



**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***

4 – Auberge of Italy

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

1.PERIODO (relativo alla prima costruzione) 16 - 17 SECOLO

1.PERIOD (concerning the first construction) 16 - 17th Century

2.INQUADRAMENTO STORICO-URBANISTICO

2.HISTORICAL-URBANISTIC FRAMEWORK

Today's Auberge of Italy in Merchants Street was not the first Italian auberge in Valletta. In 1570, the Italian langue had built its first hostel on the site where only one year later the Grand Master's Palace was erected. This first Italian auberge was later integrated in the plan of the Palace.

For over two hundred years, the auberge housed the Knights from the Italian peninsula. The head of the Italian langue also had the responsibility of Admiral of the fleet of the Order of Saint John.

Since the departure of the Knights in 1798, the Auberge has had various occupants. The French Military Command was lodged here, just across the street from Palazzo Parisio, where their General, Napoleon Bonaparte had his quarters during his short stay in Malta.

During British rule, the building served as a Corps Headquarters and an officers' Mess up to the 1920s, when it became the site for Malta's National Museum. In the early 19th century, the building also housed the first public dispensary for the outpatient treatment of the needy poor, a precursor of present-day Government Clinics.

During World War II, the Auberge was extensively damaged and, after the war, a major part of the building was reconstructed. After the war part of it served as Superior Courts of Justice, before it was turned into a School of Art. It also served as an examination hall. In the 1970s extensive works were conducted to accommodate the General Post Office. Since then, other users at the Auberge were the Water and Electricity Department, the Agricultural Department and the Central Office of Statistics. Major works were also conducted in the 1990s for the Auberge to house the Ministry of Tourism and the offices of the Malta Tourism Authority.

Since 2018, following an extensive restoration and refurbishment, the Auberge started housing the national fine arts collection in Malta's first community museum, MUZA.

For more information; <https://vassallohistory.wordpress.com/auberges-in-malta/>

Vella, Corinne. The Auberges (2018). Web.

<https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar//handle/123456789/30895>

3.COMMITTENZA

3.PATRONS

GRAND MASTER GREGORIO CARAFA - The second floor of the Auberge was paid at this Grand Master's own expense, in recognition of which a bronze bust and inscription were placed by the Italian Knights over the entrance.

Grand Master Gregorio Carafa reigned between May 1680 to 21 July 1690. The newly elected Grand Master, desirous of emulating his predecessor, Nicolas Cottoner, at once devoted himself to the completion of the fortifications of Floriana and of the Cottonera Lines. Principal works included the construction of four batteries at the foot of Fort St. Angelo for the better protection of the Grand Harbour, and the fortifications around St. Elmo. He died on the 21st July 1690, at the age of seventy-three, after a successful reign of ten years, during which period Malta prospered.

For more information; <https://vassallohistory.wordpress.com/auberges-in-malta/>

4.FASI COSTRUTTIVE

4.CONSTRUCTION PHASES

Construction on the current Auberge d'Italie was begun in 1574. The auberge was originally a one-storeyed building, but it proved to be too small for the Italian langue. A second storey was added, which is thought to have been completed by 1595.

The first room to be constructed was the Main Hall, which had a barrel-vaulted ceiling. In 1589, a decision was taken to construct a staircase connecting the different floors. The mezzanine beneath the Admiral's Room was constructed between 1649 and 1650. Beneath this apartment, there was a large room accessible from Melita Street. Due to its enormous size, it was impossible to sell. So, in 1654, it was divided into four rooms. Two years later, work started on the decoration of the facade. The project included a Trophy of Arms, and the coat-of-arms and bust of Grand Master Fra Gregorio Carafa, to commemorate a major naval victory in the Dardanelles where he commanded the fleet of the Order of Saint John. In 1680, the whole facade on Merchants Street was remodelled, though the heavily rusticated quoins of Cassar were retained and repeated.

The first restoration project on this auberge dates back to the 17th century when a number of cracks resulted in one of the walls in the Main Hall at the uppermost level. Alessandro Stafrace is documented to have started the restoration works in 1604.

Another documented restoration is that of the monumental arch over the well in the courtyard, designed by Carapecchia, which was restored in 2001.

A major conservation and restoration project was concluded in 2018 so that the auberge could house Malta's National Museum of Art, MUZA. This included structural interventions to design modifications due to new discoveries made during the works.

For more information on the 17th century restoration:

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

For more information on the MUZA project:

<https://www.maltachamber.org.mt/en/peeling-back-the-layers-of-the-500-year-old-auberge-d-italie>

<https://www.guidememalta.com/en/a-grand-staircase-was-discovered-at-the-auberge-d-italie-its-history-is-fascinating>

<https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/auberge-ditalie-gets-grandmasters-bust-back-following-restoration.620816>

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 building is almost square in plan, with a central courtyard surrounded by rooms. This type of plan, which architect Gerolamo Cassar repeatedly uses in his auberges, is also typical for Italian palazzi of the 15th and 16th centuries.

The windows on the external facade are decorated with a variety of motifs. The ground floor windows are decorated with stylised fish-fins on the supporting corbels, and surmounted by pairs of alternating grimacing faces. The mezzanine windows are surrounded by 'roll mouldings'. The top floor windows are elegantly corbelled and hooded, but less symbolically embellished than the ground floor ones.

Cassar also varied the design of his corner rustications for the first time, and applied the same diamond-shaped rustication to the portal.

The portal's main keystone is highly decorated and full of symbolism. The shield carries the Admiral's symbol: a dolphin surmounted by an Admiral's ceremonial ostrich-plumed helmet.

Above the main portal, an imposing carved marble centrepiece contains the arms and bust of Gregorio Carafa. The marble is documented to have been brought from the ruins of the Roman Temple of Prosperina in Mtarfa. The marble decoration includes armour, cannons and torches - symbols of war and victory.

The internal courtyard has a covered way along its perimeter. Most of the rooms at ground level are spanned with traditional arches supporting flat stone slabs whilst the Merchants Street and South Street entrances have coffered barrel vaults.

A fine outstanding feature of the Auberge is its monumental arch over the central well. It is surmounted by Grand Master Fra Gregorio Carafa's coat-of-arms which is in turn supported by a rich collection of weapons and surmounted by an Admiral's ceremonial ostrich-plumed helmet. The reverse side of the arch carries a statue of St. Catherine of Alexandria crowned and carrying a sword, a martyr's palm and a broken wheel. The statue stands in a richly decorated niche.

The well-head arch lies atop the octagonal well-head, raised on two octagonal surrounding steps. This outstanding piece of ornamental architecture is further embellished on both sides by carved stones depicting grimacing Ottoman slaves. The stone at the rear frieze, covering the wooden beam, to which the iron pulley ring is attached, carries two engraved dates: 1756 and 1862 – to record when the wooden truss was serviced or changed. The monument was polychromatic with the coat-of-arms painted in its heraldic colours, which have been meticulously restored in 2001.

The staircase at the east end of Merchants Street side corridors was the early Auberge's main and only staircase.

As with most buildings in Valletta, the Auberge D' Italie has incurred many changes since it was constructed.

For more information;

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

6.OPERATORI COINVOLTI

6.ARCHITECTS, DESIGNERS AND MASONS INVOLVED

Although Girolamo Cassar is given credit for the building of this auberge, various engineers and master masons are connected with a sequence of works throughout the Auberge's development since Cassar's original plans and work on site.

Girolamo Cassar designed the auberge and works started in 1574. Cassar died in the 1590's. Engineer Francesco Amitrini is believed to have been responsible for the supervision, and construction of the second floor after Cassar's death. The master mason was Gio. Andrea Farrugia, who died before the works were completed. In 1680 Mederico Blondel was in turn charged with the remodeling of the whole façade overlooking Merchants Street. The imposing centrepiece carved marble piece is documented to have been designed by Mr La Fay. The courtyard's triumphal arch is thought to have been designed by Romano Carapecchia, who was also responsible for remodelling the nearby Church of Saint Catherine of Italy.

For more information;

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

7.FONTI BIBLIOGRAFICHE

7.BIBLIOGRAPHIC SOURCES

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Bonello, Giovanni. *Valletta : Lost City : Memories of Places and Times : Vol. 1 / 1*. Ed. Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti., 2015.

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The Upper Barracca Gardens and the Garrison Chapel. Valletta: Valletta : Malta Stock Exchange, 2002.

8.FONTI CARTOGRAFICHE E ICONOGRAFICHE

8.CARTOGRAPHIC AND ICONOGRAPHIC SOURCES

9.ISCRIZIONI, LAPIDI, ETC...

9.INSCRIPTIONS, PLAQUES ETC.....

The latin inscription in the monumental centre peice over the main doorway commemorates a major naval victory at the Dardanelles in 1656.

A small marble plaque beside the door carries an inscription in English, describing the original function of the auberge. This inscription is one of a series placed on all the auberges in Valletta during the British colonial period.

10.ELENCO E DESCRIZIONE DELLE OPERE D'ART

10. WORKS OF ART INVENTORY AND DESCRIPTIONS

The Auberge now houses Malta's National Museum of Art, MUZA - many a work of art can be found here.

The collection is laid out in sections inspired by stories grouped into four main themes being The Mediterranean, Europe, Empire and The Artist. Key works include those by Southern Italian artist Mattia Preti, British 20th century artist Victor Pasmore, and Malta's own top 20th century sculptor Antonio Sciortino.

<https://heritagemalta.org/muza-national-community-art-museum/>

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