

THE MALTA OPUS

Midi Edition



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The Malta Opus is the first Opus to celebrate a country, the jewel at the heart of the Mediterranean. It captures the soul of a nation – its unique energy, timeless traditions, vibrant heritage and culture like never before.

Its 34cm x 34cm luxury format that weighs over 14kg takes the viewer on an intimate journey into the island's unique charm. From its sun-kissed shores and historic streets, to its churches and cuisine – every page invites you to explore and embrace the spirit of Malta .

As Malta steps confidently into the future, the Opus not only honours its past but also highlights the innovations and aspirations that are shaping its tomorrow, meeting many individuals that share stories of its colourful past, exciting present and inspiring future.





The Malta Opus Midi Edition:

- 436 pages, printed in high definition on luxury 200gsm silk paper
- 34cm x 34cm, weighing approximately 14kg
- Hand-bound by master craftsmen in red buckram
- Presented in a bespoke hand-made clamshell case
- Adorned with the Maltese Cross in silver foil on the cover with red and white silk ribbon markers
- Presented with pair of white cotton gloves
- Price €475

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The Midi Edition

Malta. The very name conjures a plethora of images; of sun-kissed landscapes, golden beaches, azure waters, honey-coloured stone, armoured knights, bastions and sieges, war planes and ancient stones that whisper the tales of millennia. But Malta is more than just a geographic location; it is an idea, a living testament to the strength, adaptability, and ingenuity of the people who have weathered the storms of history and emerged stronger and more determined with each passing epoch.

The Malta Opus is the result of a conversation that inspired the idea of creating such a body of work that sparked the imagination of *The Malta Opus* team. Working alongside historians, professors, government ministers, priests, craftsmen, curators, teachers, doctors, parents and children, OPUS strived to make the dream a reality. The teams of writers, editors, designers, researchers and photographers left no stone unturned in making this production the ultimate and most definitive national treasure that would both educate and inspire.

Along the journey we unearthed long-lost photographic archives and restored them to their former glory. We discovered rare memorabilia and artefacts from archives and reproduced in ultra-high definition to tell a special story.

Hundreds of thousands of photographs have been reviewed, and over 1,000 have been chosen to adorn xx giant pages of Maltese history. This Opus tells the story of Malta, from the ice age to present day and beyond.



Unique content – Exploring Malta through the eyes that know it best

Malta is an island steeped in history and brimming with culture. The Opus is a vibrant tapestry woven from the insights of experts across the island, each contributing their unique knowledge and passion for Malta's rich heritage. From ancient temples to vibrant festivals, from culinary traditions to architectural marvels, this collective work offers readers a truly immersive journey into the soul of Malta.

Whether you're a history enthusiast, a lover of culture, or simply curious about this enchanting island, these giant pages invite you to explore Malta through the eyes of those who know it best. Dive in and discover the stories, the legacy, and the heart of Malta.

Written contributions by:

Editor and Lead Writer Professor Victor Grech
H.E. Myriam Spiteri Debono, President of Malta
Prime Minister, Dr Robert Abela
Archbishop Charles J Scicluna
Charles Savona Ventura
Anton and Simon Mifsud
Kurt Farrugia
Oliver Friggieri
Adrian Grima
Herman Grech
Hon. Ian Borg

Carlo Micallef
John Borg Manduca
George Gregory Buttigieg
Pierre Bugeja
Liam Gauci
Emanuel Magro Conti
Gianluca Falzon
Hon. Owen Bonnici
Juanito Camilleri
Joseph Calleja
Richard England



Artefacts and unseen treasures

The levels of access afforded to the OPUS team was unprecedented. The belief, trust and willingness of our partners in making **The Malta Opus** is the most definitive celebration of Malta ever is evident on every page. Historic treasures never-before-published are presented in high definition on a giant scale to spark the imagination of every viewer.

Right is a letter written and signed by Napoleon giving the order for his soldiers to storm Malta. Below is his Admiral's sword and belt only recently acquired by Heritage Malta.



The most vibrant story telling through captivating photography

The magic of Malta is vividly captured through the lenses of the island's most talented photographers. Each image in this book is a testament to their keen eye for detail and deep understanding of the island's essence. Through their visionary perspectives, readers are transported to Malta's colourful festas, bustling markets, and timeless architecture, creating an experience like no other.

Their photographs do more than illustrate; they breathe life into the stories of Malta, offering a visual feast that complements the rich narratives within. Their skilful composition and artistic flair invite readers to see the island not just as a destination, but as a living, breathing work of art.

Compelling photography has been contributed by:

David Wrightson

Joel Gueller

Andrew Borg Carbott

Daryl Borg Cardona

Times of Malta

Department of Information

Malta Tourism Authority

Malta Film Commission

Gioielleria Zampa

Joseph Calleja

John Saliba

John Borg Manduca

Prevarti

Heritage Malta

Zofia Gajos

Grace Fowler

Zenon Texeira







“The Malta Opus is a work of beauty and we are very proud to have this Opus to celebrate our history and our people in this special way.”

H.E. Myriam Spiteri Debono, President of Malta





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Foreword

H.E. Myriam Spiteri Debono, President of Malta

Honourable Readers,
Malta is a remarkable island nation with a rich history and a proud people. The Maltese people, are known for their resilience, warmth and passion, and they have enriched a legacy shaped by millennia. Though our population is just over half a million, our voice and achievements echo far beyond our shores.

The Maltese islands are rich in legend, culture and enduring heritage. The etymology of Malta, whether derived from the Greek "mel" ("honey") or the Phoenician "malat" ("hewn, porous"), reflects the warm, inviting nature of our archipelago. The geographical position in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea, situated between Southern Europe and Northern Africa and nearly equidistant from the Straits of Gibraltar to the west and Asia Minor to the east, give the islands a unique strategic advantage.

Our islands have been influenced and shaped by successive waves of different civilisations which included the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Arabs, the Normans, the Knights of St. John, and the British. These influences have not only shaped our identity, but they have also fostered a unique character that continues to thrive at the heart of the Mediterranean.

In addition to the narratives of conquest and resilience, the artistic and spiritual legacy of our progenitors has had a profound impact on Malta and its people. This legacy is inscribed in our landscape, from the humble beauty of 17th-century walled sanctuaries like the chapel of Saint Mary in Bir Mifsh to the majestic grandeur of the Co-Cathedral of St. John in Valletta. These sites are not only architectural wonders, but also testaments to the enduring values, faith, and creativity of our people.

The Megalithic temples, which are among the oldest free-standing structures in the world, are proof of the dedication and resourcefulness of Malta's earliest inhabitants and are symbols of cultural continuity which flows down through the centuries to the present time.

Our evolution is as profound as our origins. Our nation has overcome an abundance of obstacles, including invasions, occupations, and the rigours of colonial rule, to emerge as a nation that is independent, proud, and forward-thinking.

Malta is not solely defined by its millennia-old history. Rather, it is defined by its people, who are steadfast in their sense of community and charitable spirit. This generosity has been meticulously inscribed in the populace from generation to generation, thereby ensuring the preservation of our values.

Our extensive cultural heritage is not only reflected in art, architecture, literature and culture in general, but our intangible heritage has also resulted in the strategic development of specialised tourism niches which are contributing no end to the strengthening of the tourism industry – one of the key pillars of Malta's economy.

Malta has embraced new opportunities, including military, religious, medical, and film tourism, each of which aligns with our historical identity and yet, tourism is also forward-thinking in its vision. These developments have made visitors keen to engage with Malta not only once, but repeatedly, seeking an ongoing experience on our islands.

This tone is a visual synthesis that encompasses the narrative of Malta, its enduring traditions, its people, its seascapes, its rural and urban landscapes, bridging past and present. It gives vibrant pictures providing both visitors and residents alike with a more profound understanding of the characteristics that distinguish our nation.

Malta's dedication to prosperity, stability, and harmony is unwavering. This manifests in the way in which Malta has done its constitutional duty of fostering peace and prosperity among nations while being military neutral, the flagship of its mission on the stage of international affairs.

The Opus dedicated to Malta amply illustrates the profound riches of Malta, its culture, its aspirations, and its vision, and is a fitting paean to a strong, resilient nation which has withstood the vicissitudes of time and history – and give heartfelt thanks to all those who contributed to its production.

H.E. Myriam Spiteri Debono
President of Malta

THREE CITIES

Three Cities

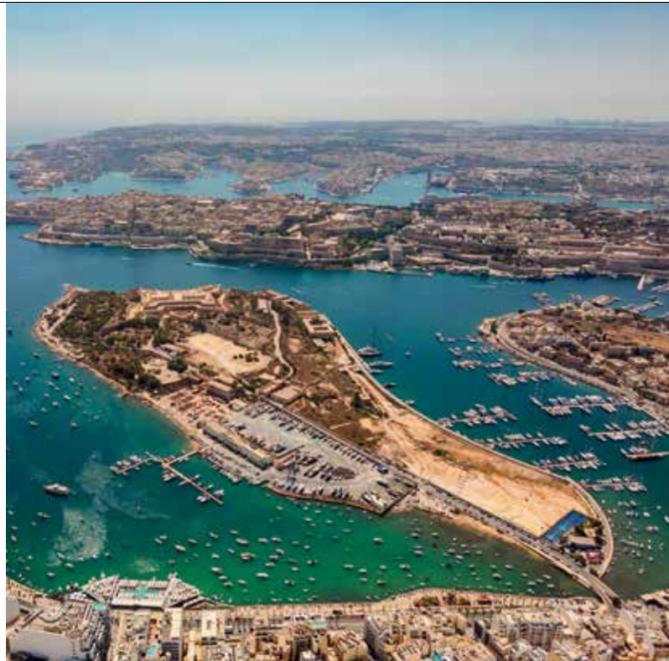
Birgu • Senglea • Cospicua

The Three Cities, Birgu (Vittoriosa), L-Isola (Senglea), and Bormla (Cospicua), are among the most historically rich and culturally significant areas of the island. While they are overshadowed by the capital city of Valletta, these cities have played crucial roles in Malta's history, from the times of the Knights to the present day.

Birgu (Vittoriosa)
Birgu (Vittoriosa) is the eldest of the Three Cities, dating back to the medieval period. The city's strategic location on the Grand Harbour made it an ideal settlement for maritime activities and defence. Birgu was originally a small fishing village, but its significance grew when the Knights arrived in Malta in 1530. They chose Birgu as their first seat of power due to its strong natural defences and proximity to the harbour and therefore their navy. They fortified the city, constructing the formidable Fort St. Angelo at its tip which became the Knights' headquarters.

Birgu's most famous historical moment came during the Great Siege of 1565, when the Ottoman forces attempted to take Malta from the Knights. Birgu and Fort St. Angelo were crucial to the fray and the city was honoured with the title "Vittoriosa", meaning "Victorious". After the siege, the knights moved their capital to the newly constructed city of Valletta, but Birgu remained an important centre of activity, a major port and hub for maritime commerce.

Senglea
Senglea (L-Isola) is the second of the Three Cities, situated on a small island in the Grand Harbour. It was founded by the Knights of St. John in 1565, during the Great Siege of 1565, when the Ottoman



Right: Engraving showing a view of Vittoriosa and Fort St. Angelo by Abbate of Saint-Nicolas city.

50 ANNIVERSARIES

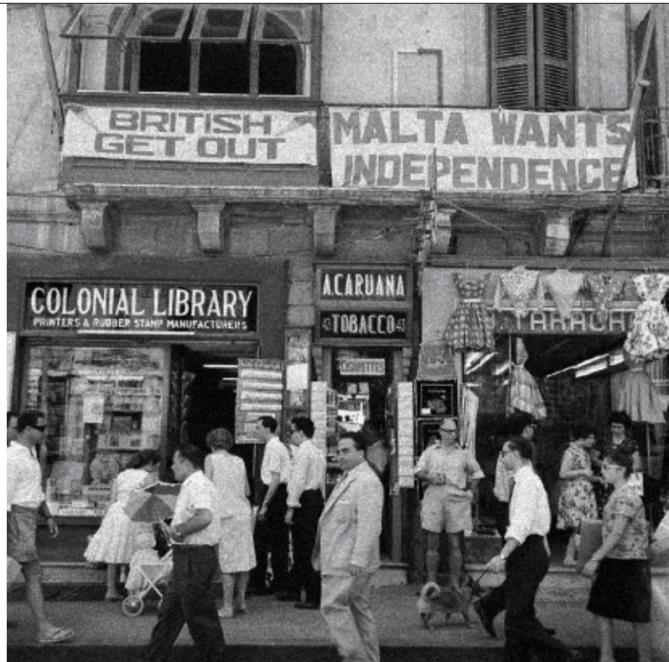
Independence ~ 60th Anniversary

Malta marked 60 years of independence from the United Kingdom on the 21st September 2024. This milestone commemorates the island's journey from colonial rule to becoming a sovereign state, reflecting on the challenges and triumphs that have shaped modern Malta.

Under British rule, Malta became a crucial naval base and played a vital role in British imperial strategy, especially as a staging post for military operations and a resupply station for ships travelling to and from India via the Suez Canal. Despite its strategic importance, Malta's colonial status meant that its people had limited political power. The push for self-governance began in earnest in the early 20th century, with the formation of the first political parties and movements advocating for greater autonomy. The introduction of the first Maltese Constitution in 1934 established a measure of self-government, but it was suspended twice, in 1939 and again during World War II, due to political unrest and the exigencies of war.

The post-war period saw a renewed push for self-determination. The Labour Party, led by Dom Mintoff, and the National Party, led by George Borgh Oliver, emerged as the two dominant political forces. Both parties supported independence, though they differed in their visions for Malta's future. Mintoff advocated for a complete removal of British military bases, which was achieved in 1979, marking what many Maltese consider the "real" end of colonialism. In 1974, Malta became a republic, with the Governor General replaced by a President as the head of state. This transition marked a significant step in Malta's journey towards full sovereignty. However, the country remained within the Commonwealth, maintaining close ties with the UK and other former British colonies.

The 1980s and 1990s were a period of economic transformation for Malta. Successive governments focused on developing new industries, including manufacturing, tourism, and financial services. The establishment of free trade zones, tax incentives for foreign investors, and the expansion of the tourism sector helped to stabilise the economy and reduce unemployment. These efforts were aided by accession to the European Union in 2004 and actively participating in international organisations, including the United Nations, the Commonwealth, and the European Union. Malta has also been a vocal advocate for peace and stability in the Mediterranean region, hosting numerous international conferences and summits. As Malta celebrates 60 years of independence, while it continues to face new challenges, it has not looked back, always seeking a prosperous and sustainable future for its people.







ROBERTA METSOLA

As one of the most prominent and influential figures in European politics, Roberta Metsola holds the esteemed position of President of the European Parliament—an institution that represents over 450 million citizens across the European Union. A proud Maltese national, President Metsola has not only broken barriers as the youngest person and first Maltese to hold this role, but she continues to shape the European agenda with her firm commitment to democracy, unity and prosperity. Since taking office in 2022, she has steered the European Parliament through pivotal moments, from legislative reform to geopolitical challenges, while advocating for a stronger, more resilient Europe that remains close to its citizens. Roberta Metsola was first elected as an MEP for Malta and Gozo in 2013, being re-elected in 2014, 2019 and 2024 with a record number of 87,473 votes. She is a lawyer by profession. Born in 1979 and brought up in Gżira, Roberta is married to Ukko and is the mother of four boys.

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Despite being arguably one of Malta's most distinguished politicians, presiding over one of the world's most influential institutions, you remained true to your roots. How difficult is it for a Maltese politician to make it happen on the world stage?
The story of Malta and Gozo is one of overcoming odds; of beating back the naysayers. We are an island of 316 km² but that has never been a limit to the size of our ideas. Hard work matters. Integrity matters. That is what has been drummed into us, generation after generation, by our parents and grandparents. It is this philosophy that drove our country forward: that led our country to join the European Union, to transform our economy to change the trajectory of so many lives. And it was that same belief that meant that a girl from Gżira could be elected to the European Parliament and become its President. We did that, together, as Maltese. The Maltese and Gozitan continued faith in me, provides me the honour to fly my country's flag proudly next to our European Union stars. It is true that we are the smallest country in the European Union, with one of the smallest delegations; and yet, we are capable of influencing policy just as much as larger countries are. I want more Maltese and Gozitan to believe in it.

You were at the helm of the European Parliament while Malta celebrated its 20th anniversary since joining the European Union. How did EU membership transform the islands?
Like millions of Europeans across the continent, I will never forget where we were on the night between the 30th April and the 1st of May 2004. I was standing in Valletta – with what felt like the entire country, staring across the sea towards our Grand Harbour. We were counting down the minutes and seconds until Malta joined the European Union as Member States.

I will always remember that huge crowd awash with the understanding of unbridled possibility, hope and belief in the future. A sense of homecoming of victory in the potential of our people of merit. Having shared Malta by so many across Europe. For millions of people, accession into the European Union gave a renewed spirit, a sense of purpose, a unity of aim. The future, suddenly, was limitless. It meant safety, opportunity and prosperity. It meant everything. I remember thinking of all those generations of Europeans for who the European Union was only a dream and now it had become a reality. How, against all odds, we had managed to bury the ghosts of the past to pave the way towards a new era of freedom. The sense of comfort it would have given them to know that from North to South, from East to West, from the Baltics to the Mediterranean, a once divided continent was now united as one. So many young Maltese I meet know no life without Europe. They do not remember the struggle, the existential question that it became.

Malta has flourished since 2004. Our economy has consistently outperformed many of our Mediterranean neighbours. We have received millions in EU funds – used to modernise agriculture, upgrade road infrastructure, build new schools and health facilities, and restore precious cultural landmarks such as the Citadel in Gozo, Fort St. Elmo, the Megalithic Temples of Ħġira, Qm and Ggantija and the Grand Master's Palace in Valletta.

We are part of the world's largest Single Market, and programmes like Erasmus+ have enabled thousands of Maltese and Gozitan students to study and train across the European Union. Our businesses have excelled, and Maltese journalists are being recognised across Europe and the world in many areas, we are no longer simply following direction – we are setting it.

308 ARCHITECTURE

Below: The Rotunda of Mosta (Rotunda of St Mary Assunta) with the longest church dome in Europe seen from above and looking up from within. **Right:** aerial view of the Rotunda of Mosta.

Maltese Churches

The Maltese archipelago, with its deep historical roots and Christian culture, is often described as an open-air museum. Its churches, which are found in every town and village, are more than just places of worship, living monuments that narrate the island's rich and complex past. Malta's devotion to Christianity is evident in the sheer number of churches on the islands, with an estimated 365 churches scattered across Malta and Gozo, a church for every day of the year. These sacred structures range from grand cathedrals that dominate the skyline to humble chapels nestled in the countryside, each contributing to the cultural and spiritual fabric of Malta.

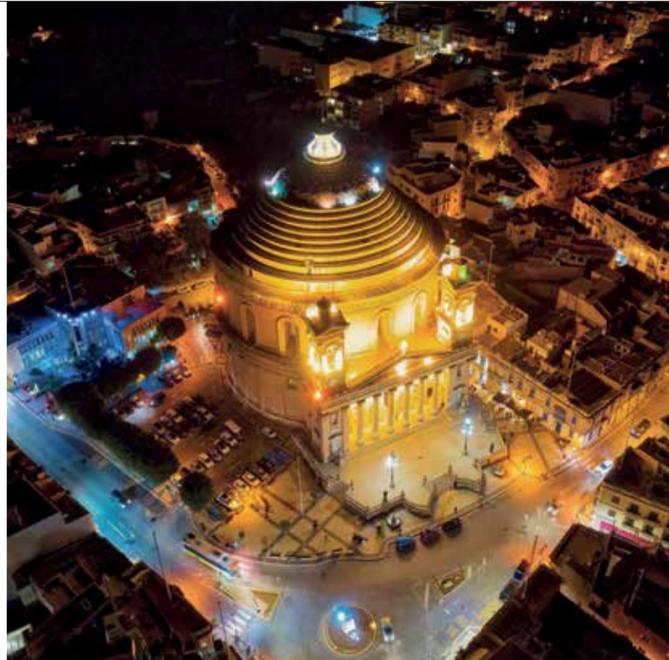
St John's Co-Cathedral

St John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta is the most renowned of all Maltese churches. Built by the Knights of St John between 1572 and 1578 it is a masterpiece of Baroque architecture. Externally austere, its interior is a stark contrast, resplendent with gold leaf, intricate carvings, and grandiose marble tombstones of the Knights. The cathedral is home to Caravaggio's The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist, his largest and only signed work, one of the most significant pieces of art on the island. The Co-Cathedral is not just a place of worship but a symbol of the power and wealth of the Knights during their rule over Malta.



The Rotunda of Mosta

The Rotunda of Mosta, known locally as il-Kneġja ta' Santa Marija Assunta, is another iconic church, famous for its massive dome, the third largest unsupported dome in the world. Built in the 18th century, the church was inspired by the Pantheon in Rome and is a remarkable example of neo-classical architecture. The Mosta Dome is not just known for its architectural grandeur but also for the miraculous event during World War II when a German bomb pierced the dome during a service but failed to explode, a miracle that is still remembered and celebrated by the locals.



Landmarks

343 TREASURES

Artifacts from the underwater excavation in galley creek A taste of life aboard

One of the most interesting underwater excavations related to the early-modern period was conducted in Galley Creek in 2002. Right where the Order's galley used to be moored, the excavation led by Prof. Timmy Gambin yielded lovely objects from an area no larger than five cubic metres of sediment, a staggering number for the size of area excavated. These excavations have shed more light on life aboard, at least while in harbour.

There were 300 men onboard a galley and all were provided with daily meals. Knights were served meals befitting their status. Five courses and dessert were suggested by the Order's council. This included mutton, roasted or stewed meat, such as mutton, quail, chicken or beef and various cheeses, washed down with wine from Europe and beyond. Sailors had a portion of called meat or fish, along with the mutton and some bread. The slaves had a serving of mutton and some bread, though they were afforded some comfort with a cup of hot chocolate after a hard day's work.

Smoking was widespread. Tobacco was brought to Europe from the New World. The copious use of tobacco aboard is clearly evidenced by the number of pipes uncovered. Most of the pipes excavated are in fact of the North African style. We will never know to whom these belonged due to tobacco's use among all strata of society (although at times smoking was considered a pastime for the lower classes of society). Both Mdina and Zepjun have been associated with pipe production. In Malta, Grand Master Cottoner made tobacco a taxable commodity in 1673.



Right: 30 dice were found throughout the excavation that were mostly made out of bone.

390 SCREEN MALTA





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Presented by

J|BONNICI
Periti


DANZAH GROUP
REPUTATION, BUILT ON SOLID GROUND

VG
Victor Grech


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