

Abstract

Transforming Valletta's built spaces

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Planned on Renaissance utopian concepts, the city of Valletta is an archetypal example of newly founded fortified-cities of the sixteenth-century. The city's orthogonal pattern, as conceptualised in 1566, reflected early concepts of space as understood by the Order of St. John and the Cortonese military engineer Francesco Laparelli. Initial plans were however re-thought during the city's plot allocation and building phase when several main edifices were relocated and peripheral areas were introduced. By the end of the sixteenth-century the convent-city was structured onto political centres of power and social confines, defining spatial distribution within Valletta for the subsequent centuries.

Subsequently, in the Baroque age changes to artistic trends, economic forces and society impacted the city's early urban fabric, re-characterising Valletta into a modern European city. By the mid-seventeenth-century, the urge to exhibit status and power as well as to meet demands of population growth, led to several alterations and re-buildings of churches, palaces, houses and commercial spaces. Valletta's streetscapes and buildings' internal spaces were re-developed introducing new concepts of space. By British times, the Baroque buildings were further transformed to introduce more houses and additional commercial spaces, most of which were re-designed on neo-classical trends. New ideas of urbanisation, introduced during the Victorian period, transformed Valletta's orthogonal plan by opening up new spaces and the widening of roads.

Understanding these transformations of space is central to Valletta's history. This study involves a multi-disciplinarian approach through different historical perspectives including archives, architecture and stereotomy, cartography and archaeological, presenting new insights into the development of Valletta as we know it today.