

S 5.1 The Old Cities



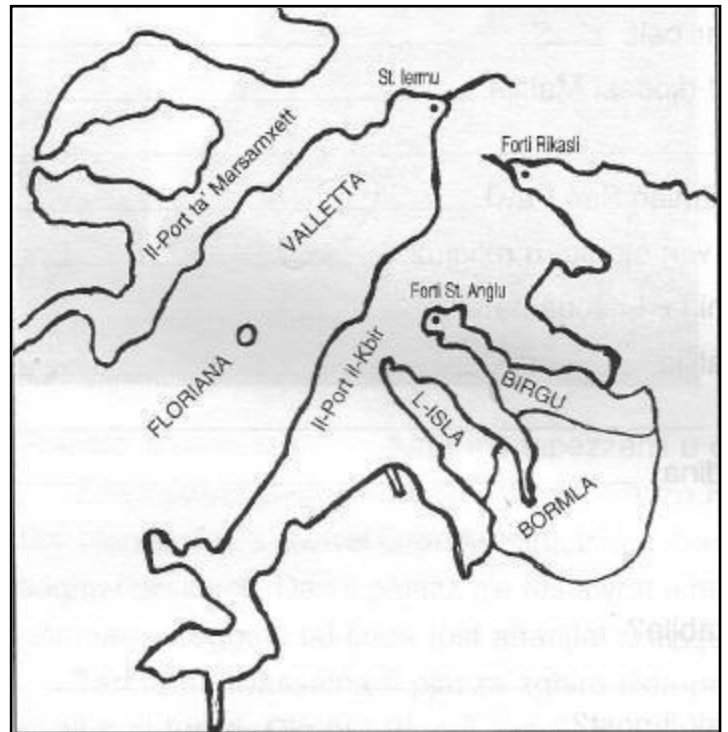
S5.1.3

Important notes about Birgu.

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Birgu is the oldest city in Cottonera. As a peninsula (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 times and lastly its 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 Mdina because this was too far away from the sea.

They chose to live in Birgu instead, 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. They built the new church of Saint Lawrence, the Inquisitor's palace and many auberges. Auberges were houses the Knights lived in.



Fort Saint Angelo: This work was carefully undertaken, and during the Great Siege this fort withstood the attacks by the Turks who were later forced to surrender. From this time Birgu started to be also 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

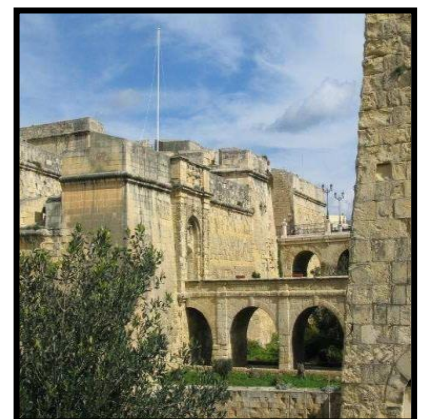
In the bastions surrounding Birgu we find many doorways, or gates however, amongst the most well-known are those which are close to the church of Saint Lawrence.

The 3 Gates:

Advanced Gate

Couvre Porte

Main Gate



The Inquisitors Palace

This big palace was built by the knights a short time after they arrived in Malta to serve as a court and prison. Afterwards it ended up in the hands of the church as the court of the Inquisitor. Anyone reported for some wrong doing used to be punished or locked up here 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 several auberges (houses) amongst which were those of England, Provence, France, Aragon, Italy, Germany and Portugal. Because 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 building served as a hospital for the knights. Since the knights were warriors they always built a hospital wherever they stayed to tend to those hurt in battle. Nowadays this building 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 very beautiful scenery with hundreds of yachts and boats.



Freedom Monument

This is a monument which commemorates the final closing down of the British 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 Mdina. When the knights of Saint John came to Malta (1530) they made Birgu their capital city and the church of

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

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 Mdina 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 and sacred 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 Fort 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 Our Lady. In the 15th century another chapel was built and was dedicated to Saint Anne. During the time of the knights this castle was fortified, extended and surrounded by bastions.

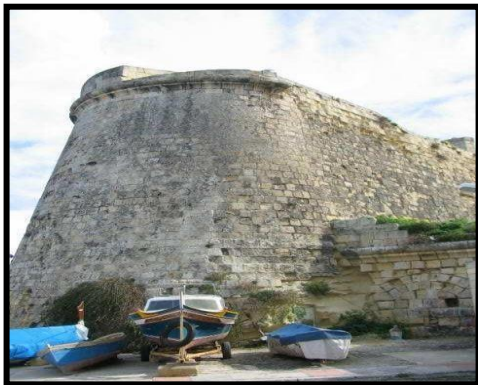
The streets of Birgu

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



The Maritime Museum

In this museum 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 seaside and the land side. High and sturdy bastions which always protected the Maltese. Birgu is a city which was never overcome by the enemy.

Fill in the blanks:

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 Anne 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 drew the _____ of the _____ of Birgu.
10. In front of the church there is _____.