

PALAZZO MANRESA - THE ARCHBISHOP'S CURIA

Palazzo Manresa at Floriana was erected by Fra Francesco Rosignoli, a Jesuit, as a Retreat House. It was intended mainly for the purpose of organizing spiritual exercises as had been designed by the Founder of the Society of Jesus, St Ignatius, during his stay in the town of Manresa, Spain. Fra Rosignoli became the first rector of the House.

It was built between 1743 and 1751 in a quiet area of Floriana which was slowly developing as a suburb of Valletta. The baroque building stood on a high ridge with an unobstructed view of Marsarmxett Harbour. Its main door is flanked diagonally with a set of columns and is reached by a flight of steps. It is decorated with garlands on its frames and is surmounted by a figure of the Madonna and Child. The facade extends both sides with two rows of windows with elaborate sculptures.

Internally, the building is likewise decorated with tines portals, classical corridors and an imposing staircase. But the principal attraction is the chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Manresa, designed by the famous Renaissance Italian Architect, Carapicchia. It has a unique oval shape and has five altars, all of which with paintings by the Order's favourite painter, Antoine Favray. The main altar is made of intricate marble and mosaic and it is adorned with a silver reliquary bearing the relics of St. Calcedonius, an early Christian martyr. A second chapel, dedicated to St. Calcedonius, is found at the back of the Palace having a separate entrance through Vincenzo Bugeja Street. This chapel was constructed by Fr Domenico Calvi, the successor of Fra Rosignoli.

The corridors are decked with a collection of paintings while the refectory hall is covered with colourful murals by Pasquale Leonetti, commissioned by Fra Calvi.

The Palace became Diocesan Seminary in 1858 which had been for many centuries at Mdina. For a brief period in 1921, the Seminary returned to Mdina until Palazzo Manresa was adapted and enlarged to accommodate the increasing number of students.

During the war the building was damaged and was later restored and modernized.

When the Mater Ad Mirabilis Teachers' Training College at Tal-Virtù, Rabat, was forced to close down in 1977, the Seminary moved to Tal-Virtù while Palazzo Manresa became the Archbishop's Curia. All the pastoral and administrative offices of the Archdiocese were transferred from the Bishop's Palace in Valletta to Palazzo Manresa at Floriana. The old Valletta Curia now houses the church's tribunals.

Words by Lorenzo Zahra.