

= Fortifications of Mdina =

The fortifications of Mdina (Maltese : Is @-@ Swar tal @-@ Imdina) are a series of defensive walls which surround the former capital city of Mdina , Malta . The city was founded as Maleth by the Phoenicians in around the 8th century BC , and it later became part of the Roman Empire under the name Melite . The ancient city was surrounded by walls , but very few remains of these have survived .

The city walls were rebuilt a number of times , including by the Byzantine Empire in around the 8th century AD , the Arabs in around the 11th century , and the Kingdom of Sicily in the medieval period until the 15th century . Most of the extant fortifications were built by the Order of Saint John between the 16th and 18th centuries .

The city has withstood a number of sieges , and it was defeated twice ? first by the Aghlabids in 870 and then by Maltese rebels in 1798 . Today , the city walls are still intact except for some outworks , and they are among the best preserved fortifications in Malta . Mdina has been on Malta 's tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites since 1998 .

= = Punic @-@ Roman walls = =

The city of Mdina occupies the tip of a plateau located on high ground in the northern part of the island of Malta , far away from the sea . The site has been inhabited since prehistory , and by the Bronze Age it was a place of refuge since it was naturally defensible . The Phoenicians colonized Malta in around the 8th century BC , and they founded the city of Maleth on this plateau . It was taken over by the Roman Republic in 218 BC , becoming known as Melite . The Punic @-@ Roman city was about three times the size of present @-@ day Mdina , extending into a large part of modern Rabat . Melite 's walls had a thickness of around 5 m (16 ft) and were surrounded by a 700 m (2 @,@ 300 ft) -long ditch .

Very little remains of the Punic @-@ Roman walls of Melite still survive . The remains of a city gate or tower were discovered in Saqqajja in modern Rabat , about 5 m (16 ft) below the current street level . Parts of the ditch have survived under present @-@ day St. Rita Street and the Church of St. Paul . The lower foundations of some Punic @-@ Roman ramparts , consisting of rusticated ashlar blocks three courses high still in situ , were found near the Magazine Curtain in the western part of Mdina . The only other remains of the ancient walls are Punic @-@ Roman masonry blocks which were reused in the medieval period . These include a wall around Greeks Gate , and some stones which were discovered in excavations at Inguanez Street and the Xara Palace .

= = Medieval walls = =

At some point following the fall of the Western Roman Empire , a retrenchment was built within the city , reducing it to its present size . This was done to make the city 's perimeter more easily defensible , and similar reductions in city sizes were common around the Mediterranean region in the early Middle Ages . Although it was traditionally assumed that the retrenchment was built by the Arabs , it has been suggested that it was actually built by the Byzantine Empire in around the 8th century , when the threat from the Arabs increased .

In 870 , Melite was captured by the Aghlabids , who massacred its inhabitants and " demolished its fortress " according to the chronicler Al @-@ Himyar? . This account further mentions that Malta remained almost uninhabited until it was resettled in around 1048 or 1049 by a Muslim community and their slaves , who built a settlement called Medina on the site of Melite . Archaeological evidence suggests that the city was already a thriving Muslim settlement by the beginning of the 11th century , so 1048 ? 49 might be the date when the city was officially founded and its walls were constructed . The Byzantines besieged Medina in 1053 ? 54 , but were repelled by its defenders .

Medina surrendered peacefully to Roger I of Sicily after a short siege in 1091 , and Malta was subsequently incorporated into the County and later the Kingdom of Sicily , being dominated by a succession of feudal lords . The fortifications of Mdina were rebuilt and modified a number of times

over the following centuries . A castle known as the Castellu di la Chitati or the castrum civitas was built on the southeast corner of the city near the main entrance , probably on the site of an earlier Byzantine fort . The city withstood a siege by Hafsid invaders in 1429 .

By the 15th century , most of Mdina 's enciente had a system of double walls . The land front was flanked by four towers , one near Greeks Gate , another at the centre of the land front , the Turri Mastra (also known as Turri dila bandiera) near the main entrance and the Turri di la Camera at the southeast corner of the city . A barbican was built near Mdina 's main entrance sometime after 1448 . In the 1450s there were fears of a Barbary or Ottoman attack , so efforts were made to improve Mdina 's walls . The main ditch was completed , and the Castellu di la Chitati was partially demolished by royal licence in 1453 , due to its ruinous state and the excessive cost for its upkeep .

By 1474 , cannons had been introduced in Mdina . Other extensive preparations for an attack were made in the 1480s , when the fortifications were once again improved under the direction of Sicilian military engineers . At this point , some buildings in Rabat were demolished to clear the fortifications ' line of fire . By 1522 , the fortifications were being modernized with the construction of embrasures . However , the walls were still regarded as obsolete , since they lacked bastions and could not resist bombardment from modern artillery .

Most of the medieval walls of Mdina were gradually dismantled between the 1530s and 1720s , when the city 's fortifications were being upgraded by the Hospitallers . One of the most significant visible remnants of the medieval fortifications is the Greeks Gate and the surrounding curtain walls , which still retains its medieval form apart from the outer portal which was built in the 18th century . Parts of the double walls , including the remains of two gun loops , still stand between the gate and the Torre dello Standardo . Most of the northern and eastern walls date back to the medieval period , although some sections were rebuilt by the Hospitallers . The northern ramparts contain a medieval wall tower , while the remains of Byzantine antemurals and the foundations of a late 15th @-@ century artillery platform have been found in the eastern walls .

= = Hospitaller walls = =

When the Order of Saint John took over in Malta in 1530 , the nobles ceremoniously handed over the keys of the city to Grand Master Philippe Villiers de L 'Isle @-@ Adam . The Order settled in Birgu and Mdina lost its status as capital city , but L 'Isle @-@ Adam converted the remaining part of the Castellu di la Chitati into a palace , which became the meeting place of the civil administrative council known as the Università .

The first major upgrade of Mdina 's fortifications occurred in the 1540s , during the magistracy of Juan de Homedes y Coscon . Two new bastions were built at the extremities of the land front , possibly to designs of the military engineer Antonio Ferramolino . Parts of the eastern walls were also rebuilt en crémaillère , the only instance this style is found in Malta . The 15th @-@ century barbican in front of the main gate was demolished in 1551 since it obstructed the line of fire of the newly built bastions . That year , the city withstood a brief Ottoman attack .

Mdina was not attacked directly during the Great Siege of Malta , but it nonetheless played a crucial role in the siege . Ottoman general Lala Mustafa Pasha wanted to take over the poorly @-@ defended city first , but was overruled by Piali Pasha who wanted to attack Fort Saint Elmo . The fort was taken over after a month of heavy fighting , but the Ottomans had lost crucial time in doing so . On 7 August 1565 , the Order 's cavalry in Mdina attacked the unprotected Ottoman field hospital , which led in the invaders abandoning a major assault on the main fortifications in Birgu and Senglea . The Ottomans tried to take over the city in September so as to winter there , but abandoned their plans when Mdina fired its cannon , leading them to believe that the city had ammunition to spare .

After the siege , Maltese military engineer Girolamo Cassar drew up plans to reduce Mdina 's size by half and turning it into a fortress , but these were never implemented due to protests by the city 's nobles . The city 's main gate was reconstructed in the early 17th century , but the next major alterations were not made until the 1650s , when the large De Redin Bastion was built at the centre of the land front . Despite these modifications , by 1658 there were also proposals to abandon or demolish the entire fortress due to its state of disrepair , although these plans were opposed by the

locals . In the late 17th century , some of Mdina 's medieval double walls began to be encased in sloping ramparts .

A major restoration of Mdina 's fortifications was undertaken in the 1720s by the French military engineer Charles François de Mondion , during the magistracy of António Manoel de Vilhena . L 'Isle @-@ Adam 's palace , including the remaining parts of the Castellu di la Chitati , were demolished to make way for Palazzo Vilhena , while the main gate was walled up and a new city gate was built in the Baroque style . A Baroque portal was also added to the Greeks Gate . The remaining medieval towers in the land front were demolished and the Torre dello Standardo was built on the site of the Turri Mastra , while the entire western walls of the city were demolished to make way for a single casemated curtain wall known as Magazine Curtain . D 'Homedes Bastion was modified with the addition of a bastionette , while traverse @-@ like batteries were built at the extremities of the land front . The city was further protected with the construction of outworks , including a covertway , two places @-@ of @-@ arms and a glacis .

Mondion also made further plans to strengthen Mdina 's fortifications , but they were not implemented since the Order focused on building its fortifications in the harbour area . The only major addition to the Mdina fortifications after Mondion 's reconstruction was Despuig Bastion , which was built during the reign of Ramon Despuig between 1739 and 1746 .

On 10 June 1798 , Mdina was captured by French forces without much resistance during the French invasion of Malta . A French garrison remained in the city , but a Maltese uprising broke out on 2 September of that year . The following day , rebels entered the city through a sally port in Despuig Bastion and massacred the garrison of 65 men . These events marked the beginning of a two @-@ year uprising and blockade , which ended in 1800 with Malta becoming a British protectorate .

Mdina 's fortifications remained in use during the British period , and some minor alterations such as the installation of gun emplacements were made in the 19th century . By the end of the century , the city was regarded as forming part of the defensive system of the Victoria Lines .

In the 1890s , the battery near St. Peter Bastion was demolished and a gateway known as the G?arreqin Gate was opened within the Magazine Curtain . This was done in order to facilitate access to the newly @-@ built railway station located nearby . The fortifications were included on the Antiquities List of 1925 .

Some of the countermine galleries in Mdina 's ditch were used as air raid shelters during World War II .

= = Recent history = =

Sections of the medieval walls of Mdina were rediscovered by Dr. Stephen C. Spiteri and Mario Farrugia while they were surveying the bastions in 2002 .

The first plans to undertake a major restoration of Mdina 's walls were made in 2006 , as part of a project that also included restoration of the fortifications of Valletta , Birgu and the Cittadella . In the case of Mdina , the main focus was to consolidate the terrain , since the city is built on a blue clay plateau which is prone to subsidence . The multimillion @-@ euro restoration was partially financed by the European Regional Development Fund . Works began in early 2008 by the Restoration Unit . The process of restoration was documented by Dr. Spiteri .

In 2011 , steel rods were inserted into D 'Homedes Bastion in order to prevent the walls from slipping down the clay slopes . The ditch was inaugurated as a public garden in March 2013 . All ERDF @-@ financed work was completed in late 2013 , but the Restoration Directorate later restored other parts of the fortifications , including the northern walls , St. Peter Bastion and the area around Greeks Gate . The project was fully completed in early 2016 .

Throughout the course of the restoration , a number of archaeological discoveries were made . Excavations along the eastern part of the city walls unearthed Byzantine antemurals and the base of a late 15th @-@ century cubete artillero (artillery platform) . In 2010 , remains of foundations of the Punic @-@ Roman walls were found when excavations were made along the Magazine Curtain . A late 14th @-@ century stone block bearing the coat of arms of Guglielmo Murina , possibly

originating from the Castellu di la Chitati , was discovered in 2012 during the restoration of D 'Homedes Bastion . This block is now displayed at the Fortifications Interpretation Centre in Valletta .

= = Layout = =

The present configuration of Mdina 's fortifications consists of an irregular perimeter of curtain walls stiffened by a number of bastions . The northern , western and eastern walls are built on the perimeter of the natural plateau , so they were difficult to attack . The southern perimeter of the city is built on level ground , along what is now the border with Rabat . It was the only realistic direction to assault the city , and was hence known as the Mdina Land Front . The southern perimeter contains an arrowhead @-@ shaped bastion with rectangular orillons on each extremity , with a large pentagonal bastion in the centre :

St. Peter Bastion , also known as Greeks Gate Bastion ? built in the 1550s during the magistracy of Juan de Homedes y Coscon

De Redin Bastion ? built in the 1650s during the magistracy of Martin de Redin

D 'Homedes Bastion , also known as St. Paul Bastion or the belguardo del Palacio ? built between the 1540s and 1551 during the magistracy of Juan de Homedes y Coscon It is further defended by a bastionette .

The two gates into the city , Mdina Gate and Greeks Gate , are located within the curtain walls of the land front . Remains of the medieval double walls as well as the 18th @-@ century Torre dello Standardo are located just within the city walls . The land front is surrounded by a deep ditch , and a traverse @-@ like battery is located in its eastern extremity .

Most of the eastern walls of the city consist of an en crémaillère enciente built in the mid @-@ 16th century , although parts of the walls date back to the medieval period . The pentagonal Despuig Bastion , built in the 1740s during the magistracy Ramon Despuig , is grafted below the walls on the northeastern corner of the city .

The northern walls of Mdina still retain their medieval form with a few Hospitaller modifications , and they contain the only surviving tower in the city walls . St. Mary 's Bastion or Ta ' Bachar Bastion , which was built in the 16th century , is grafted on the northwest corner of the city . This is linked to St. Peter Bastion by the Magazine Curtain , a long casemated curtain wall built in the 1720s in the western part of the city . The G?arreqin Gate , built by the British in the 19th century , is located within this curtain wall .