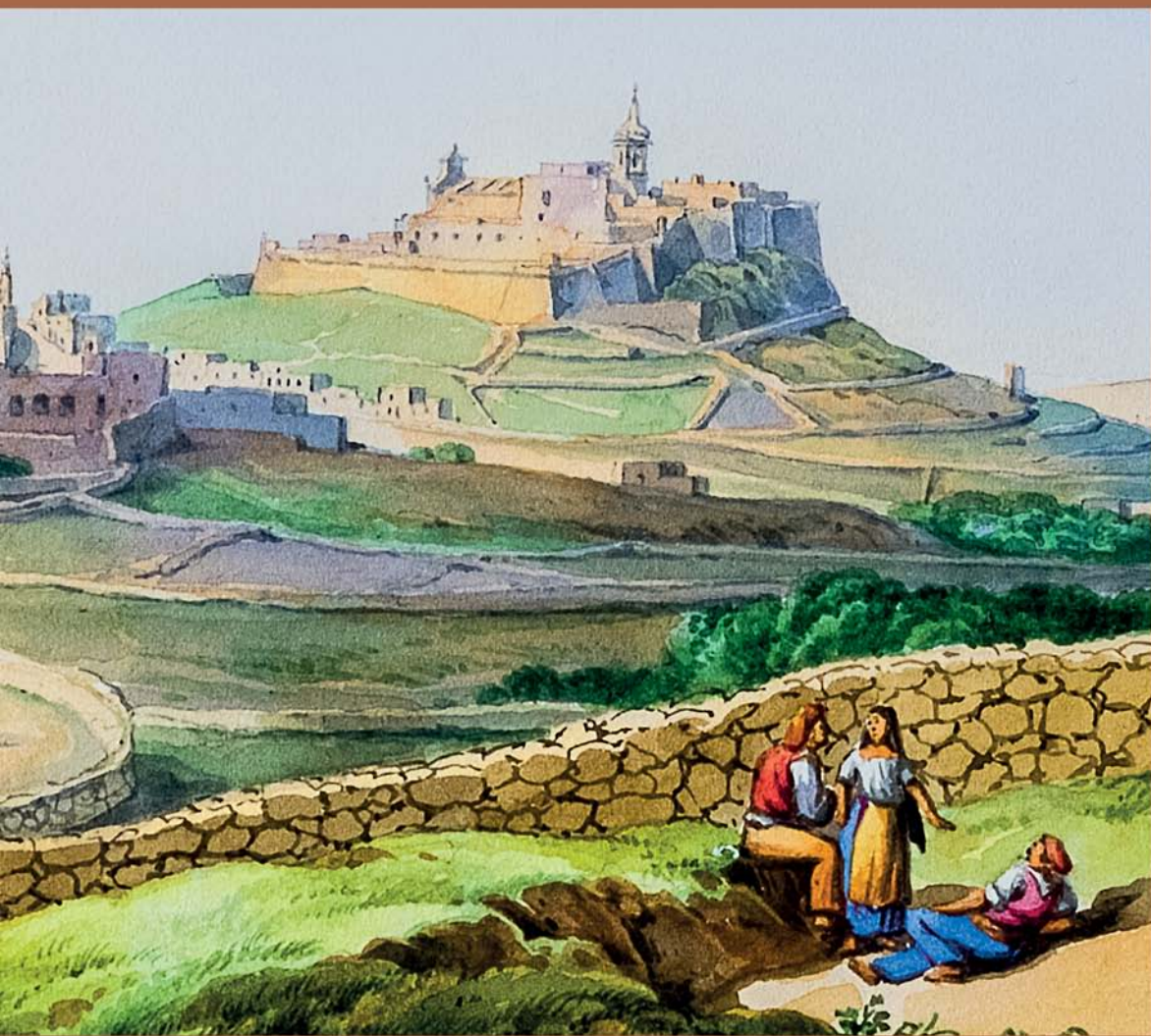


1868 - 2018

150 YEARS AS A NON-ACTIVE FORTRESS



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MINISTRY FOR GOZO

April 1st 1868 brought a long chapter in the millennial story of the small, but imposing fortified town that has been dominating Gozo's hilly landscape for centuries on end to a close. The unceremonious handover of the keys of the casemates, barrack rooms and two small buildings, from the War Department to the Deputy Collector of Land Revenue at Gozo, marked the delisting of the 'Castle of Gozo' from the roll of active fortresses and its formal transfer to Civil Government.

INEVITABLE FATE

In reality, its military relevance had long been eclipsed. Besides assuming an increasingly irrelevant role in the overarching defence strategy of the Maltese Islands, the fortification assemblage had not received any notable upgrade since the extensive remodelling project undertaken during the opening years of the 17th century. By the mid-19th century, the 'Castle of Gozo' was of no significant use for the Army, while its utility as a node for the processing and relaying of intelligence was superseded with the installation of the semaphore signal stations at Ta' Dbiegi (relocated to Ta' Giordan in 1857) and at Nadur respectively. Furthermore, Fort Chambray at Ghajnsielem was more effective in the control of the Island and, more importantly, of the inter-island channel. Moreover, it offered ample room for the accommodation of the garrison of Gozo and for the setting up of change-of-air camps and makeshift nursing stations to relieve the pressure from the sanatoria on the mainland whenever the need arose.

Although opting to retain the obsolete 'Castle' in the rationalisation exercise that triggered the decommissioning of all coast-watch towers, batteries, redoubts and entrenchments in 1853, the War Department was not particularly keen to keep occupying it, let alone preserving the integrity of the Knights' period works and maintaining them in a good state of repair. The head quarters of the Royal Malta Fencible Regiment detachment deployed in Gozo moved to Fort Chambray in 1856, and several key elements in the Castle's defensive ensemble were demolished, altered or mutilated within a few years. For instance, the main stores at St John's demi-bastion were turned into a detaining facility, the central sentry station atop St Michael's Bastion was replaced by a new clock tower, while the outer works of the land front were partially demolished to make way for a more spacious access road.

By the early 1860s the towering walls were in a desperate state of conservation. Part of St Martin's cavalier and of the adjoining enceinte collapsed in 1861, whereas an 1867 report described the greater extent of the other walls as a "danger to the lives of the tenants" cultivating the underlying fields.

More worryingly, the War Department was extremely reluctant to assume responsibility for the required repairs and reinstatements, and for the compensation of the tenants who suffered damages from falling debris. This worrying situation was eventually unblocked in the summer of 1867, when the Secretary of State informed Governor Grant that the 'Castle of Gozo' was 'of no use for Military purposes' and recommended that 'it should be handed over to the Civil Government'. The Secretary of War, thereby, relayed the decision to the General Officer Commanding (Malta), who liaised for its release by the end of that same fiscal year, namely 31 March 1868.

Heritage valorisation was still grossly alien to the *forma mentis* of the civil authorities at the time, and the perched defensive assemblage was viewed mostly as a quick and cost effective solution for the improvement of the water supply to underlying Rabat and the neighbouring villages. Further to the construction of a discreet 420-ton reservoir at the foot of the south-facing flank of the ravelin in 1867, the greater part of the ditch along the land front that had been spared by the 1860 access road was devoted for the construction of three adjoining reservoirs with a combined capacity of 6000 tons. Also, the former grain silos at the back of St John's Cavalier metamorphosed into complementing facilities by the completion of the same project in 1881. The decline of the urban cluster inside the walls was equally fast-tracked. In 1885, various properties were demolished to make way for the enlargement of Cathedral Square. Indeed, Gozo's former kingpin fortress and most prized settlement site went through a period of great turbulence during the closing decades of the 19th century.

PRIME HERITAGE RESOURCE

Fortunately, the unfolding of the 20th century reversed the tide. All standing buildings were included in the 1925 list of protected buildings, while the 1930s recovery campaign spearheaded by the then Antiquities Committee sought for the restoration of various dilapidated properties. The outbreak of World War II ended abruptly this laudable programme of works, but rekindled temporarily the former vocation of the lofty walled town at the tip of the Rabat plateau, in particular the sheltering of the civilian population, the administration of the forces deployed in Gozo, and the gathering and relaying of intelligence. Indeed, two public shelters were dug into the bedrock at the foot of the towering ramparts, while the main regional quarters of the Coastal Police, the King's Own Malta Regiment, and the Naval, Army and Air Force Institute (NAAFI) were all housed within its walls. St John's Cavalier was equally adapted as the main post of the Royal Air Force Observation Corps on Gozo.

A second and more momentous spree of rehabilitation works was triggered by the Gozo Civic Council during the 1960s. Some ruins were also cleared in the process, but it was only in 1981 that a holistic plan for the preservation and public enjoyment of the Ċittadella, as it became to be commonly referred to by then, was drafted. This paved the way for the setting up of additional museums and for a new wave of restoration works that gained notable momentum in the early 1990s. In addition, the successive planning and environment laws enacted during the past three decades augmented exponentially the protection measures of 1925. Practically all civil, military and religious buildings and underground features have since been scheduled as Grade 1 properties, while the entire hill has been declared an area of archaeological importance and of high landscape value. It also forms part of Victoria's urban conservation area, and is designated as a special area of conservation under the Natura 2000 EU-wide network. The Ċittadella earned a place on the tentative list for inscription on UNESCO's world heritage register in 1998.

NEW LEASE OF LIFE

The planning and implementation of two mammoth conservation and rehabilitation projects, part-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, during the past few years succeeded to crystallise the countless valorisation efforts enacted during the previous century and to transform this multi-faceted and multi-layered heritage resource into an authentic world-class attraction. ERDF 039 sought the restoration

of the medieval enceinte and early-modern gun-powder ramparts, whereas ERDF 246 focussed on the valorisation of the surviving urban fabric and of the ditch, the installation of an adequate backbone infrastructure, the facilitation of accessibility and the crafting of an engaging interpretation provision. Both projects also brought to light a host of notable archaeological remains attesting to the site's sustained occupation since late prehistory.

Besides reaffirming the Ċittadella's intrinsic significance, the resultant product is seen by many practitioners in the field as a textbook case in sustainable heritage regeneration. Its socio-economic potential, nonetheless, has much more in store. For Gozo and its 21st-century inhabitants, the Ċittadella constitutes a bulwark of identity and a prime avenue for the promotion of Calypso's Isle as a distinct destination. These complementing aspects, which are indispensable for the promotion of societal wellbeing, will come under the spotlight on Saturday 7 April 2018. A varied programme of activities, aimed at engaging the interest of diverse audiences, is being staged by the Ministry for Gozo with the support of various leading stakeholders as highlighted overleaf.



DAY SEMINAR

Saturday, 7 April - Ċittadella Arts Centre

Registration & Welcome Coffee

Opening

- 09.00 Introduction by Seminar Chairman
Ray Bondin, National Commission for UNESCO
- 09.10 Opening Address
Justyne Caruana, Minister for Gozo

Session 1 – A Multi-Layered Site

- 09.20 Recent archaeological discoveries and early history
Anthony Pace, Superintendence for Cultural Heritage
- 09.40 Iċ-Ċittadella to 1551
Stanley Fiorini, University of Malta
- 10.00 Redevelopment of defensive enclosure during early 17th century
Stephen Spiteri, University of Malta
- 10.20 From kingpin fortification to iconic monument
Godwin Vella, Heritage Malta

Coffee Break

Session 2 – A Heritage Resource of Note

- 11.10 A hub of faith and traditions for millennia
Joseph Bezzina, Gozo Cathedral Chapter
- 11.30 Natura 2000 management planning
Chris Cousin, Environment & Resources Authority
- 11.50 Visitors' perceptions and expectations
Stephen Cini, Ċittadella Management Team

Lunch Break

Session 3 – Valorisation and Democratisation

- 13.30 ERDF 039
Ivana Farrugia & Norbert Gatt, Restoration Directorate
- 13.50 ERDF 246
John Cremona, Ċittadella Management Team
- 14.10 Further valorisation and democratization
Joe Vella Gauci, Embassy to UNESCO
- 14.30 Discussion
- 15.00 Concluding Keynote Speech
Stefano De Caro, ICCROM

Participation is free of charge and the limited number of seats available will be assigned on first-come, first-served basis. For reservations and further information please call 2215 6497 or send an email on cittadellagozo@gov.mt

TEMPORARY EXHIBITION

7 April – 30 June

Ġittadella Visitors' Centre

Ġittadella in 2D provides a glimpse of the time-honoured story of the crown of Gozo through a representative selection of historic plans and views from various national collections. Being the kingpin fortification and the most imposing monument of the island, the Ġittadella featured prominently in all debates and proposals for the defence of the Island, and has caught the attention of most foreign and local artists who captured Gozo's beauty in their work. Indeed, the list of artistic representations and the plans related to the works, alterations and restorations carried out since the early Knights' stay, is appreciably remarkable. Some of the works featured are being displayed for the first time or have rarely been exhibited in Gozo.

Admission is free.

HISTORICAL RE-ENACTMENTS

Saturday, 7 April; 10.00 - 17.00

The configuration, location and size of the Ġittadella hill attracted sustained habitation and exploitation for defence purposes since late prehistory, while the extant buildings are but a shadow of the urban cluster that was to be found therein. The Ġittadella, or Castello as known until fairly recently, used to be a veritable hive of day-to-day activity. Being the main fortification and administrative centre for centuries, it featured prominently in the most momentous events that moulded Gozo's history through the ages. The re-enactors animating this day event will recreate the atmosphere that dominated the daily life of this flourishing community prior to the progressive depopulation and abandonment initiated during the mid-17th century. They will be highlighting also the major events that determined the fate of its inquilines and of the entire island since the early Knights' stay, and bringing back to life the most illustrious inhabitants that roamed its winding streets.

Admission to the Gozo Museum of Archaeology, the Gran Castello Historic House, the Gozo Nature Museum, the Old Prison, the Ġittadella Visitor Centre and the Grain Silos will be free of charge.

XALATA TA' KITBA

Saturday, 7 April; 15.00 - 17.00

A creative writing activity for children (aged 6 to 12) and their families. Facilitated by professional educators from the National Literacy Agency, this activity offers families a taste of the writing process and an excellent opportunity for parents and guardians to spend some quality time with their children in a suggestive yet relaxed setting. The skills acquired will prove to be of great help in the learning journey of the young participants and provide parents and guardians with practical tips of how to assist along the way.

Participation is free of charge and the limited number of places available will be assigned on a first-come, first-served basis. For bookings and further information please call 2598 3326 or send email on suzanne.balzan@ilearn.edu.mt

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