Absorbed in the Limestone Garden

Registering the Historic Island Metropolis Valletta

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Abstract

The term *landscape metropolis* and its associated practice of reading the city through the terminology and 'lens' of the landscape rather than the normal conventions of urban studies is generally applied to the contemporary city and its expansion beyond the historic centre. Yet, this approach also chimes with the peculiarities of the historic island city and the close relationship such cities have with the restricted, liminal ground on which they are founded. This paper explores the hypothesis that an island city can be understood as a metropolitan landscape as a consequence of peculiarities of geography, ecology, culture, place, and resiliency. By focusing on one such city, Valletta, a heightened case, in which a 16th Century metropolis was founded as Renaissance 'ideal', the paper examines the reciprocity between this projected 'ideal' and the actual landscape where the metropolis is fused and, indeed, confused with the landscape so that the spatial coherence between city and landscape determines the nature of the metropolis.

Keywords

metropolitan landscape, ideal city, island, garden, place, Valletta

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Introduction

"Geographic isolation favors endemism, that is to say, the originality of creatures, their uniqueness in the universe. It also favors the originality of ideas. For people who have the Southern Cross in the position of the Great Bear as their celestial point of reference, it is normal that their way of seeing the world, and consequently of representing it, assumes different forms" (Clément, 2015 p.55).

On an island, there is a deep, intrinsic relationship between human settlement and the landscape upon which it is settled. This is primarily due to the limitations of ground, resource, and a heightened climatic condition. The establishment of a completely new, 'originary', metropolis on an island makes this relationship particularly acute. The 'ideal' is altered by the resistance of the landscape; its spatial limitations and topography compress and deepen the imposition of its grain. Geographical isolation necessitates material invention and efficiency as an inevitable response to limitations of resource. This invariably forms a direct connection between the quarried land below and the constructed city above. Climatic exposure and an insular ecology require the city to constantly engage with landscape, to collect and hold water, to channel the sea breezes, to form depth and shadow, to create habitable areas and to tailor environments.

Geographic isolation favours expediency, a practical form of invention that deviates from conventional norms. One has to work with what is available and thus the limited land itself. It is this direct engagement with the landscape and the adaptation of its materials and processes that make it 'endemic', strange, and original. Within an age of globalisation where the relationship between material and its mineral source has been blurred through the speed and ease of transportation there is much to learn here. Within the placeless drift of the contemporary landscape metropolis, the sensibility of the historic island city offers an alternative anchorage, an endemism, and a material grounding that registers directly with the particularities of 'place'.

FIGURE 1 The Garden of the Casa Rocca Piccola whose history reaches back to the founding of 16th Century island city of Valletta.

Methodology

Through textual, archival, cartographic research and field work, the paper examines a particular exemplar island city, the Maltese capital of Valletta, a metropolis of the 16th Century. In his essay Desert Islands, Gilles Deleuze affirms the philosophical power of the island myth through a critique of imagined islands developed within the geological narrative of island origins (Deleuze, 2004, p.9). This paper turns this wider philosophical gaze back to discuss a real island and its inhabitation and cultivation through the establishment of a new city. Deleuze's use of geomorphic terminology offers a unique and revelatory way of reading the city and, by extension, the larger phenomenon of the landscape metropolis where not only the terms but also the very fabric of urban and landscape become re-arranged acknowledging that 'the spatial coherence between city and landscape determines the nature of the metropolis, which may be considered as a city that has gradually opened up to the landscape, on all scales and in different forms over a long period of time' (de Wit, 2014b, p.604).

As Gulliver discovered, on islands, scales operate in unusual ways. Its strategic position may afford it an impact at an oceanic scale. Its climatic exposure and scarcity of fresh water may inform an ecological strategy that operates equally at the scales of the agricultural field and the domestic garden. The analysis of an island city and its relationship to the landscape upon which it is founded needs to be agile, to operate fluidly across scales. This paper reflects this as a structural methodology and employs, as a scaling device, a parallel reading of a unique palazzo garden, that of the Casa Rocca Piccola, set deep in the urban tissue of Valletta and whose history reaches back to its founding (Fig. 1). The garden will be seen as a pars pro toto for the city, allowing a reading that oscillates between the garden, the metropolis, the island and their associated themes of scale, geomorphology, enclosure, and origin.

An Island Metropolis

From above, the Maltese capital of Valletta is seen an island commanding a complex body of water formed by the peninsulas of Vittoriosa, Senglea, and Cospicua to the south-east and the bay of Sliema and island of Manoel to the north-west (Fig. 2). These waters have provided safe haven since the age of the Phoenician Empire and imbued the island with a strategic status far greater than its size would otherwise merit. The city is tightly compacted within a massive enceinte of walls and ditches. They are precise and hinged articulations informed by the geometric logic of fortification from an early age of heavy ballistics. The aerial view registers the city as a singular landmass striated with a carefully calibrated grid of deep furrows.

Valletta emerged from the upheaval of conflict made manifest in the Great Ottoman Siege of 1555. The Order of St. John of Jerusalem commissioned the Italian architect, military engineer and student of Michelangelo, Francesco Laparelli da Cortina (1521-1570), to design an impregnable fortress on the Sciberras Peninsula. Valletta, designed above all to withstand further attack, was to become the new home of the Order following their expulsion from Rhodes. Conceived as a discrete urban artefact on an uninhabited peninsula, Valletta is considered to be one of the few examples of the Renaissance 'ideal' realised in its entirety. In this, it reflects the optimistic spirit of the century that produced Thomas Moore's 1516 island vision of *Utopia*. However, when a preconceived order is projected onto an island's surface, the manifestation of its 'ideal' is inevitably altered by the limited resources with which it has to build and sustain itself. It is affected by the pressures of strategic status bestowed upon it by the particularities of geography and is inflected by a culture where sensorial organisation is attuned equally to the sea as it is to the land.

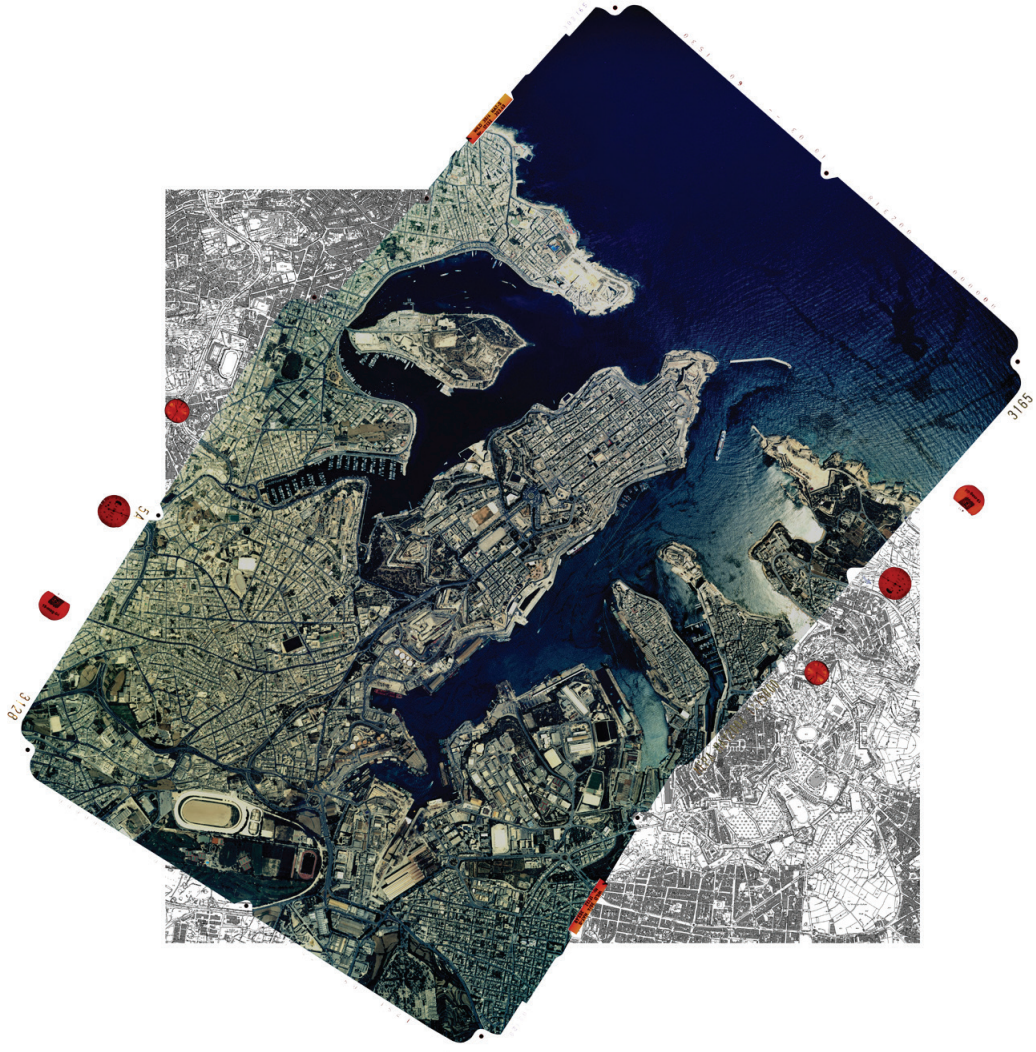

FIGURE 2 The island figure of Valletta, a metropolis of its time by dint of its density, a condition of enclosure by wall and sea required by military necessity, and its expansive influence reaching far beyond its remote position within the Mediterranean.

An Inflected Ideal

It is this confined singularity, this original *ideal*, that identifies the city so immediately as its own distinct form of island. Valletta was not only built on the rock but also directly of its matter, from limestone quarried directly from below, forming a material continuum. Its massive defensive form registers its position in the world and, as a place of harbour and refuge, radiates its status through its relationship to the sea. The cultural threads of the city repeatedly lace themselves back to a singular point of origin, the Knights Hospitaller and the founding of their capital. But they have also absorbed the tropes of other worlds drifted in through colonisation, trade, or the proud traditions of hospitality.

Valletta is representative of a metropolis of its time both by dint of its density, a condition of enclosure by wall and sea required by military necessity, and its expansive influence reaching far beyond its remote position within the Mediterranean into the depths of late Renaissance Europe and to the coasts of North Africa.

The terms *ideal city* and *metropolis* are often considered as being placeless. The first, a perfect form untainted by context and the second, operating beyond context through a network of connections. However, it is their engagement with the specificity of ground and culture that is most revealing (de Wit, 2014a, p.15). The etymology of Utopia suggests both 'no-place' and 'good place' (MacKay, 2016, p.59) and it is the goodness of the place, the unique and defining characteristics and peculiarities of the land, that resists and affects the superimposition of an ideal form and therefore stops the placeless metropolis from really ever being fully realised.

FIGURE 3 A version of Matteo Perez d'Aleccio's 1582 cartographic projection of a nascent Valletta. 'Case de Sr. Don Pietro don Rocca' – The Casa Rocca Piccola is highlighted. (National Library of Malta).

The Anomaly of a Garden

On completion of the outer defences, Laparelli prescribed a strict set of rules, a codex, to determine the order and singular grandeur of the city. To ensure continuity of street lines, the required density on limited land and in response to the scarcity of fresh water on an island devoid of rivers, the codex clearly states that the frivolity of private gardens was not to be a feature of this new metropolis (de Giorgio, 1985, p.115). Early maps of the city identify an anomaly, a deviation from Laparelli's protocols, in a particular property with the nomenclature, 'la casa con giardino', the house with a garden. The first cartographic projection of the city fully formed was drawn by Matteo Perez d'Aleccio in 1582 (Fig. 3). It identifies this property as '*Case de Sr. Don Pietro don Rocca*', the palazzo of the admiral of the Order of St John in the Langue of Italy (Gando, 2003, p541). The Casa Rocca Picola exits today as the ancestral home of the de Piro family, itself a family with deep

Maltese lineage. Although much diminished from its original size, the enclosed garden remains and around it perambulates the enfilade of the Casa's interior, each room rich with a dense collections of curiosities. As an exception to the rule, as something 'particular', the garden is in itself a curiosity, a unique specimen that offers an understanding of the landscape metropolis beyond its enclosure.

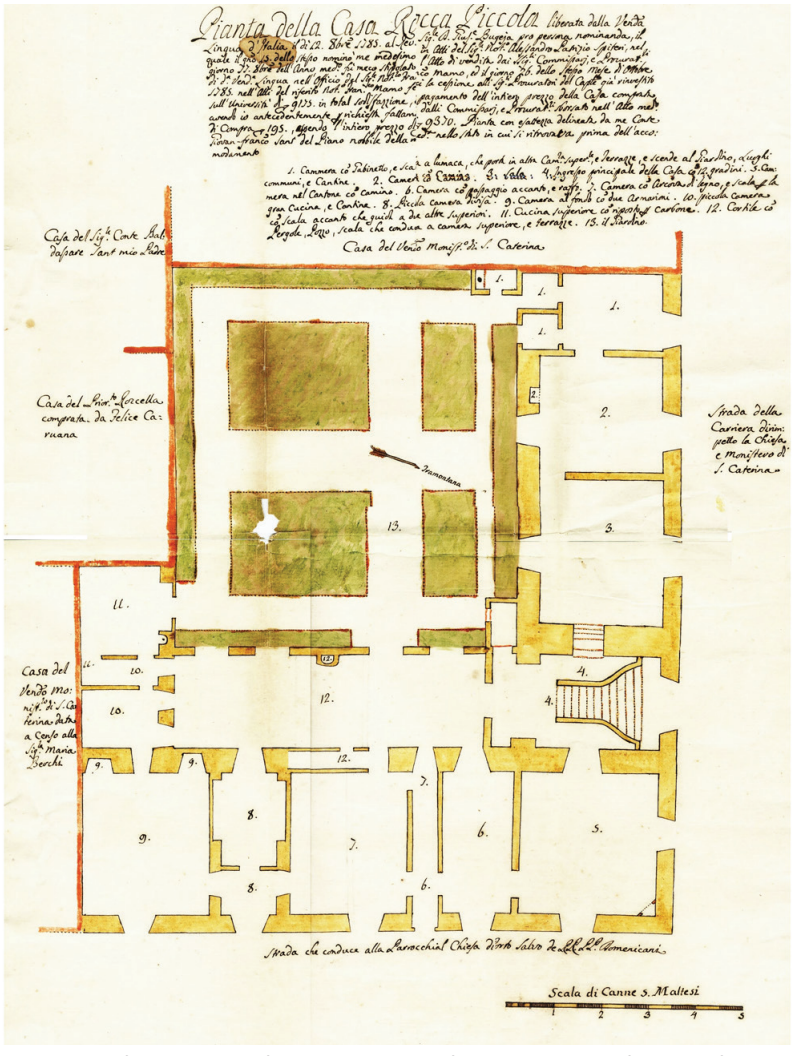

FIGURE 4 Plan of the piano noble of the Casa Rocca Piccola from 1785 showing the full extent of the original garden. (archive of the Casa Rocca Piccola).

The garden of the Casa Rocca Piccola has been tilled, compressed and reimagined numerous times over its 400-year history. Plans held in the Casa's archive from 1785 show a portion of the eastern edge of the garden being set aside for a new, more generous stairway to connect the street level cantine with the enfilade of the piano nobile (Fig. 4). To form a summer dining room, a twentieth century extension further diminished the garden. Each generation, each custodian, has left their mark. These registrations heighten the sense of the calibration so that it operates as a form of core sample, drawn through the island city revealing evidence of its colonisation, its climatic peculiarities, its underlying topography, its telluric substance, porosity, and point of origin. The enclosed garden, separated from the city by the inhabited walls of the palazzo 'gathers the landscape around it'. As an anomaly within an ideal it helps to 'understand the landscape it denies, explain the world that it excludes' (Aben & de Wit, 2001, p.10).

FIGURE 5 Entrance to garden from below. From St Dominic Street (left and centre) and on the dogleg of the main stair from Republic Street (right).

An Island of Solid Sea

The garden is entered from below (Fig. 5). We emerge onto its surface. There is something aquatic, submarine, about the sequential journey from street through palatial hall and stair on to its limestone terrace. Much of this relates to the passage of Mediterranean light as it is dappled through the citrus canopy of the garden and through the window above the upper door. Being arched at both head and cill, the window channels the light as though through an elongated porthole – a form replicated by the two later murals that address the stair. The passage is cool and white, the surfaces polished and reflective. The garden is entered from the dogleg of the stair as though on a turning tide caught between the levels of the house (Fig. 6). This sense of separation, of the garden finding its own level within the formal, highly choreographed domestic arrangement of the palazzo, is heightened by the added presence of the neighbouring eighteenth century staircase and the fluid, Art Nouveau forms of the summer dining room. Because of these new elements, the garden is no longer directly revealed to the original enfilade through deep set and shuttered windows. Instead, it is mediated through spaces that receive light through more expansive, serous membranes of glass. These spaces, with their white, reflective interiors, hold the light, delaying its passage to the house as though through the surface of the sea, *'at once opaque and transparent, meaningful and meaningless, real and unreal'* (Arets, 1993, p.35).

The party walls to the south and west that complete the enclosure of the garden are marked with tidelines of weather and growth, registering both climate and occupancy (Fig.6). The Globigerina limestone is at times pitted and honeycombed as its oxidised surface has been worn away by the elements to reveal a softer, more porous, coral-like interior. The heights of vines, clematis, and their remains act as a temporal register. The sense of being cast out of water and onto the surface of an island is, perhaps unnecessarily, heightened by the current presence, alongside two terrapins, of the classic zoomorphic image of island colonisation, of taking possession - the parrot (Carter, 2006, p.118) (Fig. 7).

FIGURE 6 Contemporary plan and section of the Casa Rocca Piccola. The garden is caught between the levels of the house as the topography of the city falls down to the sea. The three carved cisterns below the garden are indicated.

FIGURE 7 The vine covered party walls to the south and west of the garden. The zoomorphic image of island colonisation, of taking possession, the parrot.

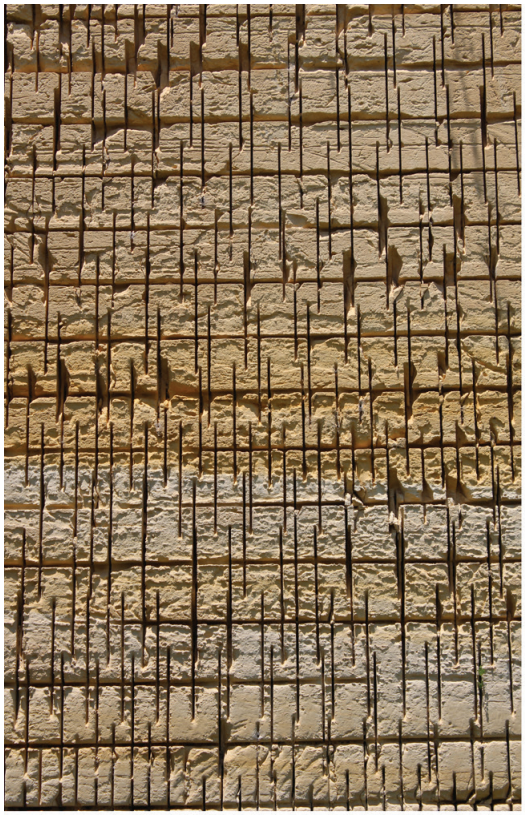

FIGURE 8 Franka limestone, the fourth layer of the island's geologic structure, being cut from the Siggiewi quarry. Franka is the primary material utilised in the construction of Valletta.

A Material Continuum

The Maltese archipelago was formed through the uplift of sedimentary rocks from the relatively shallow continental platform between Sicily and North Africa. It arose from the sea and is composed almost entirely of limestone formed from the skeletal fragments of marine organisms. Its geology is composed of five layers of limestone and, as the islands' sole resource, it has been frugally applied to the cultivation of its landscapes and the construction of its cities. The first, the Upper Coralline *(qawwi ta' fuq)*, is highly porous, fissile, and used only for the drystone walls, which hold the soil of the country's agriculture, or ground to lime. The second layer of Greensand is similarly poor and crumbles. It is pounded down to form a bedding for construction or an infill between walls. The third and fourth layers are both Globigerina limestone. The upper, blue/grey stone *(tafal)* is soft, weathers badly and is only used for rough work and infill. It is the fourth layer, of pale-yellow stone *(franka)* that is the most prized and is easily quarried with wedges and dressed with broad-blade axes (Fig. 8). The final layer of Lower Coralline *(qawwi ta' isfel or Ðonqor)* has similar properties to the top layer but is harder, crystalline, and non-porous, and therefore used for lower parts of walls, sills, thresholds, and kerbstones. Valletta is almost singularly constructed from franka and it is this material that renders the city with the distinctive buttery glow that becomes honey-like in the evening sun. The treeless nature of the island meant that timber, other than through the occasional re-appropriation of a ship's mast, was rarely used in construction. Franka, being easily cut when first out of the ground (it later hardens through exposure to oxygen), was utilised in ways normally associated with carpentry. Floors and roofs were formed from joist-like slabs resting on vaults (Hughes, 1956 p.193; Zammit, 2004, p.12; Tilley, 2004, p.94). The fabric of the city is that of the island and, by extension, was once that of the sea.

FIGURE 9 Manuscript map from 1558 attributed to Bartolomeo Genga. The island itself is drawn with an oceanic quality with the future metropolis of Valletta arising from the waters. Detail below– the walls of the future metropolis mirroring the earlier Gardens of Marsa (lower right). (collection of Albert Gando).

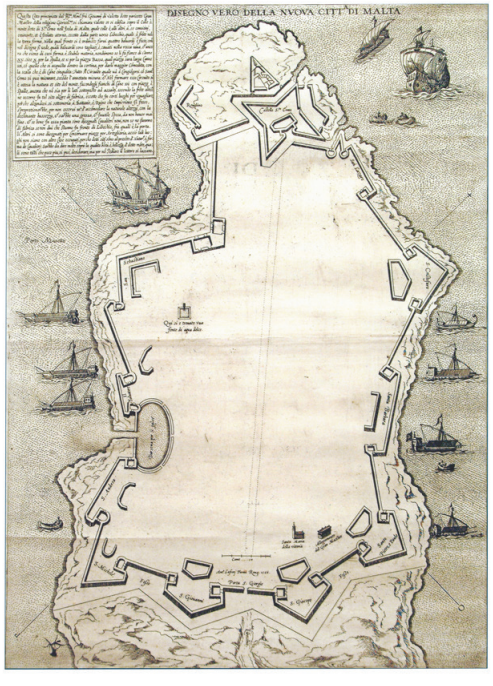

FIGURE 10 Antonio Lafreri's 1566 depiction of a fortified but, as of yet, empty Valletta - a landscape enclosed. (Collection of the Casa Rocca Piccola).

Island and Enclosure

A manuscript map from 1558, and ascribed to Laparelli's forerunner, Bartolomeo Genga, depicts an early vision of a fortress city on Mount Sciberras (Gando, 2003, p.476) (Fig. 9). It is more extensive than Laparelli's eventual city, occupying the whole of the peninsula. Drawn in brown ink on paper, it emphasises the scale and dominance that the planned metropolis would exert upon both the sea and the extended landscape of the island. The island itself is described with a sea-like quality. The undulant hills of its interior, the distinctive landscape of the Maltese mainland and a consequence of the malleability of the tafal, are rendered as a succession of waves. Seemingly barren and devoid of placenames, the only sign of occupancy is the occasional vessel of a church or an outlook tower riding a crest. The planned city is conceived as an island. It is as though by inhabiting a deserted peninsular it had *'pushed the desert outside'* (Deleuze, 2004, p.11). Genga's map reveals the city to be empty, an 'ideal' not yet formed. The surface of its interior is marked only by the proclamation, *La Citta Nouva* and, knowingly centered around the summit of Mount Sciberras, the cardinal points of the Mediterranean winds – T *(Tramonte)*, L *(Levante)*, O *(Ostro)*, P *(Ponente)*.

Curiously, towards the lower edge of the map, seemingly adrift on the topographic waves and more dominant than any other form of settlement, is a walled enclosure protected by three gatehouse towers. It is marked as *Gardino* [sic] and represents the enclosure of the cultivated gardens of Marsa, a recurrent feature of maps of this period, also appearing in Matteo Perez d'Aleccio's 16th Century frescos of the Siege of Malta that adorn the Palace of the Grand Masters. It is tempting to read this as though the walled garden is being offered up as an inspirational prompt to a nascent metropolis.

An Island of Enclosed Gardens

It was the Maltese tradition for houses to look inwards, onto a courtyard, with limited openings on the external façade. This arrangement enabled the tempering of the frigid winter winds of the *tramontana* and, in the spring and autumn, the humidity of the *sirocco*. In the summer, the mediating effects of the courtyard protected the house's interior from the direct glare of the sun, keeping it cool (Hughes, 1956, p.192). The tradition continues into the city and was further encouraged by Laparelli's codex and its concern for continuity of the street and block. Consequently, within the enceinte, the urban landscape feels equally defensive. The enclosed garden frames the sky and mediates the climate. The passage into the garden of the Casa Rocca Piccola reveals both its elevation from the street and the thickness of its envelope. Surely it is more than a coincidence that its name suggests a small fortress?

The Enclosure of Landscape

As with the Genga map, early cartographic representations of Laparelli's city depict it as empty, cleared ground awaiting ordered settlement. One such map hangs towards the end of the enfilade of the palazzo, prior to the elevated view of the garden through the summer dining room. It is from 1566 and is the second version of the engraver and cartographer Antonio Lafreri's depiction of the fortress walls and nine cavaliers of the emerging city (Fig. 10). It was drawn up for Laparelli to help enlist support for his vision from the Pope, the King of Spain and various European courts.

Lafreri's original version shows the walls enveloping a completely empty interior. This second version saw four set pieces added to the central void: *Santa Maria della vittoria*, the first church, built on the ceremonial site of the city's foundation; *Allogiamento sel Gran Maestro*, the proposed palace of the Grand Master; *qui si è trovato una fonte di aqua dolce*, a source of fresh water and Darsena per x galee, a dock for ten ships (Gando, 2003, p.363). Accompanying the addition of church, palace, well, and harbour are two new pieces of text. One identifies the *Fosso*, the ditch that separates the city from the remainder of the peninsular and *Reuelino*, the original triangulated fortification and outworks of St. Elmo on the headland. It therefore introduces the line of separation that defines the city as an island and highlighted its point of 'origin', the moment of colonisation. Two parallel dotted lines link these features as the first indication of a main street. The street is now known as Republic Street, and it is from this street that one enters the garden of the Casa Rocca Piccola. The enclosure of the landscape becomes miniaturised to the enclosure of garden.

FIGURE 11 Contours reveal the true lie of the land that resisted the 'ideal' imposition of a metropolis. From a height of 56m the Sciberras Plateau drops to the sea through an array of five valleys. The Casa Rocca Piccola (indicated) is caught midpoint on the most northerly flank.

The Resistance of the Land

Fearing further attack, Laparelli decreed that no work on buildings should commence until the fortified walls and bastions were complete (Hughes, 1976, p.1). Lafreri's drawing suggests a condition in which the walls are enclosing a tabula rasa, a mute plain on which a city could be simply formulated and contained - and perhaps indeed this is how the city was initially conceived. The reality on the ground, however, was far more corporeal. The positioning of the church and the palace was intelligent, at a height of 56m between two natural harbours, this plateau of land, Mount Sciberras, commanded the peninsula. A saddle of land known as Camerata plateau connected this summit to the headland of Fort St. Elmo. An array of five valleys indent each flank to form a complex topographic body of limestone. Of these valleys, the one falling west, from the proposed site of the church and palace, was the most pronounced and it was at its foot that Laparelli proposed to carve a harbour (Fig. 11). After abortive attempts to work with the folds of the land, Laparelli rationalised his vision to propose nine streets with a strict hierarchy of varying width to run the length of the city and twelve to cross the breadth. This formed a rectangular grid that frayed as it approached the enceinte. To implement this, he proposed to similarly rationalise the land, to lay it flat. But it resisted. Attempts to cut the higher levels of rock and to use the acquired stones to form backfilled retaining walls on the lower ground were soon abandoned due to the extreme cost and effort involved (Hughes, 1956, p.28). Consequently, the streets of the realised city repeatedly drop to form deep canyons or rise up from the sea in great stepped flights (Fig. 12). Valletta has evolved out of the strange interplay between the orthogonal, humanist order of the grid and the terrene, telluric lie of the land. One is constantly being read against the other. It is this interplay that imbues the city with deep qualities of landscape for, as Lyotard suggests, *'there would appear to be a landscape whenever the mind is transported from one sensorial matter to another, but retains the sensorial organisation appropriate to the first, or at least a memory of it'* (Lyotard, 1985, p.212).

FIGURE 12 The streets of the realised city repeatedly drop to form deep canyons (left) or rise up from the sea in great stepped flights (right).

FIGURE 13 The piano nobile of the Casa Rocca Piccola processes around the citrus canopy of the garden.

FIGURE 14 The deep garden (left) recalls the appropriation of Malta's disused limestone quarries as citrus groves (right). Both benefit from the tailored environment of this depth within the landscape.

The Garden in a Landscape of Depth

The garden of the Casa Rocca Piccola is lodged between the rationality of the ideal city and the pulse of the land. The reason the garden seems elevated, and to be entered from below, is because the palazzo is caught in the descent of the one of the valleys that fall from saddle of the Camerata plateau towards the western harbour. As a consequence, the properties rising the slopes to the east and the south tower over the garden with reinforced height, emphasising the sense of enclosure. The garden is set deep into the landscape of the city with the atmospheric consequences of such a state – it is cool, reverberant, still. The sun enters it in shafts or via the reflected honey glow of the limestone walls. The garden is dislocated; it operates with a different logic to the palazzo, creating a sense of estrangement and displacement. The clerestory of the *cantine frames* earthy roots and underbrush whilst the *piano nobile processes* around a constellation of citrus orbs (Fig. 13).

Due to its remote exposure, the landscape of the Maltese archipelago has become cultivated through acts of enclosure. Genga's rolling hills were, in reality, overwritten with a seine of drystone walls that protected the thin layer of soil from dispersal by the winds of the Mediterranean. Once exhausted, the quarries that fed these walls were themselves utilised as ideal environments for citrus groves (Fig. 14). Even the limestone slabs of the littoral zones were carved to form a grid of pans from which to harvest salt from the sea. The walls protected but they also held the landscape as a multitude of cultivated islands. Landscape and city have merged into a metropolitan network of limestone threads. Just as the crude craft of fishing nets became cultured into the fine lace for which the islands were famed, so the rough walls of the fields became refined to form a Renaissance 'ideal'. Valletta, seen from within, is a deep city, seemingly routed from the limestone body of the peninsula. The deep narrow ravines of worked ashlar and unsuppressed contour have tailored the harshness of the climate beyond its walls into civilised channels of shadow and sea breeze.

FIGURE 15 Central to the garden, the ornate narrow stair that descends to the chthonic mirroring of the three carved cisterns below (See also Fig. 6).

FIGURE 16 The blurred distinction between the naturally formed limestone of the deep outer defensive cut of the Fosso and the ashlar form of the metropolis above.

The Garden and its Chthonic Double

Central to the garden of the Casa Rocca Piccola, and guarded by two 17th Century carved lions, is a narrow stone stair that leads down into the thick limestone rock of the peninsula itself (Fig. 15). The well that is depicted on Lafreri's near empty map proved to be insufficient and of inadequate quality to sustain. As a consequence, Laparelli's codex decreed that all properties constructed within the city walls should first carve a cistern into the rock below. Each cistern was to be capable of collecting enough rainwater, channelled from the roofs and patios of the proposed property, to sustain the household throughout the year (de Giorgio, 1985, p.116). This formalised a Maltese tradition, born of necessity on islands devoid of fresh, flowing water, and made possible by the soft, malleable nature of its limestone form. The water, once collected in these cavernous bell-shaped voids, remained fresh through the cooling effects of the deep stone and the limited contact with the air ensured by its bottleneck form. The stone, once exhumed from these excavations, was then used in the construction of the house itself. If more stone was required, the public works for excavating the harbour would act as reserve. The house was therefore not only formed from the stone peninsula but also sustained by it, each house a self-sufficient island in its own right.

Empty now, the Casa Rocca Piccola has three such cisterns of varying size, voluminous caverns set deep in the rock below the garden (Fig. 6). By the end of the 17th Century, the Order of St. John had connected Valletta to the reliable springs of Dingli and Rabat on the far side of the island. The fine limestone umbilical cord of the Wignacourt Aqueduct threaded through Genga's hills and sustained the city until the early 20th Century (Hughes, 1956 p.208). The dried-out wells of Valletta then became places of refuge against the bombardment that accompanied the prolonged siege of the Second World War. Predicting the horror in 1935, the di Piro family were the first to adapt a small cistern into a family shelter. As the siege unfolded, the family opened the larger wells to fellow citizens, the lesser of which could house thirty people, while the greater one took a hundred and fifty and was supplied with a portable timber altar (de Piro, 2004, p.22).

The classical formality of the stair and its descent from the garden eventually gives way to roughly hewn passageways carved directly into the stone, the tooling marks clearly visible. The route descends in an angular fashion, a strategy to dissipate the force of an explosion and thus inadvertently echoing Laparelli's ballistic geometries above. The walls become increasingly damp, as it perspires. The air develops a musty, geologic perfume. Chamber is linked to chamber and the route intertwines with much older passageways that reach far into the city. For every building above, there is a cavernous void below, a chthonic mirroring

where the typologies of chapel, palace, house, and barrack are reflected in excavated forms of crypt, cellar, well, and magazine. This direct doubling of city and landscape is most visceral at the threshold to the city where the striated face of the excavated defensive ditch of the *Fosso* bleeds into Laparelli's ashlar walls that were formed from the product of this cut (Fig. 16).

The Garden as Lens

The agitated descent choreographs a return to a point of origin. It is a movement that is analogous to both the substance of the island city and its particular cultural heritage. The Casa's collection of paintings, maps, artefacts, and documents are arranged around the garden through the procession of the enfilade. The contents are diverse, but the theme is common - a concern for lineage, the tracing of a line back to a singular point of origin – an ancestry and the founding of a metropolis. 'It is no longer the island that is created from the bowels of the earth through the liquid depths, it is humans who create the world anew from the island and on the waters' (Deleuze, 2004, p.10).

FIGURE 17 Valletta seems to have risen from the sea with the flotsam of continents caught in its grain. Minute skeletal fragments of marine organisms caught in its stonework (left), saints embedded in street corners, walls encrusted with mashrabiya (right).

As an anomalous moment within an ideal vision, the garden of the Casa Rocca Piccola opens up a vertical seam that passes through the limestone fabric of both the city and the landscape so that it becomes unified as a form of island condition in miniature. Valletta itself seems to have emerged from the sea fully formed. Tides have occasionally washed over it, left their mark. The rigidity of the city's fortified walls honeycombed and pitted, façades weathered to Baroque forms. The flotsam of continents has been caught in its grain – saints embedded in niches on street corners, walls encrusted with mashrabiya like docked vessels.

The enclosure of a garden was scaled to a metropolis which was, in itself, formed from the minute skeletal fragments of marine organisms (Fig. 17). The corporeal folds of the island distorted an ideal urban order to form a tailored climate of shadows and winds. A landscape enclosed has enabled cultivation, developed an architectural culture whose walls are formed from the wells that sustain it. The seam emerges from a point of origin deep in the compressed solid sea of the rock, *'bringing to the light of day a movement from the lowest depths'* (Deleuze, 2004, p.9).

Conclusion

The practice of reading the city through the terminology and 'lens' of the landscape rather than the normal conventions of urban studies offers a new way of understanding the historic island city and, in so doing, offers back a critique of the contemporary landscape metropolis (Van der Velde & de Wit, 2009, p.55). A focus on the particularities of 'island' provides an alternative basis for considering issues pertaining to the landscape such as geography, ecology, culture, place, and resilience (Corner, J. 2018 p.17). Here, the limitations of land and resource, together with an exaggerated exposure to climate and colonisation, have resulted in both a vulnerability and a resilience that defines the city's relationship with the land as being one of expediency and resourcefulness. In an era in which the speed and ease of transportation has severed the connection between materials and their source, these are traits that not only inspire a more considered attitude but also engage with a concern for a grounding in the particularities of place.

Valletta may be an acute case, an 'ideal' urban form projected onto a limestone island, but it is the manner in which the landscape of this island has resisted, agitated and, indeed, materialised this form that imbues the metropolis with such a distinct registration of place. The interplay of the logic of the land and that of an imposed ideal informs something new and 'endemic'. From above, with the privilege of the aerial view or the tools of the cartographic archive, this interplay may be read and analysed but it is at its most meaningful when it is experienced. From deep within the metropolitan tissue, the garden of the Casa Rocca Piccola not only offers a reading of this sensibility but also a visceral spatial engagement with it.

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