

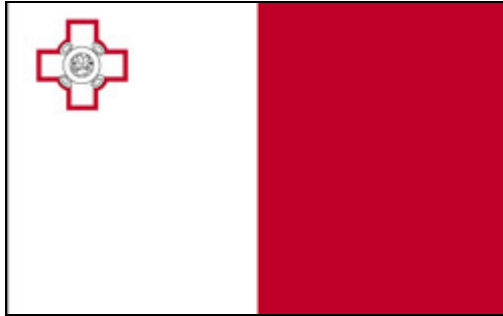
## The History of Malta



by Valeria Lo Iacono

## **An introduction to Maltese history**

Maltese history has been shaped by the several civilizations that the island has been in contact with throughout the centuries. Many civilisations invaded Malta because of its strategic position in the Mediterranean Sea. The closest contacts that Malta has had, however, are with the neighbour island of Sicily.



## **Malta between 5200 BC and 3600 BC – the Neolithic**

The first inhabitants arrived in Malta around 5200 BC, probably from Sicily. They presumably lived in caves and we have pottery items dating back to this period, that show, by their style, that Malta already had cultural and economical contacts with other Mediterranean civilizations.

## **Malta between 3600 BC and 2500 BC – the Temple Period**

This historical period in Malta is called the Temple Period, because many temples were built on the island, many of which are still standing and in surprisingly good state of preservation for such old buildings. We can say that Malta has the oldest freestanding buildings in the world. We do not know much about the civilisation that built these temples and we do not know how they disappeared, if they were destroyed or if they were assimilated by the following cultures.

## **Malta between 2500 BC and 1000 BC – the Bronze Age**

Of this period in Malta, there are still the remnants of some villages and some dolmens, big standing structures made using slabs of stone.

## **Maltese history between 1000 BC and 870 AD – Phoenicians, Greeks and Romans**

In this long period of history Malta saw the arrival of different civilisations:

- In 1000 BC Malta was invaded by the Phoenicians, a population of sailors and merchants who came from the area where today there is Lebanon.

- In 720 BC the Greeks founded a colony on Malta, called Melite (which in ancient Greek means honeybee)
- In 400 BC Carthage (a Phoenician colony in northern Africa) dominated Malta
- In 218 BC the Romans occupied Malta. Under the Romans Malta flourished until, in 440 AD the Vandals occupied Malta. In 533 the Roman general Belisarius re-conquered Malta, but since then, until the Arabs arrived, Malta became part of the Roman province of Sicily.

### **Malta between 870 AD and 1091 – the Arabs**

In 870 the Arabs conquered Malta. Under the Arabs Malta flourished. The Arabs introduced new irrigation techniques and Arabic shaped the Maltese language that, as we still know it today, is a Semitic language with influence from Italian and English.

### **Maltese history between 1091 and 1530 – Malta is assimilated to Sicily**

In 1091 Count Roger I of Sicily, started to assert the first Norman influence over Malta, which his son Roger II consolidated. Since then, the history of Malta became connected with the history of Sicily; the island was subjected to the same dominations that [Sicily had and was governed](#) by various barons and feudal lords. So, Malta saw in succession the domination of Swabia, France, Aragon, Catalonia and Castile. When the two kingdoms of Aragon and Castile became united, in 1479, Malta became part of the Spanish Empire.

### **Malta from 1530 to 1800 – the Knights of Malta**

In the XVI century, the Ottoman Empire became very powerful and started threatening the



Mediterranean populations. In order to protect the southern part of the Mediterranean against the Turkish, the emperor Charles V gave the Knights of St John the control of Malta. The Knights of St John came originally from the island of Rhode, which they had to leave following the Ottoman invasion.

Under the Knights of St John, who then became known as Knights of Malta, the island thrived. As the knights were very rich they invested a lot in Malta and they built many of

public buildings and invested in art. The knights of Malta also defended Malta successfully from the Turkish during several attacks, including the Great Siege of 1565.

In 1798 Napoleon invaded Malta and the French army was looting and robbing the island of its treasures. The French invasion lasted until 1800.

### **1800 – 1964 Malta is part of the British Empire**

In 1800 the British arrived in Malta to defend the island against Napoleon. After that, Malta became part of the British Empire, and it became an important part of it, because of its strategic position in the Mediterranean, especially after the Suez Channel was created in Egypt. Malta also played a key role during the II World War and defended itself very well during the enemy attacks.

### **The history of Malta from 1964 until today – the independence and the EU**

After a failed attempt to integrate Malta into the United Kingdom, in 1964 Malta became independent as part of the Commonwealth. In 1974 Malta became a republic and in 1979 the last British forces left the island. In 2004 Malta joined the EU as a full member.

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Valeria Lo Iacono writes for [Malta & Gozo Guides](#) and also for [Massage and sauna guides](#)