession of mainly Spanish feudal lords and emissaries, other mostly Southern European individuals and families came to stay. Nor was the conduct of many individual Knights always as virgin in practice as it was *pro forma* presumed and upheld to be. The Knights brought with them from Rhodes a large entourage, mostly Rhodians, who would have mingled and mixed with the then existing population of some 20,000. By the time the Knights of Malta left in 1798, the more europeanized Maltese population had multiplied five-fold. Maltese raised large families and the conditions for a stable demographic growth were in place.

In the evolution of a Maltese nationality and identity, the 'Western' layer (the Knights of Malta) had settled on and permeated into the former 'Southern' layer (the Sicilian Normans and later feudal lords), which itself had bitten into and camouflaged the earlier 'Arabic' layer, which in turn had superseded the Graeco-Roman legacy after the Phoenician one. The 'Western' layer, carrying over in a *continuum* from the 'Southern' one – over a time span of six centuries – was the most significant, for during its tenure modern Malta came into being as a small European state.

In state-making, the Maltese nation too was being formed. No sooner had the Knights been forced out by Napoleon that the Maltese were forced to stand up for what they held to be their rights, values, interests and customs as a people. The test came upon them with an unexpected suddenness, barely three months after Grand Master Hompesch had surrendered the islands without putting up a fight. In their own insurrection against Bonapartism



Sixteenth century Maltese and Turkish ships, from a painting in the Sant Manduca collection.



Queen Victoria's statue outside the eighteenth century Bibliotecha in the "Piazza Regina".

starting in September 1798 the Maltese *patria* – not merely their *heimat* – was at stake. Against the marauding and looting French troops, grieved by broken promises and newly-imposed burdens, leaders and led rose to the challenge with courage and determination. This time, there were no knights in shining armour to hold their hands. Leadership came mainly from the professional, clerical and merchant classes: Emmanuele Vitale was a notary; Vincenzo Bugeja, a cotton merchant; Francesco Saverio Caruana an ecclesiastic. But the mass of peasants and labourers, fed up with repressive, arbitrary rule, joined in the fray in defence of religion and country. Decorously enough, the rebellion started in Mdina, where French officers were robbing the Carmelite church. To Mdina, to the pealing of church bells, the farmers hurried, armed with their tools and implements, on 2 September 1798. After taking the citadel, lieutenants and batallions were formed, cannon and shot and rations organized; the citadel at Gozo, and all the Malta villages and countryside, were soon in rebel hands. In her first siege since it was built and fortified, Valletta gave protection to the revolutionary, abusive 'infidels' from France. In Valletta and the Three Cities, besieged by the Maltese, the French garrison hid, sometimes retaliated, and slowly starved. Most Maltese city-dwellers they threw out. As was typical of the Napoleonic era throughout Europe and the Mediterranean, the announced revolutionary ideals were not very well put into practice *sur place*; as a result subject peoples thanklessly rebelled. After all, the principle of popular sovereignty had been a corner-stone of the Revolution, enshrined in the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. The 1798 insurrection of Malta was (and remains to this day) the first and only popular armed insurrection in the country's entire history. Thousands died during the two years that it lasted. In full alert, by general mobilisation, it brought to the fore, combined, and sharpened the edges of the three residual or latent factors of the Maltese identity: culture, nationality and politics. The single most important cause of the insurrection – but by no means the only one – was probably religious. The course of events taken by it, incorporating Maltese from all walks of life, broadened into a bloody national resistance to a foreign despotism, with a premium set on liberty, patriotism and survival: 'us' against 'them'.

With the Neapolitan king's permission, the insurgents summoned Nelson's fleet to help them. The ensuing blockade forced the French out, but the Maltese felt badly slighted by their exclusion from the capitulation. The French left with full military honours; the Maltese licked their wounds; not a single Englishman had lost his life. But in 1800 the British had come to stay: they stayed in charge until 1964, when Malta finally gained her independence.

At the time of the Peace of Amiens in 1802 there was a prospect that Malta would revert to the Order with a Maltese *Langue* included: it would be made 'independent' and 'neutral'; with guarantees from the Great Powers; but the British thought better of it and the Third Coalition against Napoleon was formed. This was a time of uncertainty, when Malta's strategic importance and the Anglo-French rivalry over it were frequently the subject of debate, of comment and caricature in the French and British press. Not wanting to return to the Order, nor willing to accept that other powers dispense of Malta's dearly-earned 'sovereignty', Maltese drew up an eloquent and up-to-date '*Dichiarazione*' of the rights of the islanders, founded on historical, juridical and philosophical argumentation. They saw allegiance to the British monarch as a compact in return for protection, but challenged his or any other power's right to dispose of the islands' destiny. A number of petitions dating to the first two decades of the nineteenth century contained a thinly-veiled presumption of

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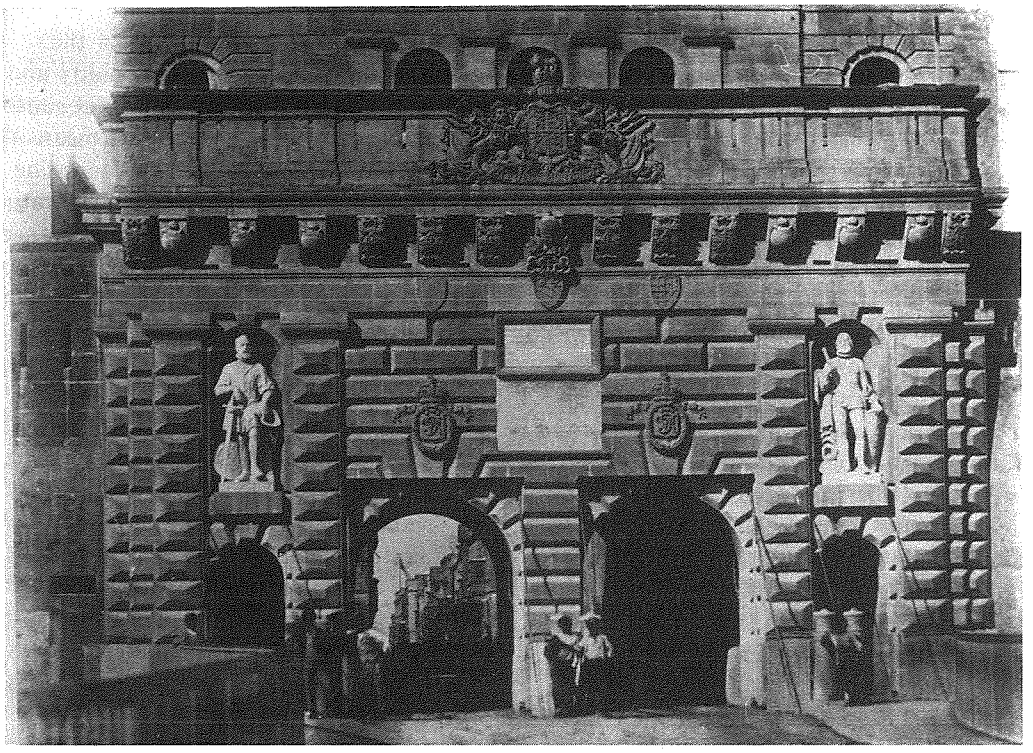

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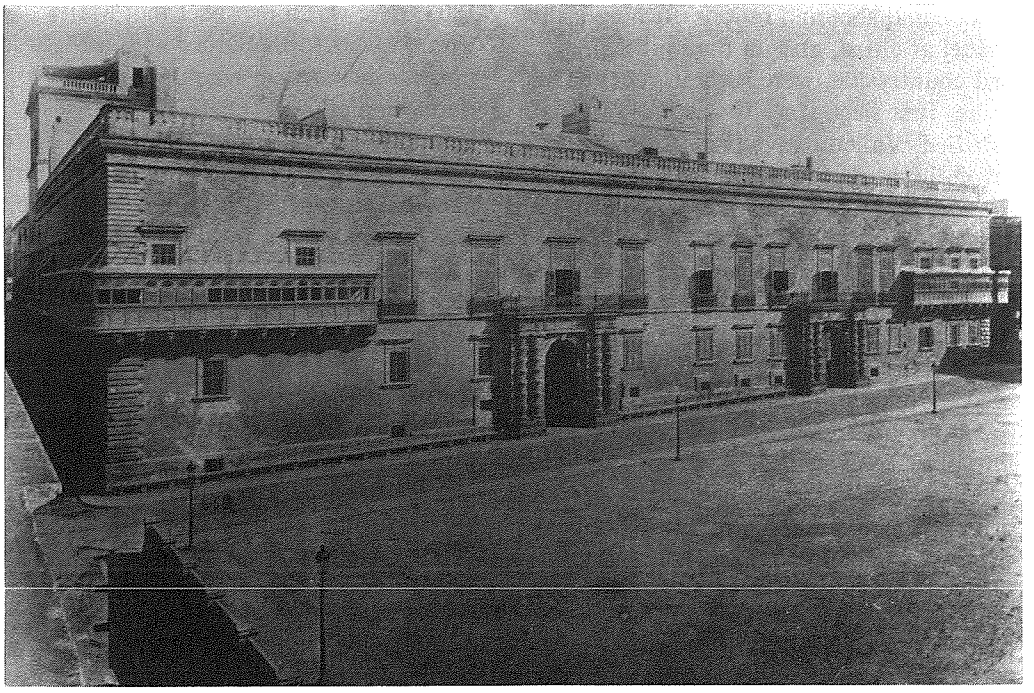

These photographs taken in Valletta in 1870 show Putirjal ("Porta Reale"), the entrance to the capital city (1); the Grand Master's Palace which became the Governor's Palace (2); the Auberge de Castille (now the Office of the Prime Minister) (3) and the Royal Opera House (4), destroyed during the Second World War.

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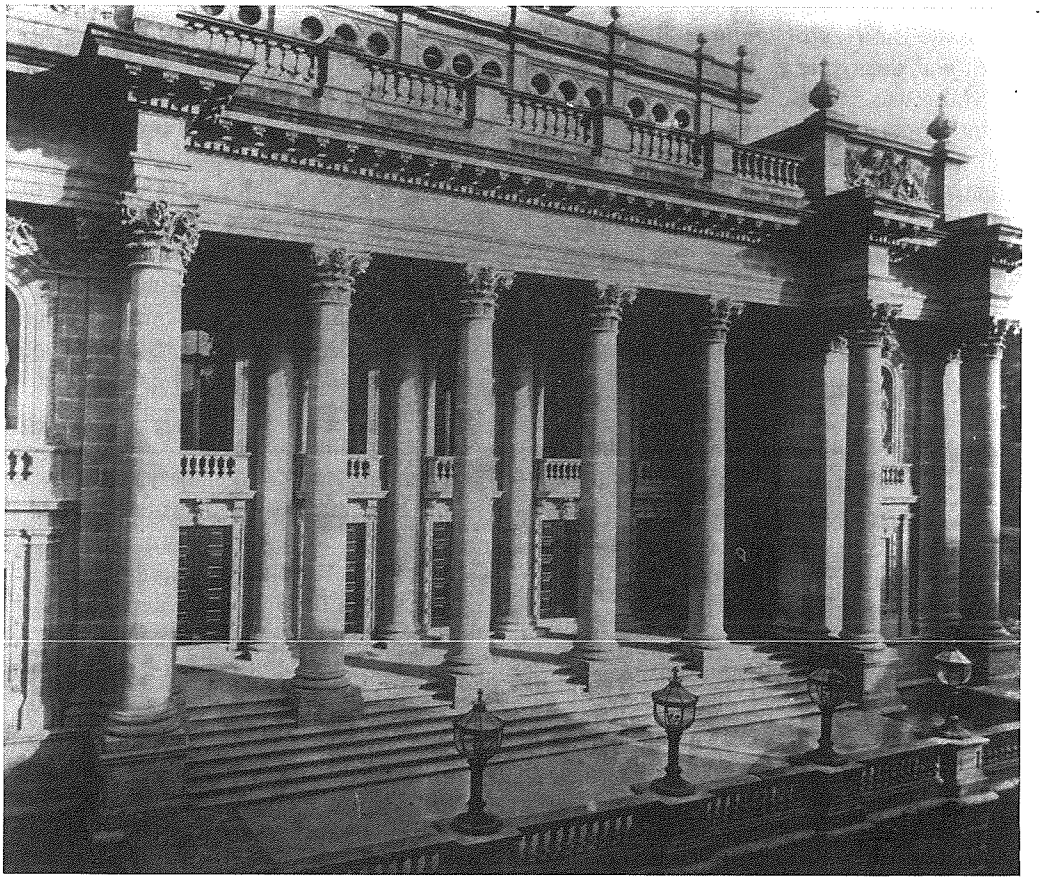


'indipendenza'.

Such, then, was the genesis of Britain's occupation of Malta in 1800, until Malta was given to her as a possession by treaty (not with Malta) in 1815. With the exception of Gibraltar, Britain held on to Malta for longer than she did anywhere else in the Mediterranean: six generations. The 'British' layer was the last and in certain respects, the most decisively formative one in the history of Maltese culture and national identity, prior to independence. Like the Order of St John, Britain was a naval and a military power, to whom defences and docks were important. Unlike the generals whom they had replaced, the British bent backwards to keep their peace with the Catholic Church and to respect such other traditions as were irrelevant to their concerns. Unlike either, the British had an industrialized country; but, like both, they needed revenues. After 1815, they were not usually at war and cherished the *Pax Britannica*, although when war did come or was felt to be close by Malta was inevitably effected, for better or for worse. The main such 'events' after the Napoleonic era were the Crimean War (1854-1856), the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878), the Great War (1914-1918), the Abyssinian War (1935-1936), the Second World War (1939-1945) and the war over Suez in 1956. To some extent the time and type of constitution Britain allowed Malta to have was also related to goings-on outside, in Britain and her empire, or in Europe, especially Italy. The main dates of colonial 'constitutions', up and down and up again, are themselves somewhat indicative: 1835, 1849, 1887, 1903, 1921, 1936, 1939, 1947, 1961, 1964.

The British influenced Malta considerably, especially in administration, constitutions and electoral politics, the economy, the dockyard, the forces, education. In deliberately seeking to anglicize, however, they had to contend with some five centuries of *italianità*. Viewing Malta on the field through army binoculars, measuring the people by land-size of territory, or by the naval and commercial utility of harbours, they underestimated the distinctive resilience embedded in historical and patriotic tradition and consequently the potential strength of national feeling. Anglicization was indeed largely brought about by the 1930s, by imperial *fiat*, and was more or less sealed by the joint war effort and its aftermath, in the following decade.

Throughout this fermentation, Maltese colonial nationalism emerged. In opposition to 'English, and English only', the middle class cultural nationalists raised *italianità* as their standard. Anglicization, said the British and their supporters, was to come about by means of the vernacular, Maltese (which until the 1930s had no standard orthography and not much of a literature). Until the post-war period, when Italy had discredited herself and *italianità* lost its appeal, Maltese nationalists had tended to suspect and to resist the upgrading and spreading of Maltese language education in schools, seeing this as a means for anglicization. Italian, for so long the main official language in Malta, was identified with education, public affairs, liberty, religion, and contacts in the region. English was seen as useful in some cases or for certain purposes but generally regarded as the language of domination and of despotism, an 'Anglo-Saxon tongue'. Maltese in its uncultivated state was usually dismissed as a dialect recalling the Saracen domination, too restrictive, unbecoming of a modern, secular and European society. On the other hand, by the 1880s, a growing category of people were being exposed to English or helped to realise that this could be more important to their advancement than Italian. Maltese political parties thus developed on so-called 'pro-Italian' and 'pro-English' lines, with the language battle, a clash of cultures and interests, a recurring and explosive issue in colonial politics. What this implied, of course, was an inability, in the circumstances, to reach a consensus on self-identity. Underlying the

culture clash, were political and economic interests and aspirations on all sides. *Italianità* was also a buffer, a symbol, a rallying cry, frequently used interchangeably with *latinità*.

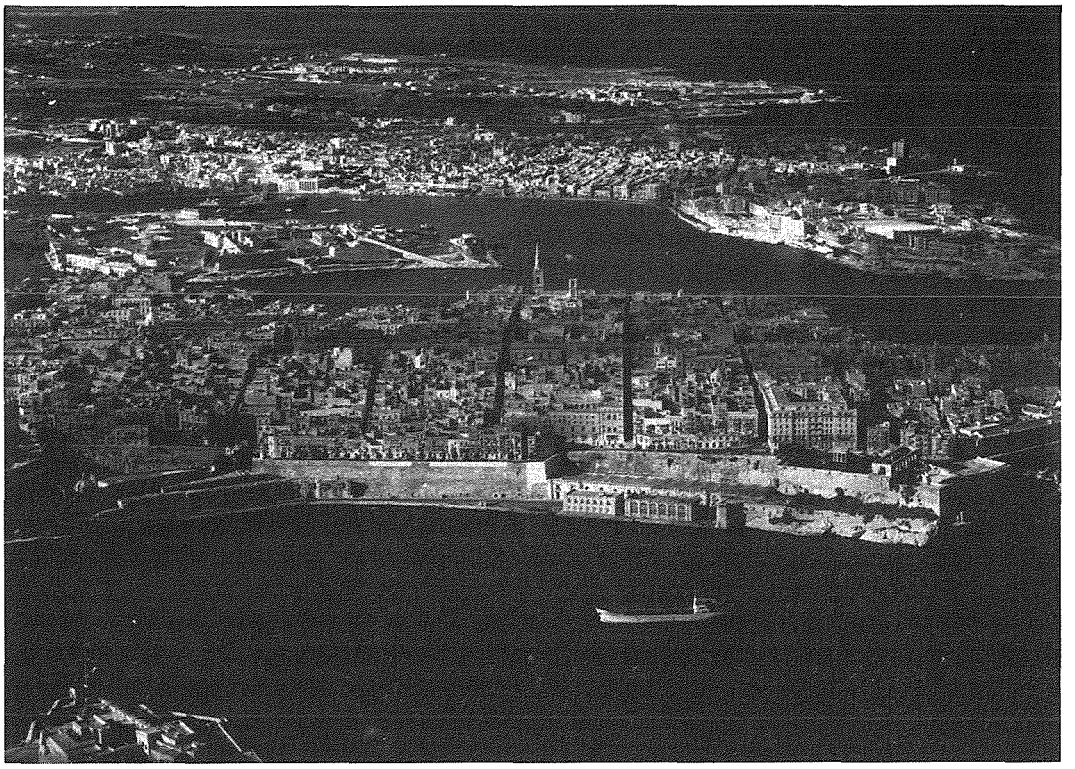
The English-Italian tussle embodied many traits which cut close to the bone of nationality, elements which are the very sinews of identity. The language question of Malta, however particular to the country, was by no means removed from concerns that continue seriously to agitate people in our own times. A Maltese historian reading the stirring *'Avenir de la Langue Française'* appeals in *Le Monde* in the 'year of Europe' 1992 may be forgiven for thinking that he was reading Fortunato Mizzi's *Malta* one century earlier. Much of the argumentation about language worth, self and nation, utility and culture, and against *'des fanatiques du tout-anglais'* is the same:

Ils oblient surtout que la langue n'est pas un vernis, une marchandise, n'est pas un matériau comme les autres: elle est ce qui porte et structure la pensée. C'est par elle qu'adviennent en nous le monde et le simple plaisir d'être soi. On n'en change pas comme on change de 'job' ou de voiture.

But in Malta's case there was also Maltese (in a French context, the *'Breton'* or *'Basque'*). Maltese gradually attracted adherents and became more creative and literary in this century, with many of those formerly using Italian starting to make use of it instead or as well. The Malta Independence Constitution of 1964 entrenched it as the national language, with English as a second language. After English, the best-known foreign languages in Malta remained Italian and French, all languages with whose countries or nationals Malta had direct contacts for long periods in the past. The multi-lingual, multi-cultural society of one time, which so impressed our English traveller as 'an epitome of all Europe', still stirred. Monolingualism certainly does not appear to be an item on Malta's national identity agenda.

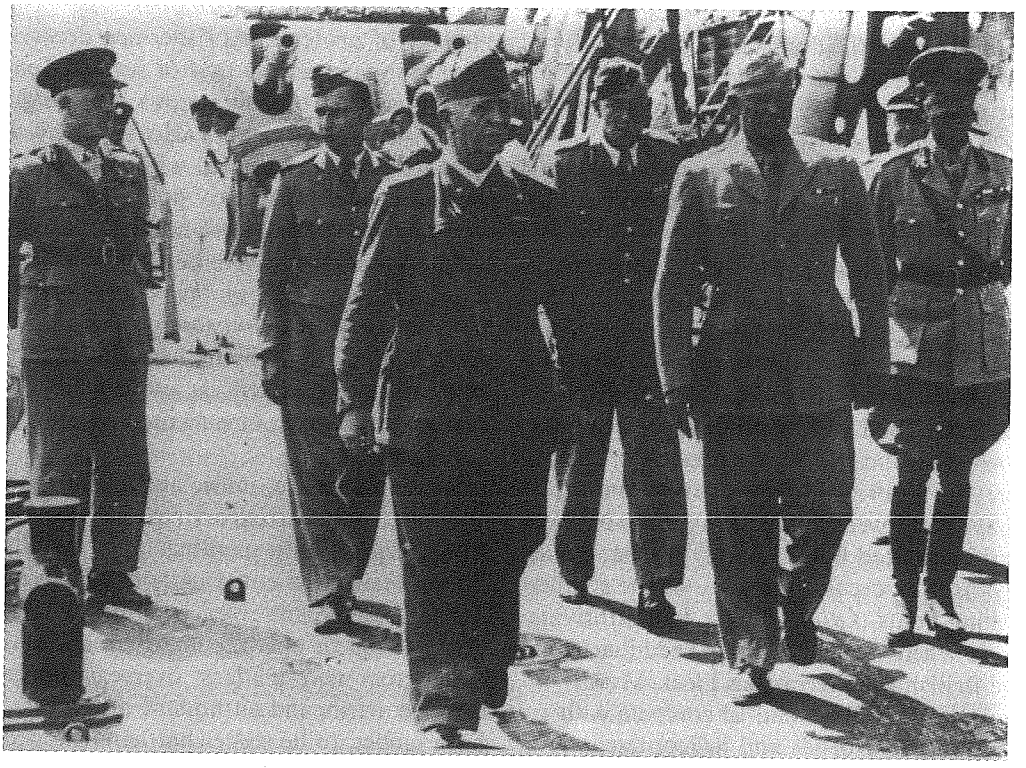
In their vast majority the Maltese remain Catholics, in the same bracket with the Irish and the Poles. Freedom of conscience is not in question; with cable television and mass tourism, secularisation has been making itself felt, inviting new tensions. In the nineteenth century parishes continued to grow and develop, as did the enthusiasm of parishioners. Band clubs mushroomed from mid-century and especially from the 1870s onwards, sometimes rival ones were formed in the same town or village. Valletta had two of them before 1880. The *festa* in honour of the patron saint, or of a secondary saint, became a great village attraction: the event of the year for many villagers who took much interest in church affairs, religious and semi-religious. Fireworks became a speciality of the *festa*. The festa of the saint was also the festa of the town or village: families and friends met and made merry. *Qubbajd, pastizzi, qassatat, imqaret*, and other nougat, pastry with dates, *ricotta*, honey, typical Maltese snacks and sweets, became and remain popular. To this day, on the 15 August when seven villages simultaneously celebrated Santa Maria's feast, the night sky of Malta is ablaze with colour, resounding with petards, a quite marvellous and unique spectacle. Lay organisations and church network diehards continue to be prominent in various religious outdoor and indoor activities, such as the Good Friday ceremonies and processions.

In nineteenth century Malta the social nation came alive. More awareness of and participation in public activities, new and old, accompanied greater political organisation and mobilization especially under the umbrella of colonial nationalism, as well as the continuing growth in population. Between 1800 and 1964 Malta's population trebled from 100,000 to 300,000, in spite of mass emigration to the English-speaking world especially after 1945. Malta thus became the most densely populated country in Europe: *"una città sul mare"*, one traveller called it. *Patria* and *pajjiż* became *nazzjon* and *stat*.



An aerial view of Valletta intersecting the Grand Harbour and Marsamxett Harbour with Manoel Island and Sliema in the background.

Churchill, Roosevelt, Badoglio and Eisenhower in Malta during the Second World War.



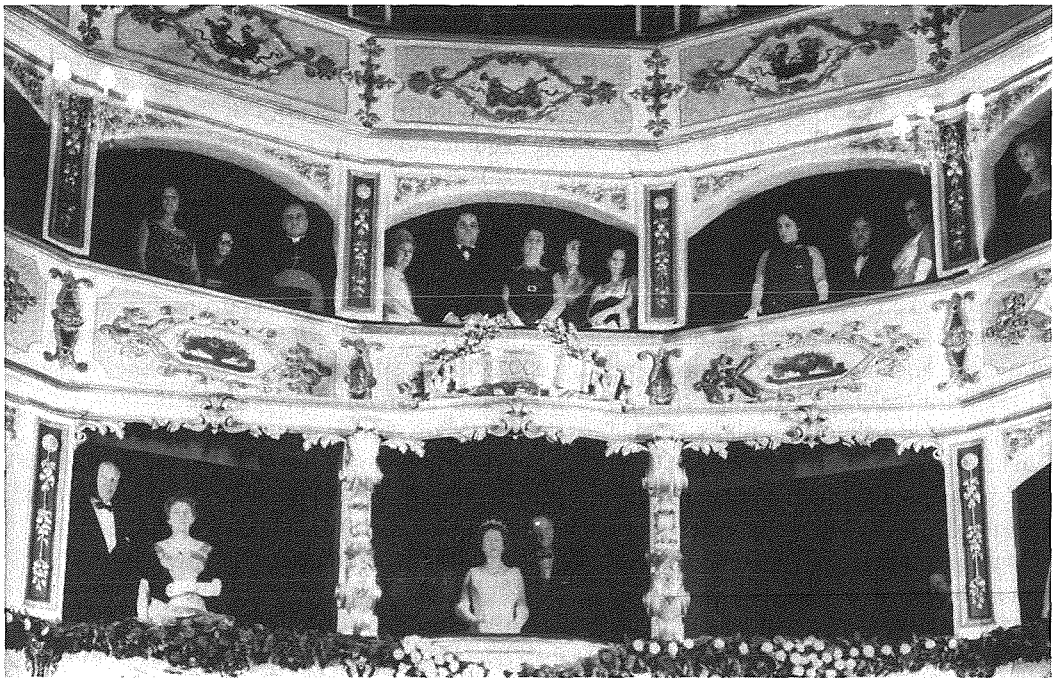
The main political parties, Nationalist (Christian Democrat) and Labour (Democratic Socialist), in the last thirty years have at times instrumentalized the popularity of open-air *festa*-atmosphere gatherings, so that sometimes even 'mass meetings' – the appeal of which seems to be decreasing of late – came to include food-stalls, fairs, fireworks, music and song.

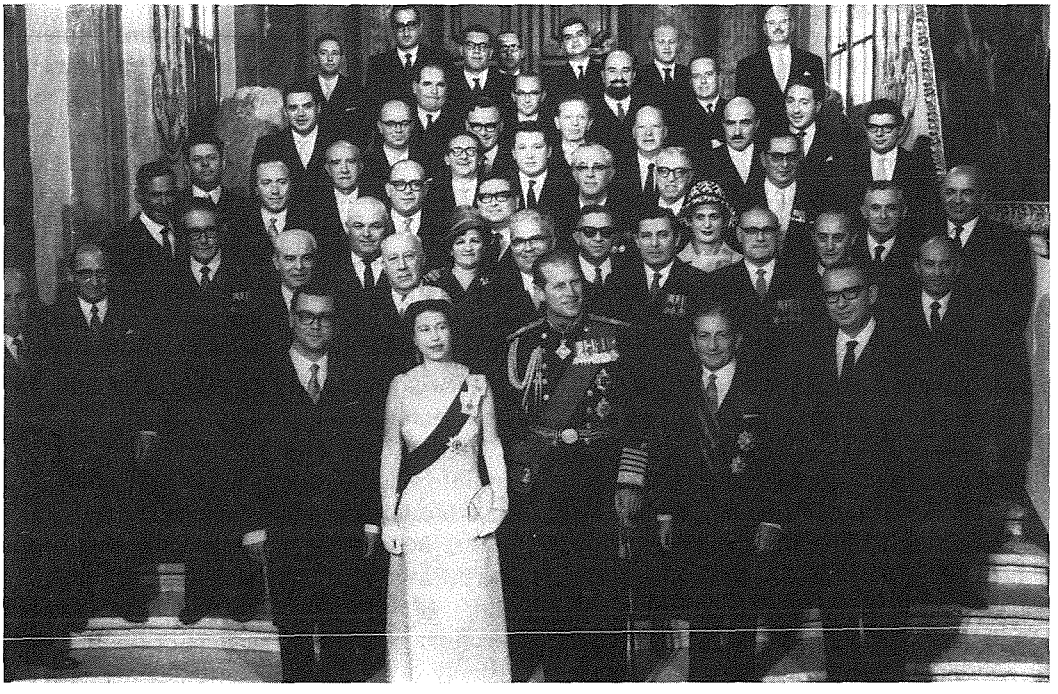
Until independence in 1964, Malta's national day was the *Otto Settembre* – 'il-Vitorja' – first celebrated as such by Mizzi's Nationalist Party in Valletta in 1885. This day came to recall Malta's victory in her two great sieges: 1565 and 1943; among emigrants it remained their most important feast. It was replaced by Independence Day, also in September, in 1964. In the 1970s, during Mr Mintoff's premiership, there ceased to be a consensus among the party leaderships as to the best date for Malta's national day. In 1988 it was unanimously agreed by parliament to have no less than five national 'feasts', including Independence Day (21 September 1964), Republic Day (13 December 1974), the *Sette Giugno* recalling Maltese anti-British demonstrations in 1919 when several Maltese were killed or wounded; the *Otto Settembre*; and even 31 March 1979, when 'the last British soldier left'.

Communications were facilitated first by train services (from the 1880s), then by trams, and subsequently by *char-à-bancs*, as the still throttling quaint Maltese passenger buses are known. The motor-car, a rare commodity until the 1950s, became all too popular, although it still has to share the road with trotting ponies or the horse-drawn carriage *karrozzin*. For ferrying across harbours or from ship to quay, there were always the typical Maltese multi-coloured boats, mainly the oar-driven *dgħajsa*, or occasionally one of the smaller fishing boats (*kajjik*). These had a thriving trade when Grand Harbour headquartered the British Mediterranean Fleet. More recently these have had to compete with launches, hydrofoils and helicopters especially for the longer distances. In print journalism, Maltese newspapers started in 1838, when Britain removed the censorship: a remarkable number of newspapers, magazines and reviews were published. For the last twenty years, Malta has had three or four dailies and Sunday newspapers, in both Maltese and English. The daily Italian language newspaper *Malta* stopped being published in 1940, after a run of nearly sixty years. British-initiated locally-based radio – Rediffusion – started in the mid-1930s, after Italian wireless had begun to reach Malta. Italian TV reception and a Maltese TV station go back to the 1950s and 1960s respectively. Information-spreading, opinion-forming and public participation became features of a more modernized, more secularized lifestyle.

Introduced by the British, football became and remains the most popular national sport; but, at the Marsa Sports Club, even polo survives. Tennis too became popular, not only among younger people. Swimming has been endemic. To Maltese, the sea is in the bones. The number of professional fishermen declined over the years, as has that of farmers, but there continue to be numerous *dilettante* fishermen and farmers. Various folk events have long been associated with the sea, such as *ġostra* (the greasy pole), or the *regatta* boat-races. Horse-racing, hunting, even home pigeons have been popular for a long time, especially among the country-folk; in some areas *impromptu* guitar-accompanied folk-singing has continued to entertain select audiences, and is well patronised among some Maltese overseas communities.

In art, literature, music and theatre, a certain revival was experienced in the 1960s, especially in painting, poetry and drama. Several talented individuals have distinguished themselves, including a few stars in film or opera, composers and conductors who 'made it' overseas. Maltese creative artists and authors of all genres have tended to be somewhat handicapped





Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip at the Manoel Theatre, and with parliamentarians led by the Speaker of the House during a royal visit in 1967. The Prime Minister, Dr Borg Olivier, is on Prince Philip's left.

by the limited audience or market around them, or the want of adequate remuneration from official quarters for their talents: thus to go abroad, or to write or sing in a language of wider communication, was always a temptation. Recognised Maltese singers are recorded as early as the twelfth century. Musical compositions found at the Mdina Cathedral archives, which have been premiered in Malta by Maltese musicians, date back to the Middle Ages and early modern times. Others distinguished themselves in various branches of the sciences, social, natural and physical: opthalmologists, for example: Barth, Preziosi, Tabone; or a maverick like Edward de Bono. The most successful not infrequently left Malta: they went to Vienna or Paris, London or Rome, settled in Melbourne or Toronto; yet many stayed, strayed back or kept in touch.

In 1964-1965 Malta became a member of the Council of Europe, of the British Commonwealth of Nations, of the United Nations, and later of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, and of other international organisations. Until 1971, NATO's Allied Forces Mediterranean were headquartered in Malta. Before the 1987 elections parliament agreed that Malta would be neutral and not host military bases on her soil (and that the party obtaining the absolute majority of votes would govern even if the number of seats won initially did not tally).

The Maltese are and feel European. They have belonged in Europe: were its *leitmotiv* Christendom, as in 1565; or anti-Bonapartism, as in 1798; or people's democracy, as in and after 1940-1945. The contrast of shimmering light and retreating shade on the limestone that constructed the megalithic temples, the towering bastions and the anti-aircraft ranges, merges with the still clean, dazzling blue sea: but the galleys and destroyers have made way for oil tankers and cruise liners.

Since 1964 Malta has been striving to acquire the infrastructural supports required by a small state competing for markets and influence in Europe, the Mediterranean and beyond; and seeking to help uplift the quality of life, social and intellectual. The economy had to be diversified radically: for centuries this had been very largely a dependent one, with the bulk of salaried employment all too often subject to the policies, priorities and exigencies of foreign and unrepresentative governments. Public sector employment, although somewhat on the decline, remains high. Tourism (mainly from Britain, Germany and Italy), light industry (computer software, quality textiles, toys, glass), ship-repairing and some agricultural and horticultural production (including export of potatoes, tomatoes, flowers) became the mainstays of the economy. In the post-war period Maltese wines and beers started to be more professionally marketed and, after independence, also exported. The latest developments have been in offshore investment, transhipment in a free port, yacht marinas, fish-farming. Maltese tend to work hard, enjoy the family and save, and the Malta currency has been a strong one; but flair, engagement, self-confidence and openness are also precious. A respectable showing in some regional or world event by a Maltese national (as in the Eurovision Song Contest or snooker competitions), always raises a cheer. Three decades after independence, as the 'cultural cringe' slowly sheds off, we find Malta in the queue to join the European Community. The parliamentary tradition has survived in this ex-colony, past hiccups notwithstanding, and its future now appears assured. Partly due to partisan polarisation, now also on the wane, Malta's voter percentages in general elections became the highest in the world, usually over 90%. Higher education has been expanding in recent years – in 1992 the University of Malta celebrated its four hundredth anniversary. The average Maltese will be accustomed to visitors and almost invariably speak or at least understand more than one language.

Increasingly conscious of Europe, with which Malta mostly trades, Maltese are also not unaware of their own limitations, and their own characteristics. They would wish to be European without renouncing to their recognisably Maltese identity: the mould of their own ingenuity over the millenia, in an intense, varied and often difficult history. They survived as one of the world's smallest ethnic minorities, about one million in all world-wide, with their own undisputed territory and surrounding seas, with their own language too.

In Europe the closest parallel to Malta is probably Luxembourg. With a comparable resident population of somewhat less than 400,000, Luxembourg like Malta has been sandwiched between neighbouring countries and language-cultures, forging its identity at least partly by default or conscious effort. Luxembourgeois is a distinguishing German dialect, not a fully-fledged language like Maltese; it co-exists in Luxembourg with French and German. In spite of its size, Luxembourg has had a fairly eventful history, of which its continued survival as a separate nation-state in continental Europe is living proof. The Luxembourgese historian Gilbert Trausch in a 1988 study on Luxembourg's search for a national conscience concluded, by exclusion: *'Ni Français, ni Allemands, ni Belges!'* By the same token, and similarly by elimination, the Maltese position is this: *'Ni Italiens, ni Anglais, ni Arabes!'*

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