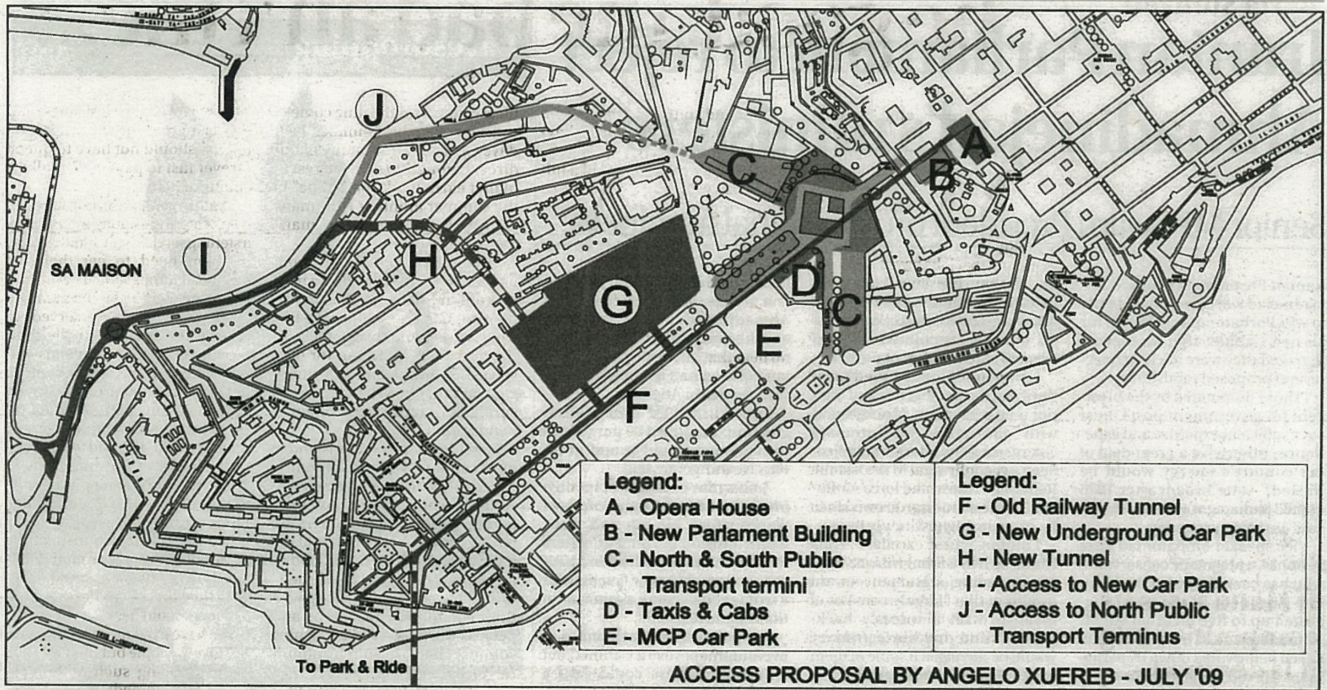


Comment & Letters



General Master Plan



Angelo Xuereb

The re-excavation and restoration of St Magdalen Ravelins

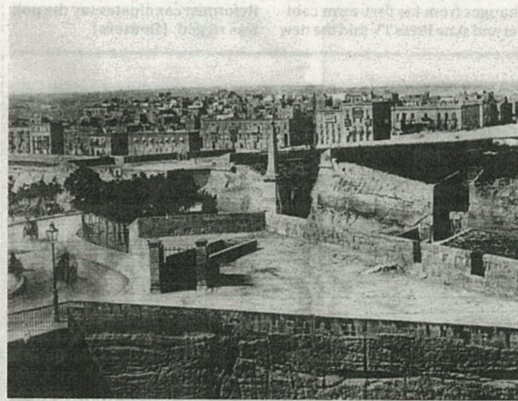
For the past 20 years, since October 29, 1989, I have written many articles on how we can revive and restore our capital city Valletta, and bring about its renaissance. Recently I published a major practical proposal for the transportation network car parking and access to our capital city which would complement the Renzo Piano plans.

This article is not intended to address the pros and cons of the Renzo Piano plans, but to deal with the mitigation of the constant depletion of parking spaces within Valletta, with negative consequences that inevitably result in the decline of business activities within the city.

It is a known fact that in today's world easy accessibility and plenty of close-by parking facilities attract more business to an area. If the centre of attraction is complemented by a number of other attractive facilities and high-quality standards, the area will attract more people and, therefore, more people will attract even more people. In this case it will mean more shoppers in Valletta which would be a definite boost to our capital city, helping to revive it to its former glory.

In my previous article I proposed a huge underground car park for around 3,000 cars below the football pitch and an open car park at Belt Is-Sebh, while replacing the same sports facilities above the said car park. The car park I am proposing would have direct access through a new short tunnel from Sa Maison. The existing old railway tunnel would be used as a main access to Valletta for commuters from this car park, the MCP car park and the Park & Ride car park in Floriana.

The tunnel would house two lines of a number of driverless, electric cabins running on a 24-hour basis with adjustable frequencies according to demand. The bus termini as well as the tourist coaches and the



Old photo of St Magdalen Ravelin

proposed Valletta circular bus routes would also be located at the same level as the tunnel. This would mean that the majority of all the commuters to Valletta would be located at one level below the present ground level, with a direct link to Valletta from the existing railway bridge, on to the upgraded "yellow garage" area and up through a number of escalators that emerge between the new Parliament and the Opera House.

The above proposal for the main transportation and pedestrian circular node would, in effect, mean the relief of the present unsightly and shambolic bus terminus and its environs. Instead there would be a more pleasing, embellished square that respects and reflects the importance of the main entrance of this fortified capital city. In this case I am therefore proposing the re-excavation and restoration of the original St Magdalen Ravelins which are buried beneath the Triton Fountain.

After analysing the plans and the old picture of these Ravelins (courtesy of Richard Ellis), I can conclude that only the top one to

two metres of these Ravelins were removed. There is the probability that the missing Ravelins' stones are still to be found in the adjacent ditches. This new square with the restored Ravelins could be pleasantly designed offering another piece of historic architecture as well as becoming a main tourist attraction.

The ditch between these two Ravelins, at one level below ground, could be used as a garden and an open space for the proposed pedestrian circulation area. A set of lifts and a staircase could connect this level with the upper part of the Ravelin.

A large modern supermarket could be constructed at the same level of the bottom of the ditch (one level below the pedestrian circulation area and the mass transportation level). The proposed garden and open air casual dining within the St James Ditch could be connected to this level by means of small openings.

This huge investment, excluding the infrastructure cost, could be financed by the private sector, as

long as they will have the right to develop the proposed supermarket, the underground car park and other minor benefits.

As part of the public transportation infrastructure and to complement this project, I suggest having the public transportation drop-offs and termini located one level below the street level on both sides of St Magdalen Ravelin, while taxis, cabs, and *karozzini* would be located in a shaded area on the sides of the existing garden, close by the RAF war memorial.

The terminus for the public transportation, tourist coaches, mini buses, etc. directed from the north side of the island could be routed from Sa Maison to the area near the Excelsior Hotel, and through a short tunnel (to avoid congestion) and onto the large open space below the Phoenicia Hotel. The other terminus for transportation directed from the central and south of the island, could be located within the ditch between Nelson Avenue and St James Counterguard. The area close to the City Gate would have to be lowered to offer direct access to the pedestrian circulation zone that leads you directly into Valletta.

I would also recommend the inclusion of a much deserved large statue dedicated to La Valette, the man behind the original vision to develop this magnificent fortified city.

The ideal location would be in the centre of the new piazza next to the chapel dedicated to St Catherine, and opposite the chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Victory. The Triton Fountain could be located in the present garden next to the RAF war memorial.

This proposal, in my opinion, forms an essential part of the revival of our capital city while respecting this heritage which, after all, is also a world heritage site - one that we are morally obliged to respect for the benefit of our future generations.

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