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## **The development of domestic space in the Maltese Islands from the Late Middle Ages to the second half of the Twentieth Century**

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

*“An ideal home acts as a territory that mediates, reflects, and shapes social identity.”*  
(Amorim and Lourerio 2003: 1)

#### 1.1 Aims and objectives

The main source of inspiration that has contributed to the development of this study has been Malta’s most precious natural resource: the local limestone. For many centuries, this has played a vital role in the life of the settlers to build their abodes and settlements as well as to defend themselves against their enemies. The Neolithic settlement of Skorba and the megalithic temples are an excellent example of this principle (Evans 1971; Trump 2004). The utilization of the local stone and the human exploitation of the natural environment through the ages were two major factors that influenced how and where people live.

The archaeological evidence confirms that there was further development in the use and dressing of the local stone in the Punic Period (Said-Zammit 1997a) and in the Roman Period (Gouder 1979b; Bonanno 2005). In the Middle Ages it was used for the building of churches, palaces, houses and defensive systems, spread in different parts of the Maltese islands (Dalli 2006). It was employed also for the building of various vernacular structures outside the urban centres (Fsadni 1992; Jaccarini 2002).

In the Knights’ Period (1530 – 1798) the local stone was exploited for the development of the most ambitious defensive system these islands have ever seen, particularly in the Grand Harbour area (Spiteri 1994; 2008). A fortified city (Valletta) was built, while new settlements were developed in other parts of the country (Blouet 1993). It was also used for the building of palaces, hospitals and churches (Sire 1994).

During the Colonial Period (1800 – 1964) the British made extensive use of this natural resource to build defensive systems and various houses and churches that were inspired by nineteenth-century architectural styles (Mahoney 1996). During this period new urban and suburban settlements developed at a fast pace. The use of concrete after the Second World War, together with the development of new construction techniques, materials and equipment meant that buildings could be built in a relatively shorter time.

The opening of the local economy after the acquisition of Independence in 1964 led to the development of the earliest industrial estates in different localities, which contributed to the establishment of new suburban areas and settlements (Busuttill 1988). New houses, apartments, housing estates and hotels started to be built in various parts of the country, gradually threatening the existence of some rural areas. Although the local stone is still used in contemporary houses, the use of prefabricated materials since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has led to a different domestic environment and climate. As will be demonstrated throughout this thesis, the local limestone, being the

principal building material of the Maltese islands is, therefore, the essential physical and material element of the houses.

This work has also been inspired by the unpublished genealogical research which the author had carried out for a long time in the local archives to trace the origins of his family. The vast collection of parish records and notarial acts provide a plethora of information through which one can decode various aspects of Maltese society through the ages. The archival records on demographics and the notarial acts on property deeds provide the societal framework created by and for the houses and their inhabitants.

Therefore, these two sources have served as a means of inspiration through which the author thoroughly engages with different types of Maltese dwellings, including the *palazzi*, terraced houses, farmhouses, the urban poor houses, hovels and cave-dwellings.

This thesis traces and analyses the evolution of domestic space in Maltese vernacular and ‘polite’ houses through time. The houses under study range from humble buildings of modest size, materials and design, like farmhouses or those for the less affluent town-dwellers, to buildings of grand design, like townhouses and private palaces. Covering the periods from the medieval to contemporary times, this work considers various aspects of Maltese lifestyle, culture and economic activities to assess the local houses both from an architectural point of view and from an economic and anthropological perspective. The specific aim is to examine Maltese houses not as a static relic of the past, but as a vibrant place of human activity and social interaction, in which people act and react in different ways, according to different circumstances. In this sense, houses are also studied in terms of their spatial properties and how these generate privacy, interaction and communication, accessibility and security, and, equally important, how domestic space relates to gender roles, status and class.

The main objective of this study is to reach a deep and nuanced understanding of domestic space and how it relates to the islands’ history and the development of its society. The complex nature of the Maltese houses can only be addressed through applying a multidisciplinary approach. Therefore, this thesis promotes a multifaceted enquiry into the houses of the Maltese islands, reaching from the physical buildings and their material culture, via the perception of houses in art and literature, to the socio-economic significance of buildings in terms of property relations and economic activities. More specifically, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of domestic space in Malta, this study pursues the following lines of investigation:

- a) systematic house surveys and rigorous data recording to establish categories of different types of dwellings;
- b) detailed field surveys, cartographic analysis and geographic research to relate the evolution of settlements to the development of domestic space;
- c) the study and appreciation of literary sources and *oeuvres d’art* to evaluate how Maltese houses have been perceived by travellers, visitors and artists;
- d) the documentation and evaluation of house furniture and contents through comparative studies of permanent museum exhibitions and notarial records;

- e) the analysis of a wide range of historical sources (including notarial records and travelogues) to explore Maltese houses as a place of human habitation and socio-economic activity;
- f) a systematic analysis of a small but coherent sample set of house and settlement plans using formal techniques for spatial analysis (Space Syntax) to study the evolution of the Maltese houses and settlements through their intrinsic spatial properties;
- g) the analysis of demographic data (for example, population records and the national censuses) to study the socio-anthropological dimension of the Maltese houses;
- h) the analysis of recent local domestic architecture to evaluate the perceptions of Maltese contemporary society.

These individual strands of enquiry have their own merits, however, when combined together they complement and amplify each other and allow new and deeper insights into the evolution of the Maltese houses.

## 1.2 The geographic setting

To comprehend the importance and value of the local building stone as well as the socio-cultural and economic context of the Maltese houses, one needs first to make reference to the geographical context of the Maltese islands, their geological setup and climate. Houses and settlements cannot be studied out of their physical or natural context, otherwise one is likely to obtain a partial or deceptive picture. Moreover, in a Braudelian sense, it is when the Maltese islands are considered within a Mediterranean context that one can comprehend better the islands' landscape and their particular history (Horden and Purcell 2000).

The Maltese islands, located in the central part of the Mediterranean Sea, are situated about 93 km to the south of Sicily, 354 km to the north of Tripoli, and 288 km to the east of Tunisia (Figure 1.1). The archipelago, having a northwest to southeast orientation and a total surface area of approximately 316 km<sup>2</sup>, consists of three main islands: Malta, Gozo and Comino (Figure 1.2). The smallest other islands of the archipelago are uninhabited. Malta, the main island, has a maximum length of approximately 27.4 km and a maximum width of about 14.5 km, thus having a surface area of about 247 km<sup>2</sup>. Gozo, the second largest island, has a surface area of approximately 66 km<sup>2</sup>. Comino is the least inhabited and has a surface area of about 3 km<sup>2</sup>. The Maltese islands have a number of naturally sheltered harbours. The highest point, at 253 m, is Ta' Dmejrek in the parish of Dingli, Malta.

The Maltese islands have a sedimentary type of rock, consisting of five superimposed layers (Figure 1.3 (a) and (b)). The lowest layer is the Lower Coralline Limestone. This is the earliest rock layer to have been formed in these islands about 30 to 25 million years ago. Above this there lies the porous Globigerina Limestone which is the most important for the local building industry. On the latter sits the Blue Clay which occurs mostly in western Malta and in various parts of Gozo. Being an impermeable layer, Blue Clay gives rise to the formation of the perched aquifers, ideal

for field irrigation and domestic use. Upon this lies the porous Greensands layer, which occurs only in small pockets of land. The most recent rock layer to have been formed is the Upper Coralline Limestone, which is particularly important for the production of grit and concrete. This occurs mostly in western Malta and in eastern Gozo.

The Maltese islands consist of three basic geological regions, namely:

- a) **the Coralline Region:** roughly extending from Marfa harbour to Dingli cliffs, it is the region in which Upper Coralline mostly prevails in Malta. It consists of two subregions: the dry coralline, where perennial water is hardly available, and the wet coralline characterized by several perennial water springs;
- b) **the Globigerina Region:** this comprises the rest of Malta and extends from roughly St. Paul's Bay down to Marsaxlokk harbour. It consists of a series of sheltered harbours which gave rise to several settlements. This region comprises two subregions: the predominant globigerina, where the best ports of the island are located, and the less common globigerina, a smaller area where all geological deposits occur;
- c) **Gozo:** this is characterized by a series of open harbours, particularly in its southern and northern parts. All geological layers feature on this island.

Geologically, the western and northern parts of Malta consist of a chain of parallel hills and valleys. They are separated from the rest of the island by an extensive natural fault, known as the Great Fault, which runs from Madliena to Fomm ir-Riġ. In northern Malta the escarpment is sometimes abrupt and broken by deep embayments, while western Malta is characterized by deeply incised valleys and undercliff areas. Soil erosion on the hill-tops of western and northern Malta does not permit proper agriculture, however across the hill slopes the land is utilized for crop cultivation and animal grazing. The valleys of this part of the island, sheltered as they are between these hills, are extremely fertile because these are irrigated by the springs that originate from the Upper Coralline uplands (Bowen-Jones, Dewdney and Fisher 1962: 235-88).

In contrast, in the eastern part of Malta several valley systems descend to the central plains. A tongue of high ground known as Sciberras peninsula, on which Valletta was built, separates Marsamxett Harbour from the Grand Harbour. The most prevalent type of rock that occurs in this area is the Globigerina Limestone. It is, in fact, in eastern Malta where one finds the most extensive surface quarries.

Gozo and Comino have similar characteristics to northern Malta. Gozo consists of a chain of flat-topped hills, across which one finds many terraced fields and a series of valleys. The most common rock types are the Globigerina and the Upper Coralline.

Recent statistics issued by the National Statistics Office (NSO) show that today only 34% of the total land is still used for agriculture. This contrasts well with the situation that occurred half a century ago, when agriculture still occupied approximately 56% of the total land (Busuttill 1993: 11; Vella and Camilleri 2003: 1569-71). The rise of new towns and the development of new industrial areas in different parts of the islands were certainly some of the main reasons which led to this decline in agricultural land. In fact, in 2010 the total urban fabric amounted to about 25% of the total land area of the Maltese islands. There was also an increase in the land devoted for industry, which increased from about 3% to approximately 7% of the land,

while forested areas and wetland in Malta and Gozo constitute about 1% of the total land area. Urban areas have spread in most parts of the islands, with a major concentration in the Grand Harbour area, being the most densely populated district in Malta. While several settlements are located in different coastal or harbour areas, a considerable number of others are situated more inland (Figure 1.4).

Historically, the former capital city of Malta was Mdina, a medieval town situated in the centre of island, while the main town of Gozo was also situated in the centre and was known as the Castello. Until the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century the Grand Harbour area was dominated by a medieval castle, known in our records as the *Castrum Maris*, which sheltered the nearby maritime settlement of Birgu. However, when Valletta became the new capital in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Grand Harbour area developed into one of the most conurbated regions of these islands. Here developed several new important maritime towns: Floriana (the suburb of Valletta), Senglea (or Isla) and Cospicua (or Bormla). Together, Senglea Cospicua and Birgu are also known as the Three Cities. While Valletta is Malta's capital city, Gozo's main town is Victoria (or Rabat), the island's most inhabited settlement, located close to the medieval Castello or Citadel (Figure 1.2).

The climate of the Maltese Islands is of the Mediterranean type and consists of cold and rainy winters and of hot dry summers. The local average temperature during the coldest months of the year (January and February) is approximately 13°C, while the local average temperature reached during the hottest months (July and August) is approximately 28°C. Normally, rain falls in winter, particularly between November and February, with an average annual precipitation of about 525 mm.

The Maltese islands have one of the highest population densities in Europe, with about 1,410 people per km<sup>2</sup>. According to recent statistical records the local population has been estimated to be around 445,500 inhabitants. In Gozo alone there are approximately 37,300 people, with a density of about 557 people per km<sup>2</sup> (Figure 1.5). For census purposes, these islands are divided into six districts: Southern Harbour, Northern Harbour, South East Malta, West Malta, North Malta, and Gozo and Comino.

### 1.3 Chronological parameters

To acquire a holistic picture of domestic space development in the Maltese islands, it was essential to analyse in this thesis different types of local houses across a wide geographical area and also over a long period of time, starting from the Middle Ages and ending with the industrialization of the Maltese islands (late sixties/early seventies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century). The period under study is divided as follows:

a) **Middle Ages** (or the **Medieval Period**): starting from the Byzantine Period (6<sup>th</sup> century AD) to the islands' occupation by the Knights of St. John in 1530. This is further subdivided as follows:

- |                     |              |
|---------------------|--------------|
| i. Byzantine Period | c. 535 – 870 |
| ii. Muslim Period   | 870 – 1091   |
| iii. Norman Period  | 1091 – 1194  |

- iv. Hohenstaufen Period      1194 – 1266
  - v. Angevin Period            1266 – 1282
  - vi. Aragonese Period        1283 – 1530
- b) **The Knights' Period:** the Knights occupied these islands between 1530 and 1798.
  - c) **The French Period:** a short period of French occupation between 1798 and 1800.
  - d) **The British (or Colonial) Period:** it starts in 1800 and ends with the acquisition of political independence in 1964.
  - e) **Post-Independence Period:** this period begins with Malta's political independence in 1964 and includes the main social and economic achievements which these islands experienced during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### 1.4 What is a house and what one can do with it?

The earliest studies on domestic accommodation and social groupings date to a period spreading from the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, at a time when the United States and various European countries, for example Italy and France, came under the cultural influence of Romanticism. Apart from their keen interest in history, the followers of the Romantic Movement also gave particular importance to folklore and popular art (Haut 1991: 66). Nineteenth-century Romantic artists, for instance Goya and Hayez, were influenced by the folklore that had been created by the common people. This interest in popular culture was often manifested even at a national level. For instance, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the Bourbon sovereigns of southern Italy showed particular interest in the folk culture of their peasant subjects, including their dress, songs and traditions, so much so that in this period various artists were specifically commissioned to embellish royal palaces with murals and paintings depicting the rural landscapes and peasant communities of their kingdom (Congedo 2001). This patriotic interest in folk culture in different parts of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe thus became a symbol of social cohesion and national identity. Scholars argue that the Romantic Movement was a reaction to the cultural alienation of the Industrial Revolution and the progressive liberalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Haut 1991: 66-67).

This interest in local history and patriotism in various countries led to the development of the folkloric approach to vernacular architecture, which became particularly influential from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards (Dorson 1972b: 1; Pavlides 1991: 305). According to Jenkins (1972: 498) the most important contribution of this movement has been the voluminous information that folklorists collected on folk society in general and on folk architecture in particular. Pavlides (1991: 308) explains that in gathering information about houses, folklorists have emphasized the house plan: “*in contrast to its material construction and its use, the plan diagram is regarded as the most persistent, the least changeable of its attributes, and therefore the most valuable for the folklorist.*”

The period between the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by two main methods to the study of the house, both of which were

crucial in the evolution of innovative approaches from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards. There were a number of architectural critics who, apart from being mainly interested in elite architecture, considered the house more as a structure than as a place of human habitation and economic activity. These scholars were therefore more concerned with architectural orders, ornamental details and construction methods. This period also saw the development of anthropology as a distinct academic discipline. Anthropologists carried out various studies around the world to explore how humans behave and organize themselves, why there are variations among different human groups, and how human societies develop. The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the emergence of several seminal studies by scholars such as Fortes, Lowie and Malinowski (Souvatzi 2008: 7-8).

The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by a new movement of architectural theoreticians and critics who were influenced in particular by scholars like Mumford (1961; 1968) and Rapoport (1969). This new wave of intellectuals began to widen their horizons by looking into the social meaning of architecture, and their research in different countries led to the publication of various important studies. These academics went beyond the study of the house just as a symbol of aesthetic beauty and elegance, and were much more interested in analysing how changes in the organization of space in the house are related to household structure, hierarchy and class (Valentino 2006). Mumford's works were a source of inspiration for later architectural critics and social anthropologists who were interested in the house as a place of socio-economic and cultural activities (Rybczynski 1986; 2001; Ward 1976; 1990; 1993).

From an anthropological perspective the house is much more than a physical structure. Bachelard (1964: 33) claims that "*house images move in two directions: they are in us as much as we are in them*". The house also implies a community, and therefore a living space for particular social groups with a particular culture of their own (Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuñiga 1999: 3). As Sanders (1990: 45) argues, "*a building is a cultural unit of meaning before it is an object of practical function*".

Lévi-Strauss (1969; 1983: 174-84; 1987: 155) considers the house as a unit of social structure, analysing it in terms of kinship, marriage, alliance, exchange systems and hierarchy. Followers of Lévi-Strauss, for example Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995: 1), regard houses as places "*in which the to and fro of life unfolds*".

People build, modify, demolish or abandon their houses due to various reasons which vary from one social group to another. Changes in domestic space also occur due to the evolution of thought and perception of people living in different chronological contexts. Rosner (2005: 3-4) argues that this metamorphosis of domestic space often takes place unconsciously. Hillier and Hanson (1990: 2) comment that there is a close relationship between people and building forms: "*the ordering of space in buildings is really about the order of relations between people. Because this is so, society enters into the very nature and form of buildings*".

Littlejohn (1960: 63-67) sees a relationship between the house and the body, and between the house and the experiences of its dwellers. People build houses not only in their own image, but also according to their needs as individuals and members of a specific social group. In this way, the house is an extension of the person and the self

(Bachelard 1964; Cooper 1974). The space surrounding the dwelling is also of particular significance since it is also “*an extension of the personal space of the occupants*” (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995: 3). The house is also a symbol of status and often implies a transmission of identity, which is generally expressed through various forms and ceremonial rituals, according to different social and geographical contexts (Gould and Schiffer 1981; McKinnon 1995: 170-88; Lea 1995: 206-25; Pellow 2004: 180). Hillier and Hanson define the house as a “*system*” and describe it as the “*domain of inhabitants*”. They also claim that “*the world outside the system was the domain of potential strangers; the space outside the entrance constituted a potential interface between the inhabitant and the stranger; and the entrance was a means not only of establishing the identity of the inhabitant, but also a means of converting a stranger into a visitor*” (Hillier and Hanson 1990: 19).

House architecture is a symbol of space and boundary that can be compared to a shell. On the one hand, it forms part of the surrounding environment and hence provides shelter to the people living in the same house, while on the other adaptations within it occur to accommodate the needs of the community or social group which is its living organism (Pellow 2004: 160-62). Even though changes occur in the dwelling’s structure, it never changes its role as a boundary and shelter (Woods Kennedy 1953: 4).

As a network of communications the house brings the outside world closer to the interior world of the household (Bourdieu 1977: 214). Therefore, apart from its functional nature to provide shelter and space for economic activity, “*the house comprises a combination of sign systems, which aim at communicating functional, typological, socio-economic and symbolic trends, according to the perceptions of society*” (Sigalos 2003: 1).

The house also expresses a degree of privacy, both internally and externally. Anthropological studies have revealed that privacy is a crucial component in the house context, particularly in societies where different genders and classes can be separated within the house plan (Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga 1999: 4). This is in sharp contrast to what occurred in post-industrial times, when many industrialized countries introduced the concept of houses with open-plan living rooms, in which certain spaces which were secluded or considered as private, for example the kitchen, now became areas in which even visitors could have access to (Cieraad 1999: 6).

The importance of privacy varies from one society to another. Among certain tribal societies, for example, privacy is restricted because of the small size of their dwellings, but certain patriarchal societies organize domestic space in a way to maximize the highest degree of privacy for the head of the household (Munro and Madigan 1999: 107-17). In the case of families living in small houses, the issue of privacy can be tackled through negotiation between family members (Cieraad 1999: 8).

Anthropological studies also refer to the changing relationship between the house and its inhabitants, particularly in modern urban and suburban quarters (Putnam 1993). Although many people in developed and developing countries still invest a lot of money and energy in their homes, they are actually spending little time in them to live and relax due to work commitments (Putnam 1995: 144-54; Cieraad 1999: 11).

This anthropological approach to the study of the house was also applied by several archaeologists to explore how domestic space was organized by various societies in the past in different geographical settings (Kent 1990; Westgate 2007a; Nevett 2003: 98-112; Parker Pearson and Richards 2003a; Sigalos 2003; 2004; Stöger 2007; 2011; Bintliff 2010; Vionis 2012). For example, Sigalos (2003: 1) defines the Greek medieval house as a “*container of material culture*”. Material culture, however basic, remains an important component of the house. This is placed in harmony with the house environment and the structure itself to meet the needs of its inhabitants. Thus there is a relationship between the structure, the house environment, and the inhabitants living within its boundaries (Sigalos 2003: 1-2; Valentino 2006).

In the absence of its inhabitants the house is something static and lifeless (Sigalos 2003: 1). From a static and passive structure the house becomes an arena of social and economic activity, with its members performing various duties, sometimes according to rank, age, gender or specific needs (Tringham 1991; Wajcman 1993: 110-20; Booth 1999: 133; Hendon 1999; Manzanilla 2004). Hodder’s investigations (1978; 1990) revealed that in different societies domestic space is also associated with social ranking.

Another important approach for the study of the house, known as Space Syntax, was developed by Hillier and Hanson (and colleagues) in the early eighties of the previous century (Hillier and Hanson 1990: 143-75). This method analyses the relationships between spaces of urban areas and buildings. In Space Syntax, the spaces are considered as voids (for example, streets, rooms and squares) between walls, fences and other obstructions that limit traffic and/or the visual field (Klarqvist 1993: 11). It also provides information about interactions among the inhabitants of the same dwelling and between inhabitants and visitors (Mustafa, Hassan and Baper 2010: 157-66; Bintliff 2014a: 215-16; 2014b: 263). In recent years Space Syntax continued to be improved through the development of new techniques, dedicated software and added phenomenological tools (Turner, Doxa, O’Sullivan and Penn 2001; Hillier 1996; 2007: 1-2), which served as a basis for various seminal archaeological studies (Grahame 2000; Kaiser 2000; Chatford Clark 2007; Stöger 2009b; 2011). Therefore, while all the approaches discussed so far in the previous paragraphs share the assumption that space acquires significance only through some kind of human agency or social process which give it its shape and meaning, Space Syntax argues that space has agency and is an active player and is not only a container or a canvas which provides a backdrop for human activity.

This section has demonstrated that scholarly opinions about houses have changed from describing them as static units, to acknowledging their function as a place of social, economic and cultural activity. It is a place where its inhabitants give it life and spirit through their daily activity. Houses generate activities and influence people; it is not only that people modify space but space also affects people (Valentino 2006). The house becomes a point of internal contact for its dwellers and of external contact with the rest of the community outside (Sigalos 2003; Vionis 2012). Thus the relationship between the microcosmic world of the house and the wider community outside (the village street, the parish community, etc.) cannot be ignored (Buttigieg 1990).

Domestic spaces become a place of social and economic organization too; these are organized in such a way so as to establish areas for communal or private use or for different economic and/or social activities (Cooper 1974: 131). The house expresses also a unique spatial identity and household culture. Each household expresses its unique identity through its attitudes towards internal house painting, façade decoration and furniture used (Cieraad 1999: 10-11). According to Rapoport (1990a: 13) the house is composed of fixed-feature elements (floor and walls), semi-fixed feature elements (for example, furnishings), and non-fixed feature elements (for example, the people). Through this triangulation of feature elements Rapoport demonstrates how architecture works hand in hand with the objects placed within it to influence life.

## **1.5 The Maltese house – the history of its study**

For many centuries the Maltese islands were the focus of attention for several historians and visitors who wished to explore and write about their unique landscape and cultural heritage. Although they provided various references to the main local settlements, to the islands' impressive fortifications and to various elite buildings and houses that are found in Valletta and Mdina, yet the non-elite Maltese house and other vernacular structures seem to have often escaped their attention. It seems as though such writers considered local vernacular architecture as of secondary importance, and therefore the traditional *razzett* (or farmhouse) and village house were almost completely neglected. Despite the fact that various aspects of the islands' folk culture and heritage were dealt with by various authors since the Knights' Period, a proper study of the local vernacular built heritage had to wait until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when due to rapid urban development this was in danger of perishing completely.

### **1.5.1 The earliest sources**

Following the three descriptive accounts written by the Arab chroniclers Ibn Hawqal, Al-Himyari and Al-Idrisi between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, which however make no single reference to local houses and buildings, the earliest detailed description of the Maltese islands was published in 1536. Its author, Jean Quintin d'Autun, also provides us with what appears to be one of the earliest maps of the Maltese islands (Figure 1.6), which shows the distribution of local settlements in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

According to Quintin, the local population at that time was approximately 20,000 people. In Chapter XVI he refers to many local troglodyte settlements, while in Chapter XI he refers to the houses of Birgu (situated in the centre of the Grand Harbour, sheltered as it was by the nearby medieval *Castrum Maris*), claiming that these were in a ruinous state and that their roofs, roughly made, were covered with tiles or reeds. The author concludes this chapter by saying that the dwellings that existed outside the city and the suburbs seemed like African huts. In Chapter XVIII Quintin makes reference to the strong winds that blow on the Maltese islands, stating that sometimes these are so violent that they almost carry people off, even the roofs of houses.

In 1647 the local historian Giovanni Francesco Abela made the earliest attempt in Maltese history to analyse the origins of the islands' inhabitants. He also produced a fairly detailed description of the inhabited and uninhabited areas of the Maltese islands and a map which shows the distribution of settlements in his own times (Figure 1.7).

Among these earliest sources one has to include as well a list of other historians who, in their quest to write about the history of the Order of St. John, provide some basic descriptions about the Maltese islands (for example, Munster 1580; Porcacchi 1590; Dapper 1686).

### **1.5.2 Visitors to the Maltese islands**

For many centuries the Maltese islands were also the centre of attraction for several travellers and explorers. One of these was Athanasius Kircher who visited Malta in 1637. Whilst here he was astonished by the way cave-dwellers lived at Għar il-Kbir, a cave habitation in the parish of Dingli. Kircher also visited a similar cave habitation in Gozo, the location of which is however unspecified. Kircher's account, published in 1678, therefore constitutes the earliest source which provides a fairly detailed description of an indigenous cave settlement and its inhabitants.

It was probably this narrative which in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century inspired the Dutch artist Pieter van der Aa to produce an interesting engraving depicting the visit of the Grand Master, Jean Paul Lascaris, to Għar il-Kbir (Figure 1.8). A closer look at this work-of-art, however, suggests that the artist probably never visited the place, but relied on Kircher's account and on his own artistic imagination.

The expeditions of the French artist and traveller Jean Houel to Sicily, Lipari and the Maltese islands were recorded in a four-volume *opus*, published between 1782 and 1787. Besides his detailed descriptive account, Houel also produced a set of engravings which included a map of the Maltese islands. One of the illustrations depicts a cave settlement and part of a farmhouse in the north of Malta (Figure 1.9).

Another eighteenth-century traveller to Malta was Patrick Brydone who visited the islands in 1773. Brydone (1809: 169) refers to the various rural settlements of the island, stating that "*every little village has a noble church, elegantly finished and adorned with statues of marble, rich tapestry, and a large quantity of silver plate*". The same author also provides a general description of the islands' fortifications. Other eighteenth-century travellers to Malta include Philip Skippon (1732) and John Dryden (1776).

The value of these works lies in the fact that they provide us with various snapshots of how tourists and foreigners from different parts of Europe looked at the Maltese villages and houses as well as local village life (see section 4.4 below).

### **1.5.3 Nineteenth-century studies**

During their British occupation, particularly from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the Maltese islands attracted several foreign writers who either visited them or even made them their permanent residence. Contrary to what happened in the previous centuries, it was practically from this time onwards that authors and scholars started to demonstrate more interest in different types of Maltese houses, including vernacular

dwelling, as well as in various aspects of local lifestyle. Louis De Boisgelin (1804) produces what appears to be an updated map of the Maltese islands and presents a brief description of most of the towns, villages and hamlets which existed in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Additionally, the author refers to various local customs and provides us with relatively detailed information regarding how Maltese folk dressed and behaved in public. Lacroix (1848: 35) makes indirect references to local vernacular houses when he describes how, conforming to what had occurred in Malta in the past, the native women enjoyed their evenings with their families, in the presence of their husbands, chatting with their neighbours on the terraces or verandahs of their homes.

While Seddall (1870: 296) describes the religious fervour of the Maltese people, which is manifested in their churches and chapels, Senior (1882: 261), who visited the Maltese islands in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, states that the majority of the Maltese lived in poverty. Others, for example MacGill (1839) and Davy (1842), provide information on the staple diet of the inhabitants. Both authors also provide some descriptions of native rural houses without, however, referring to their interior spaces. More detailed data about Maltese houses and their dwellers started to emerge from 1842, when the first national census of the local population was carried out. Consecutive censuses, which were conducted more or less on a decadal basis, continued to furnish interesting data about various aspects related to local housing and population.

Other nineteenth-century authors, notably Badger (1838), write about various aspects related to local folk culture and traditions, for example folk singing, hunting and bird-trapping, and life in the village taverns.

#### **1.5.4 Twentieth-century sources**

Descriptions of the Maltese islands and their people, with some references to houses, continued to appear during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (for example, Bradley 1912; Shepherd 1928; Luke 1949). However the house really became a new focus, particularly for several architects and civil engineers, after the Second World War, when post-war governments embarked on a regeneration programme in those areas that were heavily affected by the enemy attacks of 1941-43, particularly in and around the main towns of the harbour region: Valletta, Floriana and the Three Cities (Figure 1.2). It was also a time when many families migrated from the countryside to the urban centres in quest of a better standard of living, new employment opportunities, and improved housing conditions. This context of post-war economic, urban and social development became the background for a number of investigative studies carried out by students of the Faculty of Architecture and Civil Engineering (today's Faculty for the Built Environment) of the University of Malta, particularly from the 1970s onwards (for example, King 1971; Gauci 1977).

The urban regeneration and development which took place since the 1960s led to the gradual abandonment of several rural areas in different parts of the islands and to their partial replacement by industrial and suburban estates elsewhere. Through time a number of farmhouses in Malta and Gozo were emptied of their contents and people and were left in complete abandonment, while several vernacular structures were even

pulled down to be replaced by new housing units. For many years the traditional *razzett* was not given its due importance and was excluded almost completely from its share in Malta's national identity and from a thorough investigative study. Several scholars continued to focus their attention on the monumental buildings of Valletta, Mdina and wherever the Knights of St. John left their imprint on these islands. These authors (for example, Hughes 1986) were still inspired by the architectural elegance of palaces, townhouses and other buildings, rather than by the various activities that the inhabitants of the islands may have carried out on the inside of their houses. Other studies were also concerned with the fortifications and defence systems that the Knights and the British built locally between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Hughes 1969; 1980). These fortifications continued to be studied by later authors until recent times (Spiteri 1994; 1996; Hoppen 1999).

### **1.5.5 The Maltese houses in twentieth-century scholarship**

The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the rise of a new wave of scholars who started to explore local dwellings and settlements from a more analytical perspective. One of the earliest academics who embarked on a new method to study the traditional Maltese village from an anthropological viewpoint is Jeremy Boissevain. Whilst still interested in the historical development of the local *raħal* (village), he wanted to understand life within the village by analysing the people's mentality on a number of social issues. Boissevain (1965; 2006) was one of the pioneers who, so to speak, gave life and spirit to the stones that form the buildings of the local town or village. In this anthropological context one needs also to add a study of the elite palaces and tourist experiences in the former capital of Mdina by Sant Cassia. Whilst referring to the city's ancient past and historic monuments Sant Cassia (1999: 247) reminds his reader that the houses of Mdina are also the "*homes of living inhabitants*". Another scholar, Cassar, used his academic training in history and anthropology to analyse various aspects of Malta's early modern society from an anthropological perspective, for example religion and the role of the Catholic Church, gender, culture and identity (Cassar 1993; 1996; 2000; 2002).

In 1975 Luttrell published a seminal work which constitutes one of the earliest scientific approaches to the study of medieval Malta, including its material culture. Amongst other studies included in this work one can mention Wettinger's contribution on Malta's lost villages and hamlets, a study which is now complemented by a more recent work by the same author on local historical toponyms (Wettinger 2000).

The last twenty years of the previous century saw also a rising interest in the study of Malta's vernacular heritage. One can say that, during this period, vernacular buildings that were previously unknown to the scholar's eye or long forgotten started to be given their due importance. Two authors who were instrumental in our understanding of local vernacular architecture are Fsadni (1992) and Jaccarini (2002). The former explores the architecture of one of the most interesting vernacular structures in Malta, locally known as *girna* (corbelled stone hut). After many years of neglect Fsadni paved the way for the local *girna* to be studied in greater depth and to be

preserved from further abandonment and vandalism. At a time when there was an increasing interest in converting rural houses into real estate investment (Boissevain 2006: 92), Jaccarini's study on the Maltese farmhouse provided for the first time a thorough appreciation of a vernacular structure that had been hardly ever studied before.

Cave settlements occur in various parts of Malta and Gozo, some of which are not even accessible. Mario Buhagiar (1984; 2003; 2005) is one of the pioneers who studied the local cave settlements from an archaeological perspective. Further research on troglodyte Malta was pursued by Keith Buhagiar, whose extensive archaeological investigations resulted in two unpublished dissertations (Buhagiar 1997; 2002) and other published works (Buhagiar 2007; 2012). Another related study provides a detailed report on a cave settlement at Is-Simblija, in the parish of Dingli (Saliba, Magro Conti and Borg 2002).

From the final decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards there was also an increasing interest in various aspects of the local cultural heritage. National exhibitions organized by different local entities and foundations, for example the *Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti*, have led to the publication of various catalogues and studies on local costumes, silverware, antique furniture and jewellery, amongst others. The objective of these exhibitions was to expose for the first time priceless treasures that lay hidden for hundreds of years in various private collections (Micallef 1995; De Piro and Cremona 1998; Manduca 2002; Cremona 2013).

The rediscovery of a unique medieval chapel in one of Malta's lost hamlets, Hal Millieri, paved the way for an uninterrupted series of scientific studies of Malta's medieval heritage, which for many years had been left almost completely neglected and remained understudied. The chapel and other remains in this hamlet were excavated in 1977, with the excavation report being published thirteen years later (Blagg, Bonanno and Luttrell 1990). More recently, a new project has presented preliminary results from a joint survey project conducted between the University of Ghent, the University of Malta, and the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage (Malta) (Docter *at al.* 2012). The surveyed area yielded quantities of potsherds datable to a period ranging between the Punic Period and early modern times. During the survey were recorded several archaeological or historical features, for example rock-cut tombs, cisterns and corbelled stone huts.

Since the last three decades of the previous century Mario Buhagiar has shown a particular interest not only in the early-Christian and Byzantine catacombs and hypogea, but also in the rock-cut churches and wayside chapels which both form an integral part of Malta's rural environment. Buhagiar's studies provide a new approach to the study of wayside chapels in Malta and Gozo and their unique artistic heritage (Buhagiar 1979; 1993; 2000; 2005).

Lastly, reference should also be made to the several unpublished under- and post-graduate dissertations that have been presented to several universities, including the University of Malta, during the last twenty years. These tackle various issues of Malta's social and economic history as well as different aspects related to the islands'

vernacular heritage (for example, Cachia 1999; Aquilina 2001; Buhagiar 2002; Bezzina 2002; Borg 2003; Busuttill 2003; Vassallo 2007; Caruana 2009; Vella 2010).

This literature review is far from exhaustive. However, it provides a framework for the main sources that will be used for our analysis of Maltese houses and how they reflect changes in local society and economy through time.

## **1.6 Methodology**

To reach the objectives stipulated in section 1.1 above, the thesis bases itself on a multi-perspective approach, with the data being collected through the following methods:

- a) house surveys;
- b) archival, library and museum research;
- c) comparative and contextual studies;
- d) ethnographic data recording;
- e) Space Syntax analyses.

A similar approach was followed previously by other scholars who studied the development of domestic space in other Mediterranean regions, for example Boiotia and Messenia in Greece (Sigalos 2003; Bintliff 2012a), the Cycladic islands (Vionis 2012) as well as the Aegean Islands, South Italy and Sicily (Nevett 2001).

The subsections that follow explain in more detail each of the above methods and make reference to any limitations that were encountered.

### **1.6.1 House surveys**

The first part of this project was characterized by a number of house surveys (hereinafter referred to as the Malta Historic House Survey), which were conducted between February and December 2011. The author surveyed different types of houses (for example, *palazzi*, ‘townhouse’ style residences, rural houses and cave-dwellings) from all the districts of the Maltese islands. This was essential in order to detect any differences there might be in the architecture of the house in different parts of the islands. Moreover, it was also essential to investigate dwellings that pertained to different historical periods. Thus, these surveys considered the houses from a geographic point of view as well as from a chronological perspective. By surveying and studying different types of dwellings it was possible to acquire a wider picture of Maltese society during the period under study at all income levels.

The surveys were very schematic and were guided by a four-page data-capture sheet which provided the criteria for what had to be observed, measured and planned (Figures 1.10 (a) and (b)). The original template of the survey document was improved and refined through various discussions with colleagues and experts in the field.

Besides filling-in this survey data-capture sheet with the basic data and observations for each house, various photographs were taken. These were then digitized and archived according to location, type, dating or other criteria. The data acquired from the house surveys were then inserted in a database file using Microsoft

Access as a platform. This facilitated both the retrieval of information and the data analysis. From the house plans that were drawn on site and through the use of Chief Architect software it was also possible to generate three-dimensional images which show the entire house or specific sections thereof.

#### **1.6.1.1 Dating of vernacular houses**

The dating of vernacular structures is not an easy exercise, particularly when considering that none of these houses, including the surveyed ones, were ever found in an archaeological context. Moreover it is not always easy to trace their history through the notarial records, either because such documents do not exist or the construction of such houses was never recorded in a legal contract. It is much easier to establish the date of formal buildings, for example palaces, churches and monasteries. Apart from the fact that the latter are more likely to feature in notarial contracts or other historical documents, their foundation year was often inscribed in a prominent place of the building, for example on the main façade. The dating of such buildings was sometimes confirmed through other means, for example by the presence of a coat-of-arms of a particular bishop, Grand Master or the patron of a *fondazione* (foundation).

For this research, where it was not possible to arrive at a secure date, the dating of the surveyed buildings was based on a number of external and internal features, for example the architectural style, construction techniques or the size of the building stone. The dating of these houses was then substantiated by a number of buildings which provided more secure dating, namely by comparing construction techniques, internal and external decorative features which were in fashion during specific periods, and the way the local stone was dressed. Although the objective of this analysis was not necessarily to acquire an accurate date for these houses, yet it was possible to put them in a reliable chronological sequence. Further evidence about the dating of houses was acquired from several published studies (for example, De Lucca 1988; Mahoney 1998; Jaccarini 2002; Buhagiar 2005).

#### **1.6.2 Collection and organization of data**

The data and observations acquired from the Malta Historic House Survey were complemented and supported by other investigations conducted in the local archives and in various museums and libraries. These investigations were of particular importance, since they often provided further information that could not be achieved otherwise from the surveys.

Through the national censuses it was possible to study various issues related to different types of local dwellings. For this research, all the national censuses covering the period under study have been analysed, namely those of 1842 (which constitutes the first national census of the Maltese islands), 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931, 1948, 1957 and 1967. The data retrieved were organized under a number of headings, for example types and use of dwellings, person per room index and family size per dwelling. This thesis also uses other historical censuses and parish records which provide population estimates carried out in different periods prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Two sources that served as a good preparation for the collection of data were the 1932 Antiquities List and the 1990 National Protective Inventory. As its name suggests, the former consists of a list of historical and archaeological buildings, sites and remains which are grouped according to locality. All the entries in the list are registered as 'listed sites' in terms of the Antiquities (Protection) Act of 1925, which has been superseded by the Cultural Heritage Act of 2002. The List does not provide any other details, for example map coordinates, site plans or photographs. It was noted that this list does not contain any reference to traditional farmhouses, seemingly because at that time these were not yet considered as having any historical value.

In contrast, the National Protective Inventory (NPI) is a much more detailed document. It was launched in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but its contents and logistics were updated at different times, so much so that in the early years of the present century its custodian, the Planning Authority, developed a digital database of Malta's built environment. The National Protective Inventory contains detailed information on every archaeological and historical place and site, including map coordinates.

One particular limitation that was encountered as far as settlements are concerned is that of continuous urban development, which has often obscured traces of earlier buildings or street configurations. Several late medieval hamlets no longer exist today, except for their place-name, and therefore it is not archaeologically possible to determine how their dwellings and passageways were organized or looked like.

Further investigations were carried out in various parochial, notarial, and other historical archives. Through the local parish archives it is possible to obtain data about baptisms, marriages and deaths, particularly from 1575 onwards. These data are important in providing statistical information about birth and death rates during specific periods. Marriage records are also important for they give us an indication about migration patterns during a specific period. The Church also preserves the reports of pastoral visits that the local bishops have conducted during their episcopate since 1575.

The notarial documents, conserved at the Notarial Archives in Valletta, are of paramount importance to acquire a better understanding of Malta's social and economic history during the period under study. The earliest documents date back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and consist mostly of business ventures, sales and exchanges of land, property, animals or slaves, privateering agreements, family transactions, marriage contracts, wills and donations. The registers in these archives, therefore, provide a snapshot of the daily lives and activities of a diverse span of the population over a period of six centuries, relating to all levels of Maltese society.

In addition, the so-called *status animarum*, which record the number of inhabitants that every parish priest had under his care, are another important source for various demographic studies of early modern Malta, particularly for the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Last, but not least, further research was carried out at the National Library of Malta, where the Archives of the Order of St. John are conserved. Here it was possible to study a collection of manuscripts, known as *Cabrei* (or inventories), which list and

describe the real estate property of the Knights. Many of the descriptions provided in these inventories are complemented with coloured illustrations, showing plans and elevations of different dwellings. Other pictures depict agricultural plots, hamlets and windmills. Further *Cabrei* collections were consulted at the Archives of the Cathedral Museum (Mdina), at the National Archives of Malta (Rabat), and at the Archives of the Archbishop's Curia (Floriana).

Another part of this research was carried out at the National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta. Here one finds a wide collection of works-of-art which span a period of about seven hundred years, from the Medieval period to contemporary times. Some of the works-of-art conserved in this museum are of particular relevance since they portray scenes of daily life in Malta, either in the village or town or even at home. Through these works it is possible to get a snapshot of various aspects of Maltese life during different periods of time: domestic space organization, furniture, household items, costumes and other apparel, etc. Further iconographic data were acquired from other private museums and collections, for example the Palazzo Falson Historic House Museum, Mdina.

Other research work was conducted at the Folklore Museum in Gozo. This collection was instrumental for getting an idea of the type of furniture that one could find in a typical Maltese rural house as well as the type of costume the peasants were dressed in. Moreover, this also helped the author to form a more comprehensive picture of the economic patterns that prevailed within the rural dwelling.

### **1.6.3 Comparative and contextual studies**

This section includes other written sources that provide direct or indirect evidence and information on the local house, town and village. These can be organized under four separate headings, namely:

- a) travelogues;
- b) historical studies;
- c) dissertations;
- d) comparative studies.

#### **1.6.3.1 Travelogues**

Travelogues often provide vivid descriptions of everyday life in Malta at different periods of time. Although many of them hardly ever touch upon the aspect of domestic life, they still provide valuable information, from a stranger's eye, about the mentality and way of life of the local people. Certain authors deal with life in the town or village, others with how the villagers were dressed or enjoyed their leisure time, while certain others even provide short descriptions of specific villages. However, it was noted that the travelogues that were studied hardly ever enter into the interior of the Maltese house to describe its contents and domestic life. This particular observation suggests either that these travellers possibly considered Maltese houses as a quaint place but were not interested to see their interior or else it could have been an issue of social snobbery, with these foreigners avoiding close contact with the poor native peasants.

### **1.6.3.2 Historical studies**

This section briefly introduces a series of academic studies relating to the history of the Maltese islands. The earliest works that fall under this category include, amongst others, Abela (1647), De Soldanis (1746), Ciantar (1780), and De Boisgelin (1804). Although none of them ever enter into the real domain of the Maltese house, to investigate how the family within it lived in different periods of time, they still provide interesting snapshots of village life in Malta and Gozo prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The author also consulted more recent publications which touch upon different aspects of Maltese history during the period under study. While some of these were of a more general nature (Vella 1984; Blouet 1993; Attard 1995; Mula 2000), certain others were concerned with more specific topics (Wettinger 1985; Mallia Milanes 1988; Cassar 2000; 2002; Vella 2013). Additionally, one has to include various research papers, which have appeared in different learned journals locally or abroad.

### **1.6.3.3 Dissertations**

The Library of the University of Malta was another important venue. Here it was possible to consult a wide selection of unpublished under- and postgraduate degree dissertations which deal with different aspects of Maltese history and archaeology (for example, Buhagiar 1997a; 2002; Bezzina 2002; Vassallo 2007; Caruana 2009; Vella 2010; Gera 2011).

At the library of the Faculty for the Built Environment it was possible to identify and analyse a number of unpublished dissertations. The nature of these works varies considerably: from studies on construction materials and building methods to related official policies and legislation, from local settlement history and evolution to the Maltese houses, and from the vernacular houses to the most avant-garde domestic architectural styles.

### **1.6.3.4 Comparative studies**

The last section includes a host of publications that analyse different aspects of vernacular architecture, including the aspect of domestic space, in the Mediterranean region and elsewhere. The importance of these studies lies in the fact that the Maltese houses cannot be studied in isolation. Thus, analysing how the issue of domestic space has been tackled in different times and places was crucial to contextualize the local houses and society within a wider perspective (for example, Herlihy 1985; Atroshenko and Grundy 1991; Sigalos 2004; Souvatzi 2008; Bintliff 2009; 2012a; Bintliff and Stöger 2009; Vionis 2012).

In addition to these sources there are also the various anthropological studies referred to earlier on (section 1.4 above), which are fundamental in our reinterpretation of domestic space in the Maltese islands (for example, Putnam 1993; Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Cieraad 1999).

### **1.6.4 Ethnographic data recording**

This research incorporates the analysis of data acquired from various ethnographic surveys which the author carried out in 2011. These investigations were conducted in

different towns and villages, with the objective to gather information from various persons about house and community life in rural and urban Malta in the past and in more recent times. The ethnographic data were acquired through observation, interviews and field notes.

These surveys brought the author into closer contact with houses and settlements and were also an important source through which it was possible to discern how different people lived and organized the internal spaces of their dwellings and how these social units looked whilst participating in various aspects of life, at different times, both within and outside the territorial limits of the house. This was further complemented by the data collected on various occasions when the author met a number of farming families or farmhouse owners who narrated various interesting stories, unfortunately never documented before, about how they and their ancestors lived in such houses. Sometimes, during such occasions it was also possible to listen to stories which their grandparents recounted about their own parents or ancestors; thus, one could listen to stories the origins of which go back to more than a century ago and which have passed from one generation to another through a relatively long oral tradition. Occasionally too, such families were also supportive enough to demonstrate to the author old photographs of their relatives wearing traditional costumes.

### **1.6.5 Space Syntax**

Reference to the development and importance of Space Syntax has already been made (section 1.4 above). While a set of dwellings from different periods is tested through Access Analysis, a sample of settlements is studied by means of Visibility Graph Analysis and Axial Line Analysis. Apart from the fact that Space Syntax helps us to view the layout of houses from a different perspective, it is also a means through which one can acquire an insight into the interaction of people in houses and settlements across time.

The thesis combines both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The former are crucial because they present the data in a more organized and objective way. The data acquired can be measured to formulate statistical information, which will then be utilized in the formulation of patterns and models as well as in the development of theories. Different qualitative analyses are instrumental in the decoding and interpretation of the Maltese houses and settlements through the ages. The data and observations obtained from different sources are used to study the local houses from various perspectives not only structurally as a monument of the past, but also as a living and thriving place of human habitation.

## **1.7 Research strategy**

This chapter presented the general framework as well as the geographical and chronological parameters in which the Maltese houses will be studied. The literature review has demonstrated that, so far, local dwellings have been considered more as an architectural relic of the past than as a vibrant place of human habitation, social

interaction and economic activity. The main objectives established in the first part of this chapter (section 1.1 above) and the methodology discussed in the previous section (section 1.7 above) favour an alternative method to the analysis of the Maltese houses. Through a multi-perspective and holistic approach, this thesis uses the available evidence to analyse, discuss and clarify various issues related to the local houses, which were seldom tackled before. It looks at architectural styles to identify patterns related to the geographical distribution of urban/‘polite’ and vernacular houses in the Maltese islands and how indigenous and imported styles occur during the period under study. This research also attempts to investigate the issue of privacy and how the houses reflect different concepts of lifestyle. Two other issues raised in this thesis concern the relationship between the dwelling and class, and how the development of domestic space led to the evolution of gender-oriented rooms within the house. This work also analyses the Maltese houses as a place of social interaction and a centre of economic activity. Given that dwellings cannot be studied in isolation, village and town plans are used in this thesis to examine issues that concern the development of social hierarchy and community organization as well as man’s relationship with the environment during the period under review. It is, therefore, through the multi-faceted approach described in this chapter that the Maltese houses and settlements will be studied in this thesis. The social, cultural and economic implications of the local houses and settlements can be best understood when the various approaches mentioned and described in the previous sections of this chapter work in combination and not separately. The importance of this multi-faceted approach lies in the fact that it provides us with a holistic picture of settlement and domestic space evolution during the period under study, which could not be achieved otherwise.

### **1.8 Structure of the thesis**

The thesis is divided into twelve chapters. The first three provide the general framework for this research, including the geographical and chronological parameters as well as the methodology employed (Chapter 1), a historical background on Malta, with particular reference to society, class structure, economy and settlements (Chapter 2), and an analysis of local domestic architecture (Chapter 3). It is through the background provided in these chapters that the Maltese houses and settlements will be analysed in further detail in this thesis.

The following two chapters explore the local built environment through literature and art. Chapter 4 studies the houses and settlements from the observations or descriptions made by poets, writers and visitors. In this chapter the national censuses were instrumental to acquire data on local population and housing, for example occupancy and the person per room index. Chapter 5 examines local settlements and houses through a number of artistic works. These works-of-art were instrumental to study different types of urban and rural houses not only from an architectural point of view, but also from an anthropological perspective. The importance of these two chapters lies in the fact that the Maltese houses and settlements are considered from

different perspectives, whilst providing an insight as to how through time locals and foreigners looked at dwellings, villages and their inhabitants.

The next four chapters deal with different aspects of local life and how the Maltese family used domestic space for various functions. Chapter 6 deals with the relationship between domestic space and the family's religious beliefs and traditions. This chapter demonstrates that the house was a place which often brought together the members of the family to pray together and to conduct their private worship. Chapter 7 is concerned with aspects of diet, dining fashions, health and education, while Chapter 8 focuses on furniture and costumes, which varied according to the social status of the house owners. Chapter 9 deals with household, gender, class and property. Together these chapters are important because through the study of various sources they demonstrate that houses are a building as much as they are a place of human habitation and activity. They also show that houses were often a symbol of social status, political or economic power, and identity.

Chapter 10 looks at the development of settlements and houses in Malta from a Space Syntax perspective. It shows that the development of local dwellings often reflects changes in local society and the way house dwellers interacted together through time. This chapter has also demonstrated that settlements evolved in a way to meet not only the political aspirations of the country, but also the economic and social needs of the local community. Chapter 11 deals with the development of domestic space in the Maltese islands during the last fifty years. The changes that occurred in Maltese society during this period also had an indelible effect on the Maltese house and the configuration of its domestic space. Apart from identifying the main phases of development of local urban and rural dwellings in the Maltese islands, Chapter 12 demonstrates that changes in local domestic space were often influenced by particular political, social and economic situations. It also shows that the evolution of domestic space in Malta and Gozo was generally associated with changes in local society, particularly in issues regarding privacy, class and gender. At the end of this study Appendix 1 provides a detailed description of each house that the author studied as part of the Malta Historic House Survey. Appendix 2 includes a glossary of the key terms used in this research.