

Malta and Gozo - Experiences of a study tour from 14th to 21st September 2019

Text and Photos: Hans-Rudolf Neumann



Fig. 01: First group photo on the first day of the excursion: an INTERFEST study group with their wives and guests at the foot of the St. Michael bastion of the landfront in La Valletta under the umbrella of the European cultural route FORTE CULTURA®.

For fortress friends, Malta is always worth a trip – no matter what time of year. Without exaggerating, Malta can be named one of the biggest fortified open-air museums of the Mediterranean Sea or even of Europe. Three large fortification epochs from the crusaders, the English and from World War II formed an ensemble, which has been discovered over the time including huge restauration efforts during the last two decades. The last big step, finance maintenance costs from income of mass tourism, has not yet been completely made, but with shared efforts, especially with support by the European Union, they are on the right track. Also, INTERREG projects like the European culture route FORTE CULTURA® contribute, so that this study tour can also be named a pilot tour. Unnecessary to say, that the group of participants consisted almost only from INTERFEST members, who could welcome new guests. (pic.1).

Saturday, 14th September 2019

The morning flight from Berlin via Frankfurt Main to Malta with Lufthansa ran without any incidents. But check-in service in Berlin leaves a lot to be desired; the transition to digital full automation to reduce staff provoked the opposite effect. Luggage check-in and boarding on two different ends of the airport caused annoyance, while during boarding two flights were serviced on the same counter. One two Warsaw and one to Frankfurt Main – the line on luggage security was more than 200 people and it was safe to ask the pilot again if this is the right plane when entering the plane. The on-board meal on the flight to Frankfurt consisted of a 30 g almond tartlet of a 65 mm size and a drink, on the connecting flight to Malta we had a honey nut bar and another drink. Regarding that you had to leave the house at 4.45 am and entered the hotel in Malta around 12.40 pm, it was a remarkable performance, particularly as there was no time to buy additional food in Frankfurt due to the short connection time. There were better times! Anyways, the dinner together at Hotel Bay View in Sliema offered a rich buffet including different ice creams.

Sunday, 15th September 2019

Today's sightseeing day began with our local tour guide Nynke van Ek, who will accompany us the whole week, primarily in Valletta. For organisational reasons the original program had to be changed partly, which was also due to the fact, that in Malta nobody had focused on fortification tourism yet. So, they were confronted with the task to make the best of each day. But our tour guide took this challenge and it was fun to see how fast she became part of the team and tried everything to lead us to the objects we requested to see.

One of the organisational problems resulting from this was the fact that the near-by located Fort Manoel (1722-1732) is privately managed and only open on certain days. But this was the case on this Sunday and so the sightseeing began right there. Fort Manoel was mostly restored on the inside, but on the land side most of it

is still covered with scaffolds in the trenches to finish the restoration of the walls. The facility is impressive and background music gave it all a nice visiting atmosphere.

By van, we went on to the Floriana lines (1635 et seq.): this was the first photo stop at the *Porte des Bombes* (1721/1868, pic. 02). Surprisingly we discovered the walled tunnel gate and the stone arch bridge of the former train line from Valletta to Mdina, which was in operation from 1883 to 1931, at the St. Philipps bastion just left of the trench in front of the baroque gate (pic. 03). A first group picture was taken at the foot of St. Michael bastion.

By van we surrounded the peak of La Valletta at Fort St. Elmo and reached the former Tryon battery, located at the side of Grand Harbour, of which you could only see a concreted gun emplacement within civil top structures. The visit of the restored cavalier St. James (pic.04), rebuilt to a culture centre, turned out to be architectural highlight, like the facilities along the Ordnance Street with the parliament building (2010-2015) designed by star architect Renzo Piano, the also by him new designed city gate and the Triton fountain. From the closed St. John cavalier, where a longer discussion about the current situation of Maltese knights took place, the way led directly to the adjacent Hotel Osborne for lunch, which we took in a quiet atmosphere.

After another photo stop at the pacing houses under the Lascaris battery (1845) our bus drove back to the ferry point in Sliema, where the afternoon harbour tour began. This led along Fort Manoel (pic. 05), to the peak of Fort St. Elmo and from there on to the Grand Harbour, including the side arms on the return tour, so that you could not only see the harbour in action, but you could also see the surrounding fortifications as Fort St. Angelo (pic. 06) with the right telephoto lens.

It was an exhausting and hot day which made the dinner at the hotel even better. The heat during the day was supposed to stay all week. Only on Friday before the return flight, the temperature decreased to 26 degrees.



Fig. 02: The "Portes des Bombes".



Fig. 03: Bridge route of the former railway line leading out of La Valletta



Fig. 04: The inner staircase in the cavalier St. James.



Fig. 05: View from the ship onto the sea side access side of Fort Manoel.



Fig. 06: View from the ship to the sea-side access side of the Angelo fort.

Monday, 16th September 2019

After breakfast we walked around 10 minutes from the hotel to the ferry point in Sliema to reach Valletta. There, Nynke marched with us along the walls to Fort St. Elmo (1552-1570) which we reached after 45 minutes. The positive part of the foot march was to be able to take photos and videos of the works on the other side like Fort Manoel or Fort Tigné (1793-1795, pic. 07) from extraordinary perspectives. Nynke and the group completed each other well: she told us important facts about the current location and we told her about details from our fortification point of view as for example the long stretched huge casemate in the upper wall, which now serves as a garage and which we almost passed without noticing. At Fort St. Elmo, we were welcomed by a nicely restored vestibule which already gave interesting insights into the fort itself; even more attention found the souvenir shop at the entrance of the fort with a great offer of books which already made larger sales.

We did not have much time here though: Nynke had to find the two latecomers, because we were expected by the manager of the fort, Matthew Balzan, who guided us through the restored fort including the single museums for the next one

and a half hours (pic. 08). This is not the place to describe the fort in detail, but it took all our respect to marvel at the restoration performance in detail (pic. 09).



Fig. 07: Fort Tigné with its characteristic staircase, seen from the ramparts in La Valletta.

But these are still in work and the barrack part is still in power of disposition of the national realty funds, as until now no sustainable concepts for use were presented. During the tour we were joined by the responsible architect Ruben Abela

and Ryan Vella, both employees of the national department “Malta Heritage”, to inform us about costs of restoration and technical aspects.

The museum is divided into several parts, which are in different casemates and that way generate a sustainable concept of use (pic. 10).



Fig. 08: Matthew Balzan always understood how to captivate his listeners here at Porta del Soccorso and to draw attention to new details.



Fig. 09: The freshly restored buildings around the parade ground of Fort St. Elmo

At 11.55 am, after a 20-minute walk, we reached a small Italian bistro, where we had a relaxed lunch for the next 65 minutes. In the morning we already found out, that on the way to the ferry two important points are located which are important for fortress researchers: the military book store at the Upper Barrakka gardens and the Fortification Interpretation Centre “The Fortress Builders” (2013) directly at the ferry point.

Shopping in the book store resulted in the problem that the participants could not carry the kilos of weight on the afternoon trips and we decided to stop after the arrival of the ferry, so that they could return their purchases to the hotel,

while the others waited the necessary 20 minutes. This worked very well. Shortly before leaving with the ferry in Valletta we visited the newly designed Interpretation Centre, whose manager Paul Grima guided us through the 3-storey facility. Our group was already advised by Matthew Balzan via phone.

Although the centre is still in development, it topped our expectations, because what we were able to see was – without exaggeration – fantastic. Never before we have seen such a quantity of boards, exhibits, pictures, historic plans and others. The numerous models from and about each fortification epochs generated enthusiasm (pic. 11). The glass tops on the models were open

on each diagonal side so that you could take clear pictures of them. Just the collection of models, only made for this centre, was worth the visit. The whole centre is exemplary.

On the top floor we had a great view on Fort Manoel and Fort Tigné. You could have stayed longer, but we had an afternoon program and a ferry on time.



Fig. 10: Exemplary signage of Fort St. Elmo. The numbers refer to the individual exhibition casemates of the Military Museum: 1 From prehistoric times to the Middle Ages (3000 BC - 1530) 2 Military fortress of the Order of Crusaders (1530 -1565) 3 Under three rulers (1566 - 1914) 4 British authorities (1914 - 1942) 5 World conflict (1942 - 1945) 6 Malta's destination (1946 - 2004) 7 multimedia show "The Cavalier" (1566 - 1945)

When we arrived, the book collections were brought into the hotel before we started our walk to fort Tigné. Fort Tigné itself is a well-secured construction side which you can not enter. Whoever has visited this location 20 years ago, can probably remember the open British barrack area in which Fort Tigné was integrated. This barrack area was located over the gun batteries, starting with Fort Tigné to the Garden Battery (1889-1894) with three gun emplacements connecting to Fort Cambridge (1878-1886): former location of the second 100 ton canon, which was disassembled in the 50s which leaves only one kind of those guns in the Rinella battery.

The area is not the same anymore. Instead of the barracks there is a completely new residential, office and leisure centre now. But they were able to preserve most of the Garden Battery at

the underground infrastructure and integrate it into a skyscraper complex (pic. 12).

Same as in Fort Tigné, construction works have been going since 2001; as it seems now the battery will one day be open for public. There is not much left of the barracks (Tigné Barracks). But the shopping center "The Point, Piazza Tigné" is covered with the pillar façade (pic. 13) and reminds with a clock tower of the past of this piazza. Fort Cambridge (pic. 14), North-West of the Garden Battery, the second location with the Rinella battery of a 100-ton cannon, is open to the sea and on the valley bounded by a skyscraper complex. It is only possible to look into the trench from both sides. From the valley to the skyscraper a bridge leads over the trench.



Fig. 11: Fort Wignacourt, cut open in the model, which unfortunately we could only see later on the outside.

The attempt to reach this via the underground parking was not successful as the security at the entrance of the parking seemingly not had the needed key for the lock. The bridge visible on Google Earth which leads over the front trench does not exist anymore and seemed to be a little construction during the works; the whole glacis in the front is decorated with grass. The planning includes a foot walk from Fort Tigné to the Cambridge Battery and to mark this as the Heritage Trail. We then walked along the main street to Fort Sliema (1872) with its widely seen round tower, which is nowadays used as a café, restaurant and bistro called Fortizza. Guests sat outside, the insides were dark and were not serviced. At the Sliema Point Battery iron shields in the loopholes directed to the sea reminded of the form of the sandwich shield in Gibraltar (pic. 15). After a half-an-hour-walk we reached our hotel at exactly 6 pm. The whole distance we walked was around 15.7 kilometres which made our dinner especially delicious.



Fig. 12: The garden battery is pushed out of the underground high-rise complex.



Fig. 13: The best view of the entrance gate of the Cambridge battery could only be seen from the underground car park



Fig. 14: A modern department store center is hidden behind the historic facades of British barracks.



Fig. 15: A sandwich construction of the Gibraltar shield also in Malta at Sliema Fort.

Tuesday, 17th September 2019

Today's focus of the visits was the so-called "Three Cities" South-east of the Grand Harbour. After a large breakfast at the hotel, we reached the main entrance of Fort Ricasoli by bus at 9.38 am. Unfortunately, we were not able to go in due to a large construction site. But this was not so bad, as we could already see the show side of the fort on the harbour tour on Sunday afternoon including the entrance portal so that today's visit was limited to parts of the outer area.

Those are in need of restoration and were mostly secured with fences (pic.16). The visit therefore did not take long.



Fig. 16: The battered barbican of Fort Ricasoli on the land side.



Fig. 17: At the entrance to the Rinella battery, an isometric sectional drawing informed the visitor about the expected viewing pleasure.

A few minutes later we reached the Rinella Battery (1879-1884) at 10.05 am, well restored and now used as museum, which we could visit extensively with a guide and only left at 11.12 am (pic. 17). The tour to the Grand Harbour took exactly 20 minutes. When we reached Fort St. Angelo (1530 et seq.) we were welcomed by Matthew Balzan who guided us to the freshly restores and newly opened facility (pic. 18). On the upper plateau he described the restoration history in the court of the Magistral Palace; after visiting St. Anne Chapel we witnessed the 12 o'clock cannon shot from the other side of the shore from the Lascaris Battery.

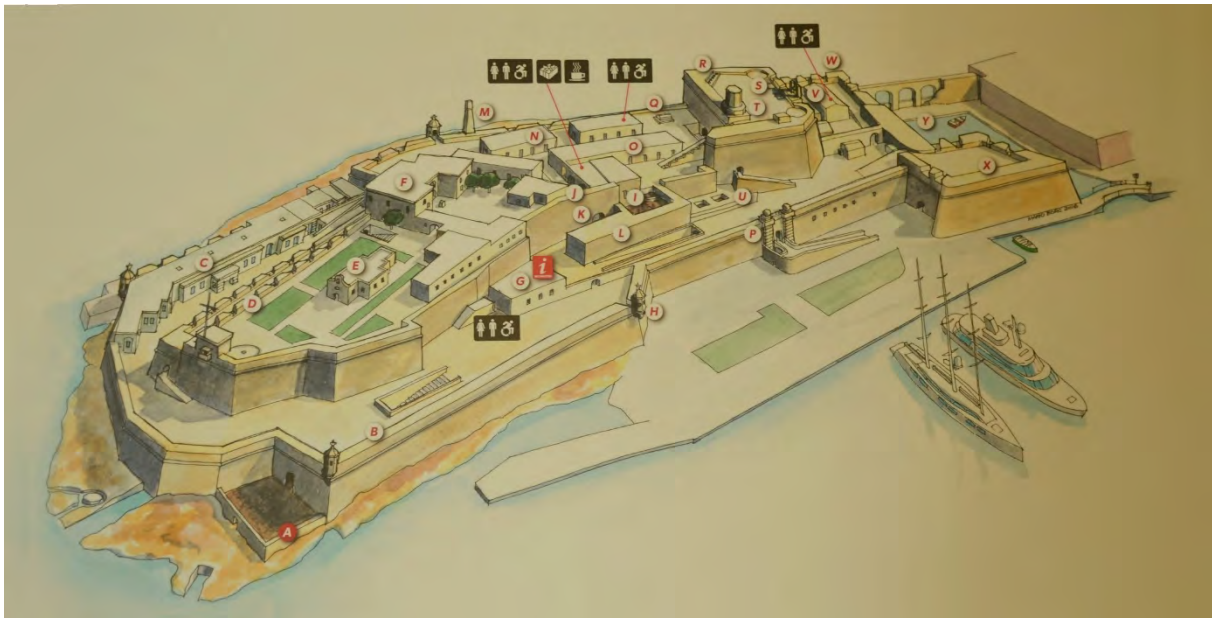


Fig. 18: Fort St. Angelo is also very well signposted.



Fig. 19: The British guns are used in well-walled casemates of Fort Delimara to protect against the weather.

The tour from Fort St. Angelo to Fort Delimara (1876-1888) in the Marsaxlokk Bay took exactly 35 minutes; Matthew had the keys and was willing to open this fort too after our visit in St. Angelo. This was perfect for us because of the cannon still located in the casemates (pic. 19). When checking online beforehand, you could see it might be a dangerous visit, but Matthew did not even let us go to the dangerous places (break-off edge to the sea).



Fig. 20: A baroque fortress gate in the Margherita lines.

We also did not see any of the dried manure which the former owner left from his pig farm running through the casemates. The three-gun emplacements we saw stood on dry casemates and clean underground. At last we had a walk on the wall to the open gun emplacement,

beside a small watch tower from where you had a great view over the Mediterranean Sea and the harbour bay behind us. At 13.55 pm we went to restaurant Carubia at the harbour for lunch.

Originally the whole afternoon was planned for visits of the walls of the three cities; but because of the visit of Fort Delimara which was moved from Friday to today, the timetable had changed and we only had one and a half hour after lunch for the visits.

But those could be used for to focus visits: for one for a walkable 25 minutes photo stop in the Margherita lines with visit of the former British barracks in Fort Verdala in the Fuq Verdala (pic. 20) and after that with a photo stop at Notre Dame gate (1675), one of the main gates of the Cottonera lines (pic. 21).

There we found a sign of the Malta Heritage Trust, which offers guided tours from the gate to the Cottonera line and to the former British hospital every Wednesday at 10.30 am. Unfortunately, this was not much for us, as the next day was completely planned-out. As our driver already had a new tour at 5 pm, we had no other choice than to return to the hotel in time.



Fig. 21: One of the main landmarks of the Cottonera lines: the Notre Dame gate

Wednesday, 18th September 2019

This Wednesday was supposed to take us for a day tour to the neighbour island Gozo. On our way to the ferry in Mellieha, which was supposed to leave at 10.30 am, we planned to visit two towers. The first tower at St. Pauls Bay, also called Wignacourt Tower (1610) we reached at 9.23 am. Unfortunately, this was closed and only opened at 10 am, which was even more disappointing as it offered a small exhibition. We surrounded the facility and took our photos (pic. 22) and went on to the next object: The Red Tower new Mellieha, also called St. Agatha Tower (1647-1649).



Fig. 22: Of the originally six towers, the Wignacourt Tower in St. Paul Bay is still one of these four remaining fortifications

We were luckier there: it was already open and let us reach the roof platform. I guess the working handyman was the reason that we could already visit the building; there is an impressive museum with decorative flags (pic. 23). We reached the ferry terminal Cirkewwa in time; the tour to Gozo took 21 minutes and we reached Mgarr around 10.54 am. During the trip we passed the small island Comino with the Tower of Saint Mary, Santa Marija Tower (1618) and the barracks beside it, which were presented greatly in the morning sun; when entering the harbour of Mgarr we saw our first visiting object on the left side: Fort Chambray (1749-1757).



Fig. 23: The Red / St. Agatha Tower is looked after by the non-profit monument conservation organization Dín l-Art Helwa.

We also had a van in Gozo and its driver Austin brought us up to the fort, which we reached around 11.15 am. The bastion facility in Vauban manner was built with private finances of the General Lieutenant Jacques François de Chambray, commander of Maltese galleys. The military use of the fort reached until 1916, then it served as a psychiatric clinic until 1956.

Several investors tried to use it after that, until it was bought by a Gozitan businessman in 2005.

A luxurious apartment area was developed on the inside of the fort; but the obligation for restoration of the historic building still lags behind, as we could see. Despite the use of some apartments, the whole facility seemed cheerless (pic. 24). On our way to Xlendi, where we had lunch, we passed the Kenuna Tower. This belonged to the kind of Semaphore (signal) towers and was built in 1848 by the British on the hill of Nadur 130 m above the sea. Unfortunately, we could not find a tower security who could allow us to step up to the roof of the tower restored in 2005 (pic. 25).



Fig. 24: The main entrance to the Chambray fort, which is now impassable, with an investment ruin in the background.

But also, without walking upstairs, we had a fantastic view over the island: in the distance we could see the citadel of Victoria. Just before reaching our restaurant in Xlendi, we stopped for another photo stop at the small watch tower (1650), which was not open and has been currently in restoration. At 2 pm we reached the citadel (1601 et seq.) in Victoria, which is called Rabat from the locals and therefore led to confusion regarding the program with the city Rabat located on Malta.

The citadel in its today's form was extensively restored from 2007 to 2013 with around 36 million Euros from European funds, which Malta had to co-finance with 15 million Euros (pic. 26). Included in those work was the establishment of an information centre in the cellar area, in which a movie about the history of the facility was shown. Unfortunately, there were only signs about the single buildings but no guideline so that we often stood at the end of a way and had to return to get to a new location.



Fig. 25: One of the highest points in Gozo: The Kenuna - Semaphore tower on the hill of in-Nadur.



Fig. 26: Under the stairs in front of the half-bastion St. Martin of the citadel in Victoria is the entrance to the visitor center.

This was not so easy regarding the heat. After one hour we had walked the most important things; at the entrance of the prison museum we could even buy a brochure about the restoration history of the fortress. Independence Square below the citadel was our meeting point with Nynke. This offered a good opportunity to take a coffee and ice cream break with its many cafés. The 20 minutes trip at 16.35 pm with the ferry to Malta was good. But the visit of the Wignacourt Towers on our return to the hotel was again not possible as they were only open until 1 pm. When reaching the hotel at 17.50 pm was the end of an interesting day.

Thursday, 19th September 2019

Our local guide Nynke drove around the Victoria lines before to ensure a safe visit of the requested sights. But the opening times of the only fort we could have visited were completely outside of our program plan, so that the arrival at Fort Madljena at 9.30 am was just an outside visit. From the near battery San Giovanni we could see into the valley, in which was the wall with openings on both sides of the hillside (pic. 27).

The Victoria lines were built as a 10.25 km long fortification line, which stood on a predecessor facility in form of watch towers and bunkers of the Maltese Order, building three forts (1875) and later a connecting wall from the British until 1867. The line should stop consequences from a possible landing of the enemies in the North of the island. A photo stop on the other side of the valley, called “Top of the World” by locals, gave us wide view on the sea and the Sound Mirrow facility Il-Widna surrounded by satellite dishes in the village Maghtab (pic. 38) and the far away Fort Mosta. On our way to Fort Mosta we stopped for photos at the Semaphore Tower in Gharghur (pic. 29), before we could photograph Fort Mosta with our telephoto lenses from the main street (pic. 30).



Fig. 27: The barrier wall at the beginning of the Victoria line with culverts in the valley floor.

Fort Mosta is used by the military and not open. On our way to the Dwejra Line – a typical part of the connecting wall – we almost passed the Targa Battery which lies under the slope of our street hidden under bushes and trees. We were lucky as the Mosta Scout Group just rehearsed there and the leader was so kind to give us the key which opened the way to the inside of the battery.

Posterns and casemates, which partly served as storage, were in a dry and clean condition;

unfortunately, we could not take any pictures of the gun emplacements because of the rehearsing youth there. The photo stop at the “Small Bridge” in the Dwejra Line was short but showed the constructions of the connecting line with trenches, walls and banquets and backward provision buildings. At the Chapel of Our Lady of Itria in Bingemma we reached the other end of the Victoria Lines. At the hillsides you could see rests of the high wall. This location was secured by a few meters further on located Fort Bingemma at the corner of the Nadur hill, which is used as an agricultural business and is watched by dogs. Here, too, we could only take pictures and videos of the outside. Very impressive was the fortress trench built into the stone, which goes steeply down on the Eastern side of the fort (pic.31).



Fig. 28: Remains of the sound mirror in Maghtab.

Arrived in Rabat, we had our welcomed lunch at the restaurant Bottegin Palazzo Xara, from where we had only a few steps to the catacombs and the WWII shelters in the Wignacout museum. Here you get an idea how the population had to find shelter, in excruciating closeness to each other, during the bombardment of Malta in World War II. The atmosphere was supported by the fact that the single cells and chambers were completely empty without any museum like objects which might influence the impression.

Mdina (= the city surrounded by walls) near Rabat was the former capital of Malta and today shines with its fortifications, which were extensively restored from 2006 to 2016. The main entrance lead over a bridge through the city's gate, which the grandmaster of the Maltese Order Antonio Manoel de Vilhena (1633 – 1736) had built.



Fig. 29: The refurbished semaphore tower in Gharghur, which was once built for the purpose of telegraphic transmission.

On the right over a curtain wall the bastion Homedes is connected, named after the 47th grandmaster of the Order Juan de Homedes. The bastion on the left is named after another grandmaster, Martin de Redin. This connects the curtain wall with the St. Peter Bastion only separated by a Greek gate as the last part of the medieval city wall.



Fig. 30: The landscaped Fort Mostar with deeper (not visible in this photo) external access to underground tunnels.

A straight curtain wall leads North-East to the St. Maria Bastion. South and North-Western parts of the fortress are well-preserved. On our way back to La Valletta we were able to see the

other two sides which were also in a very good condition. The trench on the South-West front had a designed garden (pic. 32), only at St Peters Bastions are parking spaces, which can be used for a fee. The inner city is touristically over-crowded and very slowly an infrastructure is developing in the restored buildings. Around half past four we started our way back to the hotel in La Valletta.



Fig. 31: Fort Bingemma, enthroned on a high sandstone rock.



Fig. 32: View into the moat of Mdina with the Greek gate visible in the background.

Friday, 20th September 2019

The last tour day was to be spent with the focus on the Marsaxlokk Bay – unscheduled we already visited Fort Delimara a few days ago. As the first object, we reached Vendôme Redoubt (1715) exactly at 10 am, a former tower Reduit (pic. 33). It is the last tower Reduit of a row of former facilities, which were then built by the knight's order around the island to secure the coasts. Currently the tower is used by the soccer club Marsaxlokk as headquarters and is not open. The photo tour around it therefore only took 10 minutes; after a three more-minute drive we reached the St. Lucian tower (1610/1611), which is used today by The Malta Aquaculture Research Center of the Maltese

ministry for food, agriculture and fishing (pic. 34).



Fig. 33: Bulky emerging outer walls with narrow niches of the Vendôme-Redoubt.

Nynke tried to get us in, but no one answered the bell. Supposedly, there is a few one-hour tour on Saturdays from 10 to 11am when registering at the ministry. Nevertheless, the round trip around the tower gave interesting results for the experts: due to the use the building had a corresponding condition, the same as the British battery in front to the sea. A participant of the group was friendly enough to tell us about the not far away Ferretti battery, where we of course headed straight away, and it turned out to be used as a five-star restaurant. Especially Nynke was happy about this and said that this could be a new destination which should be tested. Unfortunately, this restaurant was not open. The half-circled battery was built between 1715 and 1716 was given the name of the order knight Francesco Maria Ferretti, who enabled this construction with the gift of 917 Scudi.



Fig. 34: View of the main entrance side of the St. Lucian tower.

The Fort Tas-Silg (1879 – 1883), which we reached shortly after 11 o'clock, serves as a dog station, The Island Sanctuary, and remembered a similar facility in Fort Pomer in Kaštijun near Pula. While we were able to visit at least the fort barracks (only from the outside), we are not able to enter the fort in Tas-Silg at all (pic. 35). A

young woman, who Nynke was able to ring, was very sorry to not be able to let us in, but for this purpose at least the dogs had to be locked up. Still, there were interesting moments to discover at this fort.

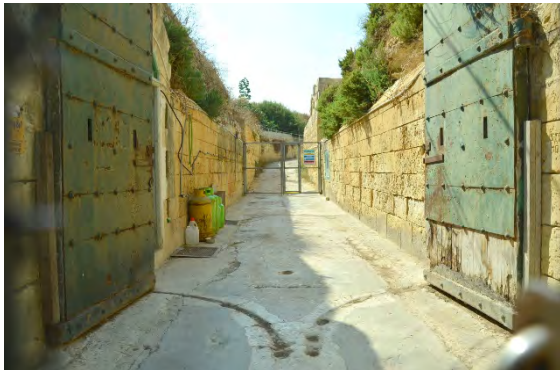


Fig. 35: Main entrance to Fort Tas-Silġ.

On both sides of the back of the fort were two quite high caponiers for which the trench was formed in steep angles on both sides (Abb. 36). The bulge would have been easy to overcome on the left side and this unusual construction is not known from any other fort. On the right side was the concreted ceiling of the caponier higher than the trench outer wall. The constructional parts of the main trench offered all in all a desperate image: large parts of the concrete construction and the embankment wall on top were collapsed and the soil began to slide into the trench. At the front of the fort was a well-secured garden area, which prevented us from further walking around. All was over-grown and quite wild.



Fig. 36: The over-concreted trench caponier on the left side of the Tas-Silġ fort.

In a much worse condition is the St. Pauls Battery, three hundred meters North of Tas-Silġ; a small polygonal gun emplacement, which was built by the British from 1881 – 1886 and has three positions for 7-inch muzzle-loaders. Some entrance houses to the underground depots are still existing, but the stairs are completely desolate, so that further exploration would have been

pointless. Although the walled trench mostly exists, nature starts its work of destruction together with wind and water erosion. We had more luck at the Delle Grazie Battery (1883-1886) in Xghajra which we reached at 12.36 pm (pic. 37). The battery is subordinate to the municipal Xghajra and serves as a storage, and when we arrived, we saw an open gate with a administrative office, whose friendly employee gave us the opportunity to visit the building until 1.00 pm.



Fig. 37: View over one of the gun emplacements into the Delle Grazie battery.

We guess visitors come more often as there where flyers available. Even the contact dates of the responsible municipal in Xghajra were handed out. As response to the Italian naval armament since 1873 those four gun emplacement, which are located within a unregular rectangular fort groundplan surrounded by the trench, should reinforce the North-Eastern coast defence between the Bay or Marsaskala and La Valletta, together with the Rinella and the Zonqor Battery. We used the remaining 20 minutes as good as we could and stepped up the gun emplacements (if you saw two, you have seen them all!) and had a look into the front trench and the postern tailings on both sides, which you would not wanted to step on even with more time.

The impression was okay, despite the material lying around, which was partly because the facility is under control due to the use. Normally, the tour would have been finished, but from our lunch restaurant “Zonqor Point” we could see the St Thomas tower. As we had a good timing, we visited this tower after lunch. But this started quietly as we were the only guests. This suddenly changed when a large Italian tour group arrived, which made my official goodbye to Nynke not easy due to the background noise. But our applause for awarding Nynke with the button “Certified Guide” of FORTE CULTURA® due to here exemplary commitment in an unknown topic was louder than them.



Fig. 38: The St. Thomas Tower with the side wings of the former Corinthia Jerma Palace Hotel visible in the background.

Around 14.40 pm we reached St. Thomas Tower, which was built similarly to the St. Lucian Tower in 1614 (pic. 38). The tower was closed and there was no information on the use at all. From the past, we know that the tower was used until 2008 as a pizzeria and restaurant and after a good clean should be reused as a pirate museum of the Mediterranean Sea. Apart from removing the rubbish, this did not seem to be realised. From time to time the municipal Marsaskala opens the building for special events. Regarding the time and construction context, the Corinthia Jerma, located between the tower and the sea, has to be seen, which is a ruin since its bankruptcy in 2007. The hotel was built in 1982 with Libyan co-financing was managed by Corinthia Hotels International. The former Libyan state president had a suite in this hotel. Tower and hotel are a nice ensemble; the municipal urges the reactivation, but the new owner of the hotel complex cannot yet decide.

Anyway, both buildings have interesting development potential for the future. After a half-an-hour tour of both facilities we returned to the Upper Barrakka Gardens in Valletta, where Nynke wanted to show us the cannon shot of the Saluting Battery at 4 pm which we missed on Sunday. She led us to the level where the cannons stand, and this was only possible for visitors of the War Museum in the Lascari's Battery. One level higher where the other, not paying, visitors, who could not see the drill book to load and fire the shot, which was done by actors in historic British uniforms. So exactly at 4 pm with a loud bang the shot went off and echoed over the Grand Harbour to St. Angelo.

Already during the week, we saw large signs (pic. 39) and found flyers announcing a "Valletta Military Tattoo" from 20th to 22nd September 2019 on the St. George's Square every day at 7 pm. That was of course the highlight of the end of our tour, and our tour operator understood that to order the tickets for the nine interested of us.



Fig. 39: Announcement of the Valletta Military Tattoo on the Porte des Bombes.

We spent the time until the entrance at 8 pm with sightseeing at the info shop of Fort. St. Elmo and the court of the grandmaster palace, named after Queen Victoria's second son Prince Alfred, was the start of the spectacle. Between 6 pm and 7 pm several bands arrived, and it started on time at 7 pm with the Tattoo. Among others, the Band La Frustica, from near Rome, appeared. Moreover, there were the flag swingers Sbandieratori e Musici Borgo San Lorenzo from Alba and the Gymnastic Club Piruett feat Dance Group Vikerkaar from Estonia. As a local band the Band and Drill Team of the Armed Forces of Malta was presented, the Band and Drill Team of The Malta Police Force and the Massed Pipes and Drums. All in all, a funny and colourful music and dance spectacle at the same time, which was not just fun for local Southerners but also for tourists and gave the press the headline "Valletta Military Tattoo ends in an explosion of colour". At 9.30 pm the show was finished with a grand finale and therewith also our tour to Malta.

Saturday, 21st September 2019

The check-in at Malta Airport shortly after lunch was easier than in Berlin on the first flight: we were all on time, had the opening of the Lufthansa terminal with enough and friendly staff and 57 kg luggage for two people were no problem at all. We could ignore the tiny lunch from Lufthansa as we had enough time between breakfast and the flight at 5.30 pm to eat again. Arrival and departure counter in Frankfurt Main were close to each other so that changing planes was no problem either. Around 11.20 pm we closed our door at home behind us.

Summary: experienced a lot – saw nothing or saw a lot and nothing experienced? Certainly not!

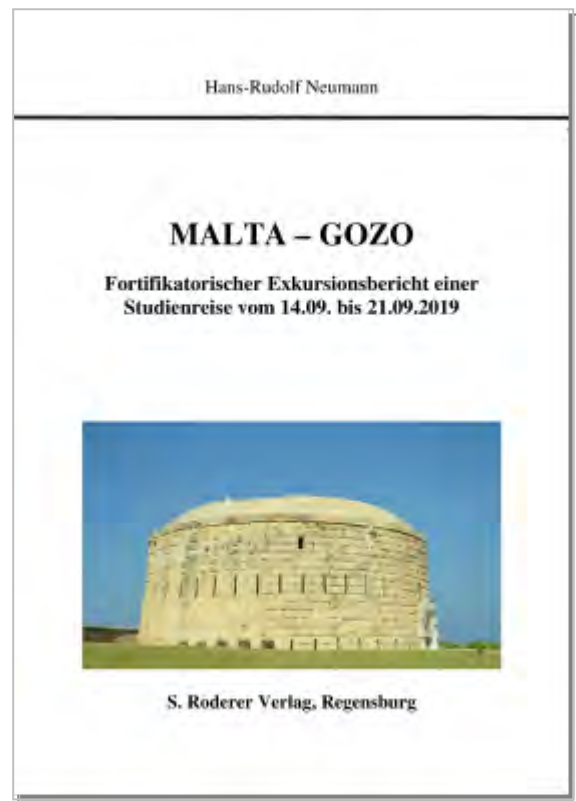
The program was exceeded and within 6 days and on six points it was possible to understand what had been restored and refurbished in this

century with the help of the European Union and private investment and what is to be developed. The pilot tour was supposed to contribute to smooth the ways for further touristic development by making communication better by more and current information, which will enable also single tourist to arrange an individual program for time and power saving visits on own tracks. This is especially important for group tour operators. The internet is no panacea. Electronic information via the iPhone can be helpful and loosen the tour as long as operators and local guides are informed in time. As we have seen ourselves and which was confirmed, fortress tourism is currently unknown, although they are in the middle of a dense pool of European fortification heritage.

For us no longer a surprise, but always nice again: the aha experience when local drivers and guides are not guiding anymore but are suddenly guided themselves. To show fortifications to tourists is a new experience for them but also the sign of us being on a good way. Many things have to be thought of: But this will be found in the printed tour documentation which can be ordered directly from the editor (<https://roderer-verlag.de/produkt/fortifikatorischer-exkursionsbericht-malta-goza/>).

This article was published in “Am Wall”,
No. 109 / December 2019

Author: Hans-Rudolf Neumann



Complete fortress study tour report Malta-Gozo 2019

Author: Hans-Rudolf Neumann
Publisher: S. Roderer Verlag Regensburg
ca. 250 pages, 345 color photos, broschiert,
german language

ISBN: 978-3-89783-930-4

Publication date: December 2019

Preis: **43,90 EURO**

e-mail: hrv.neumann@t-online.de

