



National Museums in Malta

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Summary

In 1903, the British Governor of Malta appointed a committee with the purpose of establishing a National Museum in the capital. The first National Museum, called the Valletta Museum, was inaugurated on the 24th of May 1905. Malta gained independence from the British in 1964 and became a Republic in 1974. The urge to display the island's history, identity and its wealth of material cultural heritage was strongly felt and from the 1970s onwards several other Museums opened their doors to the public.

This paper goes through the history of National Museums in Malta, from the earliest known collections open to the public in the seventeenth century, up until today. Various personalities over the years contributed to the setting up of National Museums and these will be highlighted later on in this paper. Their enlightened curatorship contributed significantly towards the island's search for its identity. Different landmarks in Malta's historical timeline, especially the turbulent and confrontational political history that has marked Malta's colonial experience, have also been highlighted.

The suppression of all forms of civil government after 1811 had led to a gradual growth of two opposing political factions, involving a Nationalist and an Imperialist party. In the absence of a formal constitution, the political battle between the two factions was necessarily engaged on a largely cultural basis. The Maltese language, its religion, literature and its history were all hotly disputed in a partisan attempt to define the Islands culture according to a pro- Italian or to a pro-British political creed. Archaeology was no exception, finding itself caught up in the frustratingly irrelevant arguments that raged between Imperialists and Nationalists as to the real identity of the 'Maltese race'. (Cutajar, 1995: 70-71)

National Museums in Malta are a reflection of the island's long history, politics, culture, values and identity. For centuries Malta depended on the sea and trade and it has had many influences arriving from the surrounding continents, as one can see at Malta's Maritime Museum in Birgu. The National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta displays a wealth of artefacts originally located in the prehistoric temple sites of Malta that range from up to 7000 years ago. The successive epoch, being Malta's Medieval period, when Byzantine, Arab and Norman communities occupied the islands, however, is barely represented. The few artefacts on display from that period do not give a clear narrative and educational representation, reflecting the fact that the Catholic faith was and still is highly dominant in the lives of many Maltese. It can be argued that the most represented artefacts on display in Malta's National Museums date to the Baroque period, when Malta was under the Catholic Order of the Knights of St. John, from the sixteenth till the eighteenth centuries. Catholicism, as it is still visible on the streets and in every village and cultural calendar of the Maltese islands, is still highly valued.

The history of national museums in Malta goes on up to today, and so do the attempts at improving the current displays and narratives. The need for the setting up of new national

museums, showing off the more recent and contemporary identity of the islands, is also strongly felt, especially the setting up of a National Modern and Contemporary Art Museum. The capital city of Malta, Valletta, – a UNESCO World Heritage Site – will be the European Capital of Culture in 2018.

Today, three of Malta's national museums are located within the city of Valletta. These are the National Museum of Fine Arts, the National Museum of Archaeology and the National War Museum. The Palace Armoury, housing the National Collections of Arms, is located in the Grand Masters Palace, also in Valletta. The other national museums that will also be briefly discussed are the National Museum of Natural History, located in Mdina, and Malta's Maritime Museum in Birgu. It is hoped that, by 2018, further improvements will be done, reflecting a more contemporary approach in displaying Malta's unique identity.

Summary table, Malta

Name	Inaugurated	Initiated	Actor	Ownership	Type	Values	Temporal reach	Style Location
Palace Armoury	1860 1974 *	ca. 1604	19 th c. British Governors (original). Ministry for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Heritage Malta (present).	State	Armoury	Armoury of the Knights and the British in Malta.	16 th c. to 19 th c.	Grand Masters Palace (16 th c.) Baroque style, Valletta.
National Museum of Archaeology	1905 1925 1958 1974 *	18 th c.	19 th c. British Governors (original). Ministry for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Heritage Malta (present).	State	Archaeology	Archaeology in Malta	5200BC - 2500BC	Auberge de Provence, Mannerist and Baroque, Valletta.
National Museum of Fine Arts	1905 1925 1958 1974 *	18 th c.	19 th c. British Governors (original). Ministry for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Heritage Malta (present).	State	Art	History of Art in Malta	14 th c. to 20 th c.	Palace built by Knights of the Order of St John, rebuilt in Baroque style, Valletta.

⤴ Dates represent different years of inauguration

Introduction

The Maltese archipelago has an area of approximately 316 km², thus making it one of Europe's smallest countries. It is located in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, 96 km from the southernmost tip of Sicily and 290 km from Tunisia. Its natural, deep harbours and position on major shipping routes made it an attractive acquisition from the earliest of times. It has a highly dense amount of cultural heritage spanning some 7,000 years, which is rather disproportionate to the size of the islands, with a number of archaeological sites and temples that are unique in the world and classified as UNESCO World Heritage sites.

Through the study of several wills, inventories and traveller journals, art and archaeological collections are known to have existed on the Maltese islands, from as far back as the seventeenth century. During the rule of the Catholic, crusading, military Knights pertaining to the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, the Grand Master's Palace in Valletta is known to have had an art collection, a fine tapestry collection, as well as a collection of military weapons. It is also known from documentary sources that visitors were often allowed inside to admire them. The nobility and wealthy merchants are also known to have owned art collections in their palaces in Valletta and in Mdina.

In 1798, the French Napoleonic troops invaded Malta on their way to their Egyptian campaign, they expelled the Knights and after two years the British took over. In 1860 the Palace Armoury, inside the Grand Master's Palace in Valletta, was officially opened as Malta's first public Museum. It was only between 1903 and 1905 that the first official 'National Museum' was set up. Before that, the 'public museums' in Malta were the *Cabinet of Antiquities* at the Public Library in Valletta and the Palace Armoury.

As the years passed, the collections inside the National Museum grew, and there was need for a larger building and a re-organization of the Museum's administrative set-up. The collection was transferred to a bigger location; however, the bombing of Valletta during World War II heavily affected the museum. The curators of the time ended up playing a vital role in its preservation and safekeeping. After Malta gained independence in 1964 and especially around the year when it became a Republic in 1974, there were various initiatives to show off the island's identity. Up until the early 1970s, there was only one official National Museum in Malta that housed the Archaeology section on the ground floor and the Fine Arts section on the first floor. After Malta became a Republic, other National Museums were officially set up. One of the reasons for this could be that after Malta gained independence, economically it started depending heavily on tourism.

A chronological, historic context of the State's commitment and the commitment of important personalities to the setting up and management of Malta's national museums

Collecting during the Baroque period

From 1530 until 1798, a theocracy ruled over Malta. The Knights of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, ruling the islands at the time, hailed from noble families from all over Europe (Bosio, 1602). They contributed highly to the development of Malta's political stability through reliable

defence networks, a flourishing and prosperous economy and European contacts. All of this led to the creation of new urban lifestyles (Buhagiar, 2009). Their presence brought prosperity, the population increased and the island increased its communication with the rest of Europe. Trade with foreign countries accelerated and so did the economic prosperity of the Maltese islands (Mallia Milanes, 1994). However, it is only after the victorious battle of the Knights against the Muslim Ottomans in 1565, known as the Great Siege, and after the new capital city of Valletta was built, that one can get a hint of the first traces of collecting in Malta, some of which were also open to the public.

For their palaces, chapels and churches the Grand Masters and Knights commissioned works by artists such as Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1573-1510), who produced some of his masterpieces during his sojourn here in Malta, from July 1607 to October 1608 (Sciberras, 2009). The Grand Master's Palace in Valletta in time built up a collection of mainly religious paintings and portraits by different European artists which can still be seen inside the Grand Master's Palace today and inside the National Museum of Fine Arts in Valletta.

A collection of weapons and armoury was also set up in 1604 when Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt transferred the Sovereign Military Order of St John's arsenal to the Palace. It is important to note here that this collection of weapons and armoury, not just intended for use in battle but also highly important status symbols, demonstrated the Knights reputation of ferocity in battle. This collection was a showpiece conspicuously and grandly displayed to travellers and potential future Knights. Caravaggio painted Grand Master Wignacourt wearing a prestigious antique suit of armour from this collection. The Armoury is still housed in the Grand Master's Palace in Valletta and it is open to the public like it has been for many years, as will be discussed further on.

The Knights sailed around the world and took part in many expeditions of exploration and discovery, given impetus not only by their naval and military prowess, but also by the wish to spread their Catholic faith (Centeio ed., 1998). The Grand Masters were characterized by their stringent recognition of the spiritual authority of the Pope, a phenomenon that could also be felt in their administration of the island. They achieved the status of 'Most Eminent Highness' and they held the title of "Princes of the Holy Roman Empire." Their power reached its greatest level during the Baroque period and they highly promoted the Catholic faith. Their influence can somehow still be felt today and this is also reflected in some of Malta's national museums. Some of the buildings today housing national museums, such as the National Museum of Fine Arts, the National Museum of Archaeology and the National Museum of Natural History are in fact Palaces built by the Knights mainly in a Baroque style.

Giovanni Francesco Abela (1582 - 1655): his collection transferred to the National Library in Valletta and officially opened to the public.

The nobility and wealthy merchants are also known to have had collections inside their palaces mainly located in the new capital city of Valletta. They owned large quantities of artworks known from their inventories affixed to their wills. Some of these collections ended up being donated or bequeathed and are today also found in some of Malta's national museums.

One of the known important collections dating from the first half of the seventeenth century belonged to the Maltese antiquarian collector Fra Giovanni Francesco Abela (1582- 1655). He

was the Vice Chancellor of the Knights and he is often described as the 'first Maltese Historian' and the 'Father of Museology in Malta' (Cutajar, 1995). In 1647, Abela published his book entitled "Della descrizione di Malta isola nel Mare Siciliano," one of the first History books of the Maltese islands, which conceived the idea of forming a national museum of local antiquities. Due to Malta's size and particular context this person's vision, ideas and collections had a major effect on the history of national museums in Malta.

He kept his collection in his house, Villa Abela, on the promontory of Kortin, also known as "il Hotba tal Gisuiti", overlooking the inner part of the Grand Harbour in Marsa, a site which was also marked by another collector, Marquis Gio Antonio Barbaro, on a map accompanying a monograph (Caruana, 1898). He called his little museum *Museo di San Giacomo*.

Apparently Abela's little museum followed the pattern of the cabinets of curiosities, which were common in Italy and elsewhere and visitors were often admitted. His collection included memorabilia regarding Maltese history and archaeology. According to Thomas Bartolin, a traveller from Copenhagen who visited Abela's Museum in 1664, the artefacts were attractively exhibited in various parts of the building (Gambin, 2003: 9). In the garden around the house, one could see statues, inscribed tablets and marble fragments of ancient monuments. The museum itself, housed on the first floor, was reached through an arched doorway, which led into a central yard dominated by an obelisk. In it were displayed glass phials, decorated earthenware, sepulchral pottery, bones, medals and bronze statuettes, Etruscan and Greek pottery and Egyptian amulets, a marble statue of Hercules and a collection of Greek and Roman coins, among other artefacts (Bonnici Cali, 1961: 70-81).

According to Cutajar (1995), Abela's collection was trying to convey the message that 'the Maltese islands could boast of a past that was ancient, Christian and noble- witnessed by its archaeological remains. The political undertones of this intellectual agenda would not have passed unnoticed by Abela's seventeenth century audiences. In fact, under the conditions of 'benign absolutism' that characterized the Order's rule, it was critical for the Maltese notables to ensure the Grand Master's political support since he was their principal source of economic patronage and of social advancement. Given the chivalric and crusading foundations of the Order's constitution, it was therefore necessary for the Maltese nobility to downplay their blatant historical associations with the Semitic Maghreb and to emphasize their allegiance with Latin Europe. This explains Abela's prevalent interest in Malta's classical antiquities and its long-standing association with Christianity (Cutajar, 1995: 68). It can be argued that his attitude can maybe still be witnessed in some of Malta's national museums today. Malta, situated as it is between Europe and Africa, 96 km from the southernmost tip of Sicily and 290 km from Tunisia, offers an interesting case study in this regard, especially since the Maltese speak a Semitic language and the Knights of St. John were highly Catholic Europeans whose main aim was to fight off the Muslims. The Roman Inquisition in Malta from 1561 till 1798 also ensured that those residing on the islands remained faithful to the Catholic Faith. Many of those who went against the Catholic faith were interrogated and tortured.

Years after the death of Giovanni Francesco Abela, several personalities were also recorded 'downplaying Malta's associations with the Semitic Maghreb.' For example in 1921, after Malta was granted self-government, Sir Gerald Strickland (fourth Prime Minister of Malta between 1927 and 1930, and the owner and director of Progress Printing Company and 'The Times of

Malta' newspaper) began a paper which he read in the presence of His Excellency Governor Lord Plumer at the University of Malta, intent on showing that the Maltese, 'men of a kindred race', shared with the British a Phoenician origin:

The object of this paper is to prove that the Maltese are not the descendants of any Semitic or African race. Jules Verne is not alone in spreading the report that the Maltese are Arabs, it has done grave injury, and should be contradicted in the interest of emigrants from Malta to America and Australia, as well as those who remain at home. (Strickland, 1925: 3 and 16, cited in Vella and Gilkes, 2001: 353).

In the seventeenth century, Giovanni Francesco Abela had already wanted to make sure that the identity of the Maltese was 'secured' as being European and Catholic. Before his death in 1637, he bequeathed his collection to the Jesuit College, then the main supplier of higher education in Malta, attempting to provide a lasting curatorial foundation for his collection. One of the conditions of the deed made by Abela was that the collection was to be rendered accessible to all interested scholars. After the expulsion of the Jesuits under Grand Master Emmanuel Pinto de Fonseca, the collection passed into the hands of the State. Other important artefacts were added to the collection, however, some were permanently lost to the island such as the inscribed stone candelabrum, now in the Louvre Museum in Paris, that was to prove instrumental in deciphering the Punic script (Cutajar, 1995).

Around a hundred years after the death of Abela, what survived from his collection was transferred to a cabinet for the preservation of local antiquities in the newly built Public Library in Valletta, constructed during the magistracy of Grand Master De Rohan (1775-97). Other collectors also donated artefacts and, over time the little collection grew and that section in the library was referred to as the 'Cabinet of Antiquities'. When the Grand Tour of Europe became fashionable for the nobility to complete their education, Malta became an increasingly attractive place to visit and many travellers kept detailed diaries of what they experienced and saw. For example in 1797, Norwegian traveller Peder Pavels (1769- 1855) and the Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844) were shown around the National Library and its little museum in Valletta during their visit to Malta. They were impressed by 'the considerable collection of Greek and Roman coins from various periods, mostly well preserved, a fine collection of recent medals in gold and silver, several specimens of lava, a Hercules statue in marble, some curious pieces of pottery from Antiquity and the like' (Sorenson and Schiro eds., 1996: 59).

The brief French interlude in the late eighteenth century (1798-1800)

By the late eighteenth century, Malta had established itself as an important mercantile centre, and a strong commercial class lived around the Grand Harbour and sailed around the Mediterranean trading goods of all kinds. This wealthy class aspired for a share in the government and they welcomed the French Revolution that championed the rights of the middle class and harboured Rousseau's ideas of a contract between the ruler and the ruled. They hoped that the rights of man would establish equality while destroying the Order, the Grand Master and its council (Ciappara in Gambin ed., 2004).

In 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte (1769- 1821), on his way to the Egyptian campaign, stopped in Malta and the Knights of St. John capitulated without offering any resistance. However, the French soon became unpopular for looting and sacking the State's property and for looting many

of the local Catholic churches of their gold and silver artefacts. A ‘national’ rebellion occurred and in September 1798, the Maltese rioted against their new occupiers. Interestingly, it was in favour of the interests of the local Catholic Church that the Maltese rebelled; and clerics played a key role in organizing the uprising. During the command of General Vaubois (1748- 1839), appointed by Napoleon as *Commandant en chef des Isles de Malte et du Goze*, the French barricaded themselves in Valletta and kept a tight hold till they surrendered to the British in late summer 1800.

The Arrival of the British in the early nineteenth century, the interest in prehistoric remains and the little museum inside the National Library in Valletta

After assisting the Maltese to expel the French in 1800, the British found themselves sovereigns of the Islands. From 1814 onwards, Malta became an important part of the British Empire, a strategic stronghold in the region, a stepping stone for Britain's expansion to the East and a base for the British navy. Although the Maltese had willingly placed themselves under British rule, a portion of the Maltese resented the fact that the Maltese had not much say in the administration of their island home.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, there was also a big interest in Maltese prehistoric remains, and the foundations of Maltese archaeology were being laid at that time. T.G. Vance of the Royal Engineers first explored, at public expense, the UNESCO World Heritage prehistoric temple of *Ħaġar Qim* in 1839, during the Governorship of Sir Henry Bouveris. Within two short months, that officer had made a plan of the buildings and sent a stone altar, a decorated slab and seven stone statuettes to the little museum inside the National Library in Valletta, (Gilkes and Vella, 2001). The majority of the findings from these prehistoric sites were deposited inside the Museum in the National Library in Valletta alongside the collection of Giovanni Francesco Abela. Today they are housed at the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta.

Sir William Reid (1791–1858) and the palace armoury, opened for the public in 1860

During the early British colonisation there was an interest in presenting Malta’s cultural heritage to the public, however, there were also many treasures which were being despoiled. Many artifacts of national importance also left the islands and travelled across the Mediterranean to enrich many Museums abroad.

The Board of Ordinance, for example, was anxious to have the whole of the Palace Armoury of the Knights in Malta transferred to the Armoury in the Tower of London. Apart from being lavishly adorned with impressive arms and trophies, the Palace Armoury held enough arms to equip thousands of soldiers and it was originally housed in the magnificent hall at the rear of the Grand Masters Palace in Valletta. At the time, it resembled an antiquarian collection, given that it had also served as a depository for suits of armour of deceased Knights. Most of these suits were finely crafted and adorned with intricate decorative detail.

The Governor of Malta of the time, Sir Thomas Maithland (1813-1824) realised the political consequences of what would happen if the whole armoury was sent, so he set about dissuading the Colonial Office from such an undertaking as ‘it could not fail to wound in the highest degree the feelings and prejudices of the Maltese’ (National Archives, Rabat, Despatch from Buthurst to

Maitland, 1822). In spite of all the protests, several important pieces were sent to London. Their removal appears to have raised considerable 'feelings of regret' among the Maltese and in 1835 some were sent back but not all of them (Spiteri, 2003: 202). In his introduction to Arthur Richard Dufty's 'European Armour in the Tower of London', Sir William Reid (1791-1858), wrote how 'quantities of Italian munitions and armour of the late 16th and early 17th century brought from Malta in 1826 and 1846 made the then Tower Armouries an important centre for the study of this type of armour' (Spiteri, 2003: 201).

Sir William Reid was appointed British Governor of Malta between 1851- 1858 and he had various initiatives to improve the situation of cultural heritage of the islands. A year before his arrival on Malta, he was chairman of the executive committee of the famous international exhibition celebrating technological and artistic accomplishments known as the 'Great Exhibition', housed in the Crystal Palace in London, which became a symbol of the Victorian age and was perhaps Prince Albert's greatest achievement.

After his arrival on Malta, Sir William Reid organised the collection in the inner two rooms of the National Library, thus drawing a line between the library and the museum. He also initiated the construction of a new monumental entrance to the Armoury, removed the British weapons and started thinking along the lines of establishing the Armoury as a sort of public museum. The Hall became a venue for cultural and social events. For example, in 1857 it housed Malta's first ever collective art exhibition then promoted by the Malta Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (Espinosa Rodriguez, 2008: 131). Succeeding Reid was Sir Gaspar Le Marchant (Governor of Malta from 1858- 1864), who was also interested in redecorating the palace and the armoury and, by 1860 the restoration was completed and the gallery was opened to the public on regular basis. With its opening to the public, the Palace Armoury became one of the first official public museums in Malta, along with the little museum inside the National Library in Valletta. By 1895, the itinerary came to include also the Tapestry Room in the Palace, except when this was closed due to the sittings of the Council of Government.

The late nineteenth century and Dr. Cesare Vassallo (1800- 1882)

In 1865, a 'Society of Archaeology, History and Natural Sciences of Malta was set up to preserve monuments and to encourage a taste for local Archaeology and the Natural Sciences' (National Library of Malta, MS 588). In 1871, the curator of the little museum inside the library, who was also the Chief librarian, Dr. Cesare Vassallo (1800- 1882), published a book to help visitors better appreciate the exhibits (Vassallo, 1871). The collection at the time consisted of clay and glass vases of different shapes and dimensions, of sarcophagi, statues, and inscriptions. There was also on exhibit, a numismatic collection of about 5,500 coins, gathered in the islands of Malta, and belonging to the Phoenician, the Greek, the Byzantine, the Gothic, the Norman, the Arabic, the Angevins and the Aragonese periods, and to the Roman Consular and Imperial as well as that of the Order of St. John.

Dr. Antonio Annetto Caruana (1830- 1905)

Succeeding Dr. Vassallo was Dr. Antonio Annetto Caruana, best known for his activities as an archaeologist. He was the librarian and curator of the little museum at the National Library in Valletta from 1880 till 1896, and from 1887- 1896 he was appointed Director of Education. He published numerous books and articles including his '*Report on the Phoenician and Roman Antiquities in the Maltese Islands*' (Caruana, 1882).

He was in charge of 'Archaeological Explorations and Preservation of Local Antiquities' between 1880 and 1896 (Caruana Galizia, 1997). Together with a number of surveyors from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Works, Caruana kept record of the antiquities that were constantly being uncovered on the islands. At the request of the Secretary of State for the Colonies, in 1881 he was asked to report upon the state of the Phoenician and Roman antiquities of the islands and to put forward suggestions for their better preservation.

Caruana was not pleased by the derelict state of many of the island's ancient remains and he complained about the sale or transfer of antiques to foreigners, the damage caused by visitors as well as weather damage. He also criticized the greed of collectors who kept for themselves valuable artefacts found on their property, rather than presenting them to the museum inside the Public Library. He also laid down some principles in the form of a guide for the formation of a National Museum, and felt that 'the default of a law protecting local Antiquities as a common historical inheritance is still deeply felt' (Caruana, 1882: 4). Although many of his ideas have since been challenged, Caruana is considered to be a pioneer in the field of Heritage Management in the Maltese islands.

Despite these developments, the construction of a Maltese national identity, throughout the nineteenth century was minimal, contrasting with the case of other European countries (Diaz-Andreu and Champion, 1996). According to Gilkes and Vella (2001), 'the plea brought in front of the members of the Council of Government by a radical Italophile, Zaccarìa Roncali, in 1884, to 'behold our historic temples not to be found anywhere else in Europe' in order to buttress political claims, is as exceptional as it is exciting' (Gilkes and Vella, 2001:355). The 'working' or 'poorer' classes, who constituted about three-quarters of the population in 1877 remained unaware of the significance of Malta's unique monuments and cultural heritage. Sant Cassia (1993) argued that Malta's megalithic remains 'never became a symbol of nationhood' because in the 19th century Christianity 'acted as a barrier to a fuller identification with, and understanding of the pre-Christian period' (Sant Cassia, 1993: 358).

John Henry Cooke, the editor of 'Mediterranean Naturalist' (1891-93), published a letter in the *Malta Times and United Service Gazette* of 24 July 1891, entitled 'Wanted - A Museum for Malta.' Mr. Cooke wrote that

It is a significant fact that while most of the principal museums of Europe possess some relic or other bearing on the former history of these islands... in Malta such treasures are not only regarded with indifference, but when found, they are absolutely neglected and are allowed to be either dispersed into the collections of private individuals, and foreign museums, or else they are relegated to some unsavory room... It is a standing reproach against the people of Malta that they should possess so little national pride as to allow such a state of things to exist. Malta requires a Museum. Why has she not one?.. Such an institution is not a luxury; it is a necessity.. the idea that a Museum is simply a store house of curiosities has long been discarded.

The early twentieth century: the insistence on self-government and the birth year of the first official national museum in 1903

In the first half of the twentieth century, Maltese nationalism took on a double form: there was a political nationalism, in the sense of the fight for political rights against the foreign ruler, with an insistence on self-government, and a cultural nationalism inspired by the native intelligentsia's

traditional openness towards Italian cultural traditions or *Italianità*, with its intractable resistance to British cultural assimilation (Wettinger, 1988).

The 'pressure' for some kind of cultural institution was increasing. In 1901, the Duke and Duchess of York inaugurated an exhibition of Maltese antiquities in the *Xara* Palace in Valletta, premises of the Malta Society of Arts Manufactures and Commerce. The exhibition was a great success and the Governor of Malta, Sir Charles Mansfield Clarke, appointed a committee with the purpose of establishing a Museum in Valletta, entrusted with the care of the antiquities of the Maltese Islands (Gambin, 2003). Sir E. Merewether, the Lt. Governor, chaired the committee while the secretary was Dr. Themistocles Zammit (1864-1935) who was also nominated Curator of the proposed museum (Government Notice No. 113' in The Malta Government Gazette No. 4599, 12/6/1903). The appointment of this committee constituted the birth of the Museums Department, who were mainly archaeologically oriented. A Museums Annual Report, which included the main achievements and donations received by the museum and national developments in the heritage sector, also started being published.

1903 was the birth year of the Valletta Museum - the first official National Museum in Malta. Until that time, the only spaces resembling public museums in Malta was the little museum consisting of two rooms inside the National Library in Valletta referred to as the 'Cabinet of Antiquity' and the Palace Armoury. Objects from the little Museum inside the National Library along with other items were transferred to Palazzo Xara to become the basis of the new National Museum as Dr. Antonio Annetto Caruana had always wished (Museum Annual Report 1903-1904 in Supplement to the Malta Government Gazette No. 4747, 25/8/1904).

Dr. Themistocles Zammit (1864-1935), a medical doctor by profession, was the first curator of the National Museum. In November 1903 the Museum Committee of Management had also asked Fr. Manuel P. Magri (1851- 1906), a foremost scholar of Malta's antiquities, to form part of the management (Pace, 2004). He was also asked to excavate and report on the underground remains of Hal Saflieni Hypogeum. The Museum Annual Report of 1906 indicates that Fr Magri's work was completed and the site of Hal Saflieni Hypogeum was surveyed up to the areas that had by then been acquired by the Government. Fr. Magri passed away in 1907 after he was called away to Sfax in Tunisia on missionary duties and his work was continued by Dr. Themistocles Zammit. In January 1908, the cleared chambers were opened to the public. The prehistoric site of the Hypogeum also had big potential as a tourist attraction. It was an important scientific discovery that was bound to attract international attention.

Artifacts found during these excavations were also sent to enrich the new Museum. The predominance of Punic and Roman artifacts in the Valletta Museum were superseded by an inflow of prehistoric remains derived from such excavations. There were many donations entering the collection of the Valletta Museum and new acquisitions consisted also of pharmacy jars, prints, drawings, maps, coins and books. (A.N.M. Minutes of meetings for the Management of the Museum 1903- 1910). The Museum was officially opened to the public in 1905, attracting in its first year 3,805 visitors. Its collections were mainly of Archaeological and historical interest but they also contained the embryo of a small art gallery, and visitors were increasing every year.

In 1910 legislation was finally enacted by an Ordinance of 1910, officially referred to as 'The Protection of Antiquities Ordinance', signed by Governor Sir Leslie Rundle (1909- 15). This law made 'provision for the protection and preservation of monuments and other objects of local

antiquarian or archaeological importance'. It included movable as well as immovable objects and it provided the right of pre-emption and expropriation by the Government, and regulated all exportation and excavations, which were made subject to permission (Ordinance No. IV, Supplement to the Malta Government Gazette, 17 June 1910, 1-5).

The First World War and the aftermath, including the 'Sette Giugno' riots of 1919, sparked by the unsatisfactory nature of economic and political life in Malta

Between 1914-18, during World War I, Malta was not directly involved in the fighting but became known as the "Nurse of the Mediterranean." After World War I, however, the cost of living increased dramatically, imports were limited, and as food became scarce prices rose. Wages in Malta were not keeping up. There was a mood of discontent prevailing on the island due to various factors, including the political situation and unemployment. Many of the Maltese were not happy, they were becoming highly patriotic and they wanted self government. Groups and unions were forming and riots started occurring.

In February 25, 1919 the first meeting of a National Assembly was convened in Valletta under the presidency of Dr. Filippo Scerberras to obtain better constitutional concessions. It approved a resolution which reserved for Malta all the rights given to other nations by the Versailles Peace Conference, which would have meant independence from the British Empire.

On Saturday 7th June 1919, the National Assembly was to meet again. The first spark of unrest started when a crowd in Valletta saw the Maltese flag defaced with the Union Jack flying above the shop called '*A la Ville de Londres*'. The crowd forced itself inside and removed the flag. This incident sparked an uprising. The crowd then proceeded in front of the National Library, shouting for the Union Jack to be taken away. Individuals removed the Union Jack flags from buildings, threw them into the street, and burned them.

Following this, British troops fired into the crowd killing four Maltese, which angered the Maltese even more. The riots reflected the unsatisfactory nature of economic and political life in Malta. The new Governor, Lord Plumer, recommended liberal concessions to the Maltese. The House of Commons of the United Kingdom stated that Malta was to have "control of purely local affairs", with the Colonial Secretary sending a detailed description of the proposed constitution to the National Assembly. All this paved the way to the first self governing constitution in 1921.

Around this time there was also the rise of Fascism in Italy, symbolically consolidated with Benito Mussolini's '*Marcia su Roma*' in November 1922. Italy considered Malta as a '*Terra Irredenta*', a land that historically and culturally belonged to her. The Maltese pro-Italians looked at Italy's culture and religion, with the Pope based in Rome, as a source of Maltese identity.

The Museums Department and the transfer of the museum to the Auberge D'Italie in 1922

In 1922, around the time when all of the above was happening, reforms were carried out to transfer the museum from Palazzo Xara to the grander and more spacious Auberge d'Italie in Merchants Street, Valletta. The Museum's collections had gradually grown over the years and they became more heterogeneous, thus the need for a larger building and a reorganization of the Museum's administrative department was a matter of urgency. The Museums Department was thus created.

From 1922 till 1935, Dr. Themistocles Zammit was elected as the Director of the Museums Department (Museum Annual Report, 1922-23). Dr. Zammit retained the direct responsibility for the Archaeological and Historical sections but was flanked by three other curators: Vincenzo Bonello (1891-1969) in charge of the Arts section, Giuseppe Despott (1878- 1936) in charge of the Natural History section and Dr. Lewis Mizzi (1847- 1935) in charge of the Mineralogical section.

The 1920's and 1930's: Malta participating in the Grand British Empire exhibition, the Antiquities Protection Act and the Maltese language becoming one of the official languages

In 1924, Malta participated in the Grand British Empire Exhibition held at Wembley. A preliminary exhibition was organized at the Auberge D'Italie in Valletta, the location of the new museum. The Malta Pavillion, had the appearance of a walled fortress and inside it had three halls - one for the island's prehistory, another for the knights period and one for contemporary industry, trade and art. According to the 'Times of London' 'Malta was able to convey a lasting impression...' (Bonello G, 2001: 215-219).

A year later in 1925, Malta saw the Antiquities Protection Act, and the museum was re-opened to the public during that year. The Act further enabled the curator of the museum to enhance the national collection through the right of pre-emption and the possibility for private individuals to present works of art in part payment of export duty (Malta Government Gazette Supplement XXX, 27/7/1925). In 1933, Maltese and English become dual official languages and in 1934, the first official grammar for the Maltese Language was published. The legitimation of Maltese as an official language was due to the struggle for cultural and political supremacy between Italian and English, the latter being the upcoming language of the middle mercantile and administrative classes during British rule. Published.

The Second World War

During World War II, the fight for the control of the strategically important island of Malta pitted the air forces and navies of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany against the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy. Italy was looking for expansion in the Mediterranean and Africa; regions dominated by the British and the French. On 10 June 1940, fascist Italian leader Benito Mussolini declared war on the United Kingdom and France, and Malta became a strategic and logistically vital base, which could influence the outcome of the North African Campaign. Italy and Germany resolved to bomb and starve Malta into submission by attacking its ports, towns and cities. Valletta was badly destroyed by bombardment. Museums, monuments and sites were badly damaged, but the city managed to withstand the war with many of its treasures.

All sites which had been open to the public had to be closed, with the exception of a few sites, which were being used as air raid shelters and for storage. In 1939, many works of art were transferred to the Royal Malta Library and eventually to a rock shelter in Mellieha. After this measure proved unsatisfactory, due to unsuitable climatic conditions, everything was again transferred to Verdala Palace in Rabat and then later to the Inquisitors Palace at Għirgenti. On Italy's declaration of war in the 1940's, the remaining collections were then transferred to the basement of the museum where some were eventually damaged by blasts. Restoration was carried out at a temporary atelier in the Upper Halls of the Roman House in Rabat (Museum Annual

Report, 1949/49). During the course of the blitz, the Auberge D'Italie which housed Malta's National Museum received two direct hits. Works of art undergoing restoration or awaiting their transfer to a safer place were damaged. The war left the Museums Department in shambles, its organization broken and its collection dispersed or damaged.

Post War years

After the Second World War, the most urgent priority was to restore what had been damaged. In 1944 a committee chaired by Charles Zammit, the son of Dr. Themistocles Zammit, was appointed to survey and report on the condition of over 2,000 historic monuments. In 1948, the Palace Armoury was officially handed over from the Public Works Department to the Museums Department. From 1951 to 1971, the Curator of the Fine Arts section was Dr. John Cauchi who resuscitated his section from the cinders of war and made sure that the restoration laboratory continued its good work with the works of art damaged during the war.

When the Museums Department started finding its feet again, the premises of the Valletta Museum - the Auberge D'Italie was taken by the Superior Courts of Justice in 1954. The Valletta Museum was then moved for a short period outside of the capital to Casa Leone in St. Venera and soon after was moved again to the capital, to the Auberge de Provence in Republic Street, in Valletta. Originally, the palace was built for the Provencal Knights of the Order of St. John in 1571, within an area including other fine historical palaces dating from the times of the knights. The ground floor was occupied, as it still is, by the Archaeological section, while the Fine Arts section occupied the decorated halls of the 'piano nobile' on the second floor. On 11th January 1958, it was officially re- inaugurated by Ms Agatha Barbara, then Minister of Education.

Capt. Charles G. Zammit, the son of Dr. Themistocles Zammit, was the director of the museum at the time. The curator of the Archaeology section from 1958 till 1963 was the British archaeologist, Cambridge University Professor and author Dr. David Trump, who said that 'in the face of many difficulties the museum has regained what it had lost and more.'

Malta's Independence gained in 1964

In 1964, Malta was finally granted independence. Many of the Maltese however, were scared and were not sure how they could cope on their own. In an article entitled 'Malta: The Most Reluctant Nation,' published on Friday October 02, 1964 in 'TIME Magazine, the author wrote:

...last week, when Malta finally became a sovereign state, much of the islands' 330,000 populace viewed the prospect of independence with anxiety and even anger. When Britain's Prince Philip arrived for the ceremonies, his motorcade was stoned, and at the Independence day parade, mounted police moved in to break up a riot. When the Union Jack was hauled down from the Valletta parade-ground flagpole, vehement boos were mixed with the crowd's cheers...

Most Maltese feared independence since the British military bases supplied one-third of all income, and employed one-sixth of the labour force. They feared that independence could only hasten the process of decay. Nationalist Prime Minister George Borg Olivier, however, was "taking the path of Malta's history: loudly promoting the glories of its wide beaches, its ornate cathedrals, mosques and fortresses, and its 4,000-year-old ruins, ... looking forward to yet another invasion. This one by tourists."

The Maltese economy was becoming increasingly geared to the tourist industry, and National Museums were an added option to the sun and sea-seeking tourists. In 1964, the Museums Department also hosted two experts from UNESCO, 'to investigate the part which Museums and monuments could play to the tourist industry in Malta' (Museum Annual Report, 1964).

The 1970s onwards: Malta becomes a Republic and several national museums officially opened for the public

On 13th December 1974, the Constitution was amended and Malta became a Republic having Sir Anthony Mamo as its first President. In the same year, 1974, the National Museum housed at the Auberge de Provence in Valletta was also split in two. The Archaeology section remained there and was officially then named 'The National Museum of Archaeology', while the Fine Arts section was transferred to another location in Valletta. From the 1970s onwards, several other national museums were also officially opened, including the National Museum of Natural History at Palazzo Vilhena in Mdina and the National War Museum in Fort St. Elmo in Valletta.

Twenty-first century: National policy for the management of cultural heritage

In April 2000, a violent act of vandalism on the megalithic temple site of Mnajdra on Malta left the island and the wider community shocked and angered. This was not the first attack, but was the latest and most extreme of a series of incidents of extreme vandalism during the 1990s. The vandalism was condemned by local and international communities and widely publicised but the perpetrators have not been identified. This incident served to highlight some potentially serious shortcomings in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention (WHC) on a local level, with particular reference to its intention to protect sites and landscapes of 'outstanding universal value' (UNESCO 1972).

The shock of this attack triggered an overwhelming local response. Marches through Valletta and much public outcry culminated in the establishment of the Cultural Heritage Act (Malta) in 2002, which came into force on the 1st of January of 2003. It reorganised the management of the heritage on Malta through the creation of two distinct bodies with responsibility for different heritage issues (Renwick, 2005).

This intended to move Maltese heritage management on with a new vision, including:

- Legislative reforms moving away from antiquated Acts and conventional institutions
- Creation of new institutions to respond to the challenges of Malta's heritage sector
- Reform of outdated, inefficient and complex operational procedures
- Investment in heritage and the exploration of alternative sources to be able to create a sustainable framework of initiatives that address the market directly and yield economic power
- Recognizing heritage as one of the main factors of social and economic development
- Encouraging private sector involvement in the new framework

(Caruana, 2004)

In 2003, the Museums Department, which was at the time responsible for the National Museums in Malta, was divided into the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, Heritage Malta and the Malta Centre for Restoration.

The superintendence of cultural heritage

The Superintendence of Cultural Heritage – is the Government heritage regulator established by the Cultural Heritage Act. The national functions of the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage are set out throughout the Cultural Heritage Act. This regulator is responsible for exercising surveillance and implementing special powers of the state in the regulation of cultural heritage in the Maltese islands. These special powers comprise the establishment of a national inventory, the protection of movable objects of cultural heritage value, the regulation of movement of cultural objects, as well as the regulation of the protection of building heritage.

The Superintendence is obliged to consider all major and minor projects that involve cultural assets and their environs. In such deliberations, the Superintendence may sanction or refuse development proposals, or it can recommend changes to proposed project design. The decisions of the Superintendence are transmitted to the Malta Environment and Planning Authority that is the agency that issues building and development permits.

In addition, the Superintendence also asserts the special powers conferred upon it by the Cultural Heritage Act. The Superintendence carries out surveillance of on-going works by imposing special monitors that report directly to the Superintendent of Cultural Heritage. These monitors ensure that development proceeds according to permits and, independently of permits; they immediately report any discoveries or infringements to the Superintendent of Cultural Heritage.

HERITAGE MALTA as the national agency of the Government of Malta responsible for the national museums in Malta

Today, Heritage Malta is the national agency entrusted with the management of national museums and heritage sites in Malta and Gozo. From March 2005, the mission of Heritage Malta was augmented with the incorporation of Malta's conservation centre, thus also becoming the National Agency for Conservation. It manages over 30 sites in Malta and Gozo, and it manages events such as lectures and exhibitions and also encourages the collaboration of projects with other different entities. It is also currently participating in a number of EU-funded national and cooperation projects. One of Heritage Malta's main initial goals is to enhance the visitor's experience through improved accessibility and interpretation. It is committed to provide physical and intellectual access to a wider audience in all its sites and museums. It also has a specific educational section with special educational programmes targeting children of different age groups as part of organised school visits. These educational programmes are based on the educational curriculum and address specific areas of study in an edutainment way. <http://www.heritagemalta.org>.

Case studies in chronological order

The Armoury Collection

The Armoury inside the Grand Masters Palace in Valletta was officially opened to the public on a regular basis in 1860. It was one of the first official public museums, along with the little museum inside the National Library in Valletta. In the nineteenth century, the British focused on the Order of St. John's military role to emphasize Malta as a military base. In 1894, a government

notice was published laying down rules for licensed guides, who were not to exceed fifty in number. They were to be furnished with a ribbon band, to be worn on the cap bearing the words “Guide No...”, the licences being issued only to men of good character, who could speak and read English or Italian. The entrance charge was fixed depending on the length of the visit (Spiteri, 2003: 210).

In 1975, the Armoury was moved to the ground floor of the Grand Masters Palace, originally the stables and where its present location still is, so as to make way for the House of Representatives. Although only a fraction of its original splendour, the Armoury still contains abundant material of Italian, German, French and Spanish origin from principal arms production centres. Also on display are the personal armours of the nobility and examples of Turkish armour in the Islamic and Ottoman section.

The National Museum of Archaeology

The National Archaeology collection was first officially exhibited in a museum in Palazzo Xara in Valletta in 1905, around the collection of Giovanni Francesco Abela (1582 – 1655) which was transferred from the National Library. The 'Valletta Museum' as it was called, was the first national museum in Malta and Dr. Themistocles Zammit was one of the personalities that directed its creation.

Dr. Themistocles Zammit

The aim of Dr Themistocles Zammit was to create an educational institution that would illustrate a factual and scientifically correct history of the Maltese islands (Cutajar, 1995). He was a medical doctor by profession, however, for over thirty years he was involved in the history of Malta's national museums and in the excavation of various archaeological sites. From 1903 till 1921, he was the first curator of the first official national museum and from 1922 until 1935; he was the director of the Museums Department.

His scientific approach was evident in the way he organized the museum's display. He organized the collection systematically, dividing it according to their site of provenance. Through his methods of research and archaeological excavations, there was recognition for the first time of the existence of a Neolithic and a Bronze Age culture in Malta. Up till then, Gian Francesco Abela had ascribed, in the seventeenth century, the island's megalithic remains to giants and to the Phoenicians by A.A Caruana in the nineteenth century. This development was given great prominence in the new museum, which came to possess a growing collection of prehistoric artefacts, which included ceramic pots, limestone and terracotta figurative artefacts and a range of tools in obsidian, flint and bone (Cutajar, 1995).

Zammit was one of the key persons to promote Maltese archaeology in the early twentieth century. He was responsible for the excavations of several UNESCO World Heritage sites in Malta; the Hypogeum, the Temples of Hal Tarxien, of Hagar Qim and Mnajdra as well as other sites such as St. Paul's Catacombs in Rabat. By 1920, the prehistoric display came to occupy the centre-piece of the entire set up of the museum. The predominance of the Punic and Roman artefacts, with its emphasis on statues, inscriptions and coinage was being replaced by the large amount of pre-historic artefacts from Zammit's excavations.

The discovery of these prehistoric complexes did much to further Malta's national identity, and also marked a transition in the way Malta looked at its own history and cultural heritage,

solidly confirming the existence of a thriving ancient culture on the island. Also, the general interest aroused by the finds engendered a public concern for the protection of Malta's historical treasures, including a need for management of the sites, the promulgation of laws and other measures to protect and preserve monuments. At the same time, Sir Themistocles' thorough method of excavating the site paved the way for a new scientific approach to archaeology in Malta.

In 1922, the archaeological collection was transferred to the Auberge d'Italie in Merchants Street, Valletta. During the bombing of the Second World War, the Auberge was heavily bombed thus the collection was eventually transferred to the ground floor of the Auberge De Provence in Republic Street in Valletta. Ms Agatha Barbara, then Minister of Education, officially launched it in January 1958, while its first director was Captain Charles G Zammit, the son of Sir Themistocles Zammit.

The collection at that time still included the Fine Arts collection, however, as the collections continued to grow it was necessary to separate the collections and house them into different locations. The Fine Arts collection was transferred to the Admiralty House in South Street, Valletta and it was inaugurated as the National Museum of Fine Arts in 1974. The National Museum at the Auberge de Provence was then renamed as the National Museum of Archaeology.

The National Museum of Archaeology today

The Museum's display was closed for refurbishment in 1996, and reopened in 1998. The present display exhibits a range of prehistoric artefacts dating back to Malta's Neolithic period, from around 5200 BC up to around 2500 BC, excavated from the various UNESCO World Heritage Temples and sites in Malta and Gozo. There are various decorative items, stone and bone artefacts with representations of animals and human figures, numerous ceramic vessels and the earliest tools of flint and obsidian used by prehistoric people on the islands. Highlights include the 'Sleeping Lady' from the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum, the 'Venus of Malta' from Haġar Qim temple and the large altars from the Tarxien Temples. Work is currently underway in the Upper Floor Halls which will exhibit the Bronze Age, Phoenician, Punic, Roman and Byzantine period's permanent displays.

The National Museum of Fine Arts

From 1905 until 1974, the National Fine Arts Collection was exhibited under the same roof as the National Archaeological Collection. It was initially exhibited in the 'Valletta Museum' located at the Xara Palace in Valletta. The collection was not as big as the Archaeological collection, but in time it grew.

A few of the artworks were purchased but the greater part was bequeathed. For example in 1915, Mrs. Zammit Clapp bequeathed several works of art including around 64 oil paintings, 48 framed engravings and 13 watercolours (Museum Annual Report, 1917). She also left a sum of money for the provision of the necessary space for the permanent display of her collection. In the Scheme for the Development of the Museum Department, addressed to the Lieutenant Governor and dated 19th October 1918, Dr Temi Zammit proposed that a third floor in the museum be built in order to house this collection. He wrote in 1918 "The space thus provided

would be large enough to accommodate other gifts and acquisitions and will, in time develop into an Art Museum which is a great desideratum in the island' (Vella, 1997).

Vincenzo Bonello (1891-1969): the First Curator of the Fine Arts Section

During the inter war period, between 1923 and 1937, Vincenzo Bonello served as curator of the Arts Section at the Valletta Museum with the Museums Department, and he made important contributions towards a greater awareness of the Fine Arts. The National Museum up until that time had a majority of archaeological works on display. However, after the transfer of the museum to its new location at the Auberge D'Italie in Valletta in 1922, works of art held in public buildings and ministries such as Auberges of the Knights, chapels and hospitals were eventually brought together. For example, many of the paintings by Italian Baroque artist Mattia Preti (1613-1699), hanging in the National Museum of Fine Arts today were brought together from various public buildings. The collection was also enlarged by acquisitions from local collectors, and the local and international market. For example, two original drawings by Mattia Preti representing a 'Study for a figure of a hero of the Order' and 'St. John the Baptist Beheaded' were purchased from Italy in 1933 (Register of Acquisitions of the National Museum (1927- 1934). Bonello was entrusted with the responsibility of building up a national collection of works of art which would represent the history of the country and support a national identity. In the history of the National Museum of Fine Arts, Vincenzo Bonello was responsible for the greatest proportion of paintings purchased.

He made various important acquisitions. He acquired approximately 200 paintings, 'bozzetti', gouaches and watercolours for the museum, most of which were Baroque artworks, dating to the time of the Order of St. John. In 1929, he acquired artworks such as the Baroque paintings 'Judith and Holofernes' by French painter Valentin de Boulogne (1591-1632) and four paintings by Dutch painter Matthias Stom (1600-after 1650), currently on display at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Valletta (Bonello V. "New Accessions to the Fine Arts Section" in Bulletin of the Museum, 1929).

The majority of the Baroque works he acquired were portraits of members of the Order from local collections. Many works were attributed to seventeenth or eighteenth century Italian artists, and only a few works were by British artists (Vella, 1997). Dating to the nineteenth century, what he purchased were views of Malta, by Maltese and foreign artists. He also purchased paintings by Maltese artists such as Vincenzo Hyzler, Pietro Paolo Caruana, Raffaele Caruana and Giuseppe Cali.

However, it was with the Italian seventeenth century artworks that he was in love with most. In the 'Bulletin of the Museum' dating to 1929, he wrote 'what has impressed every artistic achievement in Malta is undoubtedly seventeenth century Italian Art. It is a well-known fact that, if the vast exuberant field of the imposing '*seicento*' were to be explored, Malta would emerge as an important milestone. The presence and long protracted stay of Mattia Preti on the island, the central figure of the Italian *seicento* painting, fully accounts for this decided character of art in Malta. In forming the new picture gallery, this fact was purposely kept in mind and pictures of this period, that are now no longer doomed to the prejudiced contempt of connoisseurs, were eagerly sought after' (Bonello, 1929). Bonello's effort in building a seventeenth century art collection can still be seen today at the National Museum of Fine Arts, also reflecting the fact

that the Knights of St. John, along with the nobility and merchants during the seventeenth century in Malta had built up collections of art. Seventeenth century Italian painter Mattia Preti is still today the most represented artist in the National Museum of Fine Arts.

Bonello established relationships with Italian scholars such as Roberto Longhi, who helped the museum in terms of attributions and acquisitions. In 1928, Roberto Longhi, for example, also presented to the museum a small painting attributed to Alessandro Magnasco representing a 'Penitent Friar', as a sign of his good relationship with Malta.

Bonello made several visits to Italy in order to help him with setting up the Fine Arts section within the museum, and in order to gain more knowledge on the attribution of works and restoration. His pro-Italian attitude, reflecting the political environment of the time, can be seen in his acquisitions and also in his writings. Because of his Italian sympathies and his close association with the Partito Nazionale before the War, Vincenzo Bonello was dismissed from service by the British authorities in February 1937. He was one of the internees who was arrested in 1940 and deported to an internment camp in Uganda in 1942 during World War II. (Vella, 1997).

The curator of the Fine Arts section Antonio Sciortino (1879-1947)

Before Italy's entry in World War II, Maltese sculptor Antonio Sciortino, was a director in the British Academy in Rome (Italy). In 1936, the Italian government closed down the British Academy and Sciortino left Italy and returned to Malta. He became Curator of the Fine Arts collection in Malta's National Museum in 1937, succeeding Vincenzo Bonello and it is said that he managed to save much of the museum's treasures (Vella, 2000).

Shortly before his death in 1947, Antonio Sciortino bequeathed a considerable number of his art works, including several masterpieces, to the people of Malta, many of which are today housed at the National Museum of Fine Arts.

The transfer of the Fine Arts collection to De Sousa Palace in 1974

The year that Malta became a Republic in 1974, it was decided that the Fine Arts section was to be transferred to a larger location and it was thus opened officially as the National Museum of Fine Arts. The present location is a Baroque palace planned around a central courtyard and dominated by its monumental Rococo staircase. The Palace was originally designed by the Maltese architect Andrea Belli in 1761 for the wealthy dignitary Raimondo del Sousa. It was later occupied by Napoleonic forces in 1798, and between 1821 and 1961 it served as the official residence of the Commander in Chief of the British Fleet in the Mediterranean. Most of the collection on display in the 1970s is still on display today and it presents paintings from the late medieval period to the contemporary, as well as silverware, furniture and statuary in marble, bronze and wood.

The National Museum of Fine Arts today

The Fine Arts Collection is currently housed on two floors. On the first floor, in the 'piano nobile', there are artworks from the late Medieval to the High Baroque with a focus on seventeenth century Baroque paintings by artists such as Italian painter Guido Reni and by the Caravaggisti, such as works by Dutch painter Matthias Stom and by French painter Jean Valentin de Boulogne. A corpus of works by Italian Baroque painter Mattia Preti and a number of

artworks originally belonging to the Order of the Knights of St John, some of which were originally hanging in the Grand Masters Palace in Valletta, are also on display. On the ground floor, the artworks on display range from a collection of eighteenth century portraits by French painter Antoine de Favray (1706–1792) as well as various landscapes and seascapes of Malta mainly dating to the nineteenth century. Works by renowned Maltese sculptor Antonio Sciortino; the ex-curator of the museum, mentioned above, are also on display in the Modern section. The Museum also has a contemporary hall that hosts temporary exhibitions.

The National Museum of Natural History

The National Museum of Natural History was opened on 22nd June 1973 at Palazzo Vilhena, within the old capital city of Mdina. In Medieval times, the original building served as the seat of the Università, or local Government and later during the eighteenth century, it hosted the Magisterial Palace of Justice. Today it is the National repository of biological specimens, and it has a collection of minerals, insects, birds and habitats and marine ecosystems. Both life and earth sciences are represented in the museum, and it has a particular focus on the Maltese Islands. Prior to the present museum, it is known that the Museums Department had a Natural History Section in the 1930s. Various collections were destroyed during the Second World War, and the Natural History Section was not considered until 1963, when it was decided to set up the current museum. The stored collections started being brought out after many years, and the curator at the time, Harry Micallef who was curator between 1966-1970, had, as his main responsibility, the setting up of the new museum in Vilhena Palace in Mdina.

The National War Museum

The National War Museum in Fort St. Elmo in Valletta was opened in 1975, located in the building known as the old Drill Hall of Lower Fort St Elmo in Valletta. Its location was originally built in the mid 16th century, by the military engineer Pietro Pardo, during the rule of the Knights of the Order of St. John. Further modifications and developments in its structure took place in the 17th and 18th centuries and also later in the 19th century by the British, who improved the fort for modern military needs, and used it during the Second World War.

The original idea, before the opening of the museum, was to hold an exhibition called *The Gladiator Faith' and War Relics Exhibition* by a group of dedicated enthusiasts. Following its success, it was developed into a permanent display. The National War Museum was inaugurated in 1975 and it was completely refurbished in 2009. The collection on display focuses on the two World Wars from 1914-18 and from 1939-45. It recounts the story of the events that led to the two wars, their development and major actions, and also their consequences, locally and abroad. Special reference is made to the role of Malta in the wars and the contribution of the Maltese population to the war effort, especially during the difficult conditions of 1942.

Malta Maritime Museum

In 1992, the Malta Maritime Museum opened in Birgu, displaying the Maritime history of Malta. In 1998, after the extensive refurbishing, the National Museum of Archaeology's presentation was upgraded. The display showcases were climate controlled and in line with current conservation standards. The museum is still undergoing work and structural upgrading, and intensive conservation and curatorial activity are currently preparing the way for the opening of

new permanent exhibition halls on the Upper Floor to include the Bronze Age as well as the Phoenician, Punic and Roman periods. There are also a number of temporary exhibitions at times displayed in the Grand Salon on the Upper Floor.

Conclusion

“Every person in Malta as well as every person present in Malta shall have the duty of protecting the cultural heritage as well as the right to benefit from this cultural heritage through learning and enjoyment” (Article 4, section (2), Cultural Heritage Act, 3rd May 2002).

The draft of the new National Cultural Policy was launched in 2010. Its vision is to ‘affirm through concrete action, government’s political responsibility as the principal national contributor and investor in culture, and to transform and consolidate cultural and creative activity as the most dynamic facet of Malta’s socio-economic life in the 21st century.’ The policy focuses on developing cultural needs through improved cultural governance structures and international cultural cooperation. ‘Culture is a living phenomenon and it must be addressed with the mindset of a transitory journey, adhering to the changing needs felt both in the national arena and in the international field.’ According to the draft of the new cultural policy the government is committed to cultivating a cultural policy framed within the context of an evolving, diverse, tangible and intangible heritage and a developing national identity. Culture must be supported, fostered and nurtured, not for the privileged few, but for the ‘dynamic heritage of the whole people’.(<http://maltaculturalpolicy.wordpress.com/>)

According to the draft, ‘National Museums are not just symbols of identity but living biographical diaries of who we are, reflecting and supporting the development of every individual’s creative potential.’ Most national museums in the world seem to select and highlight what their nation values most in their displays, while leaving out other aspects. For example, there are only a few artefacts on display dating from 870 to the arrival of the Knights in Malta, in 1530. The Arab period (870 - 1127), the Norman rule (1127 - 1194), the period under the kingdom of Sicily (1194 - 1427) and the period under the kingdom of Aragon (1427 - 1530) are still not sufficiently represented in Malta’s National Museums. The Roman Villa in Rabat has some Muslim tombs and the Archaeology Museum in Rabat, Gozo currently has around three Muslim artefacts exhibited, such as the 12th century A.D. tombstone of the Muslim girl named Majmuna. Her tomb was embellished with a marble slab carrying an inscription neatly engraved in Kufic Arabic script and apart from giving a few biographical details about the girl, the inscription also quotes the Quran.

Malta still lacks a National Museum of Medieval Art and a National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art. The fact that Malta’s Catholic religion has had so much power and has been highly influential in the lives of many Maltese throughout the years seems to have effected what displays were, and still are, given importance to in Malta’s national museums. Most Maltese still identify commitment to religious values as their top priority in life. For example most of the population attends weekly mass regularly. Many Maltese students attend church schools and after school they have to attend ‘doctrine’ to qualify for the sacrament of confirmation. There is one church or chapel for every square kilometre, most of which are still in use. The Catholic Church and its ethos and ceremonies remain today the closest to a national symbol. However, Malta’s

Medieval past as well as the Modern and Contemporary form part of Malta's national identity too.

The National Museum of Fine Arts in Valletta, for example, displays a majority of Italian artworks, most of which are religious. The Modern section consists of only one small room with artworks on display. The choice of display in the National Museum of Fine Arts could maybe be related to the nineteenth and early twentieth century pro-Italian attitude, at a time when politically, some people opposed the protestant British Government. The Fine Arts section was officially set up at that time and its curator, active between the two world wars, was pro- Italian thus this might explain the majority of religious Italian artworks still hanging on the walls of the museum. In 2007, the National Museum of Fine Arts underwent a refurbishment project. Four halls on the upper level displaying Baroque works were completed on the occasion of the Caravaggio's 400th anniversary in order to host the *Caravaggisti* exhibition. Recently, the Renaissance section of the museum was also refurbished. Work included the installation of a new picture-hanging system and a new electrical and illumination system, plastering and paintworks. The Museum is still currently undergoing a refurbishment programme and it is focusing on the conservation of the actual building.

In the past few years National Museums have been participating in various innovative projects. Since 2008 the National Museum of Fine Arts, for example, was also a project partner in an EU funded FP7 innovative IT services project entitled SMARTMUSEUM, under the Cultural Knowledge Exchange Platform. The overall objective was to develop innovative services enhancing on-site access to digital cultural heritage to improve the educational experiences people receive from Museums (www.smartmuseum.eu). Heritage Malta in the past few years also organized several events to attract wider audiences in a fun and educational manner, such as 'Art and Wine' events, book launches, storytelling, games and treasure hunts for children, exhibitions, and various public lectures. Among the other various events organized by Heritage Malta in the past few years were the: Silent Warriors Guided Tours, Caravaggio Guided Tours, Caravaggio Creative Writing Workshops, Young Knights learning programme, Young Knights Creative Writing Workshops, Ghar Dalam Learning Programme, Tarxien Temples Learning Programme, Inquisitor's Palace Learning Programme and the Natural History Detective Treasure Hunts.

According to the draft of the new Cultural Policy, the Ministry of Culture, in collaboration with the MCCA, Heritage Malta and the University of Malta, shall also identify a site and shall implement the necessary work to open a Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art. The possibility of developing this space will hopefully maximise on the benefits for the formation of new artists. It is hoped that this will happen soon. Dar L'Emigrant is also currently gathering information for the setting up of a Migration Museum and it enjoys the full support of the two Conventions for 'Maltese Living Abroad' held in 2000 and in 2010. It set up a commission composed of individuals interested in the history of Maltese migration to one or more Mediterranean or European countries, namely Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Gibraltar, Greece, Libya, Sicily, Spain, Tunisia and Turkey. The task of these individuals will be to help gather information and material of a visual nature, for instance literary or cultural items, photos, newspapers, passports, integration documents and reports concerning Maltese people who migrated to the countries concerned, while also keeping in touch with Council representatives based in the same

countries. It would be interesting if they also include a section dedicated to people who migrated to Malta along the years.

To conclude, what would be the way forward for National Museums in Malta? Maybe further accessibility and the involvement of the public, by introducing, for example, interactive and fun displays? It is maybe important to ask questions like:

- Are Museums providing a complete picture of the island's past in an educational and inviting way?
- What does the public want to see and experience
- How can all the artworks in the National Collection become more accessible?
- If they are not, due to for example lack of physical space, are they accessible online?
- What does the public have to say about works of art and about their own identity?

Development is synonymous with participation. This leads in turn to the empowerment of people. When individuals are consulted and actively involved on matters affecting society, both the sense of responsibility and that of ownership are increased. Malta will be celebrating the European Capital of Culture in 2018. The Draft National Cultural Policy 2010 recognizes that 'the function of museums goes beyond that of a tourist attraction; they are essentially a gateway to past ways of life of Malta's people, which should be physically and intellectually accessible to today's public. Museums should diminish the borders of time and space and offer opportunities to individuals to explore each exhibit in a fascinating manner. It is therefore understood that the word 'museums' should not be solely synonymous with depositories of the past. This policy aims at encouraging the exploration of different, stimulating forms of how museums can become more appealing to the public, and is committed to invest further to have contemporary forms of exhibiting which encourage an active involvement of individuals through technology, innovation and imagination.'

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