

S 5.1 THE OLD CITIES



S5.1.3

Important notes about the Ċittadella.

Research by Etienne Vella - Għajnsielem

The Ċittadella is found at the centre of the capital city of Gozo, Rabat (Victoria). This is a very small city, with many narrow streets surrounded by bastions. It is built on a hill and from the top of the bastions you can see the whole of Gozo. From the top of these bastions the Gozitans used to guard Gozo from attacks by the Turks and the pirates.



The **Ċittadella** was very important as the the Gozitans used to shelter inside it when attacked by pirates, and they also guarded the island from the top of this high place.

From the center of Rabat, known as **it-Tokk**, we go up the long hill which brings us to the spot where we find the Ċittadella. This road leads to a long stone bridge. To enter the city there used to be a drawbridge which could be raised and lowered.

During Roman rule, the hill looked like an Acropolis with a temple dedicated to the pagan god Juno dominating the centre.

The Romans were followed by many rulers, amongst whom were the Aragonese, the Byzantines and the Knights of Saint John, who continued to build and beautify this hill with buildings as we know it today.



The Ċittadella resembles Mdina in Malta.

It is surrounded by high bastions which, prior to the *Great Siege* (a war between the Maltese and the Knights against the Turks in 1565), were weak. The *Cittadella*, also known as the **Gran Castello** (Grand Castle), passed through its toughest time in 1551, when a big fleet of Turkish galleys, led by Dragut, set sail for Malta. After the Maltese escaped thanks to the intercession of Saint Agatha, the Turks went to Gozo where they caused complete havoc among the Gozitans. The Turks attacked the *Cittadella*, they managed to enter the city, and captured around 6,000 people and took them as slaves, meaning all the Gozitans. They left only around 40 people (old people and the sick who could not serve as slaves). During this attack the bastions as well as the buildings suffered tremendous damage. The *Cittadella* had suffered a lot and it was only 50 years later that it took the shape we know today. The bastions which had been damaged were re-built on the plan of Francesco Laparelli, the architect sent to Malta by the Pope.

Until 1637 there was a law that at sunset all the Gozitans had to enter behind the bastions for protection, due to the fear from some other attack by the Turks or the pirates. Like the other old cities which we have seen already the streets of the *Cittadella* are very narrow.



Nowadays there are only a few people who still live in the *Cittadella*. During the time of the British rule the streets were rebuilt, and they are there to this day, they are better and cars can pass through some of them. As soon as you enter the *Cittadella* you see a square and in front of you, you see the Cathedral. This is dedicated



to Saint Mary. This was built on the design of the architect Lorenzo Gafà. Do you remember students that this clever architect had also designed the Cathedral of Mdina and the Church of Birgu?

The feast of *Santa Marija* (the ascension of Mary) is celebrated on the 15th of August.

This Cathedral is special because it does not have a dome, however when you enter inside you think that it has, because the ceiling was painted in such a way to make you see a dome. This is a unique painting in the Maltese Islands.

In the Ċittadella there are several places of interest, like:

The Cathedral of *Santa Marija*,

The Archbishop's Palace,

The Court Building of Gozo

The high bastions

Narrow streets

The Cathedral Museum

The Gozo Museum of

Archaeology,

The Folklore Museum,

The Gozo Nature Museum,

The Clock Tower , the Armoury (a place for old weapons), and the Old Prison.



Nowadays hundreds of tourists visit the Ċittadella to see this very beautiful place.



On the bastions of the Ċittadella some wild plants grow, such as the chamomile of the castle. Amongst the many birds we find the National Bird of Malta, which is the Blue Rock Thrush (*Merill*).

a. Fill in the blanks with the following words:

Natural	Medieval	Rabat	pirates	bastions	Saint John
Mdina	Folklore	interest	the Cathedral Museum	the Grand Castle	

1. The Ċittadella is found in _____ and it is also known as _____.
2. This city was built in _____ times, but the knights of _____ continued to fortify this city by high _____.
3. They did this because during those times many attacks were carried out by _____ on the island.
4. The way the Ċittadella is built resembles a lot that of _____.
5. The Cathedral of the Ċittadella, _____, the _____ History Museum, and the Museum of _____ are historical places and places of _____ which we find behind the bastions of the Ċittadella.

b. Choose the right answer.

1. The Ċittadella is built on a (hill, valley, cliff).
2. The Ċittadella is also known as the (Paola, Gran Castello, Fort Ricasoli).
3. (The Romans, the British, the Americans) built the first bastions around the Ċittadella.