Introduction

Captain Francesco di Niccolo di Marquantonio Laparelli da Cortona (1521-1570), an experienced military engineer, arrived in Malta at the end of December 1565. Since 1560 he had served Pope Pius IV (1559-1565), working on the fortifications of Castel S. Angelo, the Vatican and its new Borgo Pio, Civitavecchia and fortified places all over the Papal States. From May to September 1565 the Order of St John (and the Maltese) had survived (but only just) a siege in Malta by the Ottoman Turks. The fate of Christian Europe had hung in the balance and it was considered essential throughout Europe that the island's defences be strengthened quickly lest the Ottomans returned in 1566 and took the island, from where Italy could be threatened. The Pope dispatched Laparelli to Malta to advise the Order on how to prepare their fortifications and bring them to a state of defence within four months; five months at the latest.

On 3 January 1566, within a week of his arrival, he presented a long report to the Order's Grand Master Jean de Valette (1558-1568). In Laparelli's opinion the existing fortifications (at Birgu, Senglea, Fort St Angelo and Fort St Elmo) had been so badly damaged by bombardment and sapping during the siege that it would be extremely expensive to repair them. More seriously the walls were overlooked by higher ground close by from which the enemy could once again wreak havoc with their artillery. The other fortified positions at Mdina and the Gran Castello in Gozo were also very weakly fortified and too far inland to be reinforced by sea. He urged

Capitano Francesco Laparelli and Valletta

the Grand Master to build a completely new city on virgin ground on the Sciberras peninsula. This was higher than any land close by and cut off by sea on all sides except at its neck. It was a superb site and he identified four possible positions for its main front (Fig. 1). His preferred option was the 500 canne line (that eventually chosen) but he left the final decision to the Grand Master. After waiting in vain for ten days he wrote another (terse) report to Valette: further delay would make it very difficult to fortify the site in time to resist an Ottoman attack and he said that he required many more guastatori (pioneers) to build the new defences than he had originally specified in his report of 3 January. If nothing was done, he warned, Malta would not survive another siege given its badly damaged defences, worn out artillery and lack of munitions.

In addition to shortages of labourers (especially masons), building materials, victuals and munitions, there were also divisions in the Order's council: the Knights could not decide where to locate the main front on Sciberras nor agree on its design. Laparelli found himself discussing the advantages and disadvantages of dry (as opposed to wet) ditches, the ideal length of a bastion's flank, the drawbacks of orillions, the defects of Fort St Elmo and so on. He also had to explain why he had dismissed Landi's 1562 scheme for a city on Sciberras and why he also rejected a proposal put forward by none other than Don Garcia de Toledo, the Viceroy of Sicily. Many Knights wanted to repair the fortifications that had successfully withstood the siege only a few months before. Others argued that, whatever measures were taken, it would be impossible to survive another Ottoman attack on Malta. The bickering continued even after the definitive plan for the enceinte had been approved.

Valette instructed Laparelli to draw up plans for all eventualities: repairs to Birgu, Senglea, St Elmo and Mdina, preparing a suitable position for a garrison to be left behind if the Order evacuated Malta and - Valette's preferred solution - designing a new strongly fortified city on Sciberras. Laparelli too was convinced of the need for a city but he produced proposals for all these options and early on he developed a compromise solution: a large earthenwork fort on Sciberras behind which Valette could eventually build a city. This scheme had the advantage of fortifying the strongest possible site in time (hopefully) to meet an Ottoman threat that year - the population could take refuge behind it - and it left open the option of an evacuation via Fort St Elmo should that become necessary (Fig. 2). Fort St Angelo, Birgu and Senglea would be defended until they became untenable at which point their garrisons would retreat to the new fort having gained invaluable time by delaying the besiegers.

2 DocT119. The plan showing the options (Fig. 1) is based on DocT121D.
3 DocT120. 13 January 1566. Guastatori not only dug ditches and levelled the ground for the glacis, they also threw up earthenworks which were then revetted with masonry by trained stone masons.
4 Doc86, 432/435 and DocsT125, 126, 130. Orillions (oroccioni in Italian) are rounded extensions to the faces of bastions built to protect gun positions in the flanks.
5 DocsT123, 124, 128.
6 DocsT121 and 129.
7 DocsT121. The trace of the large earthenwork on Mount Sciberras (Fig. 2, Doc 121C) is very similar to the one Laparelli drew for Pallano (Doc105).
This solution would certainly have had the support of King Philip II of Spain and Don Garcia de Toledo his Viceroy in Sicily, for it would secure the defence of Malta in the short term at minimum cost (to Spain especially). But it left Valette with an unsatisfactory temporary earthwork defence. He therefore capitalised on the massive support the Order had earned all over Europe for its heroic defence of Malta in 1565 and lobbied the crowned heads of Europe and the papacy for assistance with funding and materials for building a strong city ab initio. He also put pressure on Spain and Rome to send a strong infantry force to Malta before the 1566 campaigning season to deter the Ottomans from attacking that summer. This would win time for the city's main front to be in a state of defence by mid-1567. To make sure the Spanish Viceroy in Sicily understood that he was serious, Valette announced that he would transfer the Order to Syracuse if threatened with a fresh assault. To Don Garcia this was a red rag to a bull for there was no love lost between Spain and France and French Knights dominated the Order at this time. The enraged Viceroy lectured his King on the need to prevent this at any cost: 'We must never allow a single Frenchman into Syracuse,' he said, 'let alone a crowd of them!' To underline his determination, Valette let it be known that he had prepared the Order's collection of relics and other treasures for evacuation.' At the end of February Laparelli's proposed large central fort.

Fig. 2. Laparelli's proposed large central fort. DocT121C. Codex Laparelli. Courtesy of Contessa Laparelli Pitti Magi Diligenti.

Laparelli Pitti Magi Diligenti.

Laparelli's designs the enceinte of the new city

In the meantime Laparelli had worked hard writing reports, compiling lists of stores and munitions to be procured, making notes on the properties of Maltese stone, calculating the numbers of pioneers needed to perform given amounts of work and so on. At the end of January he offered to produce a plan for a main front on the 500 canne line (where it stands today) and another for the one 800 canne from Fort St Elmo (the site of the future Floriana fortifications), which he said was also suitable. Nothing could be done until the location of the main front was determined. At last towards the end of February 1566, Laparelli could write: 'Now that the issue of where the (main front of the) new city will stand is fully and finally settled, we must discuss its design'. The main street, he said, would be 500 canne long; Valette therefore had accepted his preferred option for the main front. Laparelli worked extremely fast for he submitted his trace of the fortifications of the new city to Valette shortly before Serbelloni's arrival. The Grand Master accepted the plan on Serbelloni's advice and it was formally

11 See Archivio di Stato Firenze, Mediceo del Principato [ASF, Med. del Princ.], 520/114; 8 February 1566: Serbelloni to Cosimo I.
12 His report on how Malta should be fortified is in Archivio Generale di Simancas [AGS], Estando 130-37; 17 March 1566: Gabrio Serbelloni to Don Garcia de Toledo. There is a copy in Marques de Vida!, and Don M. Salva, Coleccion de Documentos Ineditos para la Historia de Espana, X X, Madrid 1856, [Col. Doc. Inf.], 305 and the entire report is in L. Siti, La Valletta: un'Epoeca; Analisi del periodo storico e genealogico della città, Città di Castello, 1991, 353-355.
13 DocsT133/T137. The sequence and dating of many documents and plans relating to the planning of Valletta is extremely difficult to establish. This must be borne in mind when considering all this material.
14 DocT121, 68/71.
Roger Vella Bonavita

approved and adopted by the Order’s Council on 14 March. As Serbelloni sailed back to Messina that same day he could reflect on a mission (truly) accomplished.

The new city would have a main front of four cavaliers and four bastions. Laparelli’s decision to opt for this trace shows great originality. Bartolomeo Genga (1558) and Baldassare Lanci (1562) had specified three bastions joined by two long curtains while Don Garcia de Toledo’s proposal called for a bastion at either end of a long curtain at the neck of the peninsula. Laparelli’s solution increased the number of flanks sweeping the main ditch from four to six while the high central sector of the front was further strengthened by two large bastions pushed forward and supported by cavaliers to defend the central curtain. The four bastion trace was also more flexible so that it could be fitted to the lie of the land, which Laparelli was anxious to achieve. The superiority of Laparelli’s design over those made by the consultant engineers who preceded him is indisputable.

Laparelli did not describe the fortifications at any length in his report, presumably because his trace made the layout clear to all. All he did was to explain the role of the cavaliers and that there would be upper and lower batteries in the flanks of the bastions on the main front. Additionally, he specified a pomerio or military road to go around the enceinte, called for the terrepleins to be carefully laid and said that trees should be planted along them. As for the ditch, all one had to do, he wrote dryly, was to dig it.

Most of the report describes a carefully thought through urban street plan for the new city. The main road five canne wide would run down the centre of the city. Four narrower streets (3 canne wide) would run parallel to it; presumably two on either side and eight slightly narrower streets (3 canne wide) would cross them at right angles. The magisterial palace (as large in area as the Palazzo Farnese in Rome) would overlook a large square and there would be smaller piazze in front of the eight auberges of the Order’s Langues, hospital, conventual church and other unspecified public buildings. The urban area of the new city (90,000 square canne) would be three and a half times that of Birgu and Laparelli estimated that it could accommodate 1,125 large houses. While this demonstrates an ability to think things through, the report goes on to describe a concept that every town planner today should read and admire, for Laparelli wanted to create a city that combined defensive strength with elegance, beauty and comfort:

After these matters [i.e., the detailed design of the fortifications] are decided, I will lay out the streets — but not along the lines many here in Malta are advising. For the purposes of grandeur, I will provide only one wide street running through the centre of the city, but the others will be unashamedly narrow and they will have visually attractive and graceful bends. This is because cities with hot, dry climates call for narrow streets, whilst those in damp climates require wide streets so that the wind and the sun will keep them dry, whilst the others, being narrow, will remain cool, because they are less exposed to the sun’s heat. In windy places, as is Malta, it is necessary to find a way to minimise the effects of the winds. When winds blow unimpeded down open-ended straight streets, they do so with such force that it is uncomfortable to walk in them. It is customary to reduce the force of the wind with trees or with high walls but this is not possible in Malta, and particularly so on this bare and treeless site. There will be walls along the shores, but, since these will stand on such low ground, they will never be high enough to protect the streets from the winds. So I intend to reduce the wind effects by giving the streets the kind of graceful bends which can be seen in the streets of Pisa (Fig. 3). These have lines which are so pleasing to the eye that I am certain they were laid out like that deliberately in order to cut down the effect of winds.

Even today these ideas are breath-taking and it really is sad that Laparelli’s design for this concept (if he produced one) is now lost. In his famous fifteenth century De Re Aedificatoria, Leon Battista Alberti described when it was appropriate to use curved as opposed to straight streets. But while he had studied the great master, Laparelli took his inspiration from personal observation at Pisa. He abandoned the concept either because the

16 Doc122B, 41ff. Pisa was built on marshes at the mouth of the Arno and apparently the gracefully curving streets that so impressed Laparelli were originally estuarine waterways which were gradually filled in and turned into streets. See Vella Bonavita 2011A, 267 and notes 72/73. Fig. 3 reproduces an 1857 map of Pisa.

17 On the ‘political’ side of Serbelloni’s visit see A. Ganado, Valletta Città Nuova: a map history, Malta 2003, 143/144, 340/353. reproduces the account in Bosso, 739/741 which remains the main source for this important development. In fact Valette had already decided it was advisable to honour Don Garcia as the saviour of Malta a week earlier.

18 Battista Alberti described a military engineer in Sicily, as captain of artillery at Lapanto, as governor of the Goletta in Tunis (he was captured there but quickly ransomed) and finally as a commander in the Low Countries under Don John of Austria. For his pre-1566 career see Vella Bonavita 2011A, 125ff and 315ff.

19 Plan of the fortified enceinte went through relatively little change as far as we can tell from Laparelli’s surviving plans (Figs. 4 & 5)

20 Pisa
Laparelli remains in Malta as executive engineer at Valletta

In June that year, feeling that he had accomplished the task for which he had been sent to Malta and that construction could be left to the Order's executive engineers, he asked to be allowed to return to Tuscany. Valette thought otherwise and he

Order refused to accept it or because on further consideration he concluded that the site was unsuitable.

On 14 March the Order set the date for the city's formal foundation for 28 March, only two weeks later. Laparelli had his work cut out clearing and preparing the site of the ceremony and tracing the bastions and curtains of the city so that these could be formally named and dedicated. Perhaps he planned the programme too. The precise location of the foundation stone is not known. His account does not identify the spot and even Bosio is unsure. He writes that it was at the point of the bastion of St John, or perhaps near the main gate of the new city. After a solemn mass, a litany and a sermon, all present processed along the trace of the main front dedicating its bastions, its curtains and the main gate. Then the other bastions and curtains were named and dedicated. Immediately after Valette laid the foundation stone, an astrologer solemnly recorded the position of the sun with his astrolabe so that he could cast the horoscope for the new city. High officials of the Order covered the stone with mortared masonry and as flags unfurled, church bells rang and cannon roared salutes, every hand gun available contributed to a feu de joie and everyone cheered. Then Laparelli stepped forward, knelt and kissed the Grand Master's hands. Valette embraced him and placed a gold chain worth three hundred scudi around his neck. A medallion bearing the Grand Master's image hung from it.

For Laparelli this public recognition of his work was probably the highest point of his career. Early in April Philip II's engineer Fratino came to Malta to assess the project. After a heated on site debate with Laparelli, he deferred to Valette's views about the design of the main front and sent a positive report to the King. In due course the Marquis of Pescara arrived to command the troops stationed in Malta. Supplies and labourers started to trickle in from Sicily and Laparelli got on with building the fortifications.

**Laparelli remains in Malta as executive engineer at Valletta**

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1805, 11-14.

22 Docs 139, 140, 141. See also Bosio, 747-748.
23 Bosio, 747. One would think that the point of the bastion of St John was the ideal site.
25 Bosio, 747-748.
26 Docs 143 is a report probably written by Fratino discussing the deployment of these troops. A copy, seen by Philip II, is in AGS, Estado 1131-99.
28 Doc 143. Philip II sent one of his most able engineers, Giovanni Giacomo Palean (1527-1586) nicknamed Fratino to Malta to vet Laparelli's plan. A famous debate took place early in April 1566 during which Valette persuaded Fratino's to support Laparelli's design (see Bosio, 747/748). A report to the king as to the best strategy to adopt in case of another Ottoman attack (very probably by Fratino) is among Laparelli's papers (Doc 143).
29 Doc 143.
30 R. Vella Bonavita, 'Girolamo Cassar as a Military and Civil Engineer: the “Spina Report” of 1594', in 60th Anniversary of the Malta Historical Society Memoriam, J. Grima ed. Malta 2010 (Vella Bonavita 2010), 184. The Order lost Malta to Napoleon in 1798 precisely because it failed to withdraw its forces in an orderly fashion into the main defences and demonstrate a determination to withstand a long siege.
32 Docs 156-160.
33 Bosio, 781.
that summer was not good. Progress was indeed slow. In July Don Sande di Londono informed the Duke of Albuquerque that work on the 'fortifications of the new city progresses slowly because there are not enough pioneers on the island and few of them are any good.' Soon afterwards he informed the King that 'less than a thousand people are working [on the fortifications] mostly women and children.' By contrast Valette assured Philip that 'we are working on the fortifications of the new city with all possible diligence'. Most of the Maltese population, he wrote, including the women were engaged on the project. The Maltese who had taken refuge in Sicily were being encouraged to return and he had sent to Naples for a thousand labourers. Small wonder therefore that in August 1566 exasperated by the shortage of skilled labourers, even though funds were available, Laparelli addressed Valette, in these terms:

Now that we have seen, and continue to see, the generosity of so many Christian Princes in coming to the aid and assistance of this Holy Order, I believe that it is incumbent on us to do all in our power to meet the expectations of these Princes by making every effort to help ourselves and to use these funds. Speed is of the essence because we must address many urgent and necessary tasks, all of which are important. In the first place during the eight and a half months between now and May 1567 there will be some bad weather and the days will be short. If the Turkish armada arrives in May and finds nothing has been done here, the reputations of those in command in Malta will crumble; for they will be held fully responsible. The authorities here will have no excuse at all: these Princes and the whole of Christendom will hold them in contempt. Everybody will say; "How amazing! The Knights are happy to spend their own funds and make use of their own resources but they are incapable of taking advantage of the resources and money given to them!" All it will take for funds allocated to Malta to be diverted elsewhere is the death of a Prince or the demands of a new war.

He went on to offer to raise 500 skilled pioneers himself in the Papal States and bring them to Malta, provided he could offer them reasonable wages and conditions, which he drew up and presented with the report. The terms that he listed amply demonstrate Laparelli's experience in handling construction workers, his understanding of how they organised themselves in teams and his concern for their welfare. He was furious when Valette altered the terms in the fond expectation that skilled labourers would come to Malta for less pay than they earned in their own countries:

I do not consider it advisable to pay the stone cutters and other craftsmen less than what is paid to the Sicilian workers.

The proposed reduction in the number of officers worries me because, as I have pointed out, these are the 'gang leaders' who muster the workers and bring them to the work site. Such men are used to earning between 500 and 1,000 scudi a year. Offering pioneers five baiocchi a day less than they earn in Rome will not do at all - in fact they should be paid five baiocchi more.

In order to demonstrate my willingness to assist, I will undertake the task on the basis of the list of craftsmen required and the terms and conditions which I have submitted. If I can obtain better terms for the Order I will do so; if not I will bring the men here on the terms and conditions set out.

Also in August, he wrote sharply to Serbelloni in Sicily after learning that the Viceroy and his experts remained critical of his design for Valletta's main front. He dismissed the alleged weaknesses point by point, concluding bluntly:

The need now is for more material help and fewer words of advice. We need pioneers to be sent here and especially those with expertise in cutting rock in large quantities and carting away rubble. Time flies and the days will grow shorter and there will be bad weather and rain and wind. May is only eight and a half months away so be warned! There is a huge task in hand here and little time to carry it through - and without sufficient manpower we will fail!

With that thought and with my usual greetings from Malta on the 18th of August 1566; I remain,

Your Illustrious Lordship's most obliged servitor,

Francesco Laparelli.

Valette's dispatches to Spain in the autumn of 1566 speak more convincingly of progress. The bastions, curtains and cavaliers and ditch on the main front were taking shape and the construction of storehouses and cisterns were also well in hand, though he was worried that the fortifications would not be in a state of defence by May 1567 because of the shortage of labourers. A year later Laparelli remained frustrated by the lack of progress. His report to Valette reads in part:

The Lord our God has given us more time to prepare ourselves than we prayed for. It was said that we had nothing to fear from the Turks if we had a year in which to make ready. In fact we have had three years grace and it has not been enough. There has been massive assistance from the Christian Princes - more than one dared to hope for - and it was not fully appreciated. And now that there is need for help again how dare we face them, look them in the eye and beg for help when before, we had plenty of time and money? To conclude we must for the sake of our honour and our lives make ready to withstand a second siege so that we can show our capabilities to these Princes and prove that we can make adequate and effective preparations.
This report, or rather my advice, is clearly in conformity with the wishes of the Christian Princes who have sent, and are still sending, assistance to Malta. In fact the Pope has sent a commissioner to Malta for the express purpose of verifying that the money he donated is actually being spent on the new city. Don Pedro di Toledo now General of the Galleys (which are presently in Malta) has issued orders that Spanish funds are to be released only for expenditure on the new city and not for any other purpose. He who decides to change plans in midstream should examine his conscience very carefully. And indeed the Grand Master will recall what he promised again and again [in respect of his commitment to the project to build Valletta] to the Princes of Christendom and especially to King Philip of Spain — on the 22nd February 1566 and again in his letter of the first of March 1567 and on other occasions which now escape me — and he will similarly recall the assurances he gave so many times to His Holiness Pope Pius V and to other Christian Princes.  

These very blunt remarks are an interesting commentary on the status of military engineers in the later sixteenth century. Had any other subordinate addressed Valette in these terms he would have counted himself very lucky if he only spent a long time cooling his heels in the latrines of St Angelo. As it was, the Grand Master would have found it very difficult to explain to Cosimo I why he saw fit to punish a consultant engineer who was only doing his job and to boot telling the truth. One wonders if Valette appreciated his engineer’s honesty and smiled at his brand of sarcasm.

Though his offer to bring 500 skilled pioneers to Malta from the Papal States in mid-August 1566 was not accepted, soon afterwards Valette asked him to recruit a number of bombardiers and gunners as a matter of urgency and it appears he also wanted harquebusiers. Laparelli had trained with the harquebus in the Cortona militia and he may have worked with the artillery at the siege of Siena. Already towards the end of February 1566 he had drawn up and presented a long list of the stores, arms, munitions and victuals required by the garrison of the new city, including a fully equipped and staffed field hospital to treat the wounded and priests for the cure of souls. He also listed the artillery needed to furnish the main front and we can extrapolate from his figures that he wanted to arm each of the six flanks of the bastions with two 40-60lb cannon, one 30lb culverin, two 12lb sacres and two 20-40lb petrier cannon. Fifty bombardiers and a hundred and fifty ‘experienced assistants’ or gunners would serve these guns. Fifty musketeers armed with heavy muskets or falconets firing 2-6lb shot and a hundred harquebusiers equipped with harquebuses ‘da posta’ — also heavy weapons — would support the flanking batteries.  

Following Valette’s enquiry about the recruitment of harquebusiers and gunners in August 1566, Laparelli wrote a long report on how he would choose these specialists, for such they were, and how he would train them. He proposed to station an elite corps of four hundred and fifty highly trained (and well paid) gunners and harquebusiers on the main front; substantially more than the two hundred and fifty he had specified in February. He lists the skills the gunners would be expected to demonstrate and describes in great detail how they should load, train and fire their guns. He also stressed the safety measures the team on each gun should observe during action and, interestingly, he advocated mounting breech-loading light artillery in the flanks because of its capacity to sweep the ditches with grapeshot and to maintain a high rate of fire. The harquebusiers would engage in target practice every week. This would ensure that they learned how to use and maintain their weapons and, equally important, that they could hit a target at least once in every four rounds. His sketch of the target shows that it would be 1.4 metres (say 4’6”) in diameter and the harquebusiers would fire at it at a range of just over 314 metres (say 164 yards). They would be expected to maintain a certain rate of fire and those who could not hit the target the minimum number of times specified would be dismissed. There would be a cash prize for the best shot. Just as Laparelli describes the types of artillery, he also describes the role of the various types of harquebus then in use.  

Laparelli’s plans of Valletta

The study of Laparelli’s five surviving manuscript plans of Valletta (Fig. 4 Plan A and Fig. 5 Plans B, C, D, E) is a minefield which scholars must negotiate very carefully. In 2003 Albert Ganado published plan A (preserved in the Biblioteca Angelica in Rome) which is almost certainly by Laparelli. Its provenance is interesting, for it was collected by the Augustinian Fra Angelo Rocca, a map collector who travelled with the Prior General of the Augustinian Order, Fra Spirito Anguissola da Vicenza as his secretary. Fra Spirito had delivered the sermon at the foundation ceremony of Valletta on 28 March 1566. Possibly he acquired the plan during his stay in Malta and later passed it to Rocca. The Angelica plan is a simple trace of the fortified enceinte and Ganado suggests, perhaps correctly, that it is the earliest known plan of Valletta. Whether it is a copy of the plan Laparelli presented to Valette shortly before 14 March is debatable because apart from the enceinte, it shows the location of a spring. There are no

42 DocT164, 81/89 and 109/120.
43 DocT190.
44 See Vella Bonavita, 2012A, 51, 74/75.
45 DocT134. The harquebus da posta required a stand or rest as it was too heavy to be held with a hand supporting the muzzle.
46 DocT152. I am most grateful to Brigadier Claude Gaffiero, late commander of the Armed Forces of Malta, for his comments on the technical details given by Laparelli in this report.
47 Ganado, 495 and Pl. 123 (Fig. 4).
48 Ganado, 177-181. Rocca founded the Biblioteca Angelica in Rome.
49 Ganado, 177-178.
Fig. 4. Laparelli's plan A of Valletta (the 'Angelica' plan). Source: A. Ganado, Valletta Città Nuova: A map history, Malta 2003, 495.

Following page Fig. 5. Laparelli's plans B, C, D & E of Valletta. Laparelli Papers, courtesy of Contessa Laparelli Pitti Magi Diligenti (Foto Bazzechi), edited with semi-automatic xerography by John Mangion, Printing Manager, the Royal University of Malta.)
other features on this plan. The discovery of this spring (which still exists today) was hailed as a sign of God's blessing on the new city and it cannot be dismissed as a minor feature which need not be taken into account when considering the date of this plan. A water supply for Valletta was essential. Only six years earlier a Spanish army at Djerba surrendered when it ran out of water. The remains of thousands of Christian troops massacred there by the Ottomans were not buried until the mid-nineteenth century. Don Garcia postulated filling cisterns at St Elmo with water barged in from the spring at Marsa or via channels dug along the shore to the fort. The strategic report on the defence of Malta probably written by Fratino in April 1566, similarly highlighted the lack of water on Sciberras. It recommended building a number of cisterns in the ditch of St Elmo and creating an emergency stockpile of 2,000 barrels of wine in the fort. Laparelli too acknowledged that there was no water on Sciberras.

After the foundation of Valletta, the Grand Master was at pains to explain to Philip II that cisterns were being dug with all possible speed in Valletta wherever the lie of the land made it possible to channel rainwater. The spring was found during one such excavation; but although Laparelli made every effort to find the source and to improve the supply, its flow rapidly declined to a trickle. Nonetheless, since it did not run dry, the runoff was collected in cisterns specially dug for the purpose. Laparelli himself camped nearby in an abandoned Turkish pavilion. Some early engravings of Valletta give prominence to this spring. Its importance in providing a secure supply of water and as a propaganda tool to present Valletta in a good light to potential donors in Europe is clear, but precisely when it was discovered is not known. The earliest reference to it so far traced is in a brief report on Valletta (which will be discussed shortly) forwarded to the Grand Master by Laparelli on 18 June 1566 together with four copies of a plan of the city. The report states: 'The spot [on the plan] marked with the letter F inside a small square box is the spring of running water; newly discovered and of excellent quality.' If the phrase 'newly discovered' is to be taken literally, we may suppose that the spring came to light earlier that month or perhaps some time in May. This suggests that the Angelica map was produced some weeks after the foundation of Valletta. But possibly it is indeed one of Laparelli's early plans into which the location of the spring was later inserted. The use of orillons on the bastions facing Marsamxett in this plan points to early discussions about the all-important flanks and no glas is shown on the main front. Probably such details were resolved by the time Valletta was actually founded.

Different problems face the scholar considering Laparelli's other plans (Fig. 5 plans B, C, D and E). When writing his Breve discorso, mentioned above, Laparelli added a note to his draft: 'On 18 June 1566 I presented four plans with this report to My Lord the illustrious Grand Master.' Scholars have concluded that the four plans referred to are none other than the famous four plans (here called B, C, D and E) discovered in the Laparelli family archives in the 1960's. These are important because apart from the fortified enceinte they show how the street plan of Valletta evolved. All four plans are now in the library of the Accademia Etrusca di Cortona and they are undated. It is argued here that Laparelli gave the Grand Master four copies of one plan rather than four different 'piante'. Since the point is important it is worth examining the evidence in some detail.

On 18 June 1566 Laparelli presented two versions of a Breve discorso to Valette. The first of these is headed:

A short report (Breve discorso) on the plan (la pianta) of the new city now being built on the mount of Fort St Elmo in the name of God Our Lord and with his help and with the assistance of many Christian Princes.

The second is more informative:

Since the Grand Master has told me that he would like to send copies of the design of the trace (disegni della pianta) of the new city to His Holiness the Pope, to the Kings and other Christian Princes, it has occurred to me that, in addition to the plans, it is appropriate to send with them this brief report (breve discorso) that follows here about the plan (pianta) of the city so that all can be better understood.

The four plans therefore were intended to illustrate copies of (four) reports to be sent to the crowned heads of Europe and the Pope. In both reports (they are almost identical) Laparelli praises the site of Valletta, describes how he planned its fortifications and explains that the sites of all the cavaliers except two are to remain clear of buildings in case it becomes necessary to build them during a siege. In the second report he also provides a key for the 'accompanying plan'. This lists the bastions, the darsena or haven for 10 galleys and the newly discovered spring. He says nothing at all about a street plan (or plans). In other words he wrote a report which Valette's secretariat could copy to the Pope, the Kings of France and

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52 Doc1318, 97/105.
53 Doc1314, 47/48, 60/76, 80.
54 Doc141, 24.
55 AGS, Esteso 1131-103; 26 July 1566: Valette to Philip II, describes at some length his efforts to channel water to cisterns and his joy at the discovery of a spring which, though small, yielded sweet water.
56 Bosio, 781/782. Doc154, Laparelli had a channel dug from his house to the spring but whether to take water from it or to feed its cisterns with rainwater from his roof is unclear.
57 Guado, Pits. 135, 136, 137, 147.
58 Laparelli detested orillions see Doc86, 432/435.
59 V. Vella Bonavita, Francesco Laparelli architetto militare a Malta' tr E. Mimi, in Francesco Laparelli architetto cartonec a Malta, E. Mimi ed., Cortona 2009, 59-53. Those and six other plans (including an outline map of Malta) were donated to the Accademia Etrusca by Contessa Laparelli Pitti Maggi Diligent in 2009.
60 Doc145, 3/5. The original reads (Doc145, 27/28) reads 'l' 18 di Giugno 1566 lo presente i piante con il sopradetto disegno dra. Monsignore IlII° Gran Mastro.'
61 R. Vella Bonavita, Francesco Laparelli architetto militare a Malta' tr E. Mimi, in Francesco Laparelli architetto cartonec a Malta, E. Mimi ed., Cortona 2009, 59-53. Those and six other plans (including an outline map of Malta) were donated to the Accademia Etrusca by Contessa Laparelli Pitti Maggi Diligent in 2009.
Spain and the Emperor each with an identical plan attached. To labour the point: since only his office could produce plans – not Valette’s secretariat – in addition to the discorso Laparelli also submitted four identical copies of a plan of Valletta. In the final analysis there would have been absolutely no point in sending plans showing alternative and unexplained schemes for Valletta’s street layout to Catholic Europe’s principal heads of state.

The discorso – and presumably the plan – certainly reached Rome and doubtless the other capitals of Europe, for a number of contemporary engravings publish the discorso more or less verbatim. None however reproduce the features described in Laparelli’s text precisely; certainly they do not show any street plans. Some show additional features not mentioned in the report – such as the chapel dedicated of Our Lady of Victories, the magisterial palace and a main road similar to the one in Plan B – but others omit one or other of those listed in his key. Engravers and publishers produced variants to Laparelli’s plans as more details became available to them. As Albert Ganado has shown, the study of manuscript plans and engravings of Valletta is fascinating but very difficult.

Laparelli’s style seems to have pleased Valette for in 1567 he asked him to write progress reports for the Papal and Spanish officials who controlled the funds donated for the building of Valletta’s fortifications. On another occasion he briefed the Order’s ambassadors on the numbers and types of artillery needed for arming the flanks in the bastions of Valletta’s main front in order to guide them when they requested donations of armaments from heads of state in Europe. The Order’s Conservatore also asked for a progress report which he intended to forward to an unnamed important personage. In today’s parlance Laparelli provided expert information to back the Order’s ‘public relations campaign’ for material support for Valletta.

But what are we to make of plans B, C, D and E shown in Fig. 5? While the plans do not show any major evolution in the overall design of the fortifications, plans C, D and E demonstrate the evolution of Valletta’s street plan. This is what makes these plans so important in the history of town planning even though they do not show any major evolution in the overall design of the fortifications, plans C, D and E demonstrate the evolution of Valletta’s street plan. This slopes gently down from the narrow covered way on the counterscarp of the main ditch to what seems to be another covered way behind a wide and steeply sloping outward facing parapet cut into solid rock; a very odd layout indeed. There are also changes to the cavaliers. In plans D and E the cavalier at St Barbara’s bastion appears to have been redesigned as a ‘retreat’. This was not built and there are no references to it in the sources; but clearly the modification was given serious consideration. More significantly in plan E the cavaliers on the bastions of SS Peter & Paul and St Michael, which were shown in all the earlier plans, are omitted. Instead Laparelli divides their terrepleins into two levels. The last major change to the enceinte was at the mouth of the ditch on the Marsamxett side of the main front. This remained unchanged in the first four plans but in the fifth, the counterscarp of the ditch was extended to run along the shore towards the bastion of St Andrew thus masking the ditch from fire from the ‘isolotto’. This modification reflects concerns about the vulnerability of this end of the main front.

An interesting detail in the fortifications shown on the last three plans is the evolution of the design of the galley port or ‘darsena’, originally proposed in 1557 by Gian Giacomo Leonardi who never visited Malta. Laparelli’s first proposal for an oval basin within the walls was inserted into plan C after the fortifications and streets had been drawn. In plan D, he placed the trefoil shaped galley port outside the enceinte. The defensive wall pierced by three gates was to go around the basin separating it from the urban area. These do not articulate at all well with the street plan and the scheme has an amateurish and unsatisfactory appearance. The solution in plan E is for a rectangular basin located inside the walls and aligned with the curtain. This version only appears on later manuscript maps and engravings. It

62 See Ganado, 2003, 181ff. Bosio, 744, states that a pavilion with an altar was set up for the foundation ceremony of Valletta on the very spot selected for a chapel which was built during Valette’s grand mastership. The chapel was dedicated to Our Lady of Victories, perhaps after the battle of Lepanto in 1571 when Pius V instituted the feast of Our Lady of Victories. Valette was buried in its crypt. The date construction started is not known but it was built when Laparelli drafted his plans C, D and E for it appears on all three. The fact that the chapel does not align with the street plans in plans D and E indicates that construction was already in progress by the end of summer 1566 at the very latest when Laparelli started building his own house.

63 Docs.167 and 168.

64 Doc.166.

65 Doc.T165. The Gran Conservatore was the Treasurer of the Order.

66 Doc.153. B.C.D & E.

67 These copies of the plans are easier to ‘read’ than colour photographs of the originals due to discoloration caused by damp. They were prepared by semi-automatic xerography in the late 1960’s by John Mangion, Printing Manager, The Royal University of Malta from black and white photographs.

68 The outer banquette and steeply sloping parapet may well have been the entrenchment thrown up by the Marquis of Pescara’s German troops while they were stationed on Sciberras in the late spring of 1566 to protect the new fortifications while they were being built. The entrenchment is located approximately on the 800 contour line in a map published with Pompeo Florian’s 1576 treatise on the fortifications of Valletta (see Ganado, Pl.168).

69 Vella Bonavita 2006, 30.

70 Vella Bonavita 2006, 30.

71 A similar galley port appears in at least two contemporary engravings (Ganado, Plts. 136/137).
is smaller than its predecessors and its gates still articulate clumsily with the streets. Of course Laparelli treated this project as an integral part of the defences and therefore its design took priority over the street plan. A final observation about the ‘darsena’ may be made here. It was designed as a safe haven for the galleys during a siege for there was no provision for docking and storage facilities. These remained available but only in peacetime in the Order’s naval facilities in Grand Harbour.

Laparelli evidently devoted much thought to Valletta’s main street. In plan B it would run from inside the main gate along the spine of Sciberras and down to the ditch of St Elmo. Quentin Hughes suggests it may have been the plan on which Laparelli started to lay out his original concept for Valletta’s streets with ‘graceful curves’ but this is only a supposition. By the time he drafted plan C it had been decided to locate the magisterial palace behind St James Cavalier. A raised passage on columns between the palace and the cavalier, shown on the plan, would provide swift access to the highest point on the fortifications and from there the Grand Master could direct the defence. The palace would also stand next to the chapel of Our Lady of Victories, a very evocative and symbolic building on which construction commences immediately. 

The site for the palace remained unchanged on all three street plans. In fact the main street shown in plan B appears on at least two early engravings. See Ganado, Pits. 135 and 137. The main street proposed in plan C was inelegant; the main street ended at a blank wall at the back of St James Cavalier, the entrance to the city via the main gate lacked grandeur and focus and, overall, the street plan was very unbalanced. Worse still, Laparelli resorted to a simple grid iron street pattern standardised on the length of the projected palace. Except at the peripheries where many of the blocks did not fully fit onto the site, this produced large square blocks which were difficult to break up into reasonably sized subdivisions for housing. Already some sites were being reserved for specific uses. The building on the Marsamxett side of the city near Fort St Elmo appears on all the plans and was probably earmarked for the arsenal. Further round, again on the Marsamxett side, a long structure appears on all three plans. It was perhaps intended to be the hospital. On all three plans there is another large square building (an auberge?) to the left of St Christopher’s bastion and a large building with a colonnade next to St Michael’s bastion. This was evidently to be a convent or monastery and church. A similar complex appears on plan C.


73 Valetta had established his operational headquarters in a tall tower in Birgu during the siege.

74 R. de Giorgio, A City by an Order, Malta 1986, 156 and n. 22.

75 Hughes, 69, was not impressed by Laparelli’s small sketches of civil and ecclesiastical buildings on these plans. In defence of Laparelli one may suggest that he simply sketched in rough ideas. His formal architectural drawings in Rome and Carlotto, though not outstanding, are by no means incompetent.

76 The other square is two blocks below the site proposed for the conventual church.


behind St John’s Cavalier. This does not appear in plan D but a small church is shown on plan E and the entire block next to it is taken up by another building. There is a large cruciform church in the centre of the city on the last two plans, presumably the Order’s conventual church. Of these buildings only the chapel of Our Lady of Victories was built in the position indicated in these plans.

In his second draft of the street plan (plan D), Laparelli returned to his original concept for the all-important main road of the city. As in plan B it would run more or less down the centre of Valletta from the main gate to Fort St Elmo. The chapel of Our Lady of Victories would stand next to the magisterial palace. He fitted three streets (his original specification was for two) on either side of the main road and he laid out the streets crossing the city such that they produced large blocks on either side of the main street while blocks half and even a quarter the size occupied the land sloping away to the harbours on either side and down to Fort St Elmo. This created many more sub-dividable blocks than previously. Plan E is the last surviving street plan. Here he increased the available space for subdivisions considerably by reducing the number and size of the large blocks in the centre of the city. He refined the spacing of the streets and added a new street behind St John’s Cavalier. He also allowed himself the luxury of establishing two squares, one of which was in front of the magisterial palace now modified to front onto the main street.

Probably so that he could locate the large blocks of building land on reasonably level ground, Laparelli drew lines on plans D and E to show where the terrain sloped steeply away from the (relatively) level area behind the centre of the main front; contour lines had not yet been invented. These two plans also appear to show the boundary of the proposed ‘colloachio’, or area within which members of the Order had to live. It is indicated by a line running down the centre of the streets and takes in the prime sites behind the main front and along the main street, the most level parts of the city. This suggests that the Order contemplated developing an open colloachio as it had in Birgu rather than a segregated enclave as in Rhodes. The line enclosed the most level and therefore the most desirable building land. The area of the colloachio was reduced in the last plan. The project was never realised.

Until relatively recently, Laparelli’s inspiration or ‘model’ for the street plan of Valletta has not received much attention. The possibility of the street plan of Carlentini in Sicily being the model appeared plausible. But it is more likely that he had the street plan of the Borgo Pio in mind. This was the new suburb between Castel S. Angelo and the Vatican which he himself had designed and laid out in the early 1560s. Valletta’s main street is exactly as wide as Borgo Pio (5 canne). This
also runs from a main gate to the ditch of a fortress and it too has a grid pattern of streets bisecting each other at right angles.\textsuperscript{78} It is unlikely that these similarities are coincidental and probably we need look no further for his source of inspiration. Quentin Hughes dismisses Valletta's street plan as an uninteresting grid iron.\textsuperscript{79}

But there is more to Laparelli's plan for Valletta than that. In 2004 Thomas Jäger published a mathematical analysis of plans D and E and came up with fascinating results:

Laparelli's drawings give evidence of the following: as his design took shape he did not aim to create any static regularity but rather composed a dynamic axially symmetrical urban structure with block sizes gradually decreasing from the central axis to the waterfront flanks and from the landward front to the sea wards quarters at the tip of the peninsula. The compositional principle he relied on was certainly a trigonometric set of proportions, coherently derived from a single circular diagram (Fig. 6).\textsuperscript{80}

Jäger has brought to light a hitherto unsuspected aspect of Laparelli's intellectual makeup which presupposes a very firm grounding in mathematics, geometry and trigonometry. One of Laparelli's extant papers does show that he understood the application of Euclidian geometry to the design of bastions but its application to an urban street plan presupposes a greater depth of knowledge and expertise. Possibly the obscure and unnamed assistant teacher who taught young Francesco mathematics and geometry in Cortona during the 1530s, instilled his pupil with a love of the mathematical sciences and the lad continued to immerse himself in their application to fortification and town planning.\textsuperscript{81} There were Italian treatises he could have studied. At Valletta, therefore, Laparelli developed an intellectually satisfying solution which was easy to apply when actually laying out the streets and easily modified to fit in with the requirements of the city's fortifications. Even the widths of the streets that he specified (5, 3½ and 3 canne) are geometrically related (Fig. 7).\textsuperscript{82}

The dating of the last three plans of Valletta is extremely difficult. A point to be borne in mind is that Laparelli's street plan went through further changes before the definitive master plan for Valletta's streets was approved. Thus far his final 'master plan' plan has not been traced but it would have been developed before the

\textsuperscript{78} P. Marconi, 'I progetti inediti della Valletta: dal Laparelli al Florian', in L'architettura a Malta della preistoria all'Ottocento, Atti del XVI congresso di storia dell'architetture, Malta 11-16 settembre 1967, Malta 1970, 370-371; comes to the same conclusion but goes too far when he also argues that Laparelli reproduced Polyblus' specifications for a Roman military camp at the Borgo Pio. See G. Petrucci, 'La Città Pia: un'espansione urbana del Cinquecento', in Storia Urbana, 64, 1993, 30-32.

\textsuperscript{79} Hughes, 72.

\textsuperscript{80} T. Jäger, 'The Art of Orthogonal Planning. Laparelli's Trigonometric Design of Valletta', Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, 63, No.1, 2004, 11. Every effort was made by the author to get in touch with Thomas Jäger and with the University of California Press to obtain clearance for the reproduction of Figs. 6 and 7.

\textsuperscript{81} See G. Mandini, Contributo dei cortonesi alla cultura italiana, Florence 1922, 89. Laparelli was certainly familiar with Euclidian geometry (see Vella Bonavita, 2011 A, 54) and used it to design pentagons and polygons as in DecIo, as did other military engineers such as G. Lanteri, Due dialoghi del modo di disegnare le piante delle forterze secondo Euclide, Venezia 1557.

\textsuperscript{82} Jäger, 21.
Order set up a commission early in 1569 to draw up and shortly afterwards to enforce the approved building regulations and also to manage the sale of building plots. Laparelli sat on this commission and was present at contracts for the sale of land. It was four years therefore before building land in the new city was made available to the general public. At some stage, narrow streets (Strait Street and Zachary Street, which with its extensions Old Treasury Street and Frederick Street, doubtless was also originally conceived as a long narrow street) were inserted on either side of the main thoroughfare to divide all the large blocks in the centre of the city. When these were inserted into Laparelli’s street plan is unknown. In the 1570s, after Laparelli’s departure and death, further modifications permitted the development of the magisterial palace, the square in front of it and the conventual church.

The start of the urban development of Valletta

Many questions remain to be answered as regards the early urban development of Valletta. We do know, however, that in October 1566 Laparelli started building a house for himself in Valletta. His building accounts, as well as a plan and drawings of some of its features survive:

On 21st October 1566 in the name of our Lord God and the entire heavenly court, I Francesco di Niccolo Laparelli da Cortona have started building a house in the new city named Valletta in the Island of Malta. I am building it for myself and my heirs with my own money.

The precise location of this house is not known though one of the entries reveals that it stood close to the spring. We do not know if he ever lived there either. The accounts suggest that the cellar was completed but it is not certain that the ground floor was ever habitable as the accounts tail off at the end of April 1567 only six months after construction started. The plan of the house (Fig. 8) and sketches of some features show that he intended to build a substantial residence with eight rooms on the ground floor, an imposing hall and a staircase leading down to the cellars and perhaps to an upper floor too. The house had windows onto streets on three sides which is unusual today and would have been unusual then. One has to ask oneself if he would have been permitted to build this house, before the master plan for the city had been approved.

83 The Order apparently started issuing building permits to members of the Order before the general public was allowed to purchase land. For example the knight Romegas bought a plot of land at what is now the corner of Old Bakery and 5. Lucia Streets on 3 November 1568. Probably the definitive street plan was in place by then; see C. Testa, Romegas, Malta 2002, 113. Earlier in 1567 Valette’s temporary quarters were constructed with dry stone walls near the newly built chapel of Our Lady of Victories. (See Bosio, 792).
84 Doc154, title page.
85 Doc154, 180/181. All picchierini che han facto la trincha alla cantina che va verso la fontana li ha dati tari quindici & 6 xo. The plan of the house (Fig. 8) is at Doc154g.
86 Doc154g/h. The details of window mouldings are interesting and the stone fireplace is possibly derived from Serlio. See V. Hart and P. Hicks, Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture, New Haven and London 1996, Book iv, 139.

Apart from the record of expenditure and its plan, nothing is known about the building, the first recorded private residence to be built in the new city.

There is the strong possibility therefore that the street plans discussed here were drawn up before October 1566. But if so, why did it take four years or so to publish the building regulations approved in 1569 and call for public interest in purchasing building land? The delay could have been due to a number of factors one of which (as at the Borgo Pio) was the time it took to clear the land, to lay out at least the principal streets and dig the main drains. The 1569 regulations specified: ‘that space and openings shall be provided in the foundations of every house for a conduit to connect with the ‘gran condotto’ of the street.’ Another regulation stipulated: ‘that everyone is obliged to dig at least one cistern in his house [to collect rain water] and also to provide a place (luoco) for his ‘necessitidì’ and ‘immunditidì’ to be disposed of into the ‘gran condotto’ via the connecting conduit.’

By January 1568 Laparelli had been in Malta for three years and he asked for leave to visit his family in Cortona. Valette was a hard man but he was fair, even if he possibly did not care for Francesco’s brand of humour. He gave Francesco leave to see his family. The Grand Master’s letter of introduction to Pius V dated 25 April would be described today as a professional reference. He wrote that Laparelli was an indefatigable and competent worker whose contribution to the design and construction of the fortifications was invaluable and much to his credit. He commended the engineer to His Holiness as ‘an exceptional man’ fit to be ‘shown the great affection that his qualities and worth deserve’. High praise indeed. Valette was confident that the Pope would be delighted to learn from...
Laparelli himself how well work on the defences of Valletta was progressing, concluding that:

Your Holiness will therefore understand how absolutely vital it is that he does not unduly delay his return to Malta.90

Laparelli left detailed instructions for works to be carried out during his absence and these were given or passed on to Girolamo Cassar. These notes provide a snapshot of how far construction had progressed and are also of interest because Laparelli described tasks that he wanted to carry out himself. He was anxious not to give offence by implying that his subordinate lacked competence and this says much about his consideration for those who worked with him:

although I have confidence in your knowledge and competence I believe it is advisable that you consult with me in respect of the specifications for the parapets. I myself take advice when I am designing these; I never build them unless I have first thoroughly and widely consulted. So lay the string courses where I have specified and I will return to this issue. My directions about parapets also apply to those on the counterscarp - that is to say on the covered way.91

Laparelli made his way to Rome and then to Tuscany, where he sat for his portrait and he was still there in August 1568 when news arrived of Valette’s death. The new Grand Master, Frà Pietro del Monte (1568-1572) was a Tuscan and an enthusiastic supporter of the Valletta project. He evidently held Cosimo to his promise to Valette and requested that Laparelli return to Malta, which he did in early December 1568. He found that work on the city was proceeding with all possible speed. Some 3,000 labourers were working on the defences according to Bosio and a report dated 1 December 1568 paints a positive picture of progress.92

In the new year, del Monte decided to take the city’s urban development in hand. He appointed Laparelli to a small commission set up in February 1569 to draw up building regulations.93 The commission produced an admirably succinct but comprehensive set of building regulations in Italian which were sensible and enforceable.94 Precisely how Laparelli contributed to these regulations is not known but, given his experience with town planning in Rome he doubtless did make suggestions. The Order had a record of enacting town planning and building regulations going back to 1531.95 The new capitoli

The commission was established on 3 February 1569. AOM. 92 ffl41/142 These is a transcript in Sisi 1991. 470-472. See de Giorgio. 11S/117 and 226/227, for a conclusion: Laparelli dies off Crete

Laparelli’s subsequent movements are not recorded. He probably sailed from Messina on 12 August on board Gio. Andrea Doria’s squadron. It arrived in Otranto on the twentieth of for Valletta were approved on 12 May 1569 and published two weeks later by Notary Placido Abel ‘alta intelligibili voce proclamante’ with the assistance of the crier Ambrogio la Bugier in three public places: in the square of the ‘new city’ (i.e., Birgu), in an unspecified location in Valletta and also at the Manderaggio.96 Thereafter, Laparelli appeared before the notary for most of the sales of building plots and he would have made sure that the purchasers understood the regulations and the penalties for infringements. As Ganado observes ‘when the capitoli of 1569 were promulgated all those involved in the building of houses in Valletta knew precisely the legislative regime to which they were subject.’97

Laparelli would have been extremely busy supervising work on the fortifications after Girolamo Cassar left Malta in April 1569 on a study tour of Italy.98 But there was a heaven-sent opportunity for him to leave Malta the next year when the Ottomans attacked Cyprus, then in the possession of the Venetian Republic. Spain and the Papacy made common cause with La Serenissima and this set in train a chain of events leading to the Catholic victory at Lepanto and glory to all who participated in that great battle. Laparelli volunteered to sail with the Order’s squadron to join the fleet being mustered to relieve Cyprus. It would have been difficult for the Grand Master to reject his request.

And so it came to pass that Francesco Laparelli settled his account with the Order’s Treasury (his bankers): ‘On 21 June (1579) I received another certificate for 546 scudi and 8 tori for my salary up to today because,’ he wrote, ‘I am leaving.’99 One can almost feel his excitement and relief. That day the Sacred Council handed Frà Giovanni Francesco di San Clemente his orders as Captain General of the Order’s squadron. He was to rendezvous with Gio. Andrea Doria in command of the Spanish fleet at Messina. The squadron left Malta on 26 June with some 200 extra Knights and gentlemen volunteers on board its four galleys. Laparelli was doubtless among them. When the galleys reached Messina, Laparelli probably joined the Spanish fleet thereby avoiding involvement in the disaster that befell the Order’s vessels. As it sailed back to Malta laden with provisions (on San Clementi’s account), the squadron was surprised and all but annihilated by a superior Ottoman squadron under Uluğ Ali. Eventually San Clemente and his Maltese pilot Orlando Magri (a hero of the Great Siege) were executed in Malta after being found guilty of gross negligence and incompetence.100

Conclusion: Laparelli dies off Crete

Laparelli’s subsequent movements are not recorded. He probably sailed from Messina on 12 August on board Gio. Andrea Doria’s squadron. It arrived in Otranto on the twentieth of

90 D0CT173. 91 DocT173, 92/114. 92 Ganado, 215; Sii, 462ff. 93 The commission was established on 3 February 1569; AOM, 92, f117, quoted in Ganado 2003, 221. See also Bosio, 829 quoted in Sii, 468 and Ganado 2003 221. 94 AOM, 92 M141/142. There is a transcript in Sisi 1991, 470-472. See de Giorgio, 11S/117 and 226/227, for a transcript, translation and commentary. Ganado, 221-223 consider the regulations in a wider context too. See also N. Marconi, 'Regole, Tradizioni e Pratiche Operative nella Costruzione di Valletta "Città Nuova di Malta", in Valletta: Città, architettura e costruzione sotto il segno delle fede e della guerra, Nicoletta Marconi ed., Rome 2011, 100-103. 95 They are listed in de Giorgio, 117. 96 de Giorgio 118, quoting the notary. 97 Ganado, 225. 98 See Vella Bonavita, 2010, 180. 99 DocT177. Laparelli last appears on a contract of sale published by Notary Placido Abel on 6 June 1570, while Cassar formally replaced him on the commission on 20 August that year (Vella Bonavita, 2010, 180, n.30). I must thank Dr Joan Abela for her assistance at the Notarial Archives. 100 Testa 115/117.
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that month, joining Marcantonio Colonna's scratch papal squadron hastily commissioned with borrowed Venetian galleys and manned from the eastern provinces of the Papal States (through Ancona). There is however a final document, a letter from Laparelli to a gentleman in Malta. It was written in Messina or Otranto or perhaps in Suda Bay in Crete. Fortunately it is a personal letter that tells much about his feeling and ambitions. The letter is not addressed nor is it dated, but internal evidence makes it clear that it was written after he had left Malta for good in June 1570. He had left Malta he said because he was driven by natural ambition:

In the first place, while I learned something of the science of fortification, I did this in order to be able to participate in sieges as a defender as well as a besieger. I most definitely never intended to make a career out of supervising master masons! I did serve in Florence and then in the Papal States, working with soldiers and engineers; that is true — and I am glad that I did — but now that the world has proof of my abilities that will suffice. Let me assure you that I will not undertake any more work as an engineer unless I am given the command of a fortress and entrusted with total responsibility for all aspects of its defence.

I was driven entirely by pride: I left Malta because I wanted more fame and less of the hard grind (più di fumo che di arrosto). That is why I wanted to go: I wanted to go to places where I could hope to find prestigious positions — positions that are worthy of soldiers — positions which in Malta are not available to those who are not Knights.

His ambition to command is borne out by the maps of Crete, the Peloponnese, Cyprus and Asia Minor among his papers on which he had marked a large number of cities, mainly on the coast. Laparelli had joined the Catholic fleet, therefore, because it offered a not-to-be-repeated opportunity for advancement, especially with his patron again in a position of power and influence as commander of the fleet's artillery. If the Ottomans were soundly defeated there could be an opportunity for him to be given an independent command and if not, there was an opportunity to win fame and glory and perhaps even fortune. None of these things would happen if he stayed in Malta. Before he could realise any of his ambitions the fleet was devastated by a 'contagion' as it lay off Suda Bay in Crete. Men died like flies and in October 1570, Capitano Francesco di Niccolo di Marcantonio Laparelli da Cortona also perished.

101 A. Guglielmoniti, Marcantonio Colonna alla Battaglia di Lepanto (1576-1573), Rome 1887, 48-49.
102 Doc178.
103 Doc178.
104 Doc5179/181.
105 Venuti, 56, says it was bubonic plague (la peste). Guglielmoniti, 161-192, blames a combination of plague brought by the Venetians, malnutrition, losses at sea and shipwreck. P. Pantera, L'Armata Nuova, Rome 1614, 95-96, relates that the Christian fleet lost some 35,000 oarsmen, sailors and soldiers before the battle of Lepanto and blames this on rotten stores supplied by corrupt Venetian contractors rather than on plague. N. Capponi, Victory of the West: the story of the Battle of Lepanto, London 2006, 146, suggests typhoid and, in a conversation, blamed botulism and/or ergotism from contaminated or infected food and especially grain, both of which would have spread like wildfire in the cramped unhygienic conditions on the galleys.