

**THE FRENCH LEGACY
IN THE CITY OF
VALLETTA
1566 – 1798**

**HIGHER NATIONAL DIPLOMA
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ABSTRACT

This Dissertation sets out to discover if the French legacy as bequeathed to Valletta during the rule of the Order of St John, is imparted to French tourists during their tours in and around the city. Six seasoned French-speaking tourist guides were consulted in individual semi-structured interviews to determine which treasures in Valletta are linked to a French heritage at all, and if tours are offered to French guests with their legacy as a central theme. Various sources of literature combined with a qualitative research study were implemented to discover if such a legacy even exists. The main findings indicated that French legacy-themed tours of Valletta are not offered at all. Furthermore, findings had also proven that the tours in Valletta are typically off-the-peg to appeal to just about anybody. Conclusively and in light of the fact that France is an important source tourism market for the island of Malta, a French-themed tour is propounded as an alternative to the usual tours intended for the masses.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 PREAMBLE

No era has left such an imprint on Malta as that during which the Order of Saint John reigned for nearly two and a half centuries. Beginning in the 16th and ending in the late 18th centuries, the central Mediterranean island of Malta had been transformed into a Christian military stronghold boasting a highly developed centre of arts and culture to match no other European nation. The impressive network of coastal fortifications, military structures, stately lofty auberges, grandiose palaces with their splendid gardens, and elaborately adorned churches with interiors of striking splendour are just a few examples of the cultural heritage bequeathed by the Order to be enjoyed even today.

A deep imprint was left on a number of towns and cities throughout the Maltese islands, but particularly compelling is the outstanding capital city of Valletta – a city replete and abundantly rich with intriguing historical baroque buildings to include a cathedral hosting a world-famous artistic masterpiece. It is especially these structures encompassed by impenetrable fortifications that bear witness to the passion invested by this chivalric Catholic order to transform barren rock into a city of valour and might, now declared a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The construction of this new capital city was commissioned and initiated by none other than the heroic and highly respected French Grand Master of the Order, Jean de Valette, after whom the city was named. He was the

first of twelve French Grand Masters who ruled on Malta, and one of numerous French knights who commissioned artworks and buildings of architectural importance to infuse Valletta with a rich French legacy, listing the city as one of the most historically bounteous sites in Europe.

In fact, from the city's very inception and throughout the remainder of the Order's presence on the islands, Valletta continuously experienced a strong predominance of French influence, despite the Order body being of a cosmopolitan character. Indeed, the majority of the Knights were French, and the imprint they left on the city is indelible. This French contribution to the great urbanistic development and cultural transformation that Valletta experienced throughout the time of the Knights is not readily recognised and is very often overlooked.

The scope of this research was to find out how, and if at all, the French legacy in Valletta is conveyed to French guests during their tours. To accomplish this objective, semi-structured interviews have been conducted with six French-speaking tourist guides. The aims of the interviews were to identify which sites in Valletta are directly or indirectly linked to French culture and heritage, to find out if tours of this nature are offered at all, and most importantly, to determine if French tourists would even be interested in finding out more about their heritage in Valletta.

To further reinforce the objective, it was necessary to consult historical documents and publications related to the theme in question.

Conclusively, it was discovered that local tour operators do not offer itineraries of this nature, but provide instead “off-the-shelf” tours that are typically intended for the masses. It was also noted that the number of French tourists visiting the island is on the rise, and that many of them do generally exhibit an appreciation for culture and art.

Tapping into this potential, material for an itinerary was devised, to cater to those French tourists wishing to experience an in-depth cultural immersion into this yet undiscovered wealth of French legacy in Valletta.

The following chapter includes the literature review used in the research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Interestingly enough, even though a number of historians have long recognised and valued the wealth that notable French members of the Order contributed to enrich the heritage of their beloved city, there is no one single source dedicated entirely to the French Legacy in Valletta. Drawing upon the findings of these historians, among other reliable sources, this chapter will draw attention to various sources of literature used during this research which were instrumental in shedding some light on the rich heritage left behind by the French knights of St. John during their reign in Valletta.

From the inception of the Order in the 12th Century and up until their expulsion from Malta in 1798, forty-one of seventy Grand Masters were French. Throughout this period, the majority of knights remained consistently French, which ultimately “helped maintain a French cultural dominance” (Buhagiar 2009, pp. 131). Furthermore, it was also noted that the French knights were refined gentlemen who embraced style and sophistication. Their deep appreciation and erudite patronage of culture and the arts “helped create the right ambiance for the proliferation of French taste” (Buhagiar 2009, pp. 132) throughout Valletta, resulting in grandiose works of architecture and exquisite pieces of art, executed by the best of European craftsmen.

Considering this rich abundance of French legacy in Valletta and for the purpose of my study, I shall examine only a small selection of the treasures that are historically linked to French notable personages.

2.2 ARCHITECTURAL TREASURES

Auberge de France

The French legacy in Valletta began as early as 1570 when the three French Langues of the Order began purchasing land within the walls of Valletta, upon which to build their auberges and respective residences (Denaro, 1958). Among the first of these was the first Auberge de France which remains to this day in its near-original state. Denaro (1958, pp. 147) maintained:

Today, of this old Auberge, we can still see the supports for the standards of the Langue and the Religion, four windows and one rusticated pilaster and except for the door, the façade is nearly intact.

In fact, this building is the only structure in all of Valletta featuring standard supports as described by Denaro.

To accommodate the increasing number of knights belonging to this Langue, a second auberge was built very close to its predecessor. It is said

that even this building featured a long row of flagpole supports on its façade. Indeed, it may safely be assumed that the French knights were likely involved in the design of the appearance of their two auberges (Mahoney, 1988). Sadly, this auberge was completely destroyed in bombing raids during World War II.

Auberge de Provence

Located on the main thoroughfare of Valletta, this auberge remains to this day a delightful testimony to the strong French influence in architecture where “French expertise started replacing Italian influence in the course of the second half of the seventeenth century” (Buhagiar 2009, pp. 139). Built in the 16th century by the Maltese architect Gerolomo Cassar, it was later extensively renovated and enlarged by the French architect Mery Blondel des Croisette to conform to the more decorative French style of architecture (Mahoney, 1988). Mahoney (1988, pp. 141) noted:

Certainly the existing façade was not designed by Cassar. All over it there is the unmistakable imprint of a French architect: like Cassar he was a Mannerist, unlike Cassar he had seen and been influenced by Pierre Lescot’s façade in the Louvre.

The interior of this auberge is also heralded for a myriad of fascinating features, among which is the Grand Salon on the first floor (Mahoney,

1988). This hall is one of the noblest rooms in Malta. The timbered ceiling is coffered and tastefully decorated, while the walls are richly painted with graceful motifs. Sire (1994, pp. 75) maintained that:

the dining hall, a double cube of 45 feet, was later painted with elegant wall panels in the style of chateaux of the age of Louis XIII.

Houses of French Knights

By 1610, the meticulously planned capital city had been completed (Hughes, 1993). Residential palaces for high-status knights who enjoyed successful careers in the Convent and dignitaries of the Order were strategically placed throughout Valletta. Denaro (1958, pp. 155) wrote about a number of houses in Valletta “which were at some time owned or occupied by Knights of the three French Langues of the Order of St John”.

Denaro (1958) maintained that while several of these palaces, once dwellings to multiple French high-ranking Knights who made Valletta their home, were extensively damaged or completely razed in the bombings of WW2, a few of these intriguing splendid palaces have fortunately withstood the ravages of time and stand today as relics of the past. Such is the case with the two fine houses, known as Maison Demandolx in South Street.

Opposite these two houses, another historic palace with strong French connections is Casa Miari, which was incidentally home for the Museum of Fine Arts until recently. The site was originally purchased “as early as 1569, by Chev. Fra Jean de Soubiran dit Arafat of the Langue of Provence, who had taken part in the Siege of Malta of 1565” (Denaro 1958, pp. 150). This palace was subsequently leased to various French knights among whom was the renowned French naval commander Bali Pierre André Suffren de Saint-Tropez, Captain General of the Galleys of the Order in 1780 until his death (Denaro, 1958). As a side note, it would be important to highlight that Louis Charles, Vicomte de Beaujolais lodged in this house for two weeks in 1808 before succumbing to a grave illness. The Vicomte, who was a Knight of Malta,

was buried in St John’s Conventual Church, however, before expiring he directed that his heart was to be embalmed and interred in the Church of Our Lady of Liesse in Valletta (Denaro 1958, pp. 153).

Another of these nobly-scaled houses in the heart of the city with French connections is *l’Hostel de Verdelin*. This “structure of noble proportions” (Degiorgio, 2010) belonged to Fra Jean-Jacques de Verdelin, a knight of the Langue of Provence who held a variety of high-ranking posts with the Order. This house was built in the mid-17th century and unlike the austere facades of earlier buildings in Valletta, its façade was decorated in accordance with the new Baroque trend. In Degiorgio’s words (2010),

The richly ornate façade of the palace, in its manifest Baroque exuberance, is considered to be amongst the first architectural works of its kind on the island.

A house of particular interest but “of scarce architectural appeal, [which] appears to have undergone drastic changes” (Degiorgio, 2010), is situated in Mikiel Anton Vassalli Street in Valletta. Prior to the modifications as we see it now, it was in all probability “a house which was pompously called a palace” (Claire, 1963, in Degiorgio, 2010) and was purchased by the highly acclaimed Commander Fra Deodat-Guy-Sylvain-Tancrede Gratet de Dolomieu. Various historians, geologists and mineralogists have written about this impressive individual, after whom the well-known mountain range in Northern Italy were titled, namely the Dolomites which “around 1876, were given his name ad memoriam” (Degiorgio, 2010).

Kunz (1919) stated that Dolomieu’s membership in the knighthood began already at the age of two and was later admitted into the Langue of Auvergne. He was most distinguished for his intensive research on geology, mineralogy and the origin of mountain ranges. Among his extensive scientific excursions throughout Europe, Dolomieu visited the Alps of the Tyrol (today part of NE Italy), where he discovered a particularly interesting type of rock, differing greatly than most other types of rocks he had yet found. A year after publishing these observations in the French *Journal de Physique* in 1791, this particular type of rock was named

Dolomite after its discoverer (Kunz, 1919). Dolomieu continued to establish himself as a distinguished geologist and made a name for himself in the scientific world.

In later years, as Kunz (1919) pointed out, his name became tainted after a series of hostile confrontations with the Order. The consequences of these disputes would plague him for the rest of his life, and would later play a decisive role in the fall of Malta into Napoleon's eagerly waiting hands (Testa, 1997).

Church of Saint Barbara

This small church located diagonally across the street from the Auberge de Provence, was erected in 1585 during the reign of the French Grand Master Hughes de Loubenx Verdalle to service the spiritual needs of this Langue (Galea, 2011). The pillar of this Langue also held the post of Grand Commander, who oversaw the treasury, armoury and war ordnance for the entire Order. It went without saying that the church should be dedicated to St Barbara, patron saint of armourers, military engineers, gunsmiths, and anyone else who worked with cannon and explosives.

The Church of Saint Barbara is adorned by a number of treasures associated directly with French heritage. Of particular importance is the fine

altarpiece painted by the French knight-painter of the Langue of Provence, Antoine Favray (Degiorgio & Fiorentino, 2004).

The National Library

The last building to be erected by the Order of St John shortly before their expulsion from Malta is the National Library, one of Valletta's finest and regal structures. Interestingly this state monument has very strong French connections.

The plans for its construction were executed by the penultimate French Grand Master Emanuel de Rohan-Polduc, to replace the old library building known as the *Forfantone* and to accommodate the Order's collection of books dating as early as the Middle Ages (Abela, 1999). The history of this collection dates back to 1555 when a former French Grand Master, Fra Claude de la Sengle, issued a decree which stated that all the books belonging to deceased knights of the Order were to be placed in the Common Treasury of the Order. In 1763, it was, yet again, another French member of the Order, Fra Louis Guérin de Tencin, Bailiff Grand Cross of the Order who donated the most important core of the collection – about 9700 volumes, to the library of the Order and expressed his wish that the library would become national property. He has, since then, been known as the founder of the Library (Abela, 1999).

Today, the National Library houses not only the thousands of volumes and other documents for which it was intended, but quite a number of annals and correspondence between the Grand Masters and the Kings of France, testifying to the powerful link between France and Malta (Blondy, 2004).

2.3 ARTISTIC TREASURES

So far, this review has focused on a small selection of literature highlighting the architectural patrimony with French connections in Valletta. However, when it comes to artistic contributions testifying to the French legacy during the reign of the Knights in Malta, it must be noted that their bestowal to the Maltese artistic scene is considerably less conspicuous. Nevertheless, Valletta can still boast of several artistic pieces with French connections, which are among the most valuable works of art that the Maltese islands possess.

Several of these timeless objects of art are described in Buhagiar's essay 'Malta's Art Historical Contacts with France 1530 – 1798'. It is important to note, that these were mostly commissioned by notables within the Order, which were then carried out by French artists in Malta or crafted in France to be placed in Malta.

Two such items include a gilt silver chalice made in Paris and donated to the church of St Anthony the Abbot in Birgu by the Knight Fra Pierre de

Cluys and a set of two brass lecterns donated to the Birgu Conventual Church by Francois, Duke of Lorraine, Grand Prior of France and brother of the Duke of Guise when he visited Malta in 1557 (Buhagiar 2009, pp. 134-135). The chalice can be seen in the Museum of Fine Arts in Valletta, and the lecterns in St John's Co-Cathedral, both of which are very much worth seeing.

Particularly grandiose is the very unique set of the famous 18th century Gobelins tapestries known as the Tentures des Indes, which grace the walls of the Piano Nobile's Council Chamber in the Grand Master's Palace. Woven at the celebrated and prestigious Gobelins Royal Factory in Paris, this superb 10-piece tapestry collection was donated as a gift to the Order in 1710 by Grand Master Perellos (Shaw, 1997). This outstanding set of tapestry hangings is especially unique and of immeasurable worth because "It is the only complete set that has survived and is in a splendid state of preservation" (Buhagiar 2009, pp. 135-136).

Of the two highly acclaimed French artists who were commissioned to paint various masterpieces for the Order, Antoine Favray deserves special attention. During the second half of the 18th century, Antoine Favray became the favoured painter and dominated the art scene in Malta. His extensive collection of work included paintings with religious themes and portraits of high dignitaries within the Order and Maltese aristocracy (Degiorgio & Fiorentino, 2004).

The genre of his paintings frequently reflected the customs and attitudes of the Maltese high class society during the 18th century which was strongly influenced by the trends of the times – it was highly contemporary to adopt everything French, especially the fashionable, cultural, administrative, juridical and commercial customs (Degiorgio & Fiorentino, 2004).

The historical wealth bequeathed to us by the French knights during their tenure in Valletta would deserve an in-depth and expansive exploration. However, the above review offers a perfect basis for an intriguing tour designed to delight the French guests interested in learning more about their compatriots.

The following chapter includes a description of the methodology used to conduct this research study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 PURPOSE OF STUDY

The main objective of this study is to understand if and how the French legacy in Valletta is conveyed to French visitors taking part in guided tours of the city. As part of this assessment, it was then necessary to discover which features of the city would be of special interest to French tourists. This involved identifying and researching those important highlights in Valletta that would present a direct link to the French heritage bequeathed to the city, specifically during the period of the Knights. Ultimately, these findings should then be compiled to design a tour which could be offered to those French tourists wishing to explore the rich French heritage bestowed upon Valletta by their compatriots during the reign of the Order of St John.

The general impression is that service providers who have been assigned the task of guiding French visitors around the city of Valletta, do not specifically cater to go beyond the typical, usual commentary. Additionally, the hypothesis is that tour operators tend to present standard itineraries that offer little if anything to those who might be specifically interested in finding out more about French heritage in Valletta.

3.2 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

For the purpose of this study, a qualitative approach was adopted. To attain the desired results, it was first necessary to explore the experiences of those tourist guides who are directly involved with French-speaking

tourists. Thus obtaining a clear understanding of this input from "the interviewee's experiential world in a more detailed way" (Flick 1998, pp. 99) should be helpful in determining further steps in the research process. Patton (1990) noted that qualitative data consists of detailed descriptions of events, situations, interactions, and observed behaviours, as well as direct quotes from individuals about their beliefs, experiences, attitudes and thoughts. Hence, taking the nature of the processes under study into consideration, which would be rather difficult to quantify, it was decided on a qualitative approach to gather data to better obtain a clear understanding of the participants' subjective relational perceptions and practices.

3.3 THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Once this approach had been adopted, consulting French-speaking tourist guides in face-to-face semi-structured interviews were utilized in this study to obtain information that would not just yield answers, but which would possibly provide lengthy and descriptive answers. Probing questions were often used to encourage additional and relevant information.

The interview approach provided an opportunity to meet the respondents personally, as well as to have respondents who most willingly consented to take part in the research. During the interviews, participants were asked to answer eight main questions. The introductory questions were intended to collate personal data with regard to their experience in tourism guiding. Further questions were open-ended, for which an outline was applied.

These focused on how the guides perceive the interests of their guests. Others focused on their thoughts, experiences, knowledge, ideas and preferences with regard to the tours provided to French tourists in particular. Final spontaneous questions were generated upon the responses of the participants.

Ultimately, the aim during each interview was to elicit descriptions of each participant's itinerary when guiding French tourists, and, how they manage to delight their French guests by sharing with them anecdotes and other necessary information in connection to the French during the time of the knights.

3.4 THE PARTICIPANTS

In all, six tourist guides were interviewed. In order to recruit the right participants, the tutor was asked to suggest names of guides who would be willing to cooperate. In view of the fact that not all of the suggested names replied to the emails, it was then necessary to consult the online list of tourist guides, several of whom were subsequently contacted. The qualitative nature of the study necessitated the selection of respondents who could provide useful data for addressing the research objectives. To purposefully select a small homogenous group that would provide fruitful responses to the interview questions, the following selection criteria were established. Maltese tourist-guides were sought who:

- a) have French as one of their languages;
- b) work and conduct tours with French tourists, with Valletta being one of their main localities;
- c) have at heart the history of our capital city;
- d) work freelance;
- e) would find no objection to sit for the interview and would be willing to participate in this study.

Those tourist guides who responded favourably to the emails and who were willing to participate, constituted the sample for this study.

3.5 SECONDARY DATA

Having compiled the collected data from the interviews, it was fundamental to reinforce the results from various sources of historical literature, to be supplemented by online references.

When using these secondary data sources, it was imperative to select specific information which was relative only to the topic of the dissertation. All of the data recorded from the interviews as well as that gathered through literary sources should ultimately be used in the planning and execution of the affiliated tour design.

In the following chapter, findings from the accumulated data during each phase of the research and a discussion of the results, will be presented.

ANALYSIS

AND

DISCUSSION

OF

THE RESULTS

4.1 PREAMBLE

The qualitative approach throughout the entire developmental steps of this study proved to be exactly the appropriate method to attain the expected objectives. However, setting out to substantiate these aims proved to be more difficult a matter than originally anticipated. As previously mentioned, the main goal was to discover if a French legacy as such is imparted to French tourists visiting Valletta, and if so, how is this heritage addressed and presented. To effectuate the approach, a series of interviews with French-speaking tourist guides were conducted, which were then corroborated by secondary sources.

For all intents and purposes, the data gathered resulting out of the six interviews was largely inconclusive in accordance with the above named goal. That being said, the narratives did however often reflect the ongoing current experiences of those who were interviewed, which was indeed conclusive in its own right.

While compiling the findings obtained from the interviews, it was rather disappointing to discover that the French heritage as such, is not a topic that is addressed in the itineraries provided by tour operators offering tours in Valletta. Quite a number of architectural landmarks and artistic valuables established in Valletta at the bequest of the French members of the Order of St John, are barely given any mention during tours in and around the city with French groups.

In light of this, it can be concluded that the interviews did not provide sufficient results to provide a basis upon which an in-depth analysis could be built. They did however provide vital information which was used to create the concept for the tour, so not all was in vain.

4.2 FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

The following assessments directly resulting out of the interviews, served to reinforce the increasing impression that the French heritage is not explicitly thematised in tours in Valletta:

- Specifically promoting the French heritage of Valletta was not in any way evident. Tours are not offered to include the French heritage in itineraries.
- Itineraries are not flexible to adapt to the specific interests of French-speaking groups / individuals.
- Tour operators cater to the masses, thus remaining inflexible to the groups' specific interests.
- Time is always a limiting factor prohibiting the guides from deviating from the itinerary.
- In nearly all cases, "The Knights" is used almost exclusively as a generic term when describing feats of architecture, accomplishments and other matters of interest. Specific mentioning of "the French Knights" or of specific French notable personages is seldom. A clear example here is that Dolomieu is never mentioned, despite the

impact he had on the scientific world and the role he played in the demise of the Order's reign in Malta (Testa, 1997).

On a positive note, the following findings did in fact serve to provide key information for the design of the tour itself:

- French tourists do take interest in Francophone highlights.
- Some French tourists ask specific questions about their own heritage when visiting certain sites – e.g. tombs in St. John's Co Cathedral.
- One guide in particular uses anecdotes and local stories during narration at certain sites – e.g. Church of St. Barbara, popularity of this saint in the Provence region of France.
- Generally speaking, nearly all of the French-speaking tourists very much enjoy the city of Valletta, and are intrigued by the fact that the city was founded by a Frenchman.

4.3 SECONDARY SOURCES

Contrary to the results gleaned out of the interviews, far more conclusive data was to be found in a number of publications and online sources. As is often the case, the more that was researched, the more intriguing the information became, and obviously the more exciting the results were as they came to light. It became increasingly clear that the richness of the French heritage in Valletta is indeed extensive. Notwithstanding how the tour should be designed and due to the vastness of the topic, it was

necessary to narrow the information to be used in the “trail” of French heritage to a feasible minimum through Valletta.

To bolster these findings and their relevance implemented in the final results, a small selection of examples will be highlighted.

One of these examples would be to follow up on the intriguing character of Dolomieu. It was only upon reading Victor Denaro’s article covering the houses of the French knights in Valletta, that this remarkable knight’s story emerged. Consequential research revealed not only the prominent role that Dolomieu played in his scientific endeavours, which later resulted in the naming of a mountain range after him, but also that this man of great acclaim happened to be a member of the Order of St. John, and had actually spent some years living in Valletta. To discover that this renowned personality is not given his due place in the history of Valletta is quite bewildering.

Perhaps a less conspicuous example, but no less important is when visiting the Church of St. Barbara. Worthy of acknowledgment is that St. Barbara is one of the few remaining direct historical links to France in Valletta, and the popular traditions that surround St. Barbara in the region of Provence even today. Quite unfortunate however, is that this link between St. Barbara in the Provence and in Valletta is given very little status in narratives during tours for French visitors. Interesting to mention, would be the anecdote

connected with this church describing a dowry that was collected to “endow a poor girl who was chosen by ballot by the Bombardiers” (Depasquale, pp. 55). This was donated to her during the Feast of St. Barbara in the presence of the Grand Master and the Pilier of the langue of Provence, who was also the Grand Commander and administered the finances as well as the arsenal and the artillery.

A final observation which had emerged while researching secondary sources, is that several references had been made to the French monarchy in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries which highlight the amicable relationship that the Order enjoyed with the monarchy in France (Blondy, 2004). Proof of this is found in various correspondence archived in the National Library. This strong and ubiquitous link to France that existed throughout several generations remains yet undisclosed and is rarely mentioned during tours in Valletta.

4.4 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

To summarize the findings, it would be safe to say that the topic covering the French heritage in Valletta as such has been largely underappreciated and has not yet been compiled into any one piece of work, tour or otherwise. It is not being claimed that the tourist guides do not have the necessary knowledge to provide a truly memorable and rewarding tour for French visitors – after all, guides must abide by the itineraries made available to them by the tour operators. What is meant here is that the

concept of offering a tour or even printed flyer covering the French heritage in Valletta is entirely absent.

This brings the findings and related discussion of this study to an end. Conclusions and final recommendations are presented in the final chapter.

CONCLUSION

5.1 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It can be widely assumed that a tour of this nature would in fact have great potential. Official tourism statistics published by the National Statistics Office (NSO) Malta (2019) have shown that the total inbound French visitors for 2018 were estimated at 213,299 which is an increase of 20.9 per cent when compared to the previous year (NSO, 2019). Taking into consideration that the number of French travellers visiting our island is therefore steadily increasing, offering a tour that would appeal exclusively to this particular target group is very promising indeed.

Tapping into this potential, it is generally known that French visitors often show a great appreciation for the visual arts and also express an inclination to find out more about the French historic and cultural patrimony found in Valletta.

In fact, one of the interviewed tourist guides even described her French guests as typically being 'knowledge hungry'. Yet another interviewee frequently observed art enthusiasts among his French patrons, who took great intellectual pleasure in discovering the history and the culture of the island. And finally, all of those who were interviewed, experience their French tour participants as very attentive personalities, who enjoy listening to local stories and anecdotes.

The final assessment and compilation of this information was in some ways a help, but the main hindering factor throughout the research and final preparations for this dissertation and subsequent tour, was the simple fact that nothing covering the French heritage in Valletta as a specific and compiled work seems to exist. This realisation was particularly made evident through the interviews with the participating tourist guides, as none of them were able to identify any such works.

Additionally, these tourist guides who regularly work with French visitors are themselves limited by the itineraries that are made available to them by their employing agencies. Furthermore, applying adaptations to the tours they lead is nearly impossible, as the resources into which they might be able to tap are, as already mentioned, non-existent.

With all of this considered, evaluated and compiled into a final study such as this, it has become quite obvious that the potential to produce a tour covering the French heritage in Valletta would provide a very welcome niche for specific target groups. Offering a tour of this nature would also steer away from those tours that are designed to appeal to the masses, which would in turn reduce in a small but effective way, the problematic issues involving mass tourism. Moreover, advertising tours such as this in a systematic and regulated manner would draw particular attention to these cultural immersion experiences even before the traveller leaves their country. In so doing, not only will the quality of the tour itself be enhanced,

but the quality of the visitors' experiences on Malta altogether remain memorable, with the ultimate hopes of positive comments and evaluations in travel portals such as TripAdvisor and similar.

Finally, it would be highly recommendable to continue researching this topic quite simply because the rich French heritage bestowed upon Valletta by the French during the reign of the Order of St John is very much worthy of public recognition. Taking this one step further by compiling the data into printed brochures, flyers and travel guides, visiting tourists will also have something to peruse while here, which can also be used as references for possible return visits to Malta.

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INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TOURIST GUIDES

- 1. How long have you been guiding?**
 - Do you guide on a part-time or full-time basis?
 - When did you begin guiding French-speaking groups?

- 2. How important is the French legacy per se to you as a tourist guide?**
 - Do you believe that French legacy would be an interesting topic as a specific tour for French tourists at all?

- 3. When guiding your groups/individuals, how often do you point out buildings and/or objects of art especially connected directly or indirectly to French personages of old?**
 - If yes, which ones and how detailed of a description do you provide?
 - If no, why not?

- 4. To which degree are you bound to the itinerary that your tour operator requests for you to follow?**
 - Could you deviate at all?
 - Could you add to the itinerary, and if yes, to what degree?

- 5. How would you describe the majority of French tourists that are on your tours?**
- Easy-going travellers
 - Somewhat interested in Maltese history and culture
 - Culturally inclined, taking intellectual pleasure in discovering the history and culture of the island
 - Art enthusiasts
 - Knowledge-hungry
- 6. Are French tourists usually aware of a rich French heritage in Valletta? Are they usually aware that the history of Valletta features a number of French personages of old?**
- If yes, are they usually interested in visiting sites with connection to French legacy?
- 7. If a tour itinerary were to be created, covering the French legacy in Valletta, would you as a guide be interested in presenting it as a tour?**
- If yes, with how much passion and interest?
 - To which degree of potential on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 is no potential, 5 is high potential) would you rate a tour of this nature?
- 8. What, according to you as a tourist guide, is the overall French tourist impression of Valletta?**

HALF DAY THEMED TOUR – “THE FRENCH LEGACY IN VALLETTA”.

INTRODUCTION

Valletta is beset with architectural landmarks, bequeathed by French Knights of the Order of St John during their rule on the island, 1530 – 1798. Less evident, but no less important are few pieces of art and other items of historical significance with very strong French connections, donated during the era of this chivalric Order. Join me on this tour of Valletta and learn about the interesting legacy left by French notable personages during the time of the Knights of St John, that bestows the city of Valletta up till today.

STOP 1 - MONUMENT TO JEAN DE VALETTE

- Jean Parisot de Valette - the French Grand Master who commissioned the building of this great city in 1566.
- Born in Quercy in Gascony in the late 15th century, La Valette joined the Order at the age of 20 as a knight of the langue of Provence.
- He remained known for his heroic performance during the Great Siege of Malta.
- The defence of Malta is one of the epics of military history.
- The victory inspired de Valette to found a fortified city, here on this peninsula, and thus render the island safe from further attacks from the enemy.
- France donated a large proportion of the money when Charles IX, King of France, contributed a substantial amount of the needed

funds. France was indeed one of the Order's most important patrons.

- Throughout most of the reign of the Order, France was the source of a great deal of revenue that the knights needed for their support.
- On the 28th March 1566, amid the greatest enthusiasm and rejoicing, de Vallete laid the first stone of the new city, which after its founder is still called Valletta.
- Jean de Valette died in 1568 shortly before the completion of the building of the city.
- His death brought to an end one of the most illustrious epochs of the knights of Malta.
- This was a great loss for the fraternity and for the inhabitants of Malta.
- Thankfully however, we have this magnificent city as an everlasting reminder not only of who he was, but for which purpose Valletta was built.

STOP 2 – WIGNACOURT FOUNTAIN

- Alof de Wignacourt, was a French Grand Master who reigned from 1601 – 1622. He initiated and funded personally a project to channel water to Valletta from the natural springs in Rabat.
- Fountain was erected in Valletta to commemorate the provision of water to the inhabitants of the new city.

STOP 3 – AUBERGE DE FRANCE

- An important French architectural legacy that has survived the passage of time with some parts of the building having remained intact is the **first** Auberge de France. A second auberge de France was built to replace the first auberge and to accommodate the growing number of knights belonging to this langue.
- This auberge is a palace of simple design dating back to around 1570s.
- Some interesting features on this façade include the one pillar, the four windows with straight-headed hoods, and particularly important are the supports for the standards or flagpoles of the Langue of France and the Religion.
- It is said that even the second auberge de France had a long row of flagpole supports on its façade – a very curious motif that has never been found on any other Maltese auberge façade. It is likely that the French knights were involved in the design of the appearance of their two auberges.

STOP 4 – HOUSE OF DOLOMIEU

- House experienced various modifications throughout the century.
- In the early 1780s, it was bought by the French Knight - Commander, a renowned member of the Order by the name Fra Deodat-Guy-Sylvain-Tancrede Gratet de Dolomieu.
- At age 18, he killed his adversary. He was imprisoned for life but formally re-admitted into the Order some months after.

- He studied physical sciences - intensive research on geology and mineralogy.
- In 1780s he had become one of the best known natural scientist of his times.
- His particular interests included mineralogy, volcanology and the origin of mountain ranges.
- He discovered a type of rock – named Dolomite after its discoverer.
- He became actively involved in the politics of his time – the French Revolution.
- He accompanied Napoleon on his trip to Egypt to whom he gave information about the Order and the Maltese islands.

STOP 5 – CHURCH OF SAINT BARBARA

- This small church is dedicated to the legendary catholic martyr St Barbara.
- Originally erected in 1585, to service the spiritual needs of the Langue of Provence, it was replaced by the present church in the 18th century.
- Affiliated to the church was the Confraternity of Gunners and Artillerymen, of which St Barbara is the patron saint.
- The Pilier of the Langue de Provence, held the post of Grand Commander who controlled the treasury, armoury and war ordnance.
- Christian legend of St Barbara – Barbara was beheaded by her own father, who was in turn, fatally hit by a bolt of lightning and consumed by fire – hence the connection with thunderstorms and gun fire.

- The Maltese invocation, often said during thunderstorms, “*Santa Barbara, la deni u lanqas hsara*”. *Meaning in English... St Barbara, please protect us from danger and harm.*
- Customs and anecdotes in connection with St Barbara – the Provençal Christmas traditions & the Fête de la Sainte Barbe.
- Proverb in provençal, "Quand lou blad vèn bèn, tout vèn bèn".
- Treasures with French connections inside the church include the fine altarpiece, the main altar which was erected at the expense of the knight Lucas Boyer d'Argens de Guille, and the two marble inscriptions that flank the altar.
- The gilt bronze statue over the doorway, representing Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception was manufactured in Paris.

STOP 6 – AUBERGE DE PROVENCE

- Built between 1571 and 1575 to the designs of the famous local architect Gerolomo Cassar, it was later extensively renovated and enlarged in the 17th to the designs of the French architect of the Order, Mederic Blondel des Croisettes.
- A resemblance in this façade to the Lescot wing of the Louvre Palace in Paris, France.
- In order to embellish the main thoroughfare of Valletta, Blondel redesigned the façade to reflect the fashionable French Baroque manner typical of the day.

- The interior of the auberge is also marked by a myriad of fascinating features, but of particular note is the Grand Salon on the first floor.
- This regal room is a testimony of the high standards of living that were kept in Malta by this chivalric organisation. They were great patrons of the arts.
- Information about meals served in the auberges and the French diet at the time of the Knights.
- Banquets and other festivities that the French knights celebrated in their respective three auberges.

STOP 7 – CASA DEL COMUN TESORO

- The building which housed the Treasury of the Order.
- In order of rank and right of precedence, it was The French Pilier of the Langue of Provence, the Pilier of the senior Langue of the Order, who presided over this institution.
- He was assisted by a number of knights - treasury officers, all holding prestigious posts within the higher ranks of the Order. One of these held the important post of the Secretary. His position was one of the greatest trust as he delivered and paid all bills of exchange and replied to all letters. The secretary resided on the premises in an apartment with a separate entrance.
- The last Knight commander to occupy the important post of Secretary to the Treasury since March 1776 was the French

Bosredon Ransijat. Ransijat was also one of the spies who had been working secretly for Napoleon for quite a long time.

STOP 8 – PALACE OF THE GRAND MASTER

- Among the many valuables in Grand Master's Palace, and surely a legacy of the French artistic wealth in Valletta, is the unique set of the famous 18th century Gobelins tapestries known as the Tentures des Indes, which to this day, grace the walls of the Council Chamber of the Piano Nobile.
- The superb 10-piece Tenture des Indes tapestry collection was the second gift donated by Grand Master Perellos to the Order in 1710.
- This set of tapestry was woven at the celebrated and prestigious Gobelins Royal Factory in Paris.
- The tapestries are a splendid illustration of the exotic plant and animal kingdom of the New World of the Americas.
- Perellos, inspired by the set of tapestry of the same series that Louis XIV had commissioned for the Palace of Versailles, sent the French knight commandeur Fra Jean Jacques des Mesmes to Paris and gave him instructions to order from the Gobelins Manufactory a set of the celebrated tapestries known as the Tentures des Indes.
- Five sets of the same series are known to have been woven by the Gobelins atelier and out of these five sets, the fourth was the one ordered by Perellos in 1708.
- It is the only complete set that has survived and is in an optimal state of preservation. It is kept in darkness to avoid loss of colour. The set

that had been commissioned for Versailles disappeared during the French Revolution.

- There are other works in the Palace that directly involved French artists, such as the life-size portrait of the Portuguese GM Emanuel Pinto de Fonseca, in his shining armour, found in the Ambassador's room of the Presidential Palace, by the French artist Pierre Bernard.

STOP 9 – L'HOSTEL DE VERDELIN

- L'Hostel de Verdeline, a structure of noble proportions consisting of three separate premises unified in almost perfect symmetry.
- It was built around 1650 at the expense of Fra Jean-Jacques de Verdeline.
- The richly ornate façade of the palace is considered to be among the first architectural works of its kind on the island.
- De Verdeline enjoyed a highly successful career in the Convent, occupying the posts of Commander of the Artillery, Auditor of Accounts and Grand Commander.
- He was the nephew of the French GM Gughes Loubenx de Verdalle. He died in Malta in 1678.

STOP 10 – THE NATIONAL LIBRARY

- Another highlight of the legacy left by French knights is the National Library of Malta.

- Its construction was owed to the penultimate French Grand Master, Emanuel de Rohan-Polduc who went ahead with plans to build this large-scale architectural masterpiece to contain the Order's collections of books, which went back as far as the Middle Ages.
- The origins of a library predate the building itself and go way back to 1555 when GM Claude de la Sengle, also a Frenchman, decreed that all books belonging to the knights should be passed on to the Order's treasury upon their death.
- As time passed, the collection of books became significant enough so that in 1761 the Bailiff Grand Cross of the Order, Louis Guerin de Tencin, also himself a Frenchman, opened the first public library consisting of a whopping 19 000 books, including 9700 books from his own library plus several other collections.
- The bailiff de Tencin is one of the fathers and most generous donor of this institution.
- The collection soon outgrew the confined space of this library and thus was born the need to build the one that we see today.
- Besides the thousands of volumes and other documents, library manuscripts, melitensia and non-melitensia, highlights in the library of the French legacy in Malta include the correspondence between the Kings of France and the GMs throughout the generations, copies of every book published by the Royal Press during the reign of Louis XVI and the Journal de Malte, written in French, which was issued during the time when the French republican government ruled Malta in 1798.

- Fra Gaetano Bruno, formerly the Secretary of the Chancery of the Order of St John, was responsible for saving much of the Order's Archives, which the French intended to destroy during their occupation of the Island between 1798 and 1800.

CONCLUSION

The French contribution to the cultural transformation that Valletta experienced during the incumbency of the Order of St John as rulers of Malta is often overlooked and fails to be acknowledged. However, there can be no denying that French Grand Masters and Knights, great patrons of the arts and masters of the art of living well, contributed fundamentally to the transformation of barren rock to "one of the most concentrated historic areas in the world", befitting its status as a UNESCO World Heritage Centre.