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 3

MALTESE DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE

"The house is attributed personal and social functions; as a haven for withdrawal from society and as a credential for esteem and the respect of others."

(Lawrence 1987: 116)

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the development of Maltese domestic architecture from the late Medieval period to the 20th century. The Maltese houses are analysed and interpreted within the context of political and social change, paying specific attention to how the houses developed structurally and architecturally through time and how changes in local class structure are reflected in domestic architecture. The previous chapters traced the Islands' history and their changing systems of governance, illustrating the effects these changes had on social class and demographic development, as well as the resulting shifts in settlement patterns and processes of urbanization. The changing political and historical context will provide a referential framework for the assessment of domestic structures presented in this chapter.

A house is generally defined as a building in which people live. In the local context the term 'house' incorporates seven categories of dwellings, namely:

- a) the *palazzo* (a large imposing residential building);
- b) the 'townhouse' style residence;
- c) the poor urban house;
- d) the village house (a small rural residence);
- e) the farmhouse (a rural residence where humans and animals lived);
- f) the hovel;
- g) the troglodyte (or rock hewn) house.

3.2 Methodology

The analysis of the Maltese houses occupies an integral part of the thesis. The houses examined in this chapter derive from two principal sources:

- a) the Malta Historic House Survey, conducted by the author (see section 1.6.1 above), and
- b) the *Cabrei* collections.

3.2.1 The Malta Historic House Survey
The Malta Historic House Survey (referred to in section 1.6.1 above) consisted of four major phases:

a) the house visit (sometimes, more than one visit was conducted). This included data capture, the documentation by means of photographs and site-plans produced to scale. The houses were documented from the inside and the outside;

b) entering information into a database for subsequent analysis;

c) the digitization of photographs archived according to location, type and dating;

d) the digitization of plans to generate three-dimensional images of the surveyed houses.

Each house that was surveyed presented different characteristics, leaving one to conclude that no two houses in Malta and Gozo are the same, even if they belong to the same historical period or geographical region. Each house, therefore, presented a different story, mentality, identity as well as social and economic background. Through these surveys it was possible to observe the various internal and external characteristics of the houses in diverse environments and to study how domestic space was organized at different times and places.

In a period of approximately ten months, the author managed to visit 100 houses in different localities of the Maltese islands (on average, ten houses per month). From this set of dwellings, he acquired permission or had access to survey the internal spaces of twenty-six built houses and four cave-dwellings (Appendix 1). Permission to survey the internal spaces of these dwellings depended mostly on the discretion of the respective owners as well as on the personal contacts the author had with various relatives and friends. Since the thesis focuses primarily on the development of domestic space, only those buildings that were examined internally were included in the survey. The houses which were inaccessible or for which no permission was granted by their respective owners to be surveyed internally were photographed only from the outside and the pictures taken were archived for further analysis. This group alone comprises seventy houses. They are located in different areas and have been documented by means of photographs. Table 3.1 below shows the distribution of the thirty surveyed houses by region and location.

Six houses are situated in North Malta, five in West Malta, another two in South-east Malta, eight in the North Harbour, three in the South Harbour, and the remaining six in Gozo (Figure 3.1). These regions constitute the six official census regions established by the National Statistics Office (Malta). The houses were distributed as indicated in Table 3.2 below.

This sample of houses is representative because

a) all regions are included;

b) the distribution of the surveyed houses by region is not too broad, varying between 6% in the south-east to 27% in the North Harbour. This is followed by Gozo and North Malta (20%), West Malta (17%), and the South Harbour (10%) (Figure 3.2);

c) all the different house types are represented;

d) the surveyed dwellings cover the whole period under study.

Table 3.1 – Distribution of the surveyed houses by region and location

House Survey Number	Region	Location
1	North Malta	Mġarr
2	Gozo	Xlendi
3	Gozo	Qala
4	Gozo	L-Għammar
5	North Harbour	Qormi
6	North Harbour	Qormi
7	North Malta	Mġarr
8	North Malta	Mġarr
9	North Malta	Mġarr
10	North Harbour	Birkirkara
11	North Harbour	Birkirkara
12	South Harbour	Valletta
13	West Malta	Mdina
14	South Harbour	Birgu
15	North Harbour	Qormi
16	South-east Malta	Żejtun
17	North Harbour	Birkirkara
18	North Harbour	Birkirkara
19	West Malta	Mdina
20	South Harbour	Birgu
21	Gozo	Victoria
22	South-east Malta	Mqabba
23	Gozo	Victoria
24	Gozo	Victoria
25	North Malta	Mosta
26	North Malta	Mellieħa
27	West Malta	Dingli
28	West Malta	Baħrija
29	West Malta	Baħrija
30	North Harbour	Msida

Table 3.2 – Percentage distribution of the surveyed houses by region

Region	Number of houses	Percentage Distribution (%)
North Malta	6	20
West Malta	5	17
South-east Malta	2	6
North Habour	8	27
South Harbour	3	10
Gozo	6	20

As explained in Chapter 1 (section 1.6.1.1 above), a challenging task was to date the surveyed houses, particularly when considering that none of them were found in an archaeological context and hardly any of them were recorded in historical documents. Sometimes, restoration or reconstruction works made their dating even more difficult, particularly when certain original features were mutilated or simply replaced. Although it was not possible to establish an absolute date for most of these houses, a closer look at their architectural style, construction techniques and other particular architectural features permitted these houses to be placed in a reliable chronological sequence. In this case it was possible to classify the houses as either "medieval", "Knights' period", "Colonial" or "20th century". Sometimes it was also possible to arrive at a more detailed description, for example "18th century" or "early 20th century". When later additions to the original structure were observed, this was also indicated on the data-capture sheet.

At this stage it is crucial to mention that the reutilization of houses in the Maltese islands was a common phenomenon during the period under study. Unsurprisingly hardly any houses have remained completely in their original state. For instance, the medieval Santa Sofia Palace in Mdina had its upper floor constructed in the early 20th century, while the nearby Falson Palace demonstrates evidence for even later architectural additions.

It was also a common practice to divide large houses into smaller units to accommodate more families (section 2.3.4.2 above). For instance, House 14, a *palazzo* in its own right, was through time partitioned into three smaller dwellings. Although in recent times the present occupant acquired the larger portion of this house, another part still belongs to a different owner.

Concerning the surveyed cave houses, it was yet again difficult to arrive at a secure date, since none of them were discovered in an archaeological context. There are, however, indications that these dwellings date back to late medieval times or the Knights' period and continued to be inhabited or utilized for animal sheltering and storage in later times.

Most of the surveyed houses belong to the Knights' period (about 47%) (Table 3.3 below). Medieval houses constitute about 30% of the sample, while another 16% belong to the Colonial period. The remaining 7% pertain to the second half of the 20th

century (Figures 3.3 and 3.4). Table 3.4 below demonstrates the period of utilization of each surveyed house. The dwellings in this table appear in a chronological sequence.

Table 3.3 – Distribution of the surveyed houses according to the historical period

Historical Period	Number of houses
Medieval	9
Knights' period	14
Colonial (1800-1950)	5
Second half of 20th century	2
TOTAL	30

Table 3.4 – Periods of utilization of the surveyed houses

House Survey Number	Location	Medieval	Knights' period	Colonial (1800-1950)	Second half of 20th century
26	Mellieħa	←	→		
29	Baħrija	←	→		
27	Dingli	←	→	↔	
28	Baħrija	←		→	
13	Mdina	←			→
14	Birgu	←			→
15	Qormi	←			→
7	Mġarr	←			→
8	Mġarr	←			→
3	Qala		←		→
4	L-Għammar		←		→
9	Mġarr		←		→
16	Żejtun		←		→
23	Victoria		←	→	
24	Victoria		←	→	
10	Birkirkara		←		→
11	Birkirkara		←		→
12	Valletta		←		→
17	Birkirkara		←		→
19	Mdina		←		→
21	Victoria		←		→
22	Mqabba		←		→
25	Mosta		←		→
5	Qormi			←	→
6	Qormi			←	→
1	Mġarr			←	→
20	Birgu			←	→
18	Birkirkara				↔
30	Msida				↔
2	Xlendi				↔

Table 3.4 above and Figure 3.5 show that most of the surveyed houses were utilized over several periods. Two cave-dwellings (27 and 28) were probably used between the late Medieval period and the first half of the 20th century; two other cave-dwellings seem to have been inhabited between the late Medieval period and the Knights' period (26 and 29); five houses were inhabited between the Medieval period and the second half of the 20th century (7, 8, 13, 14 and 15); twelve were utilized between the Knights' period and the second half of the 20th century (3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22 and 25), and another two between the Knights' period and the late 19th/early 20th centuries (23 and 24). Five houses were inhabited between the Colonial period and the second half of the 20th century (1, 5, 6, 17 and 20), while only houses 2 and 30 were datable to the second half of the 20th century.

3.2.2 The *Cabrei*

Reference to the *Cabrei* collections has already been made in section 1.6.2 above. These inventories record the real estate property that belonged to the Order of St. John, to the Church or to other private foundations in Malta, for example the Inguanez Foundation. These manuscripts have been recorded at different periods between the 17th and the 20th centuries.

The importance of these documents lies in the fact that they provide a description of each property and often a plan to scale of the same building or plot. Sometimes, plans were also accompanied by elevations, which thus provide a more detailed picture of how a particular structure looked (Figure 3.6). These illustrations were an important means through which it was possible to date the houses being described.

The *Cabrei*, therefore, were an invaluable data source which allowed to investigate a larger number of houses. For the purposes of this research the descriptions, plans and elevations included in these manuscripts complement and substantiate the data acquired from the house surveys, thus they strengthen the data set in terms of quantity and quality. Occasionally, the *Cabrei* served as the only source to record properties which no longer exist today.

The illustrations of each house that was studied were duly photographed and archived, while the basic data were put in a database file. Collectively, seventy-one manuscripts were consulted as Table 3.5 below indicates.

The number of houses per collection that were studied is divided as shown in Table 3.6 below, while Table 3.7 below demonstrates the distribution of these houses according to their locality.

Figure 3.7 shows the statistical distribution of these houses by region, while Figure 3.8 indicates their geographic distribution by locality. The figures between parentheses near each locality indicate the number of recorded houses. Most of them are located in the South Harbour (34%), while the smallest group recorded are found in south-east Malta (7%). West Malta is represented by 22%, North Malta by 16%, Gozo by 11% and the North Harbour by 8%. The location of the remaining 2% is unspecified.

Table 3.5 – Number of Cabrei consulted per Archive

Institution	Number of manuscripts consulted	Volume Number or Title	
The National Library, Valletta	32	- AOM Vol. 290 - AOM Vol. 292 - AOM Vol. 294 - AOM Vol. 296 - AOM Vol. 298 - AOM Vol. 300 - AOM Vol. 301A - AOM Vol. 303 - AOM Vol. 305 - AOM Vol. 307 - AOM Vol. 309 - AOM Vol. 311 - AOM Vol. 313 - AOM Vol. 315 - AOM Vol. 317 - AOM Vol. 319	- AOM Vol. 291 - AOM Vol. 293 - AOM Vol. 295 - AOM Vol. 297 - AOM Vol. 299 - AOM Vol. 301 - AOM Vol. 302 - AOM Vol. 304 - AOM Vol. 306 - AOM Vol. 308 - AOM Vol. 310 - AOM Vol. 312 - AOM Vol. 314 - AOM Vol. 316 - AOM Vol. 318 - AOM Vol. 320
The National Archives, Rabat	13	- Malta Vol. 1 - Malta Vol. 3 - Malta Vol. 5 - Gozo Country Tenements - Fondazione Barone Inguanez 127C - Fondazione della Redenzione 127D - Fondazione Santo Spirito	- Malta Vol. 2 - Malta Vol. 4 - Malta Vol. 6 - Fondazione della Redenzione 127A - Fondazione Maddalena 127C - Varie Fondazioni 127E
The Archbishop's Curia Archives, Floriana	7	- Acque del Seminario - Palazzo Vescovile Mdina - Palazzo Vescovile Valletta - Archbishop's Palace Valletta	- Feudo Piccolo 1783 - Palazzo Vescovile Vittoriosa - *Cabreo* Luigi Borg
The Cathedral Archives, Mdina	20	- Pr. 2536 - Pr. 5739 - Pr. 7004 - Pr. 7006 - Pr. 7008 - Pr. 7010 - Pr. 7012 - Pr. 7014 - Pr. 7017 - Pr. 7023	- Pr. 5738 - Pr. 5740 - Pr. 7005 - Pr. 7007 - Pr. 7009 - Pr. 7011 - Pr. 7013 - Pr. 7016 - Pr. 7019 - Pr. 7024

Table 3.6 – Number of houses recorded in the Cabrei by collection

Institution	Number of houses recorded
National Library, Valletta	163
National Archives, Rabat	71
Archbishop's Curia Archives, Floriana	10
Cathedral Archives, Mdina	13
TOTAL	257

Many of these houses belong to the Knights' period. This is not surprising since

a) settlements like Valletta, Floriana, Cospicua and Senglea were all established during the Knights' period, therefore these houses should be datable to a period ranging between the 17th and 18th centuries;

b) the Mdina houses recorded in the *Cabrei* belong to the post-1693 earthquake and are, therefore, either late seventeenth- or eighteenth-century structures;

c) the *Cabrei* of the Order, from which most of the data were acquired, refer to real estate properties built by the Knights;

d) the illustrations provided in the *Cabrei*, particularly the elevations, offer details of façades and architectural features which confirm the buildings' chronology by means of stylistic considerations.

Considering these factors, about 80% of these houses pertain to the Knights' period, while about 5% belong to the 19th century. The other 15% could not be dated with absolute certainty, because no details were provided as regards their year of construction or the available illustrations did not present any supportive indications. If one adds together the houses recorded in the *Cabrei* with those of the Malta Historic House Survey, the results obtained would be as indicated in Table 3.8 below.

Most of the houses were recorded in the South Harbour region, while the smallest group was registered in South-east Malta. West Malta is represented by 21%, North Malta by 17%, Gozo by 12%, while the North Harbour region is characterized by 10% (Figure 3.9). Figure 3.10 shows the geographical distribution of the houses recorded in the *Cabrei* and those of the house surveys taken together; the figures between parentheses indicate the number of houses recorded in each locality.

The 257 dwellings (out of the approximately 420 houses that were studied in the different *Cabrei* listed above) available for analysis make the sample representative. This is further substantiated by the fact that these houses which constitute the data set are located in almost all parts of the islands; they include all dwelling types and cover the entire period under study. In a way, this distribution of dwellings according to location and time also concurs with the general picture that emerged in the previous chapter regarding the spread and development of urban zones in the Maltese islands during the period under study.

Table 3.7 – Distribution of houses recorded in the Cabrei by region and locality

Locality	Region	Number of houses recorded
Valletta	South Harbour	66
Birgu	South Harbour	10
Floriana	South Harbour	5
Cospicua	South Harbour	1
Senglea	South Harbour	5
Qormi	North Harbour	8
Birkirkara	North Harbour	6
St. Venera	North Harbour	3
St. Julians	North Harbour	1
Gżira	North Harbour	2
Rabat	West	19
Dingli	West	7
Siġġiewi	West	11
Mdina	West	7
Żebbuġ	West	5
Lija	West	4
Attard	West	2
Balzan	West	1
Għargħur	North	5
Mġarr	North	4
Naxxar	North	13
Madliena	North	3
Mosta	North	2
Burmarrad	North	6
Qawra	North	1
Marfa	North	2
Mellieħa	North	6
Żejtun	South-east	5
Żurrieq	South-east	4
Gudja	South-east	4
Luqa	South-east	1
Għaxaq	South-east	1
Qrendi	South-east	4
Rabat/Victoria	Gozo	13
Għajnsielem	Gozo	1
Sannat	Gozo	1
Xewkija	Gozo	2
Xlendi	Gozo	2
Għarb	Gozo	3
Xagħra	Gozo	1
San Lawrenz	Gozo	1
Comino	Gozo	1
Unspecified	Gozo	3
Unspecified	Malta	5
TOTAL		**257**

Table 3.8 – Distribution of houses recorded in the Cabrei and the Malta Historic House Survey by region and locality

Locality	Region	Number of houses recorded
Valletta	South Harbour	67
Birgu	South Harbour	12
Floriana	South Harbour	5
Cospicua	South Harbour	1
Senglea	South Harbour	5
Qormi	North Harbour	11
Birkirkara	North Harbour	10
St. Venera	North Harbour	3
St. Julians	North Harbour	1
Gżira	North Harbour	2
Msida	North Harbour	1
Rabat	West	19
Dingli	West	8
Baħrija	West	2
Siġġiewi	West	11
Mdina	West	9
Żebbuġ	West	5
Lija	West	4
Attard	West	2
Balzan	West	1
Għargħur	North	5
Mġarr	North	8
Naxxar	North	13
Madliena	North	3
Mosta	North	3
Burmarrad	North	6
Qawra	North	1
Marfa	North	2
Mellieħa	North	7
Żejtun	South-east	6
Żurrieq	South-east	4
Gudja	South-east	4
Luqa	South-east	1
Mqabba	South-east	1
Għaxaq	South-east	1
Qrendi	South-east	4
Rabat/Victoria	Gozo	13
Citadel	Gozo	3
Għajnsielem	Gozo	1
Qala	Gozo	1
Sannat	Gozo	1
Xewkija	Gozo	2
Xlendi	Gozo	3
L-Għammar	Gozo	1
Għarb	Gozo	3
Xagħra	Gozo	1
San Lawrenz	Gozo	1
Comino	Gozo	1
Unspecified	Gozo	3
Unspecified	Malta	5
TOTAL		**287**

3.3 The characteristics of the Maltese houses

This section uses the available evidence gathered from the Malta Historic House Survey and from the sources described above to identify and describe the various common features that occur in most types of traditional Maltese houses. The study of the native houses, whether rural or urban, troglodyte or built, elite or poor, is certainly not an easy task. Most of the dwellings have been reutilized over various periods, and consequently they hardly ever remained in their original state. The reutilization of a house affected its original plan and often the organization of its internal spaces.

It is important to mention that the earliest post-Roman houses documented so far locally do not seem to antedate the 13th century. This implies that till today we have no knowledge about domestic (built or troglodyte) architecture in early medieval Malta (section 2.2.1 above). We acquire more detailed information about local domestic architecture from the 13th century onwards with the earliest examples of medieval masonry houses in Mdina (De Lucca 1995: 17-50). The earliest notarial archives, many of which date back to the second half of the 15th century, are also important for our analysis of the house, since occasionally they provide descriptions about its main component parts, for example the courtyard or the kitchen (section 4.3 below).

With the establishment of new settlements and the development of existing ones from the 16th century onwards, our knowledge about different types of houses becomes more extensive. For example, the houses of Valletta, Birgu and Floriana provide a clear picture of how their internal spaces were organized and how they differed from earlier times (Hughes 1953: 104-10). Moreover, the legal implications brought about by the 1880 Building Regulations help us to understand the underpinning political currents that affected the layout of urban houses and the organization of their domestic spaces from then onwards (Tonna 1985: 60). Thus, the development of the different types of local dwellings has to be understood within a wide sociocultural, political and economic perspective. In order to obtain a more comprehensive picture, the development of domestic urban and rural architecture has to be studied also within a Euro-Mediterranean context.

3.3.1 Spatial organization

Like any other human dwelling the different types of Maltese houses, including cave-dwellings, consist of a number of rooms or spaces which are interconnected, each of which serves different purposes, or is used for different purposes, synchronically or at different times. These can either be covered (like a room or a hall) or open (for example, a courtyard). Internal spaces are usually separated by masonry single or double walls, the thickness of which usually varies between 35 and 80 cm. Internal walls divide the dwelling into a number of functional spaces, each of which serves different purposes, for example a kitchen or a living area. The complexity of internal spaces in each dwelling varies according to the house type, the available surface area and the needs and aspirations of the occupants. An elite house or a *palazzo* are usually characterized by a more complex network of internal spaces than lower class (urban or rural) houses. It also depends on whether the internal spaces are organized on a single

or on several floors. The only exception to this observation is the single-room house, in which case no internal walls exist, and therefore the room is multifunctional.

The spaces within a dwelling are characterized by a number of access points; these can be internal access points which connect internal spaces within the same dwelling or external ones which link the building to the outside world. Access points between spaces can be in the form of open doorways or doors that can be closed and locked. Windows provide light and ventilation and also serve as a means of internal or external communication (Figures 3.11 and 3.12). Once again, the number of access points depends on the house type and the available surface area of the building. An elite dwelling usually has a more complex space network characterized by various internal and external access points. In the case of cave-dwellings, hovels as well as poor urban and rural dwellings, access points generally occur on a much more limited scale. Single-room dwellings, which were usually occupied by lower class families, had a single access point which connected the building's internal space with the outside world.

Spaces in a house can be organized on a single floor or spread over different storeys, depending on the house type. Access to the upper floor or floors of a house is usually facilitated through a flight of steps. Originally in both urban and rural houses it was more common to reach the rooms on the upper floor through an open staircase situated in the courtyard or even outside the house, but through time this became more internalized as a result of Western European influences, especially in the elite and upper middle class dwellings, when the internal grand staircase leading to the upper floor became one of the key architectural features of the Knights' period *palazzo*. In the farmhouses and lower class dwellings, the upper floor rooms generally remained accessible through an open staircase. Staircases took different forms and usually were stone made. In the lower class dwellings the most common was the linear staircase, while L-shaped, U-shaped or even spiral staircases were more commonly found in elite and upper middle class houses (Figures 3.13 and 3.14).

As elsewhere in the Mediterranean region and the Near East the central courtyard features prominently in different types of local dwellings (Wettinger 1986: 96; Atroshenko and Grundy 1991; Nevett 2003: 105-106; Sigalos 2004: 75; Bintliff 2012a: 409-10; Vionis 2012: 119). In Malta the central courtyard layout dates back to medieval times and remained popular until the second half of the 19th century. At a time when there were no internal interconnecting doors or passageways, the central courtyard in these houses served as the only means of access and communication to all the rooms. Thus, one had to pass through the courtyard to cross from one space to another. Its centrality did not lie only in its physical position, but also in the fact that it was the household's social and economic assembly point, for example for food preparation and welcoming guests. It also provided ventilation and light to the rest of the rooms as well as protection and shelter from wind, sun, rain and heat (Jaccarini 2002: 13-15). In various Mediterranean countries and the Middle East it was also customary to plant trees in the central courtyard to provide a cooling effect on the entire house, especially in summer (Costa and Noble 1986: 166). Hovels, single-room dwellings and many poor

urban houses were smaller in size and generally lacked a courtyard. This made these houses darker during the day and allowed less air circulation.

Certain cave-dwellings were also characterized by an open central space. It is possible that this had the same function of a central courtyard. For instance, the cave-dwelling of Is-Simblija is preceded by an open terrace, being partly enclosed by a dry rubble wall, which gives access to the different units of the complex: the chapel, the millroom and the other caves (Figure 3.15).

Other house layouts that developed locally in the urban settlements from the 16th century onwards, for example the terraced house with a back yard, are the result of direct or indirect European architectural influences. Through time the rural elite emulated these models to live in dwellings that were comparable to those of the urban settlements (Mahoney 1988: 91-97; 1996: 82-130).

3.3.2 Co-habitation between humans and animals

The house was often a place where humans and animals lived within the same complex. Human and animal cohabitation in the same dwelling prevailed more commonly in the rural environment (Grima 2001: 47; Jaccarini 2002: 17). In the urban centres this seems to have been common in medieval times, but the introduction and enforcement of new building regulations in later historical periods no longer permitted the sheltering of animal herds in the urban dwellings (Wettinger 1986: 95; Valentino 2006: 76). This cohabitation is further testified to by various late medieval notarial records, which mention the presence of strips of land, animal pens and stables as forming part of a single house.

Similar to Aalen's hypothesis for rural Greece (Aalen 1984: 56-72), these earliest local sources suggest three ways of animal and human presence within the same house complex:

a) humans and animals living under the same roof with no separating walls (Figure 1.8), or

b) humans and animals living in single-storey houses with separating walls to divide the human from the animal quarters (Figure 3.16). Therefore, this was horizontal separation, or else

c) humans and animals living in two-storey houses, with the animal quarters being located at ground floor level and the human quarters at first-floor level (Figure 3.17). Therefore, this was vertical separation.

On the basis of the present data it is, however, not possible to establish with absolute certainty whether the above three models occurred concurrently or else developed in a chronological sequence. Basing ourselves on Aalen's hypothesis for rural Greece (Aalen 1984: 56-72), it is possible to assume that in the local context:

i) (a) was the most primitive type of cohabitation, with (b) and (c) developing in the late Middle Ages, or

ii) (a) and (b) were contemporary to each other, and (c) emerged towards the late Medieval period, or

iii) the three models occurred at the same time, but by the late Medieval period (b) and (c) became commoner, or else

iv) the three models occurred in a chronological sequence, with (a) being the most primitive and (c) the most recent type of cohabitation.

These models are interesting because they indicate different types of relationship between humans and animals. Example (iv), being the closest to Aalen's parallel, suggests a shift from a primitive type of habitation, where animals and humans shared together the same house spaces, to a more elaborate one which permitted the family to enjoy more living space and possibly also a healthier environment. On the basis of Aalen's hypothesis, these three types of animal and human presence within the house could also have been an indicator of the local class structure, with (a) and (c) potentially representing the lower and upper extremes of Maltese society, respectively, before the Knights' period. Whatever they represent, the evidence indicates that by the Knights' period this phenomenon of animal and human cohabitation came to feature only in the islands' rural context. Evidence of human and animal cohabitation occurred in other parts of the Mediterranean and the Middle East, for instance Greece, Tunisia, Sicily and Syria (Atroshenko and Grundy 1991: 62-77; Sigalos 2003: 203-204; Bintliff 2012a: 470; 2013b: 41). Incidentally, it still prevails in various North African countries, for example among the Kabyle community of Algeria (Bourdieu 2007: 131-40).

3.3.3 Family structure reflected in house plans

The house layout and the organization of its internal spaces influenced the way the family conducted its daily social and economic activities. For example, when a house consisted of a single floor, the economic and domestic quarters of the household were organized horizontally near each other. When it consisted of two floors there was a possibility for more complex space organization; the ground floor rooms were usually reserved for the household's economic activities, for animal sheltering and for the storage of crops, while the first floor served as the family's living area. In the rural dwellings the domestic quarters were usually referred to as the *għorfa*, while in the townhouses and *palazzi* these comprised the *piano nobile*. There is historical evidence that locally this phenomenon of vertical separation occurred, at least in the urban settlements, in late medieval times. For instance Falson Palace, like Santa Sofia Palace, was originally a single-storey building, with its *piano nobile* being added in the 15th century. It is possible that a number of rural dwellings emulated this townhouse concept during the same period (section 3.4 below). This important conceptual evolution from full cohabitation to vertical separation concurs with Aalen's model for rural Kefalonia (in Greece), which demonstrates the gradual move from single-floor houses shared by the stock and the family to the development of two-storey dwellings in which the animal and human quarters became vertically separated (Aalen 1984: 54-60). Aalen's analysis also revealed that the rural two-storey houses were an imitation of townhouse models and were occupied by wealthier farmers (Bintliff 2012a: 470; 2013b: 41). On the basis of this comparison between Aalen's model and the Maltese houses, therefore, the local one-storey dwellings with no separating walls were possibly the oldest and the most basic, while two-storey houses were chronologically more modern and evolved. According to the same model, these different house layouts could also reflect varying degrees of economic wealth among the local peasant community, as happened in other

medieval European countries (Catling 2013: 12-19), with the former being possibly occupied by lower class peasants and the latter by wealthier peasant families. In the urban settlements this development went even a step further, because once animal and human cohabitation was no longer practised, the house spaces became more specialized and more family oriented. The evidence shows that while the first floor of the elite urban houses served as a *piano nobile*, where the family enjoyed its private life and entertained guests, the ground floor was occupied by the kitchen, storage rooms, a reception room, and occasionally a millroom. Sometimes part of the ground floor was also utilized as living quarters for the domestic servants.

Thus, on the basis of the present evidence there are indications that from the late Middle Ages, and as happened elsewhere in medieval Europe, the house layout became more synonymous with the social class both in the urban and rural settlements, as the following sections of this chapter will demonstrate in more detail. With the introduction of a more complex domestic space organization, especially in the urban centres, we acquire more information on the changing quality of life that distinguished different social classes. The evidence also shows that house layouts evolved in parallel with social and economic change. Until the mid-20th century the location of the house was also an important indicator of social class, especially in the urban centres. While the houses of the elite were situated in the city or town centre, similar to what happened in other South Italian towns (Sabelberg 1986: 59-66), those of the lower classes were generally found in the peripheral areas of the urban settlements (sections 2.2.2, 2.3.2 and 2.4.2 above).

3.3.4 Characteristics of construction: roofs, water catchment and collection

Malta's particular climate permitted houses to have a flat roof which had various functions. In the case of elite and upper middle class urban and rural houses as well as in many farmhouses the roof served as a place where rainwater was collected to be stored in an underground cistern (*bir*), which was connected to the roof through a system of water pipes (Figure 3.18). The water cistern was generally located in the courtyard or close to the main entrance of the house. In certain farmhouses the water cistern was sometimes located on the outside. As regards poor urban and single-room dwellings, water cisterns were not always available, therefore drinking water had to be brought from somewhere else, for example from nearby communal springs.

The roof also allowed the drying of clothes or, in the case of farmhouses, the sun-drying or ripening of certain crops like tomatoes and pumpkins. In other circumstances, this also had a social function where the household members could meet, talk and enjoy the fresh breeze whenever the weather permitted, especially during summer evenings (Skippon 1732: 622; Angas 1842: 16). Sometimes, part of the roof was converted into a verandah (Figure 3.19).

Despite the fact that most of the houses are characterized by a flat roof, there is evidence that in the past some of them had a pitched roof instead made of timber covered with *deffun* (a mixture of ground terracotta, lime and globigerina limestone sand) or 'chiramidi' roof tiles. Quintin's sixteenth-century map (Figure 1.6) demonstrates that houses with pitched roofs existed both in the rural and urban

settlements. Quintin (1536: f. B2v) describes the houses of Birgu as buildings without attics, with their roofs being covered with tiles or reeds. A sixteenth-century engraving by Matteo Perez D'Aleccio shows that some of the Mdina houses were also characterized by similar roofs (De Lucca 1995: 46). The practice of building houses with pitched roofs seems to have persisted till the 18th century as witnessed by some of the illustrations produced in the *Cabrei* of the Order. For example, Figure 3.20 illustrates some rural houses with a pitched roof at L-Iklin, in the parish of Lija. The local production of tiles, which were probably utilized for the construction of pitched roofs, is further testified by a number of late medieval contracts (*Acts* Giacomo Zabbara 14-i-1488: R494/1 f. 150v-151; 1-xi-1499: MS 1132 f. 32). However, there is also evidence that these were also imported from Sicily (Fiorini 1991: 321-52; 1992: xl). Apart from allowing rain water collection, pitched roofs also provided storage space especially when the house included an attic.

3.3.5 Household industries, commerical activities and storage

A number of elite urban and rural houses show evidence that their inhabitants carried out certain commercial activities. For instance, they were sometimes equipped with a *centimolo*, a mule-driven grinding mill for the milling of wheat (Figure 3.21). Other examples of *centimoli* have also been identified in certain cave-dwellings (Saliba, Magro Conti and Borg 2002: 23), while reference to them is also found in certain fifteenth- and sixteenth-century contracts. Other urban and rural houses also had an oven for the baking of bread.

Storage space in these different types of houses was of paramount importance. Apart from the fact that certain rooms were specifically utilized for storage purposes, several houses also had a *remissa* (a parking place for the animal cart and farming gear). This was usually situated next to the main doorway of the house. The *remissa* was usually left open or else was closed by a wooden gate (Figure 3.22). When the house did not have a *remissa*, the cart was parked in the lobby or under a *siqifa* (a covered passageway) or else in the yard (Jaccarini 2002: 52-53).

The space under the staircase was also an ideal storage space. Sometimes this area was left open, while occasionally it was concealed by a wooden gate or door. In certain farmhouses the space under the staircase served as a small barn for poultry or rabbits. The area of this space varied according to the staircase configuration (Figure 3.23).

Apart from ensuring a comfortable climate inside the house during different seasons, double walls often served as storage spaces and substituted for the use of wooden furniture. For example, rectangular or square recesses were often inserted in the wall to serve as cupboards, wardrobes or storage spaces (Jaccarini 2002: 64). Such cupboards (locally known as *armarji*) provided storage space for various items: foodstuffs, kitchenware, clothes and other house items (Figures 3.24 and 3.25). Cupboards were particularly common in bedrooms and kitchens. These were left open or else were concealed by a curtain or a wooden door. Smaller recesses were utilised as lampholes or niches, where oil or kerosene lamps were placed to provide light to the rooms during the evening. The use of such wall recesses is recorded in other Mediterranean countries, for example Greece (Sigalos 2003: 214; 2004: 80). In Malta,

cupboards were commonly found in all types of houses, including cave-dwellings. The storage space available in a house depended in particular on its type, on the needs of the owners and on the available spatial area. While elite and middle class urban and rural houses usually had specific rooms that were intended for storage, lower class houses, for example single-room dwellings, had more restricted storage space.

3.3.6 Climate and house architecture

The determining factor that influenced the house architecture and layout was the country's own climate. This required that elite and upper middle class urban and rural dwellings as well as various farmhouses were built in a way to satisfy the household's various economic and social needs as well as to provide comfort in different types of climatic situations all the year round (Jaccarini 2002: 14-15; Valentino 2006: 20-25). Apart from light and ventilation the central courtyard of these houses provided shelter and protection against the wind, sun, rain and heat. Internal and external double walls were of paramount importance to control the inside temperature and the dwelling's climate. Lower class dwellings, including hovels and single-room houses, were usually characterized by higher humidity levels, lack of air circulation and lighting. These conditions made the life of their dwellers more difficult and more conducive to contagious diseases.

The house orientation was also an important factor; at a time when there was yet no electric current, south facing walls took advantage of the long hours of sunshine, especially in winter. Jaccarini (2002: 15) also notes: "*Because of the strong winds and the driving rain, north-facing walls were either kept blank and windowless or pierced by one or two small apertures*".

Glass windows were hardly ever used, while window apertures were closed by wooden shutters. These allowed proper ventilation and cool cross-currents of air to flow, while glass "*created a torrid sun trap in the spaces enclosed*" (Jaccarini 2002: 15). The presence of glass windows in the local house indicates a later addition, being the result of external architectural influences. It was probably from the 16th century onwards when these became an integral part of the local elite dwelling (Figure 3.26).

Some of the internal walls of the houses were left completely bare while others, particularly those of the living quarters, were whitewashed to allow more light on the inside, especially in those rooms which were dimly lit, and to provide a pleasant cooling effect (Jaccarini 2002: 15). The ceiling height varied from one house to the other. However there was a tendency that in elite and upper middle class (urban and rural) houses as well as in two-storey farmhouses the ceiling of the ground floor rooms was relatively lower than that of the upper floor rooms. High ceilings ensured a comfortable internal climate all the year round, while the proper positioning of doors and windows ensured good ventilation. On average, the ceiling of the ground floor rooms of a local urban or rural dwelling was approximately 4.8 m high, while that of the upper floor rooms could reach a height of about 7 m. For example, one of the surveyed elite houses in Birgu consists of three floors. The ceiling of the ground floor rooms varied between 4.5 to 4.8 m, while that of the upper two floors varied between 6.5 and 7 m (Figure 3.27).

In the different types of houses that were studied, ceilings consisted of a series of stone slabs which usually rested directly either on a set of transverse arches, particularly in the case of ground floor rooms, or on transverse wooden beams in the case of upper floor rooms (Figures 3.28 and 3.29). Iron beams were introduced in the late 19th/early 20th century, first in the elite and upper middle class urban and rural houses and later on in lower class houses, and were replaced by concrete from the second half of the same century onwards (Tonna 1985: 71).

Another important factor that influenced the house layout was that of security. These different types of houses were built in such a way to ensure maximum security against any possible intruders. Thus, apertures on the façade were kept to a minimum and, particularly in farmhouses and lower class urban houses, windows were usually small (Buhagiar 1991: 20) (Figure 3.30). It was from the 17th century onwards, through external architectural influences, that architects included more windows and doors on the façade of elite and upper middle class urban and rural houses. However, to ensure security windows consisted of glass panes and often also included lockable wooden louvered shutters introduced during the Knights' period. Apart from security these louvered shutters offer a high degree of privacy since no person from the outside could see who is behind the window or what is happening on the inside (Figure 3.31). Some dwellings were also characterized by a *muxrabija*, a peep-box located on the façade which permitted the occupant to look through it without being seen from the outside, apart from providing indirect ventilation without sunlight (Mahoney 1988: 78) (Figure 3.32). The *muxrabija* window could be stone or timber made (Buhagiar 1991: 20). This type of window, whose name comes from the Arabic *mashrabiya*, occurs in North Africa, Andalusian Spain (for example, Cordoba and Aljaferia), Sicily as well as in the Levant and the Middle East (Badawy 1958: 122-28; Cresti 1990: 410-31; Williams 2002: 457-75). It is also interesting to note that cliff-facing cave-dwellings were also generally characterized by a certain level of security. This was achieved by the construction of a corbelled wall at the entrance of the dwelling, which usually had a small space for a wooden door or shutter that provided access to the inside.

The perimeter walls of the central courtyard were generally high to provide privacy to the residents and to make any possible access for the intruder (for example, thieves) difficult (Jaccarini 2002: 15) (Figure 3.33). From the 19th century onwards it was also customary for the owner to create on top of the courtyard's perimeter walls a line of broken glass embedded in cement to forbid any possible intrusion by pilferers (Jaccarini 2002: 99). Maximising house security in all types of dwellings was an issue that prevailed throughout the period under study in Malta and in various Mediterranean countries (Sigalos 2003: 215; Vionis 2012: 61). Security was ensured by the presence of other features like door locks, latches and cross-bars. Most of these were generally made of iron and were produced by the local or village blacksmiths, although door bars were sometimes timber made (Figure 3.34).

Houses were equipped with whatever was necessary for the family to carry out its daily tasks. For instance, farmhouses and cave-dwellings included stables and animal barns with feeding troughs (*maxtura*) and tie-loops (*marbat*) (Jaccarini 2002: 44) (Figure 3.35). In the elite and middle class urban and rural houses it was also customary

to find a kitchen and a toilet (*gabinetto*). In the 17th and 18th centuries several townhouses included as well a mezzanine, usually consisting of a small apartment sandwiched between the ground and the first floor of the house. Usually this had a separate access and was used as the living quarters for the household's domestic servants or else was rented to third parties (Tonna 1985: 39; Valentino 2006: 99).

The central courtyard house layout remained the most important during the entire period under study, with its existence being recorded uninterruptedly in urban and rural elite and upper middle class dwellings as well as in numerous farmhouses from late medieval times to the 19th century. Although it finds parallels in North Africa and in various Mediterranean countries, through time it adopted external architectural elements and features through the influence of Western European styles. The use of glass windows and wooden louvered shutters are a case in point. It is also interesting to note that the influence of Western European architectural styles (mainly Italian, Spanish and French) was not only limited to Malta's urban settlements, but eventually spread to the island's rural areas as well, as happened in other Mediterranean countries (Tonna 1985: 37; Bintliff 2012a: 459-62).

Apart from the *muxrabija* (peep-box), other Oriental elements which still survive in certain urban and rural elite houses include the *miglis* (Oriental style reception room), the *dukkien* (stone benches) and the *siqifa* (a covered passageway). An example of a *miglis* with its *dukkien* can still be observed at Falson Palace, Mdina (Figure 3.36). An interesting example of a *siqifa* forms part of Santa Sofia Palace in Mdina, which originally led to its central courtyard (De Lucca 1995: 45) (Figure 3.37). On the basis of the present archaeological evidence, it is possible that these features are reminiscent of late Islamic phase architectural influences which survived in later medieval buildings (section 2.2.4 above).

One final point which deserves to be mentioned concerns the house façade. Reference has already been made to the relatively small number of doorways and apertures that characterize the façades of late medieval elite dwellings and vernacular houses. It was mainly through Baroque influence that the façade of the elite urban and rural house became more elaborate. While the façade of the lower class dwellings remained relatively simple, austere and assymmetrical, including the farmhouses, those of elite and upper middle class houses became more symmetrical, monumental and ornated by the addition of architectural features like columns, reliefs and corbels (Figure 3.38). The simplicity of the façade of lower class urban and rural houses, for example the single-room houses, was sometimes alleviated by the addition of certain features, for example stone water spouts (*miżieb*) and projecting shelves (*ħarrieġa*).

3.4 The houses of the Medieval period

After having considered the general characteristics of the different types of Maltese houses, the following sections look into the particular characteristics of these dwellings during specific periods to analyze how their domestic space configuration changed during the period under study.

One of the arguments raised in the previous section concerns the reutilization of houses, which often led to changes in their original layout and space organization. Such changes may have included the addition of new rooms or floors, the opening of new doorways and apertures or the blocking of existing ones, as well as the building or demolition of internal walls. Like elsewhere in the Mediterranean world, for example Sicily, such structural changes seem to have occurred more frequently in 'polite' architecture than in vernacular dwellings, probably because the elite, apart from having had the financial means to carry out these works, usually kept themselves abreast with and emulated contemporary European styles and fashion (Sabelberg 1986: 66; Caruana Galizia 2007: 13-15).

To acquire a more comprehensive picture our analysis of the local medieval dwellings considered two important aspects:

a) the physical environment of the houses (for instance, the settlement);
b) similarities with other Mediterranean countries.

The study of local settlement evolution revealed that the main medieval settlements were Mdina, Birgu and the Gozo Citadel (section 2.2.4 above). The rest of the islands were either characterized by a number of hamlets and villages, including cave settlements, or were uninhabited. The evolution of urban and rural settlements and their particular history affected not only the extent to which they grew, but also their layout. For example, when Mdina was hit by an earthquake in 1693 several buildings were ruined including the medieval cathedral; the rebuilding of the town in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, unfortunately, led to the demolition of several medieval structures to make way for new open spaces and Baroque houses and *palazzi* (De Lucca 1995: 71-85). Regarding Gozo, the structural development that took place in certain areas of the Citadel and the abandonment of others led to the demolition of various existing structures, with the consequence that only a few medieval houses have survived. The major villages also experienced phases of reconstruction, in which old houses and churches were demolished and replaced by more modern structures. A number of hamlets were permanently deserted, leaving no traces of dwellings behind them, except for their toponym. It is hoped that further archaeological surveys and geophysical prospection in Malta and Gozo would help in the identification of these lost settlements (Dokter *et al.* 2012).

This, therefore, explains the reason why only a relatively small number of medieval houses still survive locally and those that survive do not antedate the 13th century. This situation, and the absence of any archaeological record, leaves us in complete darkness about the type of dwellings that prevailed in the early Medieval period.

3.4.1 Specific characteristics of Medieval houses

The earliest historical records, dating back to the 15th century, consistently refer to houses with a central courtyard, giving the impression that during this period this was the most common house layout in the urban as well as rural settlements. Incidentally, despite the various historical references to courtyard houses in Malta and Gozo, Quintin's map (Figure 1.6) fails to illustrate such houses.

Notarial contracts refer to single-floor and two-storey urban and rural houses. The fact that in these records the former occur more frequently than the latter suggests that in the 15th century single-storey urban (elite and lower class) and rural dwellings were still more common and two-storey ones were possibly a later development. This observation concurs with Aalen's model for Greece and with our previous hypothesis that in Malta two-storey houses presumably evolved from single-storey dwellings. This same evidence is supported by the observations made during the house surveys. Falson Palace in Mdina (House 13), House 14 in Birgu and Stagno Palace in Qormi (House 15) demonstrate that, originally, these were single-storey courtyard houses, with their upper floors being added at a later stage. This is further proved by the fact that the upper floor of these three examples follow a completely different architectural style and building techniques (Buhagiar 2005: 112-15) (Figure 3.39). For instance, the evidence shows that the ground floor of Falson Palace dates back to the 13th century, with the upper floor being added in the 15th century (Caruana Galizia 2007: 15).

Thus the evidence acquired from the house surveys regarding the layout of these medieval houses corresponds with the earliest historical records. Urban and rural houses were generally characterized by a central courtyard and by a number of rooms connected to it. Elite urban houses are referred to as *hospicium domorum* (a townhouse), while rural or urban poor dwellings are generally referred to as *domus* (a house) or *casalinum* (a small house). Certain records also make reference to the *cortile domorum*, a house which formed part of a group of tenements with a shared central courtyard; access to these tenements was via a covered passageway (Buhagiar 2005: 107). The notarial records sometimes also refer to particular rooms of the house, for example the kitchen or the millroom. The cistern, usually located in the courtyard, seems to have been a staple feature in townhouses, farmhouses as well as in lower class urban and rural dwellings. Access to these houses was reached either through a *siqifa* which led to the central courtyard, as occurred elsewhere in North Africa and other Mediterranean countries (Atroshekno and Grundy 1991: 45, 84-85, 128-29), or through a door. Certain urban and rural dwellings, for example *palazzi* and farmhouses, were spacious enough to include some storerooms (*magasenio* or *apothece*), which were normally situated on the ground floor. Other houses had their own stables, barns and surrounding fields. Houses surrounded by a field or a vineyard occur both in the rural as well as in the urban settlements (Bezzina 2001: 26; Aquilina 2002: 44-45). There are also references to houses with a cave, the purpose of which could have been for animal shelter. It was also noted that these records do not refer to the specific use of the upper floor rooms, indicating that these could have been multifunctional.

Similar to what occurred locally, the urban and rural courtyard house layout was also common in North Africa, in various Mediterranean countries, in the Near East as well as in the Middle East (Boas 1998: 150; 2010: 14-17; Boone and Benco 1999: 51-71; Sigalos 2003: 195-221; Nevett 2003: 105-107; Gerstel, Munn *et al*. 2003: 147-234; Vionis 2006: 459-92; Vildan 2011: 51-63).

The data retrieved from these historical records concur with the observations acquired during fieldwork. The surveyed medieval houses were all of the courtyard type (Figure 3.40), their cistern (or, at least, one of them) was located in the courtyard,

had a kitchen or a millroom or both, and showed evidence that originally they consisted of a single storey, with the upper floor being a later development. A medieval house in Mdina, Santa Sofia Palace, still preserves its original *siqifa*. These medieval dwellings showed similarities in their general layout as well as in the construction techniques and methods. For example, it was observed that the ground floor rooms of these three houses were often built with a mixture of mortared rubble and ashlar stones. More formal rooms, especially those of the *piano nobile*, were built by using ashlar masonry to achieve greater regularity (Figure 3.41). As regards access, it is unknown how many access points each house originally had. It seems that they had at least one main access point (either through a *siqifa* or a door), but this does not preclude the possibility that some dwellings could have had others, as the evidence of Falson Palace clearly demonstrates. Upon entrance to a house the guests found their way either into the *miglis* (an Oriental style reception room) or immediately into the courtyard. The possibility of relocating external doors from one place of the house to another due to posterior structural alterations cannot be excluded (De Lucca 1995: 43-46). In the case of House 14, access could originally have been through a *siqifa* leading directly to the central courtyard. In the Knights' period the house underwent a new phase of reconstruction, when the *siqifa* was possibly converted into the present barrel-vaulted vestibule and its monumental doorway was sided by two secondary doors, one on each side.

The façades of medieval houses, except for some of the palaces of Mdina, generally lacked any architectural decoration, while apertures were kept to a minimum. The perimeter walls of the central courtyard were usually high for more security against any possible intrusion and to ensure privacy. Thus, the façades were usually simple, austere and assymmetical.

3.4.2 *Giren* and hovels

Although the courtyard house is mentioned in a number of medieval records and its layout occurred in the urban and rural context, Quintin (1536: B2) refers to another type of rural dwelling, which was probably smaller in size and simpler in form. He describes these dwellings as "*Africana magalia*" (African hovels). The author provides no further details and such an ambiguous description can lead to various interpretations. For instance, it is possible that this is simply a generic statement, intended as a broad reference to the rural farmhouses he noted in different hamlets, which were more or less of the same kind. Quintin was a keen traveller and, besides Malta, he also visited countries like Syria and Palestine, where perhaps he observed similar structures. However, this description could indicate that the author saw something far less elaborate than the mature farmhouse (*razzett*). For example, the author could have been referring to the native *girna* (corbelled stone hut), which commonly occurs in north-western and western Malta, and which somehow resembles the mudbrick domed Berber huts of North Africa, for example those of Tataouine in Tunisia (Hole *et al.* 2007: 120). This resemblance between the native *giren* and the mudbrick domed Berber dwellings suggests that the Maltese corbelled hut could have been an inspiration from North African vernacular architecture, indicating that in medieval Malta there was possibly a phase of lithicization of these Berber dwellings. The tradition of *giren* building could

possibly have been introduced in Malta by Berber immigrants during the Medieval period, which was then consolidated by the native peasants.

The *giren* have a roughly circular plan and their diameter and height vary from one structure to the other (Figures 3.42 and 3.43). Some others have a rectangular plan instead. The *girna* is characterized by a single entrance and generally has also a small window to permit light and air circulation. *Giren* occur as single units or in clusters and often include features like tie-loops, sheds, mangers, recesses and double walls. Clusters of *giren* were usually surrounded by a dry wall precinct (Figures 3.44 (a) - (c)).

These local corbelled hovels are usually associated with the storage of crops or with the sheltering of animals. However, there are indications that these could have also been places of human habitation. This hypothesis is based on the following evidence:

a) several *giren* are usually substantially high so that a person can easily stand in an upright position;

b) evidence of lampholes are a further indication that certain *giren* were used for human habitation when it was dark or during the night;

c) other examples are characterized by recesses which were probably utilized for the storage of personal items;

d) certain *giren* were complemented by a rock-cut water cistern (Vella 2010: 196-97);

e) there is historical evidence that until the 20th century a few *giren* still served as a place of permanent habitation (Fsadni 1992: 105).

The fact that *giren* clusters are characterized by features which are typically found in the farmhouse and associated with human or animal habitation, has led scholars to believe that these could have been dwellings where animals and humans lived within the same complex, just as happened in other parts of the Mediterranean (Buhagiar 1991: 17-18; Vella 2010: 234). On the basis of the available evidence, these scholars also contend that these could have possibly been the most primitive exemplars of proto-*razzett* which eventually, presumably in late medieval times, paved the way for the evolution of the single-storey farmhouse (Jaccarini 2002: 6; Valentino 2006: 24; Dalli 2006: 294; Buhagiar 2007a: 364; 2012: 161). However, our evidence does not exclude the possibility that during this period these *giren* and the earliest single-storey farmhouses could have existed concomitantly.

None of the native *giren* were ever discovered within an archaeological context, therefore it is very difficult to determine their precise age. Although there seems to have been a strong tradition of *giren* building during the 19th century (Vella 2010: 214-15), there is historical evidence that this could have been a much more primitive structure, possibly dating back to late medieval times. A sixteenth-century notarial contract refers to a certain tenement called Corna hiren, in the parish of Għarb, Gozo (*Acts* Ferdinando Ciappara 9-vi-1578: R185/4 f. 577v). An etymological analysis of this place-name led Zammit to suggest that this could have been a corruption of the toponym "*Il-Girna ta' Ħerrin*" (literally meaning the *girna* of Herrin) (Martin Zammit 2013: personal communication). This hypothesis casts new light on the corbelled stone hut:

a) *giren* were already in existence in the 16th century, which suggests that these could have possibly been late medieval structures (Jaccarini 2002: 6). If the *giren* were truly inspired by the Berber mudbrick houses, as argued earlier on in this section, then these vernacular structures could have been even older, and

b) they were also present in some localities in Gozo.

Therefore, on the basis of the above hypothesis, it is possible that the native *giren* could have been synonymous with the 'African' huts referred to by Quintin in the first half of the 16th century.

That simple hovels existed locally in late medieval times is confirmed by several toponyms which include the words *gorboġ*, *għarix* and *newwiela*, all of which mean a hut or a hovel (Wettinger 2000; Vella 2010: 214-15). These names could have been an alternative to the term *girna* or they could have simply referred to a different type of structure. For instance, these place-names and/or Quintin's description could have been a reference to a particular type of rectangular dry rubble huts, examples of which have survived in certain localities like Baħrija, Mellieħa and Mġarr. The layout and building techniques of these structures suggest a late medieval date. The Baħrija example, characterized by a masonry exterior and a rock-cut interior, consists of two continguous spaces, one of which was possibly the animals' quarters and the other served for human habitation (Figures 3.45 (a) and (b)). Access to this particular dwelling was through a flight of six rock-cut steps. That this structure was probably utilized also as a human dwelling is supported by the presence of various features, for instance lampholes and rock-cut recesses, which were seemingly used for storage. A similar hybrid structure, forming part of a hamlet in the parish of Mellieħa, did not include any steps, with its entrance leading immediately to a natural cave (Figures 3.46 (a) and (b)). It is interesting to note that these native dwellings with a flat roof are similar in style to the North African mudbrick huts, examples of which still exist in places like Tamerza, in Tunisia (Oates 1954: 91-117; Lawless 1972: 129; Bechhoefer 1977: 19-22). Like the North African counterparts, these structures appear in isolation or in small clusters (Figure 3.47).

3.4.3 Cave-dwellings

The local limestone, especially the globigerina, permits the presence of several natural caves, some of which were utilized for human habitation since prehistoric times. Given the soft nature of the local limestone, natural caves could have easily been cut, adapted and extended to accommodate more people and/or animals. The exact number of cave-dwellings in Malta and Gozo is unknown, due to the fact that some may have been destroyed through time or else were never recorded in history. However, recent studies have shown that these were quite popular between the late medieval and the Knights' period, although troglodytism survived in later centuries until the 20th century (Buhagiar 2002; 2012: 153, 157-60). Cave-dwellings were usually divided into several compartments, sometimes separated by dry stone walls (Buhagiar 2012: 164). They were occasionally preceded by an open-air terrace which, apart from serving as a common space, provided access to the different compartments of the complex. For example, the one of San Niklaw (House no. 26), in the parish of Mellieħa, is divided

into three main compartments: the cave-dwelling (the most elaborate unit), a chapel on the right, and the animal pens on the left (Figure 3.48). It is preceded by an open terrace which resembles an open square or *pjazza*, giving access to the settlement's different sections. It seems that originally the entrance to the cave-dwelling was covered by a dry wall which separated it from the chapel (Buhagiar 1997b: 134). Two other similar examples are the one of Il-Qlejgħa in the parish of Baħrija and that of Is-Simblija in the parish of Dingli, the latter having also included a chapel (Figure 3.49). Sometimes, dry stone walls were built to cover a part of the cave entrance. A number of cave houses show clear evidence of animal rearing; this is indicated by the presence of certain features like troughs. Rock-cut shelves were probably used for the storage of certain items, while niches were used for lamps to provide light. The historical evidence and the layout of the surveyed rock-cut houses suggest that these were utilized for human habitation or animal sheltering (or both) since late medieval times. Although a number of cave-dwellings continued to be reutilized in later times (Buhagiar 2002: 135, 211, 274; Saliba, Magro Conti and Borg 2002: 47-48), most were eventually deserted or else converted into animal pens or a storage space, when their dwellers went to live in masonry houses (Buhagiar 2011: personal communication).

3.4.4 Architectural development during the Medieval period

Our analysis of Maltese medieval dwellings has explored all the available evidence to identify the different types of houses that existed during this period in the urban and rural settlements. Through the historical and archaeological data it is also possible to formulate a hypothetical reconstruction of the main phases of architectural development that took place during this period. From these investigations, the following observations have emerged:

a) troglodytism was a common phenomenon in medieval Malta, with several cave-dwellings having been utilized for animal shelter and/or human habitation for a long time (Buhagiar 2012: 157);

b) in the open villages and hamlets the central courtyard farmhouse seems to have been the most elaborate type of rural dwelling. Farmhouses were single- or two-storey buildings. The evidence suggests that single-storey dwellings were less complex than two-storey houses;

c) other types of rural structures included the *giren* (individual or in clusters) and the hovels, the latter being masonry built or hybrid (partly rock-cut and partly built);

d) in the urban settlements the central courtyard house layout is documented since the 13th century. Some of these houses consisted of a single storey, while others were two-storey. The historical and architectural evidence shows that the latter were presumably chronologically later than the former. Poorer dwellings, also with a central courtyard, were usually small, consisted of a single floor, and were generally characterized by poor quality masonry (De Lucca 1995: 46). Other lower class dwellings consisted of a group of tenements surrounding a central courtyard, access to which was through a *siqifa* (Buhagiar 2005: 107).

The evidence presented above suggests that, while in the medieval urban settlements the courtyard house was the basic house type, in the countryside the peasants lived in three types of dwellings: the central courtyard farmhouse, cave-dwellings or *giren* (or hovels) (Figure 3.50). On the basis of our evidence it is not possible to ascertain whether these types of houses existed concomitantly or in a chronological sequence, as certain scholars suggest (Jaccarini 2002: 6; Valentino 2006: 24; Dalli 2006: 294). However, there are indications that, at some point in time during this period, these three types of rural dwellings existed concurrently, with the *giren*, hovels and farmhouses therefore being the earliest examples of dwellings in the open settlements (Figure 3.51).

Towards the late Medieval period, when from the 15th century onwards there was in Malta a shift from dispersion to nucleation of settlements, with the result that many hamlets (including troglodyte ones) were abandoned and the inhabitants settled in a number of inland villages which eventually grew in population and also became parishes (Figure 2.11; Figure 3.52), the amount of hovels and troglodyte dwellings seems to have dwindled, while the number of central courtyard *rziezet* or village houses increased, as the late medieval notarial records suggest.

On the basis of Aalen's hypothesis, one can assume that the native two-storey farmhouses evolved from the simpler one-storey *razzett* and were an emulation of late medieval urban dwellings. If the native two-storey *razzett* is an emulation of the late medieval Mdina *palazzi*, this major step forward in the architectural development of the farmhouse could possibly have occurred during the late 15th or early 16th century. The historical evidence suggesting such date for the development of this rural dwelling stems from the fact that a number of late medieval houses in Mdina, including Falson Palace, had their second floor added in the 15th century. It was also from the late 15th/early 16th century onwards that two-storey farmhouses start to feature in the local notarial records.

Incidentally, this development took place at a time when the Maltese islands still experienced the effects of defeudalization, which brought about the liberalization of the land market and more peasants, at least the wealthier ones, had more access for land possession (section 2.2.2 above). It was also a time when there was a shift in the local economy from subsistence to one based more on cash-cropping (section 2.2.3 above). Therefore, this demonstrates that the social and economic changes of this period had an indelible effect on the type of houses that developed in Malta's rural areas, which possibly suggests that by the late Medieval period the local peasants were living in houses which reflected their social and economic background, as occurred in other parts of medieval Europe, for example in Midland England (Catling 2013: 12-19). Those who lived in the cave houses, *giren* and hovels were possibly the poorer unlanded peasants (the tenant farmers who worked their lords' estates), while those living in the farmhouses enjoyed a better standard of living (these were the free peasants who possessed their own land). Those living in the two-storey *rziezet* were possibly the wealthiest and represented a community of late medieval rural elite. Also on the basis of what occurred in other parts of Europe, this development in the local farmhouses can also suggest the landlords' commitment to accommodate tenant farmers in dwellings

that offered sufficient living space and perhaps a healthier environment (Catling 2013: 16).

In the urban centres the inhabitants lived in houses with a central courtyard. The poorest inhabitants generally lived in small dwellings or occupied tenements with a common central courtyard. The elite lived in the *palazzi* or sumptuous dwellings, which also had a central courtyard. Examples of still existing late medieval *palazzi* include Santa Sofia Palace and Falson Palace, both of which are found in the town's central street (Villegaignon Street). Therefore, the central courtyard appears to have been one of the most basic characteristics of the late medieval urban houses in the Maltese islands. The addition of a second floor to a number of urban houses from the 15th century onwards suggests a shift towards more comfortable and spacious dwellings.

This hypothesis is interesting because it gives us a likely picture of the types of dwellings that the 75% of rural settlers and the 25% of urban residents, indicated in the previous chapter, had occupied during this period (section 2.2.2 above). Despite the limited archaeological evidence, coupled with incomplete population and parish records for medieval Malta, the surviving structures of this period still reflect the different social classes, from the elite at the top who lived in the town centres, to the lower urban classes that lived in smaller dwellings in the periphery of the towns, and then to the peasantry who lived in the villages and hamlets in farmhouses, hovels or cave-dwellings. According to Aalen's model, it is also quite likely that even among the local peasantry there were different levels of material wealth, with a wealthier group living in two-storey farmhouses and poorer peasants occupying more primitive dwellings. Apart from the building quality and size of the dwellings, which clearly distinguished one social class from the other, there are indications that the elite houses were the first to experience structural and architectural changes, while lower class urban and rural houses presumably took a longer time to change, the reason being that the elite were usually more abreast with current changes in Europe, at least in terms of fashion, art and architectural design. The peasants and the poor, with their restricted disposable income, did not have the means to alter their houses to suit fashion. The building quality of the surviving urban elite dwellings suggests the work of professional stonemasons, referred to in a fifteenth-century poem in Maltese by Caxaro. Considering the type of tools and equipment that the local stonemason used in late medieval times, it is quite likely that houses, especially the *palazzi* and sumptuous dwellings, took a long time to be finished, something which is also hinted at in the same poem (sections 3.4.1 and 4.2 below).

3.4.5 Case study: Falson Palace, Mdina (House no. 13)
Falson Palace is probably one of the oldest houses in Mdina which, like Santa Sofia Palace, dates back to the 13th century. The house in its present state is the result of various phases of transformations and reconstructions which took place until the early 20th century (Caruana Galizia 2007: 13).

Scholars argue that, due to the many architectural changes that occurred over the centuries, it is difficult to determine the dwelling's precise original configuration (Busuttil 1999: 416) (Figure 3.53). The much larger original house was subdivided over

time, separating certain sections which then formed part of different neighbouring property units (Buhagiar 2005: 113). The *palazzo* initially consisted of a single storey with the rooms surrounding a central courtyard, while the first floor was added about two centuries later (Dalli 2006: 232).

The main façade and doorway were probably oriented towards what is now Bastions Square, with its entrance consisting of a *siqifa*, today forming part of a private property (Buhagiar 2005: 113). The rear entrance, characterized by another *siqifa*, was connected to what is now Our Saviour Street. Historical documents indicate that another section of this building formed part of a synagogue (Caruana Galizia 2007: 13). The rooms surrounding the backyard are characterized by massive walls and heavy piers, while the innermost room on the ground floor has a ceiling supported by three pointed arches and is characterized by a low arched doorway with carefully shaped voussoirs (Figure 3.54). This room and doorway probably formed part of the house's original complex (Buhagiar 2005: 115).

An important phase of development in the history of Falson Palace occurred in the 15th century when it was reduced to its present-day ground plan and a *piano nobile* was added to the original structure across its entire breath (Figures 3.55 (a) and (b)). A new doorway with a hooded moulding was added on the façade facing Villegaignon Street. The upper edge of what was previously the only storey of this house was adorned with a double-serrated frieze of inverted triangles with pendant balls. The doorway and these embellishments were inspired by Sicilian and mainland Italian late medieval architecture (Caruana Galizia 2007: 14).

While the ground floor included stables, storerooms and a millroom, the first floor served as the family's living quarters (Valentino 2006: 26). The ground floor and the *piano nobile* are different in architectural style as well as in the quality of masonry used. The latter was rebuilt in the early 16th century, when the attractive mullioned windows on the present main façade were added (Dalli 2006: 232). The original salon, which consisted of a single spacious multifunctional hall, was eventually partitioned into three principal rooms to accommodate the first Grand Master of the Order of St. John, where he could meet his Council, receive audiences and entertain guests (Buhagiar 2005: 112-13) (Figure 3.56). From the 17th century onwards other parts of the *palazzo* were acquired by third party owners, reducing it to its present day size. It was acquired by its last owner in 1927.

Therefore, Falson Palace is a diminished version of what was a sumptuous late medieval *palazzo*. The house in its present state, with a north-east orientation, consists of two floors. The front half consists of an almost square plan, while the rear section follows a different orientation becoming more irregular. The centrally located main doorway leads to a reception hall flanked by a room on each side. The doorway of the room on the left-hand side, which leads to the street, is a twentieth-century replica of the main doorway of the building. A set of three round-headed arches in each of the three front rooms support the ceiling. The reception hall gives access to the central courtyard through a covered loggia. Most of the other ground floor rooms are reached through the central courtyard (Figure 3.57).

The *piano nobile* is reached either through a covered staircase located in the area between the reception hall and the central courtyard or an open staircase located in the courtyard, the latter having been added by the last owner of the house to replace an earlier one. The covered staircase leads to a corridor which gives access to the rooms of the *piano nobile*. This same corridor also provides access to an open terrace which goes round the courtyard perimeter to reach the open staircase on the other end. The present *piano nobile* consists of three large rooms which look onto the main street (the ones characterized by the mullioned windows) and of several others, each of which have a separate function, for example a bedroom, a private chapel and a library (Figure 3.58).

Considering that Falson Palace was originally a single storey building and basing ourselves on the evidence of other local late medieval houses and historical documents, it is quite likely that its original façade was characterized by the least possible number of apertures. The fifteenth-century façade apparently included a main doorway and an adjacent smaller *remissa* door (Figure 3.59); the small rectangular window on the right-hand side of the building's façade which features in a 19th century painting by a local artist is a later addition (see Figure 5.36 in Chapter 5 below).

Despite the fifteenth-century restoration, the central courtyard configuration was retained. In fact, this still provides access to many of the rooms on the ground floor. Another important feature of the central courtyard is the water cistern.

On the basis of other late medieval houses that were observed (for example, Stagno Palace in Qormi), the evidence suggests that originally the main staircase, which leads to the *piano nobile*, could have possibly been open (or partly covered). This implies that when leaving from the reception hall a person found himself in a loggia, under the ceiling of an open terrace which gave access to the *piano nobile* (Figure 3.60). The staircase was, therefore, located on the left hand bottom corner of the courtyard. In a similar manner, the open staircase of Stagno Palace leads to an open terrace which provides access to the *piano nobile*. However, in the case of Falson Palace the open staircase and the terrace (the latter is shaded in yellow) were eventually covered over, possibly in the early 16th century, and the *piano nobile* was thus preceded by a covered passageway or corridor as it is at present. Given this hypothetical setting it is also possible that, in late medieval times the open staircase and the contiguous terrace on the opposite corner of the courtyard did not exist, which therefore made the courtyard more spacious. When this open staircase was added cannot be determined with certainty.

As a complex house Falson Palace draws parallels from different architectural traditions. Its original layout was presumably influenced by the central courtyard concept which was so widespread in the Islamic Mediterranean, in North Africa and the Near East (Lapidus 1967; Boone and Benco 1999; Nevett 2003: 105-107). At the same time, its architecture also bears similarities with contemporary Crusader townhouses, which were popular in various parts of the Near East, for example in Acre, Jerusalem and Arsuf (Boas 1998: 149-52). Comparable to the thirteenth-century Falson Palace, access to the rooms of these dwellings was from a central courtyard, while access to the latter was via a covered passageway. With the fifteenth-century reconstruction works Falson Palace, like other contemporary Mdina *palazzi*, came more under the influence of Sicilian and Catalan late medieval architecture; in fact, it bears resemblances to other

palazzi in Sicily, for example the Chiaramonte-Steri Palace in Palermo. By the 17th century the *piano nobile* emulated the layout of contemporary *palazzi*, with the formal rooms being organized in an *enfilade* arrangement to resemble a Knights' period townhouse.

3.5 The houses of the Knights' period

This period provides us with more opportunities to explore the development of the Maltese house in more detail. Apart from the various surviving dwellings of this period, many others are recorded in the *Cabrei* collections. This period witnessed the rise of new settlements as well as the development of existing ones. Mdina, which was rebuilt in the late 17th and early 18th century following the 1693 earthquake, presents various examples of interesting houses. During this period the evolution of the Maltese houses was not only restricted to the urban centres, but extended to all parts of the islands.

This period brought the Maltese islands closer to Europe than ever before. From an architectural and artistic point of view Malta saw the emergence of various prominent architects and artists, like Lapparelli, Carapecchia, Mondion, Caravaggio, Preti and Favray. During this period three major architectural/artistic styles evolved: the Mannerist, the Baroque and the Rococo. Baroque art and architecture, however, remained the most popular. This style prevailed in the main settlements and practically in all the major villages. The parish churches that were built in the proto-industrial villages during the 17th and 18th centuries are a clear example of this concept. With the expansion of the villages from the 17th century onwards (section 2.3.4.2 above), the main dwellings of the village which were occupied by prominent residents, for example by the village doctor or the parish priest, or those which served as a country residence of certain noble families, often emulated the Baroque idiom to mirror their urban counterparts, comparable to what happened in other contemporary colonies like Crete and the Ionian islands, which were dominated by the Venetians until 1669 and 1797, respectively (Bintliff 2012a: 460-66; 2013b: 42) (Figure 3.61).

During this period not only the local architect improved his knowledge and skills, but also the local stonemason. Historical records show that the number of persons employed as skilled stonemasons was substantial in both the villages and the urban centres (Boisgelin 1804: 56; Sant 1996: 12; Grima 2001: 80). The stonemasons who were involved in the fortification projects or in the building of the Valletta *palazzi* used their knowledge and skills to build sumptuous churches as well as houses that were of a better building quality, even in the villages (Figures 3.62 and 3.63). This has been particularly observed during the house surveys, which showed a tendency towards improved construction techniques from the second half of the 16th century onwards in the urban and rural settlements. For example, it was noted that in the villages there was a shift from dry rubble to ashlar masonry houses, clearly showing the workmanship of skilled stonemasons (Figures 3.64 and 3.65).

The townhouse (or townhouse style) façade became more symmetrical, which generated more aesthetic beauty, and was generally dominated by a balcony. The traditional closed timber balcony, which owes its origins to Oriental architecture, was introduced in the early 18th century and remained popular till well into the 20th century (Ireland and Bechhoefer 1998: 74-88, 89-94) (Figure 3.66). Thus, instead of the austere, simple and introverted façade of the medieval *palazzo*, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century elite houses were characterized by more elaborate and extroverted façades, sometimes also having more than one door that led to the inside. The façades of these houses were often embellished by architectural details, such as reliefs, columns, coat-of-arms and other features. The use of glass windows and wooden louvered shutters became more common, similar to what occurred in other Mediterranean countries, for example Greece, Spain and Italy, both in the urban and rural context (Atroshenko and Grundy 1991: 83, 150; Sigalos 2004: 262, 267).

Comparable to what happened in other contemporary South Italian and Sicilian towns, the more economic use of land and building plots, the elaboration of use of space and the emulation of Italian urban models led to the development of multistorey houses (Sabelberg 1986: 60; Valentino 2006: 17). These were particularly prominent in the fortified towns which, apart from being enclosed by fortification walls, also experienced continuous demographic growth.

The courtyard house layout survived and continued to develop through the influence of Baroque art. Examples of early modern courtyard houses can be found in the urban centres, in Gozo, and in a number of villages. Figure 3.67 shows a plan of the ground floor of Casa Viani, in Valletta. This two-storey house is characterized by a central courtyard surrounded by two rooms at the front and by a kitchen, a storeroom and another room at the back. Access to the house is through a hall leading directly to the courtyard.

Another house layout which became quite popular during this period was the terraced house. Its basic plan essentially consisted of a set of rooms with a courtyard at the back (Valentino 2006: 26). This layout prevailed in Malta's urban centres, but eventually was also adopted in the major villages in imitation of the Valletta townhouses (Tonna 1985: 37). These were similar in style and architecture to those of Sicily, Crete and the Ionian islands (Bintliff 2012a: 464-67). For instance, the façades of these dwellings were usually characterized by elaborate and symmetrical façades and dominated by an open stone or a closed timber balcony (Figure 3.68). Moreover, they were usually built over two floors, although others consisted of three storeys or even more. Depending on the area of the building plot and the layout of the house the ground floor rooms were usually reserved for the kitchen, the *gabinetto* (water closet) and for the storage rooms, while the rooms of the *piano nobile* were the occupants' living quarters, where they conducted their everyday activities, enjoyed their daily lives and entertained their guests.

A number of townhouses were extensive enough to include a small mezzanine, which was generally used as the living quarters of the domestic staff or was rented to third parties so that the owner would generate some extra revenue. The mezzanine, which was usually situated in between the ground floor and the first floor of the house,

generally consisted of some rooms characterized by a low ceiling and a window to the outside. Access to the mezzanine was usually through a separate entrance situated near the main door of the house or else was reached from the house through a doorway located either in the middle of the grand staircase or in another place. Certain houses also included a number of shops or warehouses (Figure 3.69).

Concerning domestic spaces, the elite dwellings of this period usually had a series of interconnecting spaces. Rooms had the tendency to have more than one access point, so that it was easy to cross from one room to the other in the swiftest time possible. Sometimes, houses had a linear plan layout, thus consisting of a string of rooms (*enfilade*) which gave access to each other forming a straight line. A clear example of this is Casa Rocca Piccola in Valletta and Casa Leone in St. Venera (Figures 3.70 (a) and (b)). This new concept shows that, from the late 17th or the early 18th century the courtyard of many elite houses no longer served as a hub which provided access to the other rooms through their separate entrance (Figure 3.71). This development in domestic space direction and organization reflects the changes that took place in the configuration of Baroque townhouses and *palazzi* across Europe, particularly in France and Italy (Norberg-Schulz 1988: 164; Grundmann and Fürst 1998: 45; Valentino 2006: 86-87). It also shows the harmonization of the local architect's knowledge and technical skills with what was happening elsewhere in the Continent in architectural planning.

Another important development concerned the staircase. Whereas previously the staircase had been placed in the courtyard, or outside the house, in many townhouses of this period this was relocated to the inside. Therefore, access to the upper floor was through a covered staircase. Observations made during the house surveys in Valletta and from the *Cabrei* revealed that a substantial number of townhouses had their staircase situated inside between the entrance hall and the courtyard. So, in case of ill weather it was still easy for the dwellers to reach the *piano nobile* without getting wet. The shift from an open staircase in the courtyard to a covered staircase in a central position of the house is also the result of foreign architectural influences, mainly Italian and French, which were quite popular during the Baroque period (Tobriner 1982: 118-19; Valentino 2006: 92; Lemerle and Pauwels 2008: 328). A number of *palazzi* and townhouses also had a secondary staircase usually at the rear of the dwelling's spatial network, which connected together all the floors of the house from the ground floor to the roof. While the grand staircase was usually reserved for the owners, the secondary one was apparently used by the domestic staff, given its particular location near the kitchen and other spaces which, in such houses, were usually associated with domestic servants. Therefore, the staircase was also another symbol of social status, which separated the occupants from the servants. Despite this step forward in the development of the Knights' period townhouses others, particularly those with a central courtyard layout, still provided access to the upper floor rooms through an open staircase (Figures 3.72 (a) and (b)).

The shift from houses with multifunctional domestic spaces to more complex dwellings with additional internal divisions to permit specialized functions, evidently visible in the townhouses and *palazzi*, mirrors the social and economic changes that took place in Malta as well as in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe (Johnson

1996). Section 2.3.3 above referred to the market economy that the Maltese islands developed from the late 16th century onwards, based in particular on entrepot trade, as well as to the consequent urbanization process that led to the emergence of new urban centres and the expansion of existing ones. The social change that this market economy generated, especially among the elite and the upper middle class, was reflected in the type of dwellings that they occupied (section 2.3.2 above). Their houses were elaborate and elegant in style and internally more complex, with the presence of several private spaces to separate the owners from the servants as well as to enjoy a lifestyle typical of the urban elite and upper middle class, who in the mid-17th century constituted about 20% of the total urban population (Cassar 2000: 246-48).

3.5.1 Lower class building during the Knights' period

The previous section has dealt with the elite houses and their main characteristics. However, to acquire a more complete picture, it is likewise important to explore the type of dwellings where the remaining 80% of the population lived. Section 2.3.2 above has analysed the local class structure in Malta during the Knights' period and has shown evidence that the houses of this period reflect different social classes.

The urban centres, despite the strict building regulations, became a place where many lower class families settled in quest of more employment opportunities and a better standard of living. However, with their limited financial resources to acquire comfortable dwellings, poor families had no other option but to live in small dwellings or even in cellars, comparable to what occurred in other countries, for example South Italy and Sicily (Sabelberg 1986: 60). Those who could not afford to become house owners rented a small house or a common tenement in Valletta, Birgu, Senglea or Cospicua. Many of these houses consisted of single rooms, while others had an additional room (Figure 3.73). In about 1650, approximately 50% of the Birgu population lived in this type of houses, while in Valletta a substantial number of families were living in similar conditions (Buttigieg 2003: 41-44). Such dwellings, especially the cellars, had a limited space and lacked proper ventilation and lighting, particularly when such houses did not even have a backyard to allow air circulation. These lacked adequate hygienic standards and were often the cause of various health problems and contagious diseases (Mahoney 1996: 82). They were certainly places offering little space and lacking amenities, where the family enjoyed little privacy and where all domestic activities had to be conducted in a restricted space. Some other families, possibly those with a relatively higher income, could afford to rent an apartment (or mezzanine), which were also small and usually consisted of not more than three rooms. An analysis on a sample of forty-two townhouses listed in the *Cabrei* of the Order has revealed that about 65% included a mezzanine.

This shows that the urban settlements were characterized by a combination of different social classes: the elite (the Order, the nobility and the Church), the upper middle class (members of different professions and entrepreneurs), the lower middle class (craftsmen, small business owners and clerical workers), and the lower class (labourers, servants and the destitute). The different types of houses that have been studied so far in this section reflect the different social classes that characterized the

urban community during this period. An analysis of a sample of ninety-two houses in Valletta listed in the *Cabrei* to test the potential level of material wealth within that community during this period has shown that approximately 38% of this sample consisted of houses with less than four rooms, about 43% contained between four and six rooms, while the remaining 19% comprised more than six rooms. These figures concur with the Valletta parish records for the mid-17th century, which showed a similar percentage distribution of houses (section 2.3.2 above). In the absence of more detailed population records, and considering that by the 18th century almost half of the local population lived in the Harbour area, particularly in Valletta (Mallia Milanes 1993: 15-16), these estimates provide us with a likely picture of how the local urban class structure in Malta was quantitatively distributed; the first group potentially represents the urban low class, the second group the urban middle class, while the urban elite are represented in the third group.

In the villages and hamlets the situation was different. In the centre of the major villages, usually dominated by a sumptuous parish church, a group of rural elite (for example, the parish priest, the village doctor and, perhaps, a notary or a lawyer) lived in houses which emulated the urban *palazzi*, often on a smaller scale. Many peasant families, with limited disposable income and with a lack of aspiration to change their dwellings according to fashion, continued living in small vernacular houses, often outside the village core which, contrary to the early modern townhouses and *palazzi*, remained similar in style and general layout to those of the previous period. A parallel phenomenon occurred in other contemporary Mediterranean countries (Bintliff 2012a: 467). Like their predecessors, these houses were characterized by simple, introverted and asymmetrical façades, bearing the least architectural embellishments possible, if at all (Figure 3.74). Nevertheless, in the villages some peasant families could afford to alleviate the austere façade of their dwellings by the addition of simple Baroque-style door or window frames (Figure 3.75). Most of the contemporary rural houses were also characterized by a central courtyard, which provided access to the different rooms (Figures 3.76 (a) and (b)). They were also a place where animals were kept, for example poultry and goats, as an eighteenth-century poem in Maltese suggests (section 4.2 below). Like the farmhouse, many village houses were built with a mixture of mortared rubble and ashlar masonry.

The farmhouses of this period were usually two-storey buildings (Figure 3.77). The ground floor rooms were generally intended for animal sheltering and for the storage of crops and agricultural tools, while the *għorfa* was the family's living quarters. Others consisted of a single floor, where animals and humans lived together at the same level. On the basis of Aalen's model and our previous discussion (section 3.4 above), it is possible to infer that the single-storey farmhouses belonged to the poorer peasants, while the two-storey *rziezet* belonged to a wealthier group of peasant families. An analysis of a sample of sixty-eight farmhouses which were listed in the *Cabrei* collections or else formed part of the Malta Historic House Survey has revealed that about 76% of these were two-storey buildings. This suggests that by this time this type of rural dwelling had become widespread in the Maltese islands and that a large section of the peasant community were living in dwellings which vertically separated animals

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from humans. This possibly also indicates a decline in the number of cave-dwellings, hovels and single-storey farmhouses and a trend towards an improved standard of living among the peasantry of this period. Considering that the farmhouses listed in the *Cabrei* were rented properties suggests the Knights' commitment to accommodate tenant farmers in dwellings that offered sufficient living space and perhaps a healthy environment, in line with the Order's mission as a Hospitaller organization. This subsidised accommodation was, therefore, also linked to the development of more complex rural dwellings which permitted an improved lifestyle among the landless peasants and farm labourers, contrary to what occurred in the Medieval period when more tenant farmers lived in single-storey farmhouses in which human and animal cohabitation was commoner. This shift towards improved and more complex rural dwellings occurred also in other European countries, for example England (Catling 2013: 12-19).

The *Cabrei* collections also give us an interesting picture about the likely level of land and house ownership among the local peasant community. An analysis on a sample of sixty agricultural estates spread in different parts of the Maltese islands, to test the potential level of material wealth among the peasant population in the 18th century, revealed that about 63% of them, which belonged to the Order or to the Church, also included a dwelling place. This suggests that during this period

    a) 63% of the peasant families from this sample probably owned neither lands nor a house, and

    b) the Order and the Church, besides being the islands' major landowners, not only provided landless peasants and farm labourers a means to earn their daily living, but also an accommodation.

The remaining 37% of the estates in this sample could have possibly been leased to tenant farmers who were, however, house owners. They suggest that during this period many peasant families could not afford to become house or landowners, an observation which was made in a previous study on the basis of other historical records (Vassallo 2007: 164-70). The pattern that emerges from this analysis could also be linked to the Order's incentive programmes to relocate peasant and poor families in different rural areas of Malta to mitigate the high population density in the urban maritime settlements (section 2.3.4.2 above).

On the basis of our historical evidence, it was also possible to estimate the totally independent farm percentage. From a sample of one hundred and sixty notarial records dating back to this period, it was found that thirty contracts were related to independent farms which belonged to common people. This number amounts to about 19% of the whole sample, which tallies with the percentage of landed peasants in the Maltese islands during the Knights' period (20% of the total landownership) (Cassar 2000: 237-45).

3.5.2 The windmill: another example of local vernacular architecture

Another type of dwelling was the windmill (*mitħna*) which replaced, at least in the towns and major villages, the more primitive animal-driven *centimolo*. Most of the existing windmills date back to the 17th and 18th centuries, being spread in various

localities in Malta and Gozo, like Rabat, Birkirkara, Għargħur, Cospicua and Żurrieq. Apart from being a place of economic function (mainly the grinding of grain), it was also the dwelling place of the miller and his family.

A typical Maltese windmill consisted of two floors: the ground floor where all the economic activity took place and the upper floor which served as the miller's living quarters. The windmill is dominated by a centrally-placed cylindrical masonry tower. On one of the sides of the windmill there was usually a courtyard, the size and shape of which varied from one example to the other (Figure 3.78).

3.5.3 Cave-dwellings and hovels

Although the number of cave-dwellings in Malta and Gozo had diminished by this period, many of which were converted into a storage space or as animal pens, certain others, like that of Għar il-Kbir, were still inhabited (Zammit Ciantar 2002). According to Abela (1647: 79) there were 117 people living at Għar il-Kbir in the first half of the 17th century, with other studies showing that this declined drastically during its second half, leaving only one family living there by 1699 (Buhagiar 2002: 254). The number of families occupying this cave-dwelling increased slightly again during the 18th century, but there was another demographic decline towards the end of the same century. In fact, the last inhabitant of Għar il-Kbir was recorded in 1793 (Buhagiar 2002: 252-53). Dry rubble hovels and *giren* experienced a similar situation, with many of them being converted into animal shelter or storage and others ending up completely neglected. This decline in the number of cave-dwellings and hovels shows that rural peasants sought better accommodation and also an improved standard of living either because their economic opportunities increased and/or their landlords sponsored better housing.

3.5.4 The houses as a reflection of social and economic change

The houses of this period reflect the social and economic changes of the time. The particular economy that developed during the Knights' period, based primarily on different harbour and commercial activities, generated a long period of urbanization in the Grand Harbour area, with the establishment of new settlements and the expansion of existing ones. Valletta and the Three Cities became cosmopolitan centres, in which foreigners and locals were integrated on the social, legal and economic planes. By the 18th century, about half of the local population was living in one of these urban centres, which contrasts the 25% of the previous period. Houses were acquired according to a person's level of material wealth and social status. The building regulations of Valletta discussed in section 2.3.4.2 above are a clear example of this notion. The size, the building quality and architectural style as well as the dwelling's location were all crucial indicators of class and material wealth. The interior of the urban elite houses was organized in such a way so as to separate the owners from the servants. Distinction of social classes was expressed, therefore, not only between the houses, but often within them too (section 9.3 below).

Outside the urban centres, the villages continued to expand, all at their own pace, showing a general trend towards an improved standard of living. During this period the proto-urban villages in particular became more market oriented and were inhabited by

peasant families and the rural elite. The village centre, generally dominated by a sumptuous parish church, was usually the area where the local doctor, the parish priest and other members of the clergy, businessmen, skilled craftsmen and entrepreneurial farmers lived. It was also here where some of the urban elite established their second residence. The evidence shows that more primitive dwellings declined, while the number of peasant families occupying two-storey farmhouses increased. Similar to changes occurring in other parts of Europe (Catling 2013: 15-19), even within the local rural community of the Knights' period there were different levels of material wealth. The emulation of urban *palazzi* and aspects of town life by the rural elite from the 17th century onwards suggests that, in the proto-urban settlements, village and town life began to merge into each other, narrowing down the cultural barrier that existed between the rural elite and the peasants since medieval times. Apart from the fact that the proto-urban villages continued to expand in terms of size and population, an improved system of communication between these settlements and the urban towns made this phenomenon even faster (see Figure 5.4 (a)).

Land and house ownership was a symbol of material wealth, which reflected the person's quality of life. Our analysis has revealed that house ownership was not something that many families could afford. In the urban centres, those with limited financial means generally had no other option but to rent a small property in the underprivileged areas of the town, for example at the Manderaggio in Valletta. The observations made from the *Cabrei* and the house surveys concur with the figures acquired from the historical records, showing a sizeable urban lower class, a more substantial middle class, and a relatively smaller elite class. In the villages, there is evidence that many peasant families did not have enough income to own their land or dwelling. Those who did not own their house had to rent a property either from the Order, from the Church or a private landlord. Other poor peasant families lived in cave-dwellings and possibly also in dry rubble hovels.

The distinction between the elite houses and lower class dwellings is evident in their exterior as well as in their internal organization. While the former were characterized by elaborate Baroque façades, the latter generally adhered to the vernacular idiom, thus having a simpler and an assymmetrical exterior. Our evidence has shown that only a few rural houses could afford a decorated door or a window frame in simple Baroque style. Regarding the interior, the elite houses became more complex with the addition of separating walls to create spaces with specialized functions. Lower class dwellings had limited domestic space, suggesting that their rooms were often multifunctional. Apart from class separation, the interior of the elite houses also permitted more individual privacy and gender segregation. For example, it was normal in these dwellings for men and women to sleep in separate bedrooms. In lower class dwellings, however, there was little room for privacy and gender segregation (section 9.4 below). The elite houses reflect the particular lifestyle of a section of the local population, who kept themselves abreast with current trends in Europe in terms of fashion, house architecture, interior design and domestic space organization. They had the financial means to alter and embellish their houses according to current fashion in Europe. However, lower class families, with their

limited disposable income, could not afford to alter their houses according to fashion, so any changes in their dwellings were often minimal and sporadic. Therefore, through the different house types analysed in this section, it was possible to explore various aspects of the local society of this period within a Euro-Mediterranean context (Figure 3.79). This is, after all, the Maltese society which the Knights of St. John left behind when they were expelled from Malta in 1798.

3.5.5 Case study: Ange's Palace, Mdina (House no. 19)

Ange's Palace in Villegaignon Street, Mdina, is a mid-16th century *palazzo* with extensive 18th century architectural modifications, carried out after the 1693 earthquake. Unlike Falson Palace, the history of this house is little known. For a particular time it belonged to a family of the local nobility, with the last owner bequeathing it to the Mdina Cathedral Chapter to become an alternative venue for the Cathedral Archives.

The palace is built over two floors with a small mezzanine in between (Figure 3.80). At present, the mezzanine belongs to a different owner and it was not possible to investigate its interior spaces. Access to the mezzanine is through a separate doorway from the main street or else through the grand staircase, where a secondary doorway (presently blocked) leads to the same property. The symmetrical façade of Ange's Palace, approximately 16.5 m wide, is typical of the Baroque period and consists of a monumental doorway at the centre flanked by two windows, one on each side. The small window located just above a larger one on the right-hand side of the main door belongs to the mezzanine. The upper section of the façade is dominated by an elaborate open balcony flanked by two large windows. The balcony rests on five elaborate stone corbels and lies exactly above the main door, the latter being embellished by elaborate mouldings. The door and the balcony give the house a sense of monumentality and grandiosity characteristic of the Baroque period. The façade does not bear any coat-of-arms, which could have provided an indication of its exact age or original owner.

The house is built over a plot of approximately 250 m^2 area and has a south-west orientation (Figures 3.81 (a) and (b)). It has a rectangular plan and two entrances, one in Villegaignon Street (the main entrance) and a rear one in Gatto Murina Street. The latter entrance was widened by the last owner to fit a garage door. The ground floor consists of a spacious barrel-vaulted reception hall which leads directly to an L-shaped backyard (Figure 3.82). The courtyard is dominated by a water cistern embellished in typical Baroque fashion (Figure 3.83). The reception hall gives access to two rooms on the left (1 and 3) and another two on the right (room 2 and another small one near the courtyard). Between room 2 and the courtyard an elegant staircase leads to the *piano nobile*. The reception hall is characterized by six stone benches, which suggests that this perhaps served as a waiting area.

The ground floor rooms follow different dimensions. It is possible that rooms 4 and 5 at the rear originally consisted of a single room. In fact, if this room did not have a dividing wall it would have been almost identical in size to room 3. This room could have been partitioned into two smaller units to serve different purposes; eventually

room 5 was utilized as a garage. The exact purpose of the ground floor rooms is unknown. It is possible that some of them were specifically concerned with the domestic activities, for example the kitchen, storerooms, or other service rooms. That these were possibly associated with domestic work is supported by the fact that:

a) room 3 does not have any windows and therefore enjoys little lighting even though it has three doors;

b) room 1 has access to a spiral staircase which was possibly used by the domestic servants, as suggested by Valentino (2006: 104);

c) the rooms which could be accessed from the reception hall of the house all had separate doors, possibly to avoid the servants from being seen when visitors were present.

Needless to say that nothing precludes the possibility that some of these rooms, for instance room 2, could have been used by the owners for some particular purpose, for example for welcoming guests.

The mezzanine could have been used as living quarters for the domestic servants or as the family's private quarters (Valentino 2006: 87). The latter hypothesis is supported by the presence of a doorway located in the middle of the grand staircase which, before it was blocked, led to the mezzanine (Figure 3.84). This hypothesis becomes even more reliable if, as suggested earlier, the grand staircase was used by the house owners.

Storage space is abundant. Apart from the rooms which may have been specifically utilized for storage, the space under the grand staircase was also an ideal storage place. It was noted that, at some point in time, possibly in the 19th or 20th century, the area under the upper section of the staircase was structurally modified to be converted into another storage area. Access to the latter is through a small oval opening covered by a small iron-framed glass aperture. The available documentation about this palace demonstrates that these storage rooms and spaces were intended for the household's needs and therefore, as suggested by Sabelberg (1983: 250-52), this house had a function similar to the show palaces of Sicily rather than the Tuscan economic palaces.

Rooms 1, 3, 4 and 5 were characterized by a higher ceiling than room 2 and the small one near the backyard. It was also observed that the ceiling of rooms 1, 3, 4 and 5 rested on a series of arches and those on the opposite side of the hall rested on a series of wooden beams. While the rooms and spaces on the eastern side were approximately 3 to 3.5 m high, the ones on the western part reached an average height of approximately 5.5 m. The reason for this height variation is due to the fact that, on the right-hand side of the house, exactly between the ground floor and the *piano nobile*, there is the mezzanine. It was also observed that the internal and external walls of the house varied in thickness between 0.38 and 0.78 m. The house layout permits good ventilation in most of the rooms and also a comfortable internal climate. The house was surveyed during the hottest time of the year; despite the unbearable weather conditions outside, the rooms inside still maintained a comfortable room temperature. The high ceilings, the thick walls, the relatively large doors, the various windows and fanlights are all important features which contribute to a comfortable internal climate in the house.

The *piano nobile* consists of a *sala* (or hall) (room 9) and three adjacent rooms (rooms 6-8). It is possible that the contiguous rooms 6 and 7, both giving access to an open-air terrace, originally consisted of a single room which was partitioned in later times, possibly in the 19th or 20th century. The grand staircase leads to a corridor which, in turn, provides access to the *sala* and room 6. As Valentino (2006: 87) suggests for other contemporary townhouses, this type of layout ensured that the *sala* and the room facing the staircase enjoyed maximum privacy as they were both characterized by separate access points and lockable doors. The other rooms of the *piano nobile* (7 and 8) are reached through a set of interconnecting doorways (Figure 3.85). The interconnecting doors permitted free movement between the rooms without any need to pass from the corridor, except for when privacy needed to be ensured, in which case the interconnecting doors were simply closed. Assuming that originally rooms 6 and 7 consisted of a single room, one can deduce that the elegant room 8 was therefore the only one on the *piano nobile* which could not be reached directly from the passageway. In such a case, to reach room 8 a person had to pass first from the *sala* or else from room 6. When the latter was eventually partitioned into two smaller units (to become rooms 6 and 7), access to room 8 became even more difficult, because this meant that to reach that room a person had to pass first from rooms 6 and 7, if not opting to take the *sala* route instead.

Three large elegantly decorated windows located along the upper half of the staircase, which open onto the courtyard, provide light and ventilation to the *piano nobile*. Apart from their functional importance, these windows give to the *piano nobile* and staircase area a sense of elegance and nobility. The open balcony is reached from the *sala*.

The rooms of the *piano nobile* are all characterized by a flat ceiling which rests on a series of wooden beams. On average, the ceiling height of these rooms varies between 4.5 and 5.5 m, while the thickness of the walls varies between 0.30 to 0.65 m. It appears quite likely that the *piano nobile* contained some formal rooms where the guests were entertained. These rooms could have served as a salon, a dining room or a library. This is confirmed by the fact that the ceiling of the *sala* and that of room 8 rest on a series of wooden beams with decorated side corbels underneath, a feature which is not usually found in more modest stately rooms (Figure 3.86). The reason why through time one of the rooms was partitioned into two smaller spaces is unclear. Presumably the owners wanted to add another room for a specific purpose, for instance a study or an office. It is also possible that, when the mezzanine was acquired by a third party owner, the rooms of the *piano nobile* were converted into the family's private quarters, and therefore room 6 was partitioned into two smaller spaces to fit an extra bedroom. However, this is just an hypothesis since no original plans of the house have been identified so far.

Ange's Palace has all the characteristics of an eighteenth-century elegant townhouse. It is the aim of its present owner to continue restoring this house and to acquire the complete property by purchasing the mezzanine as well.

3.6 The houses of the Colonial period

The Colonial period had an indelible effect on the development of the Maltese house. The Knights had left behind them an island fortress, with various defensive systems spread in different parts of Malta and Gozo. The *palazzi* and houses previously occupied by the Order became vacant, which the Colonial government gradually converted into government offices or private dwellings occupied by British officers and their families.

As mentioned in section 3.5 above, the Baroque idiom remained entrenched in local architecture for many more decades, reminiscences of which survived until practically the early 20th century (De Lucca 1988: 317). Nineteenth-century churches had the tendency to emulate the Baroque counterparts of the previous period. Baroque-style houses continued to be built in the centre of several major villages in Malta and Gozo, where the rural elite normally lived. For example, the main square of Nadur (Gozo) is still characterized by a number of nineteenth-century houses which have a symmetrical façade and ornate door and window frames typical of the previous century (Figure 3.87). The persistence of Baroque architecture hampered, in a way, the development of other architectural styles which were already in vogue in Europe, for example the Neo-Classical and Neo-Gothic styles (Hooker 1994: 294-311). In fact, these two styles were adapted locally from the second half of the 19th century onwards and remained popular until the early 20th century.

The reutilization of houses by the British meant that certain structural alterations were needed to meet the specific needs of their new occupants. The Victorian age, marked by the effects of the Industrial Revolution, affected the British living in Malta as well as the local community, particularly the Anglophile elite (Frendo 1988: 190). This period brought with it a great technological advancement, with the invention of new machines and communication methods. The late 19th and early 20th century witnessed a thread of great inventions such as the motor car, the electric current and the railway. The progress which the Victorian era brought with it generated a major change in Maltese society and in the way people lived (section 2.4.2 above).

As part of its task to improve sanitation and health conditions in the islands, in the second half of the 19th century the Colonial government issued strict housing regulations which affected the layout of settlements as well as the local dwellings (section 2.4.4 above). For instance, these encouraged the end of the courtyard house in favour of the terraced house with a backyard, which had already been quite popular in the previous period (Tonna 1985: 60-62). Another important regulation stated that house frontages had to be between 4 and 6.5 m in width (Pinfold 1894). This housing legislation gave rise to the development of row houses with repetitive wall construction and a balcony on the outside, in the new settlements that developed during this period, for example Sliema, Marsa and Ħamrun (Tonna 1985: 38, 60).

With the abandonment of the courtyard house design in the late 19th century, the terraced house consisting of a room at the front, a staircase at the core, another room at the back with an appendage to the kitchen and sanitary facilities, and with a courtyard at the back remained the standard type of house layout which persisted till well into the

20th century. This house layout became common in the settlements which were established during this period and in the various new residential areas that developed in the periphery of the agro-towns, for example Mosta, Birkirkara and Qormi. However, there were some variations to this layout. For example, a more extensive building plot would permit a front room and an adjacent hall, a room beside the staircase, a kitchen, a dining room and sanitary facilities (Valentino 2006: 29). An important characteristic of these nineteenth-century houses was the *antiporta*, a light glazed door immediately behind the heavy panelled main door of the house (Tonna 1985: 61). Given that these were extrovert dwellings, the *antiporta* was certainly a showcase to exhibit the owner's tastes to the passers-by, particularly when the main door was left open. Examples of elite dwellings with a similar layout, inspired by Neo-Classical architecture, are located in places like Sliema, Rabat and Victoria, Gozo (Figure 3.88). Certain urban elite dwellings follow the Neo-Gothic style, for example the one in Cathedral Square, Mdina, which is the only house in that town to be built in this particular style (Figure 3.89). Other early twentieth-century houses are inspired by *Art Nouveau*, but these occur in a limited number.

3.6.1 The elite houses and the Victorian age

The Victorian era also had an indelible effect on the family, with particular reference to gender and roles within the family. Locally this affected in particular the local Anglophile elite. It was a time when the mother was considered as the ideal housewife, while the husband was deemed as the dominant and rational *paterfamilias* as well as an efficient husband (Roberts 1995: 93; Low and Lawrence-Zuñiga 2007: 10-11; Löfgren 2007: 147). The father was conceived of as a strict person, whose instructions had to be followed without being contested. While the wife's role was more related to domestic issues, like interior decoration, child rearing and the management of the domestic staff, the husband was more concerned with business issues (Creed 2000: 335). As the head of the family the latter required appropriate space where to conduct his business, write correspondence, read and concentrate on his daily work (Roberts 1995: 90). The house lady did not carry out any domestic work, like cleaning and cooking, which was done by domestic servants. Children of well-to-do families spent little time with their parents, since they spent most of their time with their nanny or, when they grew up, were sent to a boarding school (Roberts 1995: 96).

The gender segregation and the contrasting roles of both husband and wife influenced the way elite houses were built and their spaces organized (Löfgren 2007: 144-45). Such segregation led to the development of gender-related spaces within the same house (Valentino 2006: 71). For example, in a typical nineteenth-century elite house in Malta the gentleman's area consisted of a study, a smoking or a billiard room, a library and the gentlemen's room. The lady's area included the drawing room, the boudoir and her private bedroom. The drawing room was usually situated near the dining room (Valentino 2006: 71-72). Whilst after dinner men would assemble in the smoking room to socialize, women went into the drawing room. Women had to observe the highest etiquette and decorum in the drawing room, but the boudoir allowed them more freedom and flexibility. This was the place where women could talk in private,

away from the formality of the drawing room. In a way the boudoir was equivalent to the gentleman's study (Daly 2001: 284). This mentality, therefore, created a segregation of spaces within the house layout itself.

To ensure a high degree of domestic privacy, interconnecting doorways of Knights' period houses were usually blocked so that rooms had only a single access point. Like in the previous period, however, the ground floor rooms of the elite house remained associated with the domestic staff (the kitchen, stores, etc.), hence there was a clear sense of class segregation between the domestic staff and the house owners (Löfgren 2007: 145). However, there are also instances when the gentleman's quarters were found at ground floor level, while the lady's quarters were located at the first floor (Valentino 2006: 73).

Another source of influence on the Maltese house was the English villa, which became quite popular among the elite in the early 20th century (Tonna 1985: 60). These villas include features or details which were alien to the Maltese house, for example the bay windows. Examples of these houses are found at Ta' Xbiex, Sliema and Rabat (Figure 3.90).

So far, this section was concerned with the townhouses, where the elite and upper middle class families, comprising about 20% of the local population between the 19th and first half of the 20th century, lived (section 2.4.2 above). In the early Colonial phase these houses were usually situated in the town centres, however from the late 19th century onwards there was a tendency among the well-off to settle in villas that were situated in new and quiet residential areas outside the urban centres, comparable to what occurred in contemporary South Italy and Sicily (Sabelberg 1983; 1986: 60-61). As a result, several palaces and townhouses in Valletta that were left unoccupied by the well-off were gradually converted into common dwellings (Tonna 1985: 39). In fact, it was from the late 19th century onwards that the earliest villas of Sliema and Ta' Xbiex started to be constructed. Other villas were built in coastal settlements, for example St. Paul's Bay, Marsascala and Birżebbuġa. The house surveys, however, revealed that in the main town of Gozo the situation was rather different. While the urban centres of Malta experienced a period of decline and pauperization of the elite dwellings, from the second half of the 19th century Victoria saw the building of a number of houses of Neo-Classical and *Art Nouveau* inspiration along its main street, a development which persisted until the early decades of the 20th century. Gozo's traditional economy and lifestyle (see, for example, Blouet 1993: 168-80) were perhaps two of the main reasons which, during this period, encouraged the elite to continue living and building their houses along Victoria's central street (known today as Republic Street).

The elite and the upper middle class lived in five types of houses, namely
a) Knights' period *palazzi* and townhouses, with their interior being left in the original state;
b) Knights' period *palazzi* and townhouses, with their interior being converted to suit the needs of a typical Victorian lifestyle;
c) the houses of Neo-Classical, Neo-Gothic or *Art Nouveau* inspiration that were built in the town centres, for example in Victoria, Gozo;

d) the villas and elite houses which were built outside the towns and agro-towns in new residential areas. These were often built in Neo-Classical or *Art Nouveau* architecture in emulation of their urban counterparts, as happened in other Mediterranean countries, for example Greece (Bintliff 2013b: 44);

e) the houses located in the agro-town centres, occupied by the rural elite. Several of these belonged to the previous period, while others were built during the 19th and early 20th centuries, often emulating Baroque-style house façades.

3.6.2 Urban lower class dwellings

The urban lower classes, which formed the overwhelming majority of the urban community, lived in smaller houses, often consisting of single- or two-room dwellings and cellars. Statistical records show that in the mid-19th century, in the Manderaggio only, which occupied an area of approximately 0.01 km^2 (or about 2% of the surface area of Valletta), there were about 3,000 inhabitants living in substandard accommodation. This implies that approximately 12% of the Valletta residents were living in houses which often lacked ventilation, air circulation and lighting. These overcrowded dwellings permitted neither individual privacy nor a decent quality of life. They often lacked a proper sewage system and a drinking water supply, and therefore contagious diseases here spread like wildfire. With the elite movement to the urban suburbs, various palaces and townhouses of the previous period, particularly in Valletta, were partitioned into smaller units to accommodate more low-income families. Therefore, similar to what occurred in the 19th century in Sicily (Sabelberg 1983: 247-50; 1986: 59-62), a number of elite houses in the urban centres ended up being pauperized to accommodate lower class families.

The census records show the government's attempt from the first half of the 20th century onwards to eradicate substandard accommodation in Valletta. In fact, by 1939 the number of Manderaggio residents had been reduced to about 5% of the total Valletta residents (Cassar 1988: 103). Although living conditions in these dwellings were difficult, contemporary literary sources demonstrate that the occupants of these houses did their utmost to keep their homes in a good state (section 4.2 below).

According to the 1851 national census there were 4,849 families living in Valletta; of these 1,624 families lived in "*comfortable dwellings*"; 2,460 families occupied "*smaller but comfortable dwellings*", while 765 families lived in "*substandard dwellings*". This means that in Valletta about 16% of the residents were living in poor houses. These figures are interesting, because they give us a likely picture of the level of material wealth among the Valletta community and how the urban classes were potentially distributed. On a national scale, however, the situation in the mid-19th century did not appear any better. According to the same national census almost half of the total population lived in substandard housing (more than 40%). About 37% of the total population lived in small but still comfortable dwellings, while less than 20% lived in comfortable houses. These housing figures concur with those of the local class distribution during this period (section 2.4.2 above) indicating, once again, that houses are a reflection of the local class structure. The national censuses, however, demonstrate that from the early 20th century there was a general tendency among the

Maltese to live in more comfortable dwellings. For instance, while in 1891 there were 22% of all the local families who lived in single-room dwellings, by 1931 this figure decreased by 14% so that only 8% of all the families lived in similar conditions.

3.6.3 The effects of the urbanization of the Harbour region

The urbanization of the Harbour region, which had started in the previous period and continued during this time, led to the development of new urban and suburban areas, for example Marsa, Msida, Gżira and Ħamrun. The various row houses or apartment blocks built in these new towns between the second half of the 19th and the early 20th century were generally occupied by lower middle class families, for instance skilled labourers, shopkeepers, and those employed in the military or naval service.

Middle class row houses were likewise built in the new residential areas that developed in the periphery of the major villages, such as Rabat and Mosta, where some of the local elite families also had their dwellings. The increase in the number of accommodation units in different parts of the Maltese islands reflects the settlement evolution that occurred during this period and perhaps the improvement in the quality of life of many Maltese families (sections 2.4.2 and 2.4.4 above).

3.6.4 Peasant houses, cave-dwellings and hovels

The peasants and the destitute continued to live in the same type of dwellings as in the previous period. The house surveys and the *Cabrei* of the Colonial government have revealed that during this period the farmhouse retained the same layout and features, thus consisting of a central courtyard surrounded by a number of rooms. Minor modifications included the addition of other rooms to meet the needs of the peasant family, but in general they were still characterized by their typical introvert and austere façade, with the ground floor rooms serving mainly as animal quarters and the *għorfa* as the family's dwelling space. With their limited disposable income, the peasants neither had the means nor the aspiration to alter their houses to suit fashion.

The historical evidence also shows that during this period many cave settlements in Malta and Gozo continued to be abandoned, while others were still inhabited by isolated farming communities (Ballou 1893: 121; Buhagiar 2002:176; 2007a: 368). In fact, the 1891 national census shows the presence of twenty-two inhabited cave-dwellings. Some of these dwellings that were no longer used for human habitation during this period were possibly converted into animal pens or storage areas (Buhagiar 2002: 99). There is also evidence that some were used as air-raid shelters during the Second World War, while others were completely abandoned (Buhagiar 2002: 95, 145, 148). There are indications that during this period a small number of rural families still lived in dry rubble hovels or *giren* (Fsadni 1992: 104-105). This further decline in the number of cave-dwellings and hovels suggests that at this time more peasant families, particularly those with a higher disposable income, sought better farmhouses or accommodation in the villages. Many landless peasants and farm labourers migrated to the Harbour region in quest of more employment opportunities (Figure 3.91).

3.6.5 The street network of the major villages

From the second half of the 19th century the street network of the major villages, for instance Rabat, Qormi and Mosta, had the tendency to become more complex. While the village core remained characterized by its narrow, winding streets, the new residential areas that flourished in the periphery had straight and wider roads. The rural elite generally continued living in the village centre, where they occupied large houses, the poor lived further away in the old village outskirts, while the new residential areas that developed outside the old periphery of these villages were occupied both by middle class families and by the urban elite who no longer lived in their urban *palazzi* or townhouses (Figure 3.92).

3.6.6 Case study: townhouse at Birgu (House no. 20)

This courtyard townhouse is situated in Scicluna Street, Birgu, and dates back to the first half of the 19th century. It is built on a plot of about 320 m^2 and has an almost rectangular plan except for the garage front wall which tilts at an angle of about 15° (Figures 3.93 (a) and (b)). The house has a south-east orientation.

The symmetrical façade of the house is approximately 15 m wide and bears similarities with the townhouses of the previous period. The lower half of the façade is characterized by a main door flanked by two secondary ones, while its upper section is dominated by a central open balcony flanked by two large windows (Figure 3.94). The mouldings surrounding the door and window frames as well as the friezes on the sides of the façade give this house a sense of monumentality and elegance. A simple horizontal frieze which runs along the width of the façade separates the ground floor from the first floor. The part of the façade which tilts at a slightly different direction has no architectural embellishments and is characterized by a timber covered balcony.

The main door of the house gives access to a spacious vestibule embellished in Neo-Gothic fashion (Figure 3.95). The latter is characterized by two rooms one on each side and provides access to the rest of the house. On leaving the vestibule, a passageway or corridor leads to an L-shaped courtyard or to the other rooms on the left, or else to an elaborate staircase on the right (Figure 3.96). The ground floor rooms can be reached from the courtyard through separate doorways or else a series of interconnecting doors. Thus, for example, a person can reach room 7 from room 1 by simply passing through rooms 3, 4, 5 and 6 without any need to cross the courtyard. The kitchen (room 6) and the water closet are located at the rear of the building. Although the original function of the other ground floor rooms cannot be ascertained, the old furniture that still remains in some of them hints at the possibility that they may have had some particular function, for example where guests were welcomed and entertained. For example, room 2 was presumably a salon, while room 4 probably was an informal dining room.

The house also has a spiral staircase at the rear (Figure 3.97). This could have been used by the domestic servants, given that it was situated exactly near the kitchen, or else it may have served as another means of access to reach the floors upstairs, including the roof. Considering that room 6 served as a kitchen and room 4 probably as a dining room, and the spiral staircase is located exactly near the kitchen, one may

hypothesize that rooms 5, 6 and 7 could possibly have been the servants' quarters, where they carried out their daily chores. This hypothesis is further substantiated by the fact that the kitchen, the spiral staircase and the small water closet are located in a secluded area at the rear, as was also observed in several Knights' period elite houses.

The courtyard contains a cistern where rainwater is collected from the roof through a water-pipe system. The area under the main staircase served as a storage place, access to which was through a door from the courtyard.

The *piano nobile* follows more or less the same layout. The main staircase leads to a corridor which gives direct access to rooms 8, 9 and 11. The other rooms are reached either through a series of interconnecting doors or an open passage that runs along the courtyard perimeter, eventually leading to an open terrace at the rear (Figures 3.98 and 3.99). Room 10 contains a timber covered balcony which looks onto the street. The original use of these rooms cannot be ascertained, however the sumptuous *sala* (room 9), dominated by a fireplace, an open balcony and another large window, gives the impression that originally this may have been used for formal occasions. The *sala* gives access to three other rooms through interconnecting doorways (rooms 8–10). This group of rooms could have served a number of functions including formal dining and as a salon or library. The layout of these rooms is interesting. As suggested by Valentino (2006: 87) it is possible that the *sala*, with its lateral interconnecting doorways, could have provided access to two gender-segregated rooms, one for men and the other for women. For instance, the *sala* could have served as a formal dining room, while one of the side rooms (room 10) could have been a drawing room for the ladies and the other (room 8) a smoking room for men, a common arrangement in Victorian houses (Daly 2001: 284). The other rooms of the *piano nobile* probably served as private bedrooms. In a typical Victorian arrangement, rooms 12 and 13 could have been used as bedrooms for the lady and her children, while room 11 could have been the gentleman's bedroom.

Like the ground floor rooms, and except for those which look onto the street, the main source of ventilation for the rooms of the *piano nobile* is the courtyard. The various doors and windows, the relatively high ceilings, the spacious courtyard and the thickness of the walls ensure that the house remains climatically comfortable all the year round. The thickness of the walls varies between 0.35 and 0.55 m, while the height of the ceilings varies between 3.5 and 5.0 m.

This house is reminiscent of the Baroque courtyard dwellings. It is probably one of the last courtyard houses which were built in the Maltese islands before these could no longer be constructed due to new building regulations. Despite its adherence to the Baroque idiom, it introduces some interesting Neo-Gothic and Neo-Classical features, which are visible in the vestibule, in the grand staircase, and in the formal passageway that gives access to the *piano nobile*.

3.7 The houses of the post-war period

The Second World War left several effects on the Maltese islands in terms of settlement, population and society. The Harbour region settlements were the ones to be

severely hit by enemy attacks. The war brought with it as well the relocation of many families from the affected urban areas to safer places. Consequently, the social detachment that had separated the town people from the villagers for a long time had by now been narrowed further since they started living closer together. The post-war period was also marked by various rebuilding projects, particularly in those areas which had been heavily damaged by the war (Cassar 1988: 118-19).

Technological improvements in the building industry and the use of concrete instead of local limestone accelerated the rate of urban growth. From the late sixties onwards new housing estates and government apartments started to be built in various localities to accommodate families with a low-income. The rise of new urban and suburban quarters from the sixties onwards led most of the villages to lose their autonomy that once formed part of their identity. Consequently, the territorial limits of many villages ended up merging into each other. An improved quality of life, access to more employment opportunities and a better road network were some of the main reasons that encouraged many families to leave the villages or the centres of the densely populated towns and dwell in more modern urban or suburban zones at their periphery. An analogous situation occurred in other European countries, for example Italy and Sicily, which also experienced a similar type of socio-economic development as a result of industrialization (Sabelberg 1983: 247-64; 1986: 61-62).

The late sixties of the 20th century were marked by an emphasis on an economy largely based on the manufacturing sector and the service industry. Industrial estates spread in various parts of the islands, while certain villages which originally were synonymous with the fishing industry developed into tourist centres, for example St. Paul's Bay and Mellieħa. A compulsory free education to all was instrumental to nourish a new generation of people that was more knowledgeable and skilful. The rate of illiteracy was reduced from approximately 29% in 1948 to less than 5% of the total local population by 1960 (Cassar 1988: 106-107). The emancipation of women in society and a general tendency towards more gender equality and equal rights meant that, as happened in other European countries like Italy, more women sought paid employment outside the house, particularly from the seventies onwards (Rydell 2003: 20). The separation between the State and the Church, the role of the mass media in the civil society, and the opportunities that an increasing number of families had by visiting countries abroad, were some of the causes which generated a period of secularization among the Maltese, especially the younger generation. The improvement in the quality of life, together with more employment opportunities from the late sixties onwards, brought a demographic transition characterized by a trend towards lower birth and mortality rates, similar to what happened in other European industrialized countries, for instance Italy and France (Rydell 2003: 13). In fact, the local birth rate decreased from about 36.0 per 1,000 in 1948 to approximately 16.1 per 1,000 in 1968. The local death rate declined from about 12.2 per 1,000 in 1948 to 9.0 per 1,000 in 1968 (Formosa 2013: 90-91). Access to free national healthcare and more awareness of personal hygiene led to a higher longevity.

These social changes had a dramatic effect on the family as well as on the Maltese house. The family became more nuclear and the percentage of parents in full-time

employment increased. From the seventies of the previous century this gradually brought a changing relationship between the house and its inhabitants. As happened in other European industrialized countries, although people invested money and energy in their homes, they began to spend less time to work, live and relax in them (Cieraad 1999: 11).

Despite this general tendency towards an improved quality of life, the house evidently remained a symbol of social and economic status. Similar to what happened in Sicily and South Italy during the same period, the house location, its size and type were generally an indicator of social class (Sabelberg 1986: 62-63). From this time onwards, the centre of Valletta gradually developed into a commercial area, with many houses and *palazzi* being converted into offices or commercial establishments; Sabelberg's investigations into the Sicilian town showed a similar phenomenon (Sabelberg 1983; 1986: 62). This meant that the number of the elite and upper middle class residents who lived in the city centre continued to decline. The Maltese census records for the year 1985 demonstrate that from the seventies onwards there was also a steady drop in the number of middle and lower class urban residents, who sought alternative accommodation in new residential areas or government housing estates. There were five main factors which stimulated people to seek residence outside the old town centres:

a) the government's incentives to provide accommodation in new residential areas at a subsidized price, encouraging families to become house owners;

b) the government's initiatives to eradicate substandard housing in the Maltese islands. Census records indicate that by the late sixties less than 3% of the total population occupied single-room houses, however 20% were still living in two-room dwellings;

c) commercial banks issued loan schemes to help families acquire a house. As a result, long-term bank loans made it easier for a number of families to buy a dwelling which otherwise they could not afford. However, the family's regular yearly income often determined the amount of loan given, hence the type of house that could be purchased;

d) the busy town centre no longer remained an attractive residential area. There was a general tendency among the people to seek new and quieter suburban areas, similar to what occurred in Sicily during this period (Sabelberg 1986: 61-63). In fact, census records show that the number of uninhabited dwellings in Valletta, Floriana and the Three Cities increased from 582 in 1957 to 1,151 in 1967;

e) the increase in the number of private cars as well as an improved road network and public transport made it possible for people to travel further in less time. In addition, since in the old town centres it was uncommon to find houses with a garage was a further reason which encouraged car owners to seek residence in the new suburban areas.

The sixties were the age of the 'Maltese villa', which was synonymous with the elite and upper middle class families. Detached and semi-detached villas, often inspired by Modernist architecture, which was so popular in western Europe at the time, for

example in Germany, France and England, were built in various localities, for example in places like Kappara, Tal-Qroqq and Guardamangia. Some were built on extensive building plots to include, generally, a front and a back garden, a garage, and several rooms usually spread on two floors. Villas had no fixed layout since this depended mostly on the area of the building plot (Figure 3.100). The so-called 'villa age' in Malta persisted till approximately the last decade of the 20th century when stricter planning regulations and policies were developed to regulate the growth of urban development and to protect the islands' rural landscape from further uncontrolled building frenzy.

The terraced house remained popular in various localities, even in the new residential areas. These usually consisted of two-storey dwellings and were generally owned by middle class families. More affordable properties that became quite popular in the post-war period among the middle class were the maisonettes and apartments. These were built in various localities in Malta and Gozo. Although smaller in size, they had all the basic amenities for a decent family lifestyle, for example a kitchen, a bathroom and two bedrooms (Figure 3.101).

The traditional closed timber balcony no longer formed an integral part of the modern house, as it used to be in the dwellings of the previous periods. It disappeared completely from the new residential areas to be replaced by stone or aluminium ones (or a hybrid of concrete/stone and aluminium balconies). Open concrete or stone balconies were usually more common in apartment blocks.

Low-income families or the socially underprivileged who could not afford to own a house were usually accommodated in government housing estates, spread in various localities, for example in Santa Luċija, San Ġwann and Rabat (Figure 3.102). Post-Independence governments demolished several slum areas in various localities, particularly in the Harbour towns, to make way for new apartment blocks, which at least provided the basic amenities one would expect in a house of this age, for example a bathroom, a kitchen and two bedrooms. Despite all this progress, substandard accommodation was not eradicated completely, with examples of slum areas still surviving in limited areas in Valletta and the southern harbour area.

In the rural areas, the number of peasant families who lived in farmhouses declined sharply. While several of these sought an alternative employment and went to live in more comfortable dwellings, many others migrated to other countries. Consequently, a number of houses ended up being abandoned or else continued to be utilized for storage or animal shelter, but not for human habitation. Although by this time cave habitation had declined sharply, there were still some isolated cases of peasant families living in cave-dwellings. According to Fsadni (1992:106), there is also evidence that certain poor peasants were still living in the *giren*.

It was later on, from the late seventies onwards, when the farmhouse became once again an attractive place of habitation. The island's particular climate, coupled with tax concessions and property investment opportunities, attracted a number of retired foreigners, mainly from Britain, to buy farmhouses or houses of character and convert them into charming properties. It was also a time when houses of character in the village core began to be converted and occupied by the elite and upper middle class families, who preferred living in the quaint village centre than in the busy urban and

suburban areas. During the last forty years the village centre increasingly became a source of attraction for many families who came from different localities to live here in houses of character or in newly built dwellings. This cohabitation between villagers and outsiders challenged the traditional village lifestyle and changed the way the villagers used to look at different aspects of life (Boissevain 2013: 17-23). This situation contrasts with that of Mdina which, despite the many tourists who visit this walled city everyday and the increasing number of well-off outsiders who opt to live in Mdina, the elite residents, many of whom belong to the local nobility and whose ancestors had lived here in their *palazzi* for various generations, still seek to protect their homogeneous culture from external influence (Sant Cassia 1999: 252-54).

The census records show that in 1967 about 15% of the total population lived in houses which had more than six rooms, 64% occupied houses that had between three and five rooms, while about 21% lived in single- or two-room dwellings. These figures compare well with those of section 2.4.2 above, which analysed the distribution of the different social classes during this time. This demonstrates that, in the post-Independence period, different houses still reflected different social classes.

The social changes in post-war Europe affected the lifestyle of the Maltese and also the organization of domestic spaces. The elite and upper middle class houses generally had the tendency to emulate Modernist style houses in Europe, with the inclusion of various spaces with specialized functions. With the general decline of house servants and the introduction of kitchens with domestic appliances, similar to what happened in the United States and in various European countries from the mid-fifties onwards (Gassert 2012: 185-90), the kitchen no longer remained a hidden place associated with domestic servants, but gradually became a showcase of the family's tastes. Although the dining room remained a separate unit, this was generally located close to the kitchen, sometimes adjoining each other. The common areas of the house also included a children's play area. In a two-storey house of this kind the ground floor rooms usually served as a communal area, where the members of the family socialized and entertained their guests, while the first-floor rooms were the family's private quarters (bedrooms and bathroom). In such houses it was common for children to sleep in separate bedrooms.

In the case of maisonettes and apartments the internal spaces were usually more restricted and did not contain the luxury of an elite house. For example, these dwellings generally did not have a separate dining room, while children usually had a shared bedroom. Despite the more restricted space, the domestic spaces of these dwellings were planned in such a way that private rooms (for example, the bedrooms) still enjoyed maximum privacy. For example, these rooms were usually lockable and located in an area which was not easily visible to the visitor's eye. The rooms in which guests were entertained, for example the sitting room, were located closer to the main door of the house.

The poorer dwellings (generally one- or two-room houses), apart from being limited in space and comfort, provided no or little privacy and often lacked basic amenities, for example a bathroom. In these dwellings it was also customary for all the

members of the family to sleep in a single room. The restricted area by which these dwellings were characterized implied that the available space was multifunctional.

3.7.1 Case study: house at Msida (House no. 30)

This property forms part of a three-storey house, consisting of a ground floor maisonette and an overlying duplex maisonette. Both properties belong to different owners. It is situated in Msida, in a residential area which developed in the post-Independence era. In fact, this area was originally intended as a villa area, but eventually maisonettes and apartments were also constructed to accommodate middle class families. For this case study, only the duplex maisonette is considered. This was built for a middle class family in the late sixties over a plot of approximately 100 m^2 area, being about 16.8 m deep and 9.4 m wide.

Its general layout, which has an eastern orientation, consists of six rooms at ground floor level and of another five at first floor level (Figures 3.103 (a) and (b)). Most rooms are rectangular in shape, while some are irregular due to the particular configuration of the building plot. Access to this property is through a straight staircase which leads to an irregularly shaped landing. This leads to rooms 1 and 3, which today serve as an office and a dining room, respectively (Figure 3.104). Rooms 3–5 are organized in a row and are reached through a series of interconnecting doorways. The bathroom (Room 6) is accessible from room 5. Rooms 2 and 3 (the sitting room and the dining room) are separated by a wide arched doorway to give this area more spaciousness (Figure 3.105). Rooms 4 and 5 (the living room and the kitchen, respectively) constitute the family's living quarters. Although the kitchen, which is served with a small dining area, is situated at the rear, it is still visible from the public area (Figure 3.106). Therefore, as Montello (2007: 4) suggests the ground floor rooms ensure a straight-line mobility and also a straight-line visibility.

The rooms situated on the first floor (7–10) constitute the family's private area (bedrooms and another bathroom). Room 11 is a laundry room which gives access to an open terrace. Access to the first floor is through a straight staircase which leads to an irregularly shaped landing. The rooms on this floor all have a separate door to ensure individual privacy. The only bedroom with an interconnecting doorway is room 10, which leads to the contiguous laundry room.

The narrow façade of this property (Figure 3.107), which lacks any type of architectural embellishments, is characterized by an open balcony on each floor. The two courtyards of the underlying ground floor maisonette,which likewise belongs to a middle class family, ensure that the property under review enjoys proper lighting and ventilation. These qualities are further complemented by the various doors and windows one finds in each room of this maisonette. While on average the rooms of this property are 3 m high, its exterior and interior walls have more or less the same thickness of approximately 0.35 m. The maisonette in both layout and spatial organization reflects the aspirations of Maltese lower middle class representing a type of house which fits their lifestyle and financial standing.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has studied the development of the Maltese house from the Medieval period to the second half of the 20th century. The analysis was based on historical sources, census records and the house surveys. Collectively, these sources helped to form a holistic picture of the various types of houses that the local inhabitants used as a habitation. The evidence showed that the development of the Maltese house through the ages reflects the social and economic changes that occurred locally during the period under study. It has also demonstrated that houses largely mirrored the level of material wealth of their respective owners, and therefore provide us with a likely picture of where the various social classes lived, how they organized the internal spaces of their dwellings, and the quality of life they potentially enjoyed. Before the mid-20th century class distinction was not only visible between different dwellings, but in the case of the elite houses even within the same dwelling.

In the Medieval period, the historical and archaeological evidence indicates that the earliest type of urban dwellings were of the courtyard type. While the elite lived in the centre of the urban centres in the *palazzi* and townhouses, the urban poor lived in small dwellings situated in the periphery. It seems quite likely that the urban houses were originally single-storey, but at some point in time during the late Medieval period, possibly in the 15th century, a number of them underwent a new phase of development to become two-storey dwellings. In the rural settlements, the peasants lived in simpler and more primitive type of dwellings. While the serfs and landless peasants lived in cave-dwellings and hovels (including the native *giren*, which architectually might have been influenced by the Berber domed mud houses), wealthier peasants lived in single-storey farmhouses. At a later stage, perhaps in emulation of the two-storey townhouse, the *razzett* also underwent a new phase of development, when a number of farmhouses were converted into two-storey dwellings to be occupied by wealthier peasants. This upgrading of peasant houses was possibly related to the end of serfdom and the liberalization of the land market, through which peasants gained more access to landownership and subsidy from landlords, and possibly also benefitted from the shift in economy from subsistence to cash-cropping.

This period also experienced a shift from full cohabitation between animals and humans to houses which vertically separated the two, with the animals occupying the ground floor spaces and the humans the *għorfa* upstairs. Eventually, while the farmhouse remained a dwelling where animals and humans lived within the same complex, the ground floor of the townhouse became synonymous with storage and domestic work, but no longer with animal shelter. The earliest courtyard houses were influenced by Islamic architecture, but through time while the rural houses adhered to the vernacular idiom, the elite dwellings became increasingly influenced by European architectural styles.

The Knights' period saw the emergence of new settlements and house types, for example the terraced house. While the earliest houses of Valletta appear to have been of the courtyard type, later urban development favoured the terraced layout. The urbanization of the Harbour region between the 16th and 18th century led to an

excessive population density, with the result that many families, especially the urban poor, lived in substandard houses, often consisting of cellars and single-storey dwellings, where the living conditions were awful. The *palazzi* and townhouses were situated in the town centre, along its main streets, while the poorer dwellings and common tenements were located at the periphery. The evidence also revealed that domestic spaces became more complex when compared to the elite houses of the previous period. The addition of several internal walls to create more rooms alludes to spaces with specialized functions. From the mid-17th century onwards, the centre of the agro-towns and the major villages, dominated by their Baroque churches, became associated with the rural elite, where prominent residents lived. Towards the periphery the lower class peasants occupied smaller introverted dwellings which, together with the farmhouses, were still characterized by assymmetrical and austere façades. Although the number of cave-dwellings declined, some peasant troglodyte communities survived, while a few others still lived in hovels.

In the Colonial period the Harbour region saw a further settlement expansion, where new urban and suburban areas were established to accommodate more low-income families who left their villages in search of employment opportunities with the British. New building regulations favoured the terraced house, with the result that these brought to an end the reproduction of the courtyard dwelling. While the interior of a number of the elite and upper middle class houses adhered to the Baroque idiom, certain others were inspired by the Neo-Gothic, Neo-Classical or *Art Nouveau* styles. Internal structural alterations were carried out in several elite dwellings of the previous period to resemble Victorian mansions, in which privacy, class and gender segregation were crucial. The urban poor lived in small dwellings, usually consisting of single-room dwellings and cellars, in which sanitary conditions were inadequate and individual privacy nonexistent. However, from the late 19th century the town centre did not remain as popular among the elite as it was before. The high population density of these settlements and better transport systems encouraged various elite and upper middle class families to seek alternative habitation in new and quieter residential areas, where they built their houses. As a result, many vacant townhouses and *palazzi* were gradually partitioned into common tenements to accommodate poorer families. This meant that the city centre no longer remained a residential quarter exclusively reserved for the elite. The urban lower class families continued to dwell in substandard houses, where living conditions were difficult. However, this analysis revealed that through time the Colonial government sought to gradually eradicate substandard housing, providing better quality housing to the urban poor.

The village centre remained synonymous with the rural elite, where the parish priest, the village doctor, businessmen and entrepreneurial farmers usually had their houses. However, from the late 19th century onwards a new phenomenon occurred outside the village centre: while the old village periphery continued to be occupied by the rural peasants, new residential areas developed outside its limits to accommodate the elite and many middle class families who no longer lived in the urban centres. The poorest peasants still lived in cave-dwellings or in dry stone hovels, although through

time the number of these dwellings sharply declined as more peasants, particularly those with a higher disposable income, sought better accommodation.

The elite houses of the Colonial period were the first to experience a change in style and layout, in line with the latest fashion trends in Europe, while the native rural houses generally still adhered to conventional designs. The census data have been useful to study how these different house types reflect the local nineteenth- and early twentieth-century class structure.

The social and economic changes that unfolded in Europe and Malta during the post-war period had an indelible effect on the Maltese houses. These remained a symbol of economic wealth and social status; their architectural style, domestic space organization, size, location and contents were some of the principal indicators of social class. While the villas were usually associated with the elite, terraced houses, maisonettes and apartments were more synonymous with the middle class. Low-income families and the socially underprivileged generally found accommodation in one of the government housing estates, which were constructed in different localities. Although substandard housing in the Maltese islands persists till the present day, during the last fifty years there has been a general tendency among many families to live in more modern residential areas and in more comfortable houses. The complete disappearance of live-in domestic servants and the introduction of domestic appliances in the house, similar to what occurred in the United States and in most western European countries from the late fifties onwards, changed the way domestic spaces were organized. For example, from a completely secluded space, the kitchen became a place where the family members enjoyed some of their time together.

The elite and upper middle class houses were the ones to be influenced most by the latest architectural styles of the time, which were also popular in Europe. Lower middle class dwellings were characterized by simpler architectural styles and certainly lacked the external finesse and interior elegance of the elite counterparts. The farmhouse also experienced a period of development, because from being the abode of the peasant family many were gradually converted into houses of character occupied by well-off families who preferred the tranquillity of the village than the more hectic urban lifestyle. Others were abandoned since their owners sought employment elsewhere or even left Malta in search of better life opportunities abroad. Unfortunately, several others were demolished in the name of progress to make way for new buildings and residential areas. The economic and social changes that characterized the Maltese islands during this period had an indelible effect on the family as well as on the house, with its internal spaces being organized to reflect the quality of life and aspirations of the contemporary family. The available evidence has, therefore, provided us with a likely picture of the various aspects related to local housing in the post-war period.

During the period under study the Maltese houses underwent dramatic changes: from introverted to extroverted dwellings; from the rural hovels to the townhouses; from single-room houses to more spacious dwellings; from multifunctional spaces to rooms with specialized functions which provided more privacy and segregation; from an open to a covered staircase, and from a central courtyard which provided access to the rest of the house to the back yard of the terraced house which had a different

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function. All these, amongst others, demonstrate that the house is much more than a simple shelter. It goes beyond its style, architecture and aesthetic beauty. Whilst this chapter has studied the general characteristics of the Maltese house, the following ones explore some related aspects that concern the everyday life of its occupants.