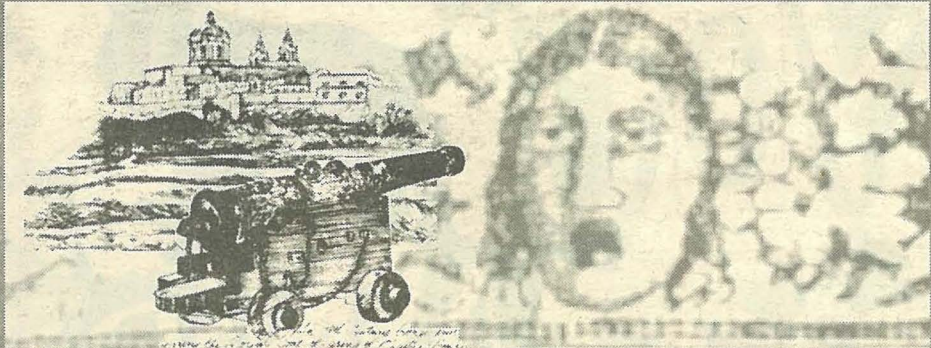


Around Malta



Few sights in Malta are as impressive as Mdina. High on a plateau in the middle of the island, away from industry and the grand harbour, it still is Malta's patrician old capital; set back in time, an other age caught within mellow walls. For more than 2,000 years Mdina has played a key role in the island's history. On a wider stage, as one of the few remaining fortified medieval cities in the Mediterranean it has special status.

was the seat of their municipium. The city walls spread into Rabat and afforded them in the northern and eastern quadrants good natural defences. The wily Arabs adopted Melita as their capital in ad 870, renamed Medina ('the walled city'), quickly reduced it to its present size, dug a moat and strengthened the southern walls.

The defences proved strong enough for 220 years, until

Grand Master L'Isle Adam received the silver keys to Citta Notabile in Palazzo Falzon from the Haken of the of the Universita' soon after his arrival in the autumn of 1530. His promise to maintain all their privileges and rights, was promptly broken.

During the ensuing Great Siege of 1565, Citta Nobile was a refuge from which the cavalry squadrons and local militia under the command of the Portuguese knight Don Mequita, harried the Turks' camps on the Marsa and Corradino. After a limp second attack the Turks conceded defeat in September 1565.

For most of the 17th century Mdina was in decline, people left and the defences were weakened. The earthquake of 1693 came a blessing as an opportunity for a new start and fitting end to the century. By 1702, Grand Master de Vilhena's reign lavished money on the city. As the century progressed the gracefully ageing stone palaces of Mdina silently witnessed the slow, inevitable crumbling of the Order that had built them.

Napoleon

By midday on June 10, 1798 the keys to the city were formally in the hands of Napoleon's governor designate, General Vaubois, and the order's reign came to an end.

Napoleon's war effort urgently needed funds, and within three months the French set about auctioning treasures looted from the city's Carmelite church. Incensed, the devout Maltese rioted, killed the French commander and set in train rebellion that led to the French being besieged inside Valletta and eventually, with the aid of the British, overthrown.

Today much of Mdina remains intact and is a haven for culture vultures and historians.

Outside of Mdina lays Rabat surrounding its walls with a plethora of other sights. The Roman Villa and Museum probably belonged to a wealthy Roman Merchant or senior official. The Villa and its grounds were first excavated in 1881. The clean neo-classical temple museum-building now camouflaged by a forecourt of citrus trees was built in 1921-4 during the second round of

Mdina, translating in Arabic to 'a walled city', was the old capital of Malta. Two hundred years after the Arab occupation ended in 1224, it was renamed Citta Notabile, and in 1571 when Valletta became the capital, Citta Vecchia, 'the old city'.

History is, for what was the capital city of the central Mediterranean hubs until the late 16th century, remarkably uneventful.

Melita

A numerous cast of aggressors - Romans, Arabs, Turks, and French have all at one time besieged and or occupied this 190meter-high fortified city.

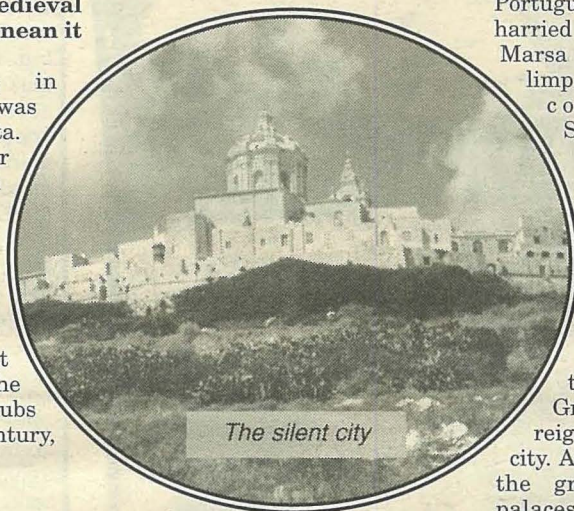
The Romans were first the first excluding Neolithic man and the Phoenicians, to seriously colonise the plateau. Their settlement, named for simplicity the same as the island, 'Melita',

Christianity spread south and in 1090 it was taken by Count Roger the Norman. He found a crumbling city, built a new rectangular-plan cathedral and introduced a north European feudal system.

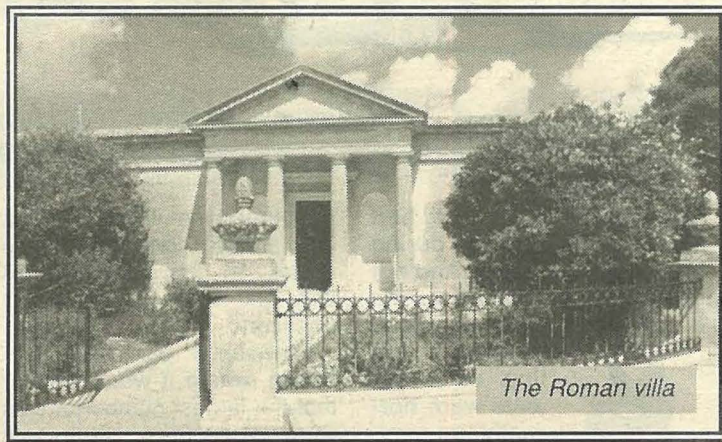
Between 1194 and 1530, under Swabian, Angevin, Aragonese and Castilian influence - known under the collective misnomer, the 'Spanish Period' - Mdina not only prospered but became an aristocratic Maltese city.

In the 14th century it accommodated the almost mute Universita', or governing body, established by the Spanish viceroy in Sicily. Alphonso V of Aragon visited in 1428, rejuvenated flagging morale, vowed the city would forever remain Spanish, and renamed it Citta Notabile.

In 1530 Charles V broke his ancestor's promise and ceded the islands to the wandering Order of the Knights of St John.



The silent city



The Roman villa

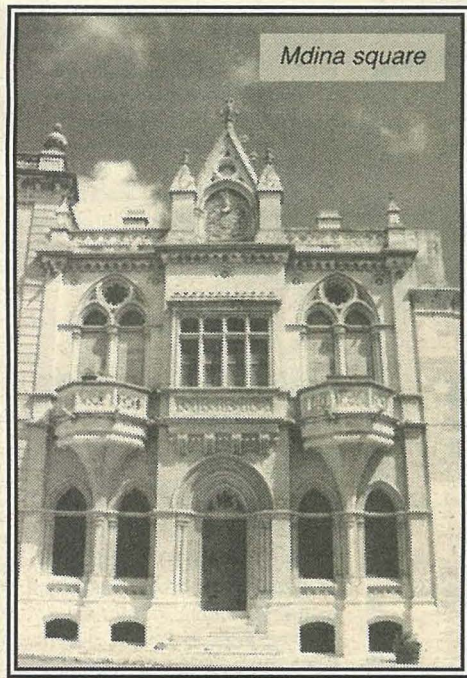
excavations. Among the artefacts and architectural fragments is an olive-pipper, parts of flour mills made from Italian lava and tombstones. There are some fine examples of mosaics, marble statues and busts including Octavia mother of the Emperor Claudius.

The Grotto under the parish church of St Paul was traditionally home to the Apostle has stated, during his enforced three-month stay in Malta.

Legend has it that the prisoner of the Roman governor, Publius, St Paul turned down the comfortable surroundings offered to him and chose this subterranean grotto instead.

The catacombs of St Catald, St Paul and St Agatha were hewn out of living rock as the early Christians were forbidden by Roman law to bury their dead within the city limits and as cremation was not an acceptable solution, families and fraternities developed the intramural catacomb. Outside of Rabat are the country villages of Bahrija, Mtahleb, l'Landrijiet, Dingli and Dingli Cliffs. All are worth exploring not only for the flora and fauna but also for the quaint bars and tiny restaurants which lean towards typical Maltese food especially the traditional rabbit.

There are some beautiful walks to be had, and you'd be surprised what an idyllic ramble in the countryside will reveal.



Mdina square