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# English summaries

(Michael Swithinbank)

**Achim Schmidt / Kurt Frein**

***Opus spicatum* – Reflections on the use of heringbone construction in castles**

*Opus spicatum* is not limited to any particular function. Rather, it is a technique that was used by builders in Antiquity and, depending on the region and the circumstances in which a given castle was built, continued to be used until the Middle Ages. Circumstances that invited its use included a desire to build quickly, a need to overcome problems in the makeup of the subsoil or to compensate for unsatisfactory binding properties of the mortar used, and adaptation to the use of heterogeneous quarry stone, while it may also be assumed that sometimes it was even a deliberate design choice. In fortifications in the German-speaking part of the area being researched, the use of the technique can be observed from the 9<sup>th</sup> century onward. It was deployed most frequently in the Romanesque castle-building period, when Mediterranean influences were at work. By the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century, it already appears to have fallen out of use in castles north of the Alps. Only in the interior of the Alps did it persist until the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Just as the dissemination of the technique can be associated with practitioners of Romanesque architecture, the slowly growing influence of approaches that can be lumped together as “Gothic” also seems to have condemned the Romanesque to become increasingly unfashionable. But reactions to regional events of which we simply know nothing could also have brought about the growing “unacceptability” of that style. The impact of new assault weapons which were introduced around the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century could certainly also be relevant. *Opus spicatum* as a method of wall-building can therefore only be taken as indicative for the purpose of dating buildings. Future scientific dating will be needed in order to establish whether the existing findings concerning the periods when the technique was used hold water. It would be desirable to carry out similar studies in neighbouring regions of Europe, particularly in Italy, in order to further clarify the provenance of the technique.

**Michael Losse**

**Mansions, castles and palaces in Malta – an overview (Part 1)**

Hardly any country in Europe has such a high density of historical fortifications and noble residences as Malta, starting with Bronze Age fortifications, up to fortresses and palaces of the Order

of St. John (1530–1798) and the fortifications of the British colonial rulers (1800–1930s). Many aspects of this subject are little known to central European scholars, including Malta's early modern palaces and mansions, which will be presented here in a brief overview.

In 1530, Emperor Charles V gave the Maltese Islands to the Knights of St. John as an “eternal fiefdom”. After the Turkish siege in 1565, the Order founded its new capital, the Renaissance fortress town of Valletta on the Grand Harbour. Napoleon caused the demise of the religious state of Malta in 1798. With the help of British troops the Maltese forced the French to surrender in 1800. In 1814 Malta became a British crown colony.

Landowners built tower houses on their lands, suitable for the defence of smaller-armed troops. The first *torri* originated in the late Middle Ages, a larger number in the early modern period. Characteristic elements were machicolations and small loopholes for firearms. Due to frequent Muslim raids, the *Militia* had been set up in Malta. It used noble residences militarily. Later, tower houses and palaces of Maltese nobles were included in the watchtower and defensive system of the Order of St. John.

In the late 1580s to the 1750s, country castles were built, which symbolically suggested defensiveness with towers or “bastions”, corner guards, merlons, drawbridges and ditches. Some have tower parapets containing gun gates (Verdala Palace, 1586/1588), which were mostly barely usable (Selmun Palace, mid-18<sup>th</sup> century). Four-towered palaces partly resemble Malta's “Wignacourt Towers”, coastal forts. Due to tower-like corner attachments on the platform, the appearance of some tower houses of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was visually aligned with that of the forts.

Most of the summer palaces built in Malta by individual grandmasters, inquisitors and nobles are not of a uniform type.

There are many palaces in Malta's towns and villages. Most of them are located in Mdina, the old capital and seat of the Maltese nobility, in Rabat, the unwallled suburb of Mdina and in Birgu and Valletta, successive residence cities of the Knights of St. John. But palazzi can also be found in villages. In several cities there are palaces called “Siculo-Norman”, which are often perceived as Norman buildings, but these buildings in Birgu, Mdina and Rabat/Goza are late Gothic palaces of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. These noble houses with striking biforate windows on the upper floors of the main facades

correspond to largely contemporary buildings in Spain and southern Italy or on Rhodes/Greece.

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, individual palaces and townhouses with striking décor were created: in the largely simple, unstructured facades, the piano nobile was adorned with windows framed with so-called Melitan mouldings. A distinctive element of many early modern palaces and townhouses is a balcony on the first floor with a stone parapet (in relief). Since the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the wooden balconies typical of Malta have prevailed. The most magnificent baroque city palaces were built in Mdina and Valletta, many of which show Italian influences. Maltese noble families (partly wealthy in Sicily) were oriented towards *palazzi* in Catania, Palermo and Syracuse. Its facade décor is more extensive and plastic than that of the Renaissance palaces. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there have also been influences of French palace architecture and the Parisian hotel type.

With the end of the early modern era, Malta did not experience “the end of the castles“. After the fall of the Order of St. John in 1798, villas and palaces were built during British colonial rule. The period from burgeoning romanticism around 1800 to the castle and palace reception in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is therefore described in detail in the next issue of this magazine.

#### **Tanja Kilzer**

##### **“La Cuesta Encantada” (The Enchanted Hill) – Hearst Castle (USA)**

*William Randolph Hearst's castle in Spanish neocolonial style near San Simeon, California*

On a hilltop in the Santa Lucia Range near San Simeon in California, not far from the coast of the Pacific Ocean, one of the most splendid properties ever to be commissioned by the richest of the rich in the USA still stands: Hearst Castle.

With its colossal main building, which by itself contains 124 rooms, with a combined area of 6 363m<sup>2</sup>, three imposing outbuildings, extensive gardens and two impressive swimming pools in Roman style, it is not only on account of its enormous dimensions that the building is reminiscent of prestigious castles in Europe.

Built in 1919 in Spanish neocolonial style, its exterior recalls the architecture of the Mediterranean nobility, while its interior is based on castles in southern and central Europe.

It was commissioned by the American newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst – who at the time was one of the richest men in the world – to house his European art collection and display it to good effect, while at the same time providing him and his family with an attractive summer residence where they could accommodate large numbers of guests. Hearst's chosen architect was the up-and-

coming, ambitious Julia Morgan, the first woman who had ever been permitted to study classical architecture at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. She was responsible for the exterior of the building, its interior design and all the landscaping of the grounds, and sought to turn Hearst's outlandish wishes into reality while at the same time creating tasteful surroundings which would combine all mod cons with an appearance reminiscent of stately homes in Europe. In order to create this special atmosphere, Morgan drew heavily on European models. She combined familiar elements of Spanish courtly and church architecture with others from Italian villas and Venetian palazzos, bringing them together in new ways to form a colossal whole.

The essay outlines the architectural history of the castle-like complex and also answers further questions about the choice of style and location, the selection of Julia Morgan as the architect, and so on.

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