

S 5.1 The Old Cities



S5.1.3

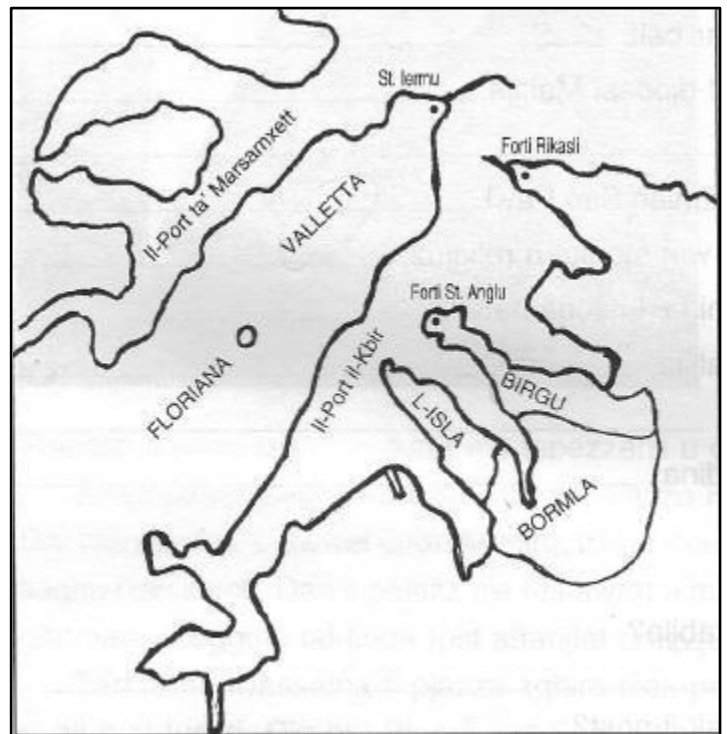
Important notes about Birgu.

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Birgu is the oldest city in Cottonera.

As a peninzula (a piece of land in the shape of a tongue over the sea) this city was always very important as a:

- Commercial centre in the port
- It defended the entrances to the Grand Harbour,
- It defended the people who lived in the city surrounded and protected by the bastions.



The history of this city comes down to us from Roman times. Arab and lastly it's most important time, that of the Knights of Saint John.

When the Knights of Saint John came to Malta in 1530 they did not want to live in Imdina because this was too far away from the sea. They chose to live in Birgu as this was close to the sea.

Here in Birgu the Knights built many important buildings amongst which they extended and fortified Fort Saint Angelo which was also surrounded by bastions, a new church of Saint Laurence, the Inquisitors palace and also many auberges. Auberges are houses the Knights lived in.



Fort Saint Angelo: This work was carefully undertaken and in fact during the Great Siege this city withstood the attacks by the Turks who were forced to surrender. As of this time Birgu started to also be known as **Città Vittoriosa** which means **the Victorious city**.

However a lot of the buildings in this city were badly damaged during the last world war (1939 -1945), because Birgu was one of the most heavily bombed places. This happened because the enemy used to bomb the areas around the Grand Harbour.

Places of Interest in Birgu

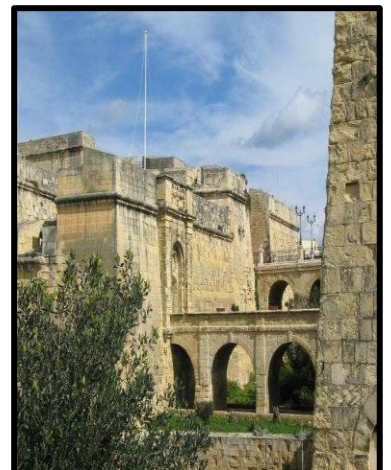
In the bastions surrounding Birgu we find many doors, however amongst those most renowned we have those which are close to the Saint Lawrence church

The 3 Gates

Advanced Gate

Couvre Porte

Main Gate.



The Inquisitors Palace

A big palace built by the knights a short time after they arrived in Malta to serve as a Court and prison. After this ended up in the hands of the church court. Anyone who was reported for some wrong doing used to be punished by torture or locked up in very small cells.



Victory Square

Here we can see the beautiful statue of Saint Lawrence, who is the patron Saint of Birgu and another statue of Victorious Malta.

The Seven Auberges of the Knights

In this city the knights had a number of auberges (houses) amongst which that of England, Provence, France, Aragon, Italy, Germany and Portugal. Due to the fact that the knights came from different countries they used to meet according to their nationality in these auberges. These kept on being used until the knights went to Valletta where they once again built more auberges.

The Sacred Infirmary

This serves as a hospital for the knights. Due to the fact that the knights used to fight a lot they always built a hospital wherever they stayed to tend to those hurt in battle. Nowadays this serves as a convent for the cloistered Benedictine nuns.

The coast of Birgu and the Yacht Marina

This is the place closest to the sea with a very beautiful aspect with hundreds of yachts and boats.



Freedom Monument

This is a monument which commemorates the closing down of the English naval base in Malta. (31st of March 1979)

The church of Birgu



It is dedicated to the martyr Saint Laurence. The church of Saint Laurence was the second church which became a parish, after the Cathedral in Imdina. When the knights of Saint John came to Malta (1530) they made Birgu their capital city and the church of

Saint Laurence became their principle church. They used to call it their conventual church.

One should also mention that over the years a lot of changes and extensions took place in this church until a new one was built during the time of the knights after the old church suffered a lot of damage when it was badly burnt. The church as seen today was designed by Lorenzo Gafà (the same architect who designed the Cathedral of Imdina and the Cathedral of the Cittàdella). The feast of Saint Laurence is held on the 10th of August. Next to the church there is also a museum of antique sacral objects.

The Collachio

The Collachio was a part of the city of Birgu reserved only for the Knights.

The Manderaggio

Between Fort Saint Angelo and Birgu, the Knights dug out a Manderaggio or better still mandragg. Here the Knights used to keep their boats (galleys) safe during an enemy attack.



The Castle/Fort Saint Angelo

This is the most important place in Birgu. The Phoenicians had built a temple to Hammuna at the tip of Birgu, in the place where today there is the Fort/Fortress Saint Angelo. The Arabs demolished it and instead built a castle. After

the Arabs the Normans fortified the castle and probably built in it a chapel dedicated to the Madonna. In the 15th century another chapel was built dedicated to Saint Anna. During the time of the knights this castle was given a facelift as it was fortified and extended and surrounded by bastions.

The streets of Birgu

These are very similar to those of Imdina. Narrow streets to make it more difficult for the enemy to enter the city.



The Maritime Museum

This is a museum in which we find things related to the sea and the boats which had some naval connection to the history of Malta.



The Bastions in Birgu

Birgu is surrounded by bastions both on the sea side and the land side. High and sturdy bastions which always protected the Maltese. Birgu is a city which was never overcome by the enemy.

Complete these sentences.

1. Birgu is one of the _____ cities.
2. Fort Saint Angelo is found _____ of Birgu.
3. The people of Birgu celebrate the feast of _____ on the 10th of August.
4. Along the coast of Birgu we find _____ and _____.
5. Those that were against the teaching of the church were brought in front of _____.
6. The chapel of Saint Anna is found in _____.
7. The knights had _____ auberges in Birgu.
8. In the Maritime Museum we see things related to _____.
9. Lorenzo Gafa was the _____ who made _____ of the _____ of Birgu
10. In front of the church there is _____.