



I-ACCESS
IMPLEMENTING THE ACCESSIBILITY TO URBAN HISTORIC CENTER'S
USE AND KNOWLEDGE

*SCHEDA DI ACQUISIZIONE DEI DATI
SUI MONUMENTI DEL PERCORSO*

*DATA ACQUISITION FORM
ON THE ROUTE MONUMENTS*

3 - Auberge of Castille

CENNI SULLA STORIA DELLA FABBRICA
NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF THE MONUMENT

1.PERIOD (concerning the first construction) 16 - 18th century

2.INQUADRAMENTO STORICO-URBANISTICO

2.HISTORICAL-URBANISTIC FRAMEWORK

This Auberge is one of the most important buildings of Valletta, and since 1972 it has housed the Office of the Prime Minister. It housed the knights from the kingdom of Castille since the 1500s, served as the office of the Commission for National Property under the French, and subsequently housed military and residential and administrative functions during the British period.

The 1740s façade reflects its rich history. The crescent moon which appears on the main door and in the carved decoration over the windows is a reference to the coat of arms of **GRAND MASTER PINTO DE FONSECA** who ordered its rebuilding. The wrought iron gate fronting the main doorway carries the initials 'RA' (Royal Artillery) and 'RE' (Royal Engineers) who were stationed here in the British period.

3.COMMITTENZA

3.PATRONS

GRAND MASTER PINTO DE FONSECA

Manuel Pinto de Fonseca served as Grand Master between 1741-1773. He caused several notable additions to be made in the fortifications both of Malta and Gozo, and also erected the Law Courts and several other important public edifices.

For more information on Grand Master Pinto;

<http://www.vassallomalta.com/Grandmasters/GM2/GM.htm>

4.FASI COSTRUTTIVE

4.CONSTRUCTION PHASES

The first auberge was built in the 16th century. The present facade dates back to the 1740s.

The original Grand Master's Coat of Arms and bust placed just over the central window of the new facade were found to be too large and heavy. They were removed and replaced in 1766 – 1768 to avoid damaging the building fabric. In 1791, the main door was enlarged, while an arch for the main door and a large staircase in the parapet were constructed.

In the 1930s the building acquired the prominence that it enjoys today, when the Duke of York avenue, nowadays known as Girolamo Cassar Avenue, was built to create a new entrance for traffic into Valletta. The new road which regrettably necessitated the removal of part of the parapet wall of the fortifications.

In 1934, the original marble bust of Grand Master Pinto was removed for better preservation and replaced by a bronze version. During the Second World War, in 1942, the area to the right of the main entrance and the ceiling of one of the front halls were damaged. These were rebuilt after the war.

Restoration of the auberge's facade took place between 2009 and 2014. The works were undertaken by the Restoration Unit of the Ministry of Resources. The restoration entailed cleaning of the stonework, re-attachment and replacement of stonework as well as the conservation of the bronze bust.

<https://restoration.gov.mt/en/otherprojects/completedprojects/Pages/Castille.aspx>

<https://vassallohistory.wordpress.com/auberges-in-malta/>

<https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/restoration-of-auberge-de-castilles-facade-starts.317774>

5.TIPOLOGIA E RIFERIMENTI ARCHITETTONICI (descrizione dell'interno, dell'esterno, materiali e tecniche costruttive tradizionali...)

5. ARCHITECTURAL TYPOLOGY AND COMPARISONS (description of the interior, exterior, traditional materials and construction techniques...)

The first Auberge, appears to have had a more military character while the present Auberge was built in the flamboyant Baroque style.

The façade is richly decorated with pilasters (which are said to have been built on the previous ones of the first Auberge), a recessed panel and a centrepiece projection of pleasing proportions. Five windows are found on each side of the main entrance, which according to some sources are also located on the exact place of the first Auberge. They are secured with wrought iron grilles with Pinto's half moon emblem. On each window one also finds the abbreviation E.P (Emanuel Pinto)- a rare monogram on the buildings in Valletta. In line with the Baroque style, the new Auberge carried a higher front elevation that made it visible above the bastions.

The interior consists of large halls and private rooms which surround a large courtyard. A magnificent staircase in Baroque style leads to the first floor. This staircase is attributed to the Maltese architect Andrea Belli.

For more information;

<https://restoration.gov.mt/en/otherprojects/completedprojects/Pages/Castille.aspx>

6.OPERATORI COINVOLTI

6.ARCHITECTS, DESIGNERS AND MASONS INVOLVED

Livello 1

GIROLAMO CASSAR – also known as Ġormu Cassar, was a Maltese architect and military engineer who designed many buildings in the capital Valletta, among which, the first Auberge of Castille in 1574.

Girolamo Cassar was born in 1520 to a Sicilian family who had lived in the Maltese islands since around 1440. He became assistant to Francesco Laparelli in the building of Valletta and helped him design some of the fortifications. He took over following Laparelli's departure from Malta in 1569 (and his death a year later). Since Cassar had only designed military architecture before, he briefly went to study in Italy where he learnt about mannerist architecture. He returned to Malta within a year and he began to design various buildings. Among the buildings he designed in Valletta there were the Grandmaster's Palace, almost all of the Auberges in Valletta and the Conventual Church of Saint John's (nowadays the Co-Cathedral).

DOMENICO CACHIA – architect who redesigned the Auberge as we see it today.

Domenico Cachia (c. 1690–1761) was a Maltese master builder involved in the construction of several notable buildings, including the second Auberge de Castille in Valletta following the designs of architect Andrea Belli.

ANDREA BELLI – Maltese architect responsible for the interior staircase of the auberge of Castille as we see it today.

Andrea Belli (1703-1772) is one of the most prominent Maltese Baroque architects of his day. He was also a merchant and an exporter of Maltese stone. In 1741, he was commissioned to build the staircase at the Auberge de Castille in Valletta.

For more information on Girolamo Cassar:

<https://vassallohistory.wordpress.com/maltese-architects/>

For more information on Andrea Belli:

<https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/Andrea-Belli-s-anniversary.420505>

7.FONTI BIBLIOGRAFICHE

7.BIBLIOGRAPHIC SOURCES

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Vella, Godwin, and Daniel Cilia. *Valletta 1566 : Melita Renascens*. Malta : Malta : Heritage Malta, 2016.

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Zammit, Themistocles. *Valletta. an Historical Sketch*. Empire Press, 1929.

8.FONTI CARTOGRAFICHE E ICONOGRAFICHE

8.CARTOGRAPHIC AND ICONOGRAPHIC SOURCES

Elevazione dell'Alberga di Castiglia e Portogallo. By Charles Francois de Mondion, 18th century. National Library of Malta Inv. No. Plans Collection V26.

10.ELENCO E DESCRIZIONE DELLE OPERE D'ART

10. WORKS OF ART INVENTORY AND DESCRIPTIONS

The Auberge is only open to the public on special occasions. It houses a heritage collection that spans throughout Malta's history. The collection includes furniture, paintings, sculpture and majolicas. The

collection includes a number of gifts that were presented to the People of Malta by foreign Governments to mark historical occasions.

Along the main staircase, one comes across mid-sixteenth century armour originally found at the Grandmaster's Palace Armoury, a marble bust of Grand Master Pinto de Fonseca and a miniature 17th century cannon cast by a Maltese founder.

In the Ambassador's Hall, one may admire a striking 17th Century mirror, the original marble sculpture 'Smiling' by sculptor Antonio Sciortino, and an oil on canvas attributed to one of Malta's most important Baroque painters, Mattia Preti.

The Cabinet Room is in turn adorned with, among others, a pair of 18th century oak cabinets carrying the coat of arms of the Langue of Aragon as well as 18th century Majolica vessels that were in use in the Order's of St John's hospital – the Sacra Infermeria.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, Baroque painter Rocco Buhagiar was commissioned to paint the main ceiling of the stairway within the auberge.

For more information;

Miceli Demajo, L. (2019). L'Auberge de Castille et Leon : an architectural appraisal of a palatial edifice within a fortified city (Bachelor's & dissertation).

<https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/46432>

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