

Malta's Hospitals and Medical History around the Valletta Harbours, between the 16th and 20th Centuries.

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Abstract

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<p>Throughout its history, Malta was often, directly or indirectly, involved in events that saw it act as a military and naval hospital base, due to its positioning in the Mediterranean. This study, through research of existing literature, qualitative research and the creation of a guided tour, aims to analyse the relevant sites around Valletta and its harbours which characterised Malta's medical landscape between the 16th and the 20th centuries. By doing so, the study delves deeper into the importance of Malta as a medical base throughout these centuries, and how this may have influenced events in the Mediterranean, which were of global significance. The general findings suggest that Malta's medical facilities often impacted the progression and outcome of certain battles occurring across Europe and the Mediterranean. In turn, Malta's different rules and their need for a strong medical base, influenced the development of medical structures on the island. Therefore, the link between international events and the development of medical infrastructure in and around Valletta, appear to be directly linked. These findings reveal that having a high density of medical sites in such a small geographical area, can indeed open up opportunities to create a specialised tour on medical history in the region. Simultaneously, the findings of this study put into discussion the idea of Malta as a base for medical tourism.</p>		
Keywords Medical heritage Hospital Naval base Valletta Medical Tourism.		

Declaration of Authenticity



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Declaration:

I hereby declare that this research study is based on the outcome of my own research. I, as the author, declare that this research study is my own composition which has not been previously produced for any other qualification.

The research study was conducted under the supervision of Mr Vincent Zammit

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1. Introduction

The early stages of the medical history of the Maltese Islands, can be traced back to its prehistory (circa 2400 B.C). At this time, health and medicine had more to do with the divine than with science and technology. However, the interest to improve health and overcome illness could already be noticed. It is with the arrival of the Romans in 218 B.C., that one start seeing the increased use of medical instruments and medicinal substances. A big effort was also made at this time, to improve sanitation amongst society, in a bid to decrease illness. Up until this period, there is no concrete evidence of medical facilities that were erected to serve this sole purpose. Records of a civil hospital first emerge in the Medieval Period, featuring Santo Spirito Hospital in Rabat, known to have existed already in 1372. (Cassar, 1977.)

However, without a doubt, the islands' medical development received its biggest push forward with the arrival of the Order of the Knights of St John in 1530. The Order's foundations were in the area of present-day Israel. Their original function as an organisation was that of assisting pilgrims travelling at length to reach the Holy Land. Anyone that fell ill or got injured during their trip, would have found refuge, accommodation and medical attention within the Order's quarters and hospitals they would have set up. (Fenech & Galea, 1967.) This mission remained a staple function of the Order long after it left the area of Jerusalem. Eventually, once in Malta, medical facilities had to be established in order to be able to carry out this hospitaller work.

Given that The Order of St John, together with subsequent powers, particularly The British Empire, all had a military or naval scope, the development of medical facilities had to therefore reflect the needs of the militia. The separation between civil and military hospitals was introduced during the French Occupation which lasted two years; between 1798 and 1800 (Savona-Ventura, 2001). With the arrival of the British in 1800, an increased effort was made to construct new military, and eventually, naval hospitals. Such additions proved to be well-needed during one of Europe's bloodiest centuries; the 20th century.

1.1 Research Aim, Objectives and Questions

This study will aim to examine how Malta's strategic geographic position, in the middle of the Mediterranean, impacted the development of its military and naval hospitals in and around Valletta's harbours. In doing so, this study will identify key medical structures in Valletta and around its harbours. It will further aim to understand the correlation between Malta's historic events (from the 16th to the 20th century), and its advancements in the medical and medicinal sectors.

It will seek to explore whether the sites being studied could eventually lead to the creation of a special interest tour.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This section will aim to look at existent studies and literature related to Malta's medical history. In turn, it will explore any literature related to the development of a special interest tour out of the sites related to this medical heritage. The availability, or lack of, said literature will build the basis for the discussion in following chapters. For the purpose of this study, this section will focus on medical heritage found within Valletta and its harbours. Primarily, this literature review will seek to list and discuss the different medical structures that are deemed relevant to the study. In subsequent sections, the relevance of this medical heritage will be applied to key events in the island's history, in order to explore the degree of significance these structures might have had in the outcome of said events.

2.2 Medical Structures in Valletta

The building of Valletta commenced in 1566. The process of building a new, fortified city was accelerated by the fact that in 1565, Malta suffered one of its bloodiest battles against the Ottoman Turks. In fear of a new, imminent attack, the Order felt that it needed to upgrade its defences. With this in mind, the first priority of the Order was that of building the fortifications of the new city. However, in 1574, when the Order had already established itself in the new city of Valletta, a new hospital started to be built. This hospital took four years to be finished but underwent various modifications in years that followed (Savona-Ventura, 2018). This building became known as the Holy Infirmary or *Sacra Infermeria*. It was only the first of many medical facilities to be set up in Valletta.

2.2.1 Sacra Infermeria

The *Sacra Infermeria* is today known as the Mediterranean Conference Centre and is used as an event venue having a theatre within it. Recent refurbishments have brought the medical history of the building back to life through the use of Augmented Reality. This interactive experience allows visitors to reimagine what it meant to work in or be taken care of at the *Sacra Infermeria*. When it was built, the infirmary became known as one of the best hospitals of its kind in Europe. Many foreign visitors remarked on the services offered, as well as, the running of the hospital itself (Cassar, 1962). Its chosen location was in great proximity to the Grand Harbour, in the south-east of Valletta with Fort St Elmo adjacent. It is thought that this location was chosen for two main reasons: to ease the transferring of patients from the Grand Harbour to the hospital, and to provide patients with a natural sea breeze, coming in from the harbour, which could have aided in their recovery (Savona-Ventura, 2018).

The hospital acted as a general hospital, welcoming people from different social strata. Great emphasis was made to provide for the poor but the *Sacra Infermeria* only had facilities for male patients. In addition, there were non-admissible patients and these had to have some kind of criminal record. Some examples of those not allowed to receive care in the infirmary were murderers, sodomites and burglars, for instance (Savona-Ventura, 2018). By 1787 (towards the end of the rule of the Order of St John), the hospital could hold a maximum of 914 patients. However, the normal number of in-house patients was that of 563. To hold this many patients, the hospital had to be split into wards. The two main ones were The Long Ward (155 metres in length) and The Great Magazine Ward located in the semi-basement level and normally dedicated to the care of slaves or the mentally infirm. Other wards included the 'Falanga', which was dedicated to treating venereal diseases but which had to be converted into an extension of the other wards at times when bedding was not enough. Apart from wards, the Holy Infirmary had important extensions such as the pharmacy, kitchen and the School for Anatomy and Surgery established by Grand Master Nicholas Cottoner in 1676.

By the time The Order left Malta, their finances had begun to suffer and therefore, once the French, led by Napoleon Bonaparte, took over Malta in 1798, the infirmary was given the role of a military hospital and this role was separated from that of a civil hospital. The French had commented on the shortcomings of most of the structures within the infirmary. Due to this, when the British Empire took control of the islands just 2 years later, it sought to assist its sick and wounded soldiers in the hospital but did not improve on its condition much. The hospital kept a generally low occupancy in the years that followed and regained prominence in 1887, when the germ causing Undulant Fever was discovered in the then-called Valletta Station Hospital by a surgeon named David Bruce (Cassar, 1962). Although the hospital still served its function during the First World War (particularly 1915), it was not considered to be the primary medical facility at the time and was soon converted to Hospital Headquarters.

2.2.2 The Ospedaletto or Casetta

Given that the Holy Infirmary tended only to male patients, the need for a medical facility in Valletta that catered for female patients, was soon felt in the 16th century. It was through the vision of business woman and philanthropist Caterina Scappi, that this was realised. Scappi decided to open up a house, of her own accord, referred to as *Santa Maria delle Scale*. This house was eventually upgraded so that in 1625, a proper building was set up, close to the Holy Infirmary, as a hospital for females. The *Casetta* or *Ospedaletto* was regarded as an important institution by the Knights of St John. So much so, that after the foundress' death, the Order continued to finance the running of the hospital. (Savona-Ventura, 2018). Scappi herself had also made sure that after her death, the hospital would not cease to exist and had, in fact, specified in her will that her financial savings should go for the upkeep of the hospital. The function of the hospital was to medically aid women from all walks of life but most patients were from

lower social backgrounds. The injuries or diseases presented were often related to lack of hygiene, domestic violence and sexually transmitted illnesses. It was for this reason that many patients within the hospital were deemed incurable. One could also find specific rooms dedicated to those with mental health issues. Patients could be aged anywhere between 4 months and 95 years old. The site of the *Ospedaletto* was eventually used to keep a hospital for female patients in later years but it was also used as the area for the set-up of a civil hospital once the French Occupation decided to split the functions of a civil and a military hospital.

2.2.3 Infirmary of the Slave Prison

Although galley rowers could be tended to at the *Sacra Infermeria*, land-bound slaves did not have an official medical facility in the early years after Valletta's construction. When the slave prison was shifted to the lower parts of Valletta (in the region of St Christopher Street), the opportunity was taken to set up an infirmary adjoining the prison. The shift in prison location occurred during the last two decades of the 16th century. However, the establishment of an infirmary must have occurred in later years, although there is no defined date. This infirmary accepted both publicly and privately-owned slaves. If privately owned, the owner would have had to pay a fee for the care of the slave. Once again we see that as an institution, the infirmary accepted male slaves whilst female slaves are thought to have been provided care in their owner's residence. (Cassar, 1968). Many measures were taken to ensure the containment of diseases and a particular regulation stipulated that upon the death of a slave suffering from a transferrable disease, the bedding and clothes of that slave had to be burned or cleaned in boiling water. A great deal of importance was given to the recovery of slaves since an unhealthy slave was of no use to its owner and at this time, slavery was seen as a form of investment. This infirmary was later turned into a naval hospital for the use of the British Empire.

2.3 Medical Structures around Valletta and its Harbours

Prior to their establishment in Valletta, the Knights of St John had took up residence across the Grand Harbour, in a hamlet known as Birgu. Once here, as was their custom, they set up a hospital for the needs of the poor and the sick. This area, which was later developed to create the region referred to as The Three Cities was given prominence by the British in the 19th century as it was used as a site to develop naval hospitals and cemeteries. In addition, both the Grand Harbour area as well as the Marsamxett Harbour (flanking Valletta on the opposite side), had medical facilities set up for isolation and disinfection procedures.

2.3.1 Sacra Infermeria in Birgu

Having a hospital was always a priority for the Order of St John. After settling on the islands in mid-1530, the Knights wasted no time in initiating the process of building a hospital. In fact, by 1538, the Order's first hospital already had two storeys (Savona-Ventura, 2004). The Infirmary in Birgu was kept busy and therefore had to have a high level of organisation. Just like the newer infirmary that was opened in Valletta some decades later, the hospital in Birgu had specific wards relating to different disease. In addition, the hospital was in proximity to the harbour and therefore patients could be carried into the building directly. (Fenech & Galea, 1967.) Once the new *Sacra Infermeria* was opened, certain galley slave treatment was still directed towards the older hospital until its conversion to an isolation hospital in 1592 (Cassar, 1968).

2.3.2 Fort Ricasoli

Fort Ricasoli was the last fortification to be built by the Order of the Knights of St John. Its location is right at the entrance of the Grand Harbour, overseeing anyone arriving or leaving the harbour. With the arrival of the British in 1800, the fort was destined to serve other functions besides being a structure for defence. In the early decades of their rule, the British converted Fort Ricasoli into a hospital to serve the Cottonera area. In addition, during the cholera epidemic of 1837, the fort was used as a site of confinement for those suspected to have been attacked by the illness. Mentally ill patients housed in other institutions in Floriana, were moved to this new facility (Pisani, 1970). The epidemic was a very deadly one, costing the lives of at least 855 people. Those who died of the illness were mainly buried in a mass grave dug close to Fort Ricasoli. This site in Kalkara was turned into a plague cemetery.

2.3.3 Bighi Naval Hospital

Bighi Naval Hospital is yet another structure that was built for one purpose under the Order of the Knights of St John but its role changed completely with the arrival of the British. Villa Bighi was initially intended to be the summer residence of a knight in the 17th century. However, once the British arrived in Malta, one of their top priorities was that of establishing a good naval hospital for their forces. The *Sacra Infermeria* was considered to be quite run-down by this point and therefore delegates were sent to scout for new potential locations to build this hospital. A certain Dr Snipe reported back to governor Ball and Vice-Admiral Nelson that the location of Villa Bighi would be an excellent choice to establish a naval hospital. Some of the reasons given resonate with those mentioned with reference to the construction of the *Sacra Infermeria*. Its proximity to the sea, and its location near the harbour were just two of the reasons that made Villa Bighi a good base for a naval hospital. In addition, its distance from other structures and its surrounding fertile land made it both an ideal area for isolation, as well as, a promising

prospect for better recoveries. It was not until the late 1820s that the property passed to the British government and navy. In fact, Bighi started to operate as a hospital in 1832. (Savona-Ventura, 2001.)

2.3.4 Lazzaretto

In all medical structures, past and present, an important characteristic is that of having facilities which offer space for isolation. Between the 16th and 20th centuries, most passenger and commercial traffic occurred on seas by means of ships. This meant that any foreign vessels arriving into Maltese harbours from abroad, especially from areas that were suspected to be infested with disease, had to be isolated before being allowed to mix with the local community.

On the Grand Harbour side, one could find what was literally referred to as a barrier, where locals and those in isolation would be separated by means of railings (Cassar, 1987). However, by far, the most important isolation facility was that of the Lazaretto, situated on Manoel Island (previously referred to as Bishop's Island) on the Marsamxett Harbour. The location was seen as ideal for isolation due to its geographical separation from the Grand Harbour (the main hub for trade and port activity). One main method of isolation was that of quarantine (initially termed this way since isolation was for a duration of forty days).

2.3.5 The Ospizio

For mentally ill patients, secluded areas were reserved within the *Sacra Infermeria* (males) and the *Casetta* (females). However, when the patients' condition worsened or when they were declared incurables, they were moved to a separate facility in Floriana known as the *Ospizio*. During the British rule, both male and female patients were transferred here (Savona-Ventura, 2018). Often times, when it was thought that a patient would be uncontrollable, measures were taken to chain the person to walls, confine them to small rooms, or use physical strength against them. Medication and cure were not so readily available to those suffering from mental illness. With the passage of time, extreme methods of recovery were used and these included the use of opium and cold rooms or cold baths (Savona-Ventura, 2004).

2.3.6 Sir Paul Boffa Hospital

A much later addition to the medical structures around Valletta is that of Sir Paul Boffa Hospital in Floriana. Initially, this building was placed as a memorial to those members of the Merchant Navy who lost their life in World War I (Times of Malta, 2009). After a few restorations, the hospital took its current name in the 70s. The hospital's medical function is still retained to this day; a characteristic that can be boasted by only a couple of medical structures on the island to date.

2.4 Medical Heritage as a Potential Tourism Niche Market

The parameters of this study look at Malta's medical scene from a historical perspective. In this remit, any exploration of a niche market or potential guided tour needs to be looked at from the heritage and cultural tourism perspective. Cultural tourism cannot be given one definition, according to Csapo in 2012. However, McKercher and du Cros emphasise that motivations for cultural tourists may vary. Some may actually visit a destination for the cultural heritage it has to offer. Others, are only participants of cultural tourism as a secondary reason to their motivations for travel. In 2019, Ebejer examined the role of Valletta as a city in the development of cultural tourism. In his study, he argues that 91% of inbound tourists visit the capital of Valletta. This presents a great opportunity for tourists to be introduced to various aspects of Maltese culture and heritage.

2.5 Conclusion

The above review gives an expansive idea of the existing medical heritage in and around Valletta and its harbours. Through the review of these structures, a more comprehensive look is given at Malta's medical history. The above information can therefore be used to set the foundations for the discussion of medical development on the island, relevant to medical needs arising due to various events in and around the country.

3. Methodology

This chapter will highlight the main methods used to extract information relevant to this study. Given that the basis of this study, is that of looking at Malta's medical heritage from a historical perspective, the most fundamental method of data collection was through document-based research of secondary sources. This allowed for existing literature to be seen from a perspective relevant to this study; that to establish the historical significance of the studied medical structures, as well as, their potential in creating a special interest tour. To add to this literature, an interview was also carried out with a scholar having done extensive research on the subject of interest.

3.1 Sources

This qualitative approach, paired with the creation of a guided tour, allowed an in-depth degree of observation that could be implemented to fulfil the research aims and objectives. Qualitative research allows for more specific conclusions to be drawn, especially in the case of a study based on a historical perspective. The main secondary resources used were books, academic journals and articles, editorials and previous dissertations. Whilst some sources, mainly books, were obtained as hard copies, the vast majority of sources were available in digital format through online libraries and repositories.

The data gathering process consisted of cross-referencing many of these sources in order to gain a more clear timeline on the construction and the use of each medical structure across different centuries and rules. Additionally, the data gathered was used to understand how these medical structures contributed towards various historical events that impacted Malta in a direct or indirect manner. Once the information gathered sufficed to answer the afore-mentioned points, an effort was made to categorise the data. This data was sectioned as follows: (i) historical data referring to the structures and their characteristics, such that an inventory could be created and (ii) data recounting the use of medical structures during historical events and their impact on such events. From these two data categories, an effort was made to create a link between various sites, in order to create a viable walking tour based on this medical heritage. During this data-gathering process, reference was continuously made to the research aims in order to extract the most relevant information required.

3.2 Interview

In addition to the data collection mentioned in the previous section, an interview was carried out to help with filling any existing gaps in the literature. The interview also allowed for the creation of questions which are more specific to the area of study.

The criteria for choosing the interviewee, were purely based on the expertise in the field of study. As a scholar in the medical field, the interviewee was able to provide the historical perspective required for this study whilst also putting this knowledge into the present context in terms of the potential to have a special interest tour. Questions were kept quite open-ended to allow further expansion by the interviewee and the number of questions was limited to six, in order to achieve more in-depth answers.

3.3 Limitations

During the data gathering process, it was noticed that most of the material available is of research which was conducted in the 1970s or prior. Only fewer sources are of a more recent nature. Thus, one of the limitations discovered was the lack of availability of recent research on the subject. In addition, seeing as a specialised medical history tour falls under the cultural tourism umbrella, very limited sources were available to argue in favour or against the creation of such a tour. Many resources commonly referred to the more modern medical tourism, which is a separate niche market and less relevant to the research subject.

3.4 Ethical considerations

With respect to the interview carried out as part of the data gathering process, it was of utmost importance that no personal questions were asked during the interview. Before conducting the interview, it was made clear that the interview was being conducted as part of the data collection for this research. All questions included were of relevance to the study and were not directly connected to the interviewee. For anonymity purposes, the identity of the interviewee will never be revealed in the discussion of findings.

4. Results, Analysis and Discussion

The presentation and discussion of results will be split into three categories to aid with analysing the data in a more systematic and clear manner. These categorisations will be split as follows: (i) the discussion of the development of Malta's medical heritage under its various rules; (ii) the discussion of Malta's use as a naval and military base and (iii) the potential to use the studied area as a base for the creation of a guided tour.

4.1 Malta's Development of its Medical Heritage

Without a doubt, the timeframe studied throughout this research was one when the development of medical structures in Malta was given a big push forward. One of the most evident outcomes is that which reveals how medical structures were categorised differently under different occupations. Mainly, the difference in organisation consisted of having one central hospital under The Order of the Knights of St John whilst the French Occupation and the British tried to segregate civil and military care (Savona-Ventura, 2018).

As highlighted during the conducted interview, 'the governing bodies involved during the 16-20th century, namely the Order of St John, the French, the British, and eventually self-governing Maltese administrators, were all tuned in to the needs of the local population in the three cities and beyond.'

This reflects that the development of medical facilities in the harbour area was not haphazard. Different rules were mindful of the different medical needs of the population. In fact, we see how the arrival of the Order of St John brought with it an improvement in the welfare services offered to different people of different social statuses; most especially the poor. This was not only reflected in the hospital care received but also in other services offered outside of the hospital. This support included the issuance of monetary pittances, provision of warm meals where this was lacking, as well as nursing services in the harbour district (Savona-Ventura, 2018). The British, later sought to expand on the number of hospitals on the island whilst also adapting them to new battle technologies. However the 19th and 20th centuries were fraught with wars and crises. This, therefore impacted the financial disposition of the government to invest more on the islands.

However, this research has also shown, that having a good healthcare system, was also beneficial to the governing power itself since a healthier nation is often, a more hard-working one. In addition, the treatment of slaves was definitely given importance due to the financial investment that owners would have made. Therefore, the improvement of medical facilities was a decision made, not only in the interest of the citizen but also of the government.

The interviewee also chose to highlight that the foundations of Malta's medical advancements, to a large degree, owe their credentials to the Order of St John, who were the first to introduce foreign concepts to the island and an organised medical system.

4.2 Malta's Role as a Naval and Military Base

Once Malta's medical structures were organised into civil and military structures (following the French Occupation on 1798), Malta's role as a military and naval base was augmented. Immediately after the arrival of the French, military troops arrived in the island's harbours and sought medical attention.

The traffic of wounded military men remained a staple of the island's port activity, practically until its independence in 1964. Although Malta served as a refuge centre during different wars, the most notable of all has to be World War I. During this war, Malta was not directly involved in the battles. However, it is at this time that the island received the title of 'Nurse of the Mediterranean'. As evidenced in the conducted interview, at this time, the island had significantly augmented its facilities to enable injured and sick soldiers to be brought over and treated in Maltese hospitals. However, one cannot fail to mention that wars preceding WWI, were also impacted by the medical structures in Malta. Particularly, the Crimean War which occurred between 1854 and 1856, saw Malta prepare itself for the reception of up to 10,000 wounded men (Savona-Ventura, 2001).

The use of Malta as a base to assist troops in these various periods throughout history was definitely of consequence to the final outcome of the battles. The strategic location of the islands meant that voyaging soldiers had to journey for less distances before being tended to, allowing for a greater chance of survival.

4.3 The Potential of Creating A Guided Tour

When reflecting upon the findings of the literature review, one of the most evident outcomes is that of having a large density of medical structures in a small geographical area. The proximity of each structure studied, contributes positively to the possibility of having a special interest tour developed around the medical heritage in the region. Given that up until 2013, 39% of tourists visited Malta for culture and heritage, there is potential to develop a tour that would provide a new perspective of the island's heritage.

In addition, the guided tour carried out as part of this research can be taken as an example of a walking tour in Valletta, with a difference. The itinerary may be used or amended to suit specific client needs but can serve as a starting point for special interest tours in medical heritage.

5. Final Arguments

5.1 Conclusions

The aim of this study was to answer two main research questions. These related to how Malta's medical development was influenced by, and in turn influenced, global events that required the use of medical structures. In addition, the study aimed to identify key structures within Valletta and its harbours that would allow for an itinerary to be built and for a narrative to be created.

Through the analysis of the many different medical structures and how they were organised through time, one can say that their establishment and the way in which they were run, did in fact have a positive impact in the story of many an event around Europe and the Mediterranean. In addition, the study concluded that although medical development was aided by these external forces, it was the governing bodies themselves who actively took an interest in improving medical facilities. Therefore, the fact that Malta was passed from one rule to another, also made a difference in the outcome of how the island's medical scene developed.

When one has a look at existing tours being conducted, some of the medical structures introduced above are already being included in more generic tours. However, tours that specialise on the development of Malta's medical history and which only visit sites related to this sector, are uncommon if non-existent. This study has sufficiently provided evidence of enough resources in a small geographical area that can be included in a guided tour itinerary.

5.2 Recommendations

The main limitations of the study were the lack of recent research carried out on Malta's medical history. The continued research into what characterised Malta's medical landscape is of utmost importance in maintaining the subject's relevance and in peaking interest in the study area.

In addition, when it comes to the creation of the guided tour, more in-depth research can be done into the ways in which the tour may be augmented. Ways of doing this may involve extending the running time of the tour, expanding the tour area to two locations in the harbour area and adding a means of transport to facilitate travel, rather than limiting one's self to a walking tour.

In addition, more knowledge on the subject should be made readily available in order to allow for more potential guides to engage in tours similar to the one proposed.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 : Interview Transcript

The title of the Long Essay was provided before conducting the interview with the relevant background to the study also being presented to the interviewee.

Question 1

Do you believe that, within the mentioned time-frame, Malta's development of medicine and medical facilities was particularly aided by any of its governing bodies? Were there any that were more influential than others?

The governing bodies involved during the 16-20th century, namely the Order of St John, the French, the British, and eventually self-governing Maltese administrators, were all tuned in to the needs of the local population in the three cities and beyond. Sometimes this enthusiasm for ameliorating the medical conditions of the local population in part was associated with a selfish facet since the health of the rulers and their team was also dependent on the health of the local population. The Order of St John set up effective hospital and social support services augmenting the earlier ones instituted in Rabat-Mdina in earlier centuries. The arrival of the French forces saw the development of military hospitals serving primarily the interests of the French soldiers [since the French took over the Sacra Infermeria for their own use, they set up a new Civil Hospital in Valletta to serve the needs of the Maltese]. The short French interlude did not give the new administrators time to further organize the health services. This arrangement was adopted by the British, who through the near one-and-a-half centuries of dominion continued to improve and augment the medical facilities in line with the increasing needs of the population. I would think that the Order of St John built the foundations of medical and social assistance to a degree that it is only in recent decades that we have reached the same breath of services [of course augmented and improved].

Question 2

Of all the medical structures in or around Valletta and its harbours, were there any which played a more fundamental role in Malta's medical history?

The medical structures around the Grand Harbour area included the Sacra Infermeria, the Casetta delle Donne, and the slaves hospital – all in the vicinity of St Elmo. During the British period, the services included the Sacra Infermeria now used as a military hospital and the Civil Hospital which moved from Valletta to Floriana and eventually to Gwardamangia. On the other side of the harbour, the British also set up a naval hospital [first in Vittoriosa and the Bighi Hospital at Kalkara]. They also

built another military hospital at Zabbar [Cottonera Military Hospital]. In addition, specialist hospitals [such as the Mental asylum and the Ospizio for the elderly infirm] were set up at Floriana – eventually being transposed to new edifices inland. All the civil establishments played a significant role in ensuring the maintenance of the health of the local population; while the military and naval hospital played an essential role in maintaining the health of the soldiers stationed in Malta and of the sailors serving in the Mediterranean fleet. The essential role of these establishments was very evident when the health of the population was at risk, especially in times of epidemics and war.

Question 3

Why, in your opinion, was the Marsamxett Harbour, chosen as the preferred location for quarantine and disinfection?

Manoel Island [then called Bishop's Island] was taken over by the Order of St John since it was considered a suitable quarantine station in cases of infectious disease presenting on ships [or as an isolation centre during times of epidemics]. Its convenience lay in the fact that suspect ships not having pratique were kept away from the Grand Harbour and there was easy access to Manoel Islands for medical and support staff.

Question 4

What were the events (e.g. wars, epidemics, pandemics etc.) that put the biggest strain on the medical facilities within Valletta and its surrounding harbours?

Any medical service, past or present, is put under significant strain whenever faced with pan/epidemics affecting the population [vide the Covid epidemic]. The Second World War affected the local population directly upsetting the social structure of the community and hence increasing the risks of disease. The medical services, then mainly stationed in Floriana, were significantly augmented by the setting up of Emergency Hospitals throughout the Island.

Question 5

Considering Malta's strategic location within the Mediterranean, what would you say are the main events / battles (that occurred in the Mediterranean within the mentioned time-frame) that benefitted from Malta's medical structures the most?

Without doubt, Malta served as the Nurse of the Mediterranean during the First World War. This was a time when the medical services were also significantly augmented to enable injured and sick soldiers to be brought over and treated in Maltese hospitals.

Question 6

Do you believe that Malta's medical heritage can develop into a niche market for special interest tourism?

Simple answer: NO! Anybody who would be able to afford to come for specialist treatment to Malta would simply go the extra mile to more renowned European centres of excellence.

Appendix 2 : Guided Tour Itinerary

This research also involved the creation of a guided tour. The chosen area for the tour was that of Valletta and a walking tour was conducted in the lower parts of the city.

The following were the stops made and included in the tour itinerary:

1. Sacra Infermeria – explain the building and life within the hospital
2. Stop along Mediterranean Street to get a clear view of Fort Ricasoli.
3. Stop under the Siege Bell Monument for a wider view of the Grand Harbour, including Esplora (Bighi Naval Hospital). This platform was used as an opportunity to speak about quarantine procedures.
4. Stop at the corner of St Christopher's Street to speak about the old Prison Infirmary
5. Stop on the corner of St Ursula Street to mention the different monasteries that were often given free medical care during the Occupation of the Order of St John
6. Stop in front of Church of St Mary Magdalene as an opportunity to speak about the *Ospedaletto* and its subsequent expansion to form the civil hospital for the French and British.
7. Stop in front of Evans Building to speak about the foundation of a surgery school and the cemetery used by the Sacra Infermeria.