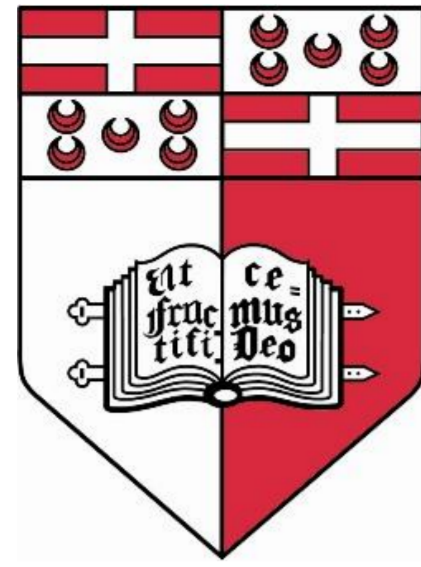


# Down Memory Lane: Geographies of Maltese coastal villages at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century



John A. Schembri<sup>1</sup>, Ritiene Gauci<sup>1</sup>, Charles J. Farrugia<sup>2</sup> and Leonard Callus<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Geography, Faculty of Arts, University of Malta, Msida, Malta.

<sup>2</sup>The National Archives of Malta, 'Santo Spirito', Hospital Street, Rabat, Malta.



## Introduction

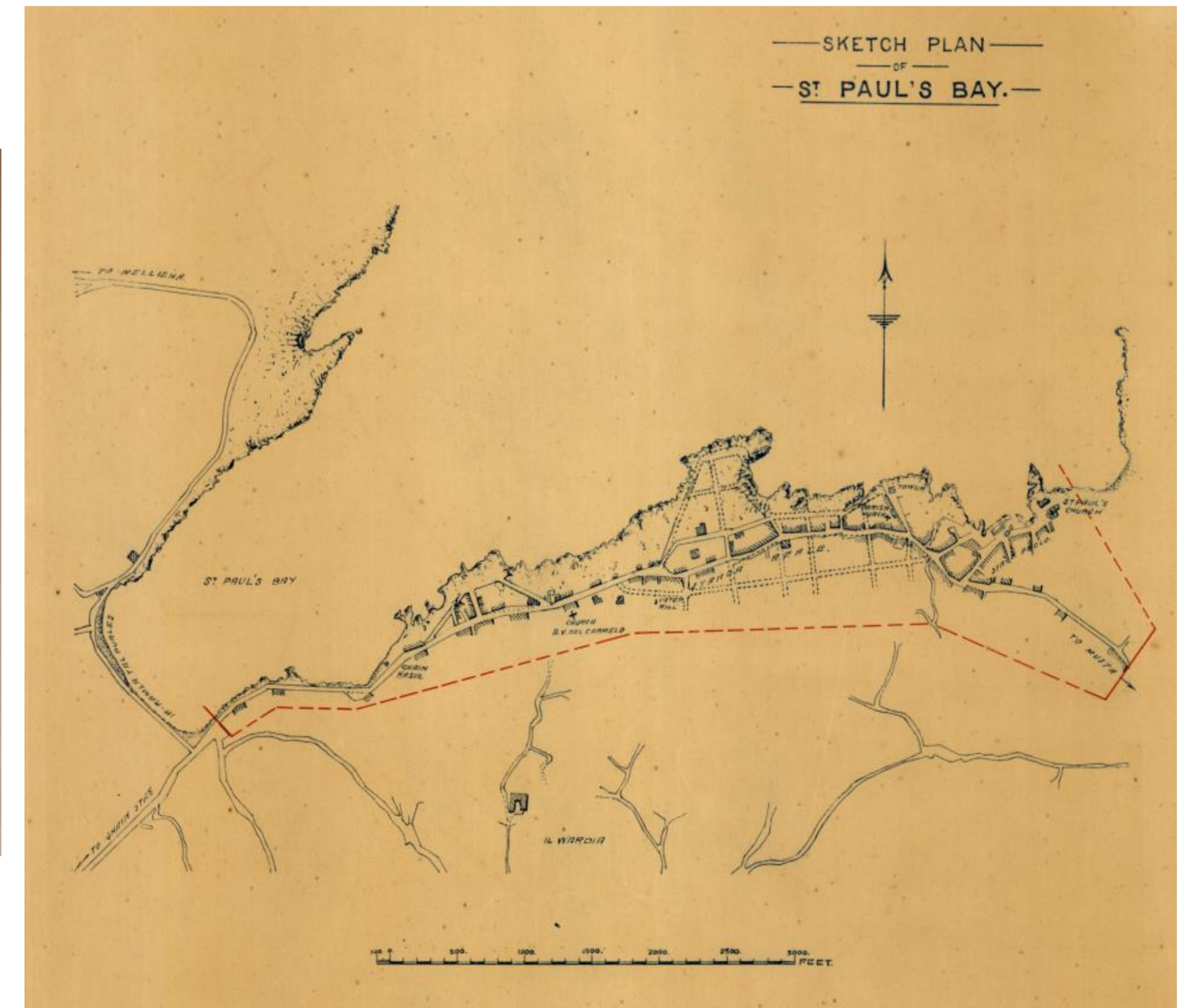
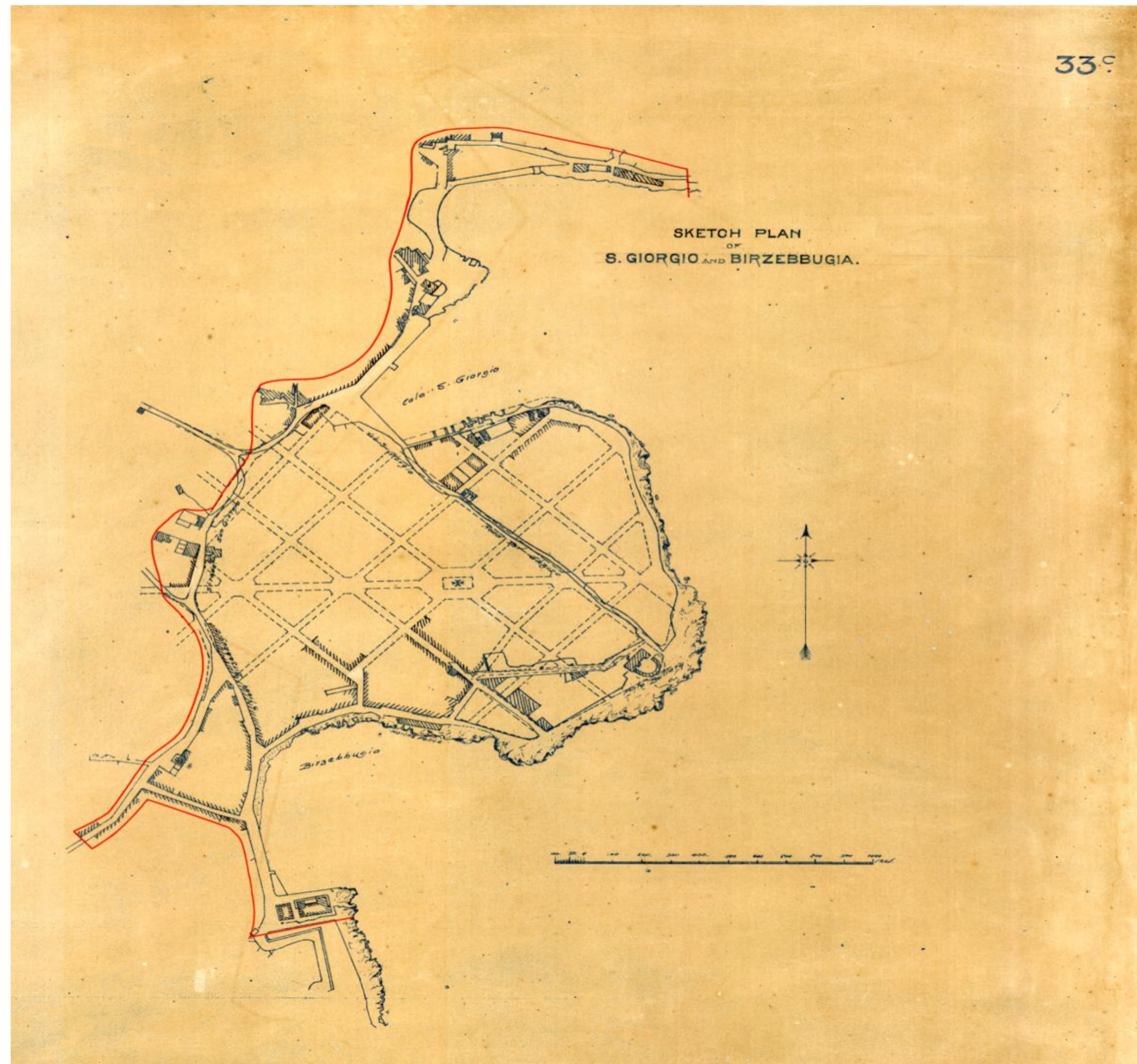
At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Malta had been a hundred years under British rule and the cartographic knowledge developed in the United Kingdom through the Ordnance Survey, was used in Malta to represent the rural, urban and maritime landscapes. In addition, the Maltese landscape had already been drawn at various scales during the preceding centuries. These included the identification of Malta's centrality in the Mediterranean, initially through Herodotus' maps, then through Piri Reis's cartographies and subsequent portolan charts. However the detailed surveying and mapping ensued with the Knights of St John from the sixteenth century and the British as from the nineteenth with engineers, surveyors, cartographers, allied technical and other staff using the necessary equipment and accompanied by local personnel prepared and updated terrestrial maps and bathymetric charts. A geographical inventory was thus developed and showed physical attributes, military installations and defences, roads and also monitored urban growth.

The series holds a wealth of information pertaining to the settlement geography of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and also depicts in detail the geomorphology of the shoreline in the coastal localities. The series was also intended to draw a proposed street pattern for most localities and identify parish boundaries. This research project aims to evaluating the methodologies used in putting together the series of sketch. Three case studies are hereunder illustrated: Birzebugia, Sliema and St Paul's Bay.



In 1907 with a population of around 200,000 and the presence of the British military garrison, planning development was a crucial factor especially due to the small size of the islands. The geo-political situation in the Mediterranean, with increasing French, Russian and Italian interests, was such that the Maltese Islands started to attain an importance greater than their strategic position gave them. As a result, British interest in the colony intensified, with urban planning of areas, other than those around Grand Harbour, initiating a series of measures amongst which was the sketching of the existing villages. Planning of new road networks to accommodate future population growth, improve accessibility and infrastructure, which the old webbed street pattern did not allow, were foremost measures ushering the new century.

The sketches under consideration were part of this continuous effort of mapping undertaken by the local authorities and have a number of attributes. The main reason for this is that they are a stand-alone series, concentrate only on the built-up areas, with no preceding or follow-up works using the skills and techniques developed by the Public Works Department under local supervision. The quasi-organic method of sketching in the series is evident in the various scales used to represent the different localities with an indication of this seen from a number of separate villages having no representative fraction appended to the scale.



- Legend
- Sketch plan number
  - Fortification, fort
  - Residential, Built-up
  - Residential, proposed
  - Foreshore
  - Steep rock face
  - Road
  - Coast road
  - Fortification, tower
  - Church
  - Locality boundary
  - Proposed boundary

This poster represents a snapshot of a newly-established research collaboration between the Department of Geography of the University of Malta and the National Archives of Malta, with the aim of highlighting the geographical realities exhibited by this series of sketches in a forthcoming book for academic and public benefit.

## References

- Blouet, B. (2007) The Story of Malta. Allied Publications, Valletta.  
 Public Works Office. Sketch Plan of S.Giorgio and Birzebugia. Original scale [ca.1: 2,400] 5"= 1,000'. 7th June 1907. Villages of Malta and Gozo 1907. Sheet 33c. National Archives Malta, Public Works Office, Valletta.  
 Public Works Office. Sketch Plan of Sliema. Original scale [ca.1: 5,000] 4 13/16"= 5,000'. 7th June 1907. Villages of Malta and Gozo 1907. Sheet 18 National Archives Malta, Public Works Office, Valletta.  
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 Public Works Office. Key Map of Malta. Showing by red figures the number of the plans of the villages. Original scale [ca.1: 107,000]. 7th June 1907. Villages of Malta and Gozo 1907. National Archives Malta, Public Works Office, Valletta.