















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|---|--------------------------------|---|-------------------------|
|  | CAR PARKS |  | MAIN BUS ROUTES |
|  | PAVED AREAS |  | INTERNAL CITY BUS ROUTE |
|  | TOURIST BUSES and TAXIS |  | EXTERNAL CITY BUS ROUTE |
|  | CAR PARK PASSENGER TRANSPORTER |  | MAIN BUS TERMINAL |
|  | SUBWAY LINK |  | FERRY LINK |
|  | PLACES OF SPECIAL INTEREST |  | TRAFFIC DIRECTION |

ANGELO XUEREB LIMITED
 Office: New Street in Constitution Street, Mosta, Malta.
 Factory: Triq il-Forġa, Naxxar, Malta.

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A proposal for the Valetta Master Plan

I HAVE BEEN reading so much about Valetta city and its entrance, and since development is one of my main interests, I felt it is my duty to give my own opinions about the development of our unique city of Valetta.

To revive business, rehabilitate Valetta and make the whole city a monument, besides turning it into one of the Island's leading tourist attractions, is a task which calls for careful planning and consideration before implementation. Following are some ideas for the public and the Government to consider. I admit that, although I gave the matter much thought, I did not have sufficient time to carry out more research. Given more time for research, these proposals can obviously be better refined.

If one asks why business and residents are leaving Valetta, the first answer comes out very clearly: the problem is parking. When the Knights planned the city, they had taken care of every need for those days but never thought about vehicular traffic, so it was not planned for. Since the introduction of motor cars, almost nothing was done to cater for systematic parking in Valetta. Now it is our duty to solve the traffic problem without spoiling the environment within the city. People in general are becoming too lazy to walk. So to generate business around the whole city, one has to solve the problem of the steep uphill walking.

Other possible improvements in our city include restoration, infrastructure, cleanliness, greenery, rebuilding of the opera house and City Gate.

Undiscovered city within city

How many of us Maltese know about the ingenious underground network beneath Valetta? I tried hard to find a plan of these wide passages, shelters and the large water reservoir, but without success. I asked several important persons who had studied the history of our city. They all told me that there are many wide passages through which even a group of people could walk at the same time. One such passage is said to run beneath the entire length of Republic Street. Passages are said to be connected to all the Auberges, the Grand Master's palace and Fort St. Elmo.

A wide passage is said to run beneath the whole length of the bottom of the Valetta main ditch, with exits at both ends of the ditch. It is even shown on an old plan of the city. Other passages are said to be connected with the building which houses the Ministry of Health and are believed to be located over 15 metres below street level. Such a great work of art! Why not explore it and add it to the other main tourist attractions?

When tourists go to other countries, such as Greece, they find numerous ruins which, apart from their great history, are also a main point of interest which attracts millions of tourists every year. In Paris, another tourist at-

by Angelo Xuereb

traction is the network of underground sewage passageways. In Malta we have a wonderful fortified city with an ingenious underground network and we do not exploit it! These are not ruins, but are still intact — built by the Knights of St. John, when building Valetta as their headquarters.

When the city was built, the Maltese were living in fear of attack by invaders. To make sure that the city would have enough supplies of food and water, they built the granaries to have an adequate supply of grain for the whole city and an aqueduct to carry water from the Mdina area to reservoirs within Valetta. I am sure that after building such a long aqueduct the Knights also built reservoirs large enough to hold enough water for a whole summer, and also to last a whole siege. The Great Siege had provided sufficient experience! Where are all the reservoirs located? The answers I had about how many there are, how large they are and where they are located, were not very clear.

Transportation

Parking in Valetta is becoming impossible. Besides, we are ruining the environment because fumes cause excessive deterioration to the stonework. Parking areas have to be provided on quite a large scale. If we are to proceed with the idea that Valetta should become the centre for offshore business (for which I believe it is an excellent location) the flow of people within Valetta is bound to increase; so we have to solve the transport problem and improve the infrastructure. Whenever I have to take visiting businessmen to Valetta, they are always very much impressed by its history and fortifications. Most of them say that if they had to set up office in Malta they would choose Valetta.

We know that a tunnel, which was used by Malta's old railway, already exists from Porte des Bombes to Freedom Square. Why not use it for a small underground electric train (as in all other major cities in Europe) from Porte des Bombes to its original station (now occupied by Yellow Garage). If the concept of trains is considered to be too complicated, one could think of underground electric buses with a small number of carriages, which could be increased according to requirements. Commuters would then use large lifts to go up to City Gate or to overlying Cavalier Street, to connect with the city bus service which I will refer to further on. Along the Porte des Bombes-Valetta tunnel one could accommodate two or more trains/buses: one going one way and the other in the opposite direction. The tunnel has to be widened in one or two sections along the line, to allow two trains to pass at the same time.

Car parks

Large multi-storey underground car parks would have to

be built along the tunnel outside Valetta and some smaller ones within the city. Initially we could provide two large open car parks near Porte des Bombes — one at *Belt il-Hazna* and the other next to the proposed railway/bus station on the opposite side of the main road. These would be linked by an underground passage. One or two passenger-carrying vehicles (free of charge) would go round the car parks and transport motorists to the station, to save them walking long distances in the sun or rain.

Another large underground car park would be built on the site of the present Olympia Car Park. Exit would be by means of a lift or an underground passage leading to the ditch or the station where one could take one of the city buses. Another underground car park could be sited next to the football pitch opposite the Ministry of Education, and yet another beneath Freedom Square. It could have about three storeys over the railway/bus station. This car park could have an entrance in Valetta and an exit to the ditch. Other underground car parks could be located at Palace Square, within St. Andrew's Bastions and at Marsamxett. These would be in addition to the open car parking along the peripheral road.

Another suggestion to reduce car parking in Valetta could be the introduction of parking meters for daytime parking, thus avoiding unnecessary delays in parking within the city. By so doing, one would be reducing traffic congestion in Floriana and Valetta.

Above the underground car parks inside the city should be beautifully landscaped with fountains, benches, plants and flowers and a space for a monument.

City buses

The above-mentioned transport system would be complemented by an efficient city bus network, which could be free of charge. There could be two circular routes. One would cover the internal side of the city with its terminus located over the City Gate arcade shops next to St. James Cavalier (which is already a car parking area). Commuters coming to Valetta in any of the above ways could use the lift from the underground level up to street level. These city buses would obviously make several stops along the route. This route should be planned in a way that would not cross any of the paved streets restricted to pedestrian traffic.

Another route would be along the peripheral road, again with several stops. Its terminus would be located in the ditch beneath City Gate bridge. This, too, would serve commuters going into Valetta by any of the available methods of transportation. It would also pick up passengers arriving by ferry from Sliema, Senglea or Vittoriosa. These commuters could change to the internal city bus route either at its terminus or at the end of Old Bak-



MR. ANGELO XUEREB

ery Street, where both routes meet.

Ferry shuttle

Once Government is planning to build a breakwater between Sliema and Valetta, the sea inside the creek should be calm and so a fast and efficient ferry shuttle should be re-introduced from the Strand to Marsamxett, and from Senglea and Vittoriosa to Valetta. Then these commuters could take the city bus and join the transport network within Valetta. This service to the Three Cities would generate substantial tourist interest in the area, which is currently limited owing to motor traffic congestion in the Marsa area and the Three Cities themselves.

Tour handling agents will be able to make the best possible use of the time at the tourists' disposal, and this at the lowest possible cost. By the introduction of this service, one would be generating more business in Valetta, while reducing traffic within the city itself.

Traffic flow

Car traffic within the city should be kept as low as possible. Traffic flow should be one way within the built-up areas and around the city. The road from the War Memorial to the bus terminus, in St. John's Ditch, would have to be widened for a better flow of traffic, and also to permit two-way traffic for route buses only.

Traffic would go down Great Siege Road (next to Grand Hotel Excelsior) and go around the city and come up from Crucifix Hill. Those who would like to park in the Valetta ditch, beneath the city entrance, could enter from the side near the Excelsior and come out from the other side of the ditch, near where the old lift used to be (some old structures built during the last war have to be demolished), and then linked to the peripheral road. The new traffic arrangements should generate more activity for taxis, who should be allowed access to streets restricted to other traffic.

The bus terminus should be transferred from the present location to two separate places. One would be sited over the top of the underground car park, where the Olympia car park is today. The other would be in St. John's Ditch. Thus buses would be sheltered from the heat of the summer sun, in a way not to harm the environment.

The reason for possibly having two termini is to allow more space for buses to manoeuvre, while avoiding the unsightly conglomeration of a large number of buses in one area. The terminus overlying the car park could take

route buses coming from the southern part of Malta, and the other terminus at St. John's Ditch could handle the northern routes. The entrance to this terminus would have to be widened to provide better access to buses. Commuters could either make use of a lift to the area outside City Gate, or else use a tunnel leading to the transportation network beneath Freedom Square.

The taxi stand should be opposite the Hotel Phoenicia with tourist buses and stand-by route buses in St. James Ditch underneath the trees, or shaded, so as to keep the buses as cool as possible during the summer heat.

Opera House

I strongly believe that the Opera House should be rebuilt. Such a nice building could be utilised in other practical ways, if it is determined that there is no more use for another opera house. How about turning such a beautiful building into a National Museum, to house many of the country's antiquities which are currently scattered in many different buildings? I also feel that the Government should bring some pressure to bear on the countries responsible for the destruction of this beautiful landmark during the war.

In Germany, Austria, Italy, England, France, etc., you will not find one of their beautiful buildings destroyed during the war and not yet rebuilt. They had a number of such beautiful monuments and buildings and most of them were all practically rebuilt to their original state. Malta had only a few such monuments and we have been left with this monument, in such a prominent position, still in ruins. The countries responsible for its destruction must realise that during the war Malta suffered more air raids per square mile than anywhere else in the world. Our claim to assistance to rebuild this landmark, — the pride of all the Maltese people — would be minimal to them.

Restoration, tidiness and greenery

Going around Valetta, one immediately notices the lack of tidiness and of greenery. Here I must congratulate architects Richard England and Anton Valentino for their proposals to remove the numerous and varied signs over the shop windows, the removal of wires and the introduction of street furniture, plants and flowers, patterned floors, etc. Such work should include Republic Street and some other shopping areas within Valetta.

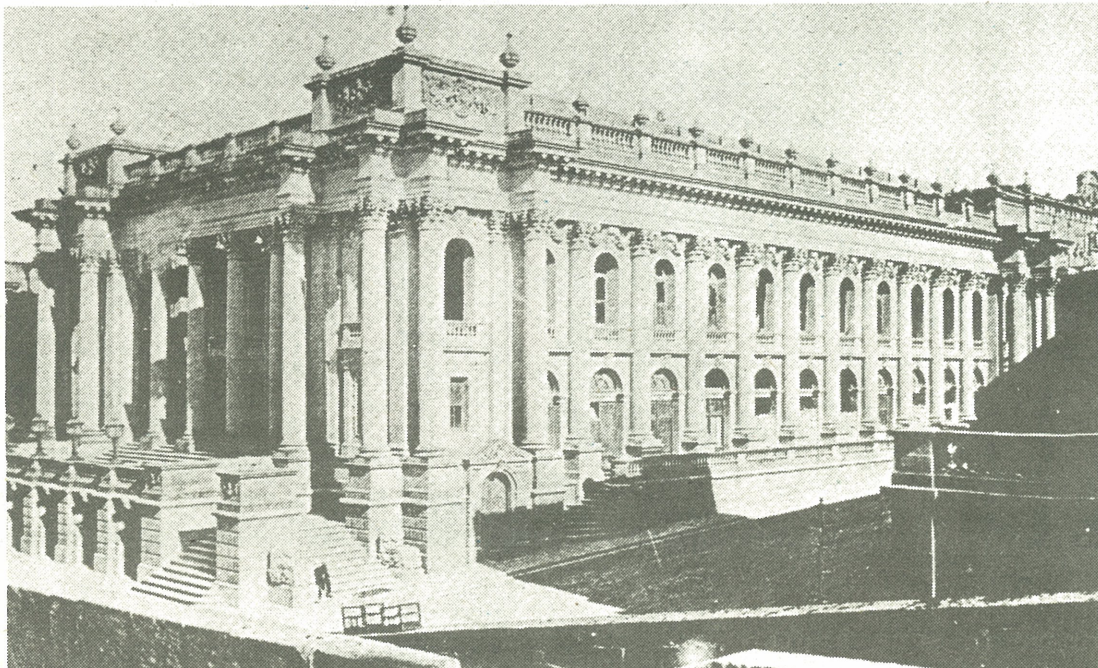
Another tourist attraction would be created within Valetta by transforming one of its streets into a small craft workshop with retail selling from the same premises.

Whenever possible, ornamental pots are to be installed; the initial cost is minimal. All it needs is a couple of trained garden keepers to take care of such plants or it could be left to the responsibility of shop owners in the area. If the place is kept clean, it would be to their benefit.

Public conveniences must be increased and kept clean. A large number of waste bins with lids, nicely designed to match the surroundings, must be introduced. Restoration works are imperative and in this respect two or more teams have to be kept on the job on a continuous basis. If offshore business comes to Valetta, then the same companies would not find it difficult financially to keep their building in a good state.

If we really want to rehabilitate

(Continued on page 22)



THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE, built in 1866, and restored after the fire which gutted it in 1873, was destroyed by enemy bombs in April 1942 and not rebuilt since.

HALL RENTALS HALL CLUB 29

St. Margaret Street, San Gwann

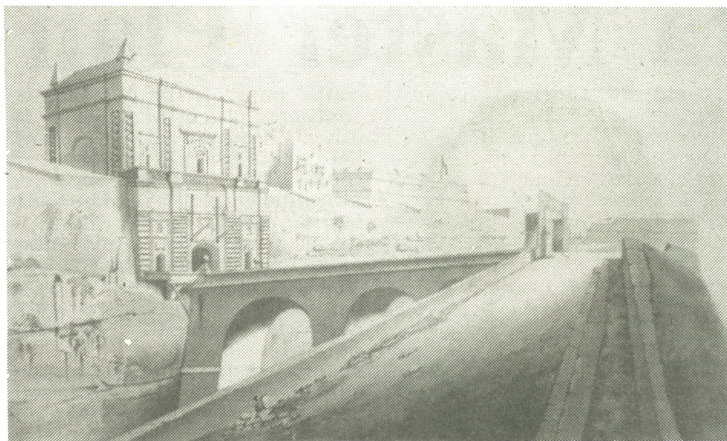
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CITY GATE as designed by Tumas Dingli.

The style of City Gate has to be acceptable to the Maltese

(Continued from page 21)

Valetta, passenger lifts have to be introduced in buildings over three storeys high. Moreover, work on the restoration and the infrastructure has to continue.

Entertainment

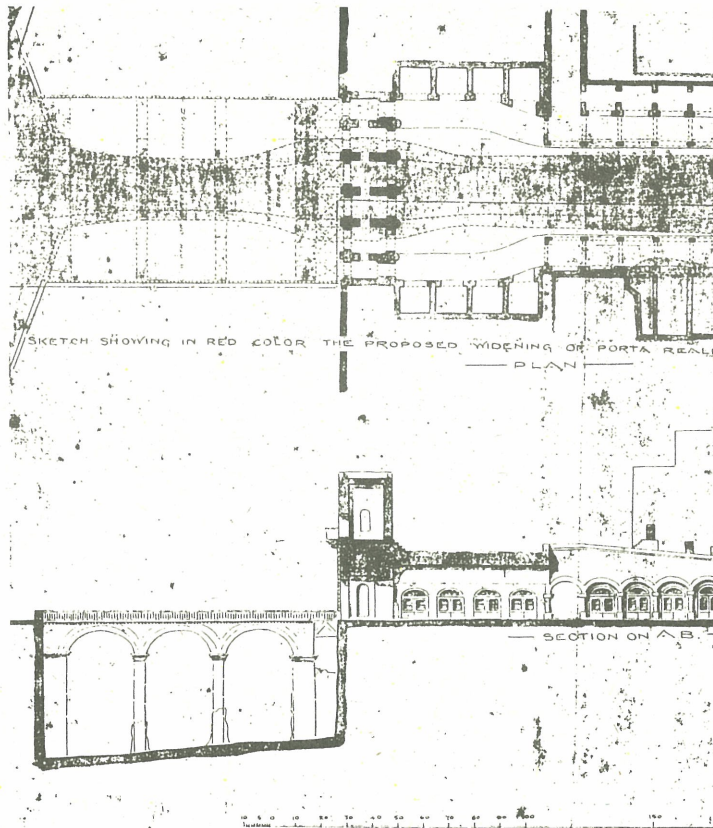
I tend to disagree with certain comments in the press indicating plans to try to revive the city after the shops close. If you look at cities in other countries, you will always notice that if the area is being used for offices or shops during the daytime, normally in the evening it will be dead. You always find within the same cities that another area is left for night entertainment. This, unfortunately, does not exist within Valletta and will not be easy to recreate.

The area now occupied by the bus terminus should be tiled or

nically covered in Maltese stone slabs (*tal-qawwi*) and used as cafeterias and open air restaurants, nicely designed with plants and flowers and soft live music with strict orders to keep the place tidy. This area could be a place where night entertainment could be developed and where one could enjoy the beauty of the bastions and the new City Gate. The bastions and the ditches should also be illuminated, in a way similar to those at Mdina.

City Gate

Much has been said about City Gate, but, as I said earlier, I gave this subject least importance, because I feel other problems of the city should have a higher priority. I believe, with all due respect to architect Renzo Piano, that there are good Maltese architects, both in private practice and in Government employment, who could



SKETCH showing the proposed widening of City Gate in 1897.

have submitted a proposal, even on a tender basis if possible. Valletta belongs to the Maltese and the style of the new gate has to be acceptable to the Maltese. In this respect a Maltese architect can better understand the Maltese mentality and the wishes of the people.

I believe that the majority of the Maltese wish to have a City Gate in a 16th century style to be in keeping with the rest of Valletta buildings. We can be innovative in the design, but still retain tradi-

tion. If one asks, "Do we really need a wide gateway?" the answer is: traffic is no longer making use of this gate. "Do we really have to demolish an existing structure to build the new gate?" A 1.5 metre wide skin could do to change the façades.

Do we really need to demolish the existing bridge? I believe that the bridge proposed by Piano is too narrow for the volume of people using it. I personally do not agree that the present bridge should be narrowed. Should,

however, the final decision be indeed to narrow it, then one could demolish the existing cantilevers on both sides of the bridge, thus reducing the width by about three metres.

In 1897 the British already had plans to demolish Kingsgate, as it was then known, and to widen the bridge to 70 feet. The older part of the existing bridge is part of our history. Are we going to demolish this as well? One has to be practical. In my opinion, rebuilding a new façade on both sides, possibly with a continuous arch would be sufficient; there is no need for the arch to be of the same height and width as at present. The façade should be kept within the parameters of its original design by Tumas Dingli.

Tourist attraction

We must all believe that Valletta is unique in the whole Mediterranean. Fort St. Elmo and its history is on its own a marvellous tourist attraction.

Considering all existing tourist attractions in addition to the ingenious underground network, together with the launching of the *son et lumiere* project and the superb scenery from all around Valletta and given a good steering committee for good marketing, we could attract many more cruise liners to Malta and many more upmarket tourists. The people will surely not be lacking in determination to achieve all this.

What I have suggested represents my own opinions which are to be considered as food for thought and a subject for discussion within the responsible bodies or organisations. My intention is simply to give an indication of what ideas can be generated if the people are given the opportunity to participate in the plans for the rehabilitation of our wonderful capital city.