

Continuity in change

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is the Chief Executive Officer and a director of Lombard Bank Malta. He started his banking career in Malta in 1968, where he served for seventeen years in all areas of banking. In 1998 he took up his current appointment within Lombard Bank. Since 2007, he has served as Chairman of MaltaPost, the privatised postal services operator in Malta, and in 2008 he took over as Chairman of Heritage Malta, the national agency for museums, conservation practice and cultural heritage.

Nature has endowed Malta and Gozo with a unique location in the centre of the Mediterranean and with a superb natural harbour that over millennia attracted the attention of practically every empire that dominated this Middle Sea. Every new settler brought novel techniques and experiences that enriched the local people's knowledge and traditions. As a result of these continuous developments, Malta's story is a voyage of discovery of man and his environment spanning from prehistory to the present.

Permanent human occupation of the Islands started around 5200BC in the Neolithic Age. The first settlers came from Sicily. Malta's farmers flourished and gave rise to the 'temple culture of Malta' around 4200BC. The temples, with their astounding architecture, are recognised among the oldest freestanding monuments in the world, a full thousand years before the Egyptian pyramids.

These megalithic monuments are marked by two main characteristics. The first is the adoption of rock-cut chamber tombs, which developed into large underground cemeteries such as the al Saflieni Hypogeum. Dating back to around 3600BC, the Hypogeum is a unique monument, a splendid example of architecture in the negative, since parts of it were carved in a clear imitation of the temples built above ground. The second phenomenon was the building

of a series of megalithic structures of monumental proportions, which demonstrate great creativity, and a rational philosophy of engineering, aesthetics and repertoire of objects. The temples include Ggantija in Gozo, agar Qim, Mnajdra, Tarxien, Skorba, Ta' agrat and Kordin in Malta. They are all inscribed in UNESCO's World Heritage List.

The Neolithic civilisation in Malta came to an abrupt, unexplained end around 2500BC. The Bronze Age constitutes a fresh beginning for Maltese prehistory, which had to respond to an uncertain social environment caused by the Mediterranean Prehistoric Metal Ages. These developments spanned over a period of two millennia, until around 750BC, with the arrival of a new sea-faring culture coming from the eastern coast of the Mediterranean: the Phoenicians. With the Phoenicians Malta became a hub for the commercial and political dominion of Carthage.

Malta became part of the Roman Empire in 218BC, during the Second Punic War, when the governor of Sicily administered the Maltese islands. One of them, Verres, was accused by Cicero of stealing precious and sacred objects from Malta, which was a centre of economic activity of certain importance, and where the locals seem to have enjoyed a high standard of living. The Roman period is also characterised by the arrival of St Paul in 60 AD as recounted in the Acts of the Apostles. Collective memory has come to incorporate St Paul's stay in Malta following his shipwreck.

The Byzantines absorbed Malta in AD 535 during which period it would appear that there were no significant changes in the lifestyle of the inhabitants. Following the spread of Islam, the Arab invasion of 870 AD brought to an end a millennium during which Malta formed part of the Greco-Roman world. The Muslims ruled the Islands directly until 1091 they were driven out by the Norman Count Roger of Sicily. However until around 1240 the Arab culture remained a point of reference. The roots of the Maltese language are still a living testimony of the Arab presence in Malta.

From then on Malta increasingly fell under a European, Latin and Christian sphere of influence. The Maltese raided North African coasts; but the Moors also raided Malta and thousands were enslaved. Attachment to the Christian faith and the struggle against Muslims were natural elements in the self-definition of a people that bridged the cultural divide



A Fatimid Dinar found in Malta. Muslims ruled the island for over 200 years

across the two sides of the Mediterranean world.

In 1530 Charles V of Spain granted Malta to the Order of St John. The latter immediately started to transform Malta from a vulnerable outpost of Sicily into a central Mediterranean fortress. Fortifications extended around the entire harbour areas and the coast.

The siege of 1565 brought about a radical change and secured a place for Malta on the map of Europe since it was now on the forefront of Mediterranean power politics. Valletta, defined by Patrick Brydone as ‘an epitome of Europe,’ dominated Maltese life and became one of the busiest centres of the Mediterranean. Ideas, manners, artists and architects were imported from Europe while the Church, also through the Holy Roman Inquisition, held a strong hold on the population. The knights introduced a European-style urban civilisation into Malta. The stupendous St John’s Co-Cathedral and the Grand Master’s Palace bear witness to the power and the glory of the Order in Malta.

In the eighteenth century and possibly as a result of the French revolution the Order increasingly became an anachronism. Napoleon attacked Malta on his way to Egypt in 1798. Upon the surrender of the Order, a series of laws were enacted in rapid succession and the Maltese revolted and asked Great Britain for protection. The French retreated behind the harbour fortifications until they capitulated in September 1800.

From insurrection against the French in 1798 to independence from the British in 1964 Malta engaged in a ‘nation-building’ exercise. British influences on Maltese life were varied. British imperial strategy considered Malta primarily as a fortress rather than just as a colony. Consequently political freedom was granted (and withdrawn) selectively. Two main political parties developed, advocating resistance on one side and assimilation on the other. The role of the Catholic Church remained steadfast. Catholicism was a bulwark of identity against outsiders.

The Second World War literally changed Malta politically, socially, economically and culturally. During the dark days of WWII the Island stood as a bastion against the totalitarian forces that dominated the Continent. Malta became ‘the most bombed place on earth.’ The Island was devastated, yet the people endured. On 15 April 1942 King George VI awarded the George Cross to the people of Malta: ‘To honour her brave people ... to bear witness to a heroism and devotion that will long be famous in history.’

Malta’s nation-building efforts matured at Independence in 1964. Independence was consolidated through economic diversification and strengthening of the welfare state in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1974 Malta became a Republic and a member of the European Union in 2004. For more information visit www.heritagemalta.org

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The Sleeping Lady, Museum of Archeology, Valletta



Malta’s megalithic temples pre-date the pyramids of Egypt



St John’s Co-Cathedral in Valletta was built by the Knights of Malta in 1577