



knights from Germany, Italy, France and Spain. The German commissioner was Fra Von Bombast.

Besides their concern for the security of the Order's Covent at Birgu, the Langue of German was also entrusted with the defence of the capital city, Mdina, and of the castle of Tripoli. This had been granted to the Order by Charles V in 1530, with the obligation to defend it. Between 1535-1541, the governor of the Tripoli outpost was the German Bailiff Georg Schilling. He was a valiant knight and distinguished himself so much that he was later appointed Captain General of the Order's Fleet. The Castle of Tripoli held on until it was vanquished by Dragut in 1551.

The archives of the Church of St Lawrence, which was the Conventual Church of the Knights at Vittoriosa, preserved documents relating to the Langue of Germany during the Order's stay at Vittoriosa. Unfortunately few of these survived, and these were recovered from the debris of the Church Vestry and Archives when these were destroyed by bombing in 1941.

## German Knights during the Great Siege

German Knights played a significant role during the Great Siege of 1565. The Post of Allemagne ran along the northern side of Birgu and commanded by Fra Konrad Von Schwallbach who was deputising for the Grand Bailiff of German who was away from the Island at the time of the siege. The Post of Allemagne is situated behind the Order's Holy Infirmary. It was through a small sea-level entrance within the bastion that injured defenders were brought to the hospital across the harbour from the beleaguered Fort St Elmo, and also from here that the Piccolo Soccorso, the small contingent of reinforcement entered Birgu in the middle of the siege. German Knights who fell during the siege were buried in the crypt of St Lawrence Church at Birgu.



Their remains were subsequently reinterred in the cemetery at St John's Church, Valletta. The names of all the German knights who lost their lives during the Great Siege appear on a marble tablet in the cemetery.  
Move to Valletta

When the Order moved to Valletta, the German Langue built a large new auberge in the new city which was inaugurated in 1575. The old auberge at Vittoriosa was relinquished by the Order and passed into private hands. Because of its central location in Vittoriosa Square, it served over the years as a casa bottega. It survived until the last war. As for the fate of the Valletta auberge, this was demolished in 1839 by the British colonial government to make way for the erection of St Paul's Anglican Cathedral. However, the Anglo-Bavarian Auberge at Valletta is still practically intact.

## Further defence works

The Langue of Germany never failed its duty to look after and coordinate the Islands' defences. The Grand Bailiff of Germany, despite his absence during the Great Siege, made a substantial contribution towards the repair and rebuilding of Vittoriosa's battered fortifications after the siege. Giacomo Bosio, the Order's historian, did not hesitate to praise the knights of Allemagne in short but eloquent terms.

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**Auberge  
d'Allemagne**



## The Langue Of Allemagne And Its Auberge At Vittoriosa

The Knights of the Order of St John were scions of royal houses of Europe. They came from noble families and lived a communal life within the Convent, bound by monastic rules set by their founder. Their principal aim was to look after the pilgrims to the Holy Land and to defend Christianity. As the Order grew, Grand Master Hellion de Villeneuve in 1330 decreed that the Order was to be divided into separate branches called Langues. This made the Order easier to administer and provided more efficiency resulting from competition and ambition between the Langues to secure higher honours. At that time the Order of St John was based on the island of Rhodes.

### Origin of German Langue

After the General Chapter held under Grand Master Pedro Raimondo Zacosta (1461-1467), the head of each Langue was assigned a specific responsibility. The head of the German Langue, called Pillier of Allemagne and Grand Bailiff, was obliged to supervise the defences and was also in charge of the ammunitions and the victuals. He also had the duty to maintain watch over the Order's commanderies in Europe and elsewhere.



Germany's connection with the Order dates back to 1250 when the first German noblemen were enrolled as knights. Their membership with the Order had the approval of the state which wanted to be among the other European nations taking part in the defence of the Faith in the Holy Land.

### German Auberge at Birgu

When the Knights came to Malta in 1530, they settled at the old maritime port town of Birgu. Soon, each Langue was allocated a suitable house to be converted into a hostel called auberge. The German Auberge was right in the centre of the city and close to it there was the Greek parish church of St Nicholas. The narrow street where the auberge was located was called after St Nicholas. This church started to be frequented by the German Knights who also had their own Conventual Chaplain. Both the church and the auberge no longer exist but their site is marked by a marble tablet at no. 7-8 Vittoriosa Square. The church was demolished in 1832 while the auberge was destroyed during the war in 1942.

The architecture of the Auberge of Allemagne was of the style called old Tuscan and the design was attributed to Bartolomeo Menga, the civil engineer who accompanied

the Order from Rhodes. It was a two storey mansion with an arched entrance hall and living area with a typical Maltese stone staircase leading upstairs to the Councillors' offices and dormitory. There was also an underground cellar serving as store room. The white banner of the German Langue with the black twin-headed eagle flew on the roof. The building was internally joined to the Auberge of England which was situated right in the back street.

The location of the Auberge d'Allemagne was particularly significant because it stood right at the entrance to the collacchio. This was that area of the city which was reserved for the knights and their subjects. It was the area where the auberges were segregated. When the Order was at Rhodes, it enforced strict rules on access to the area. At Vittoriosa, the Order attempted to re-introduce the practice and most of the Birgu auberges are indeed established in the collacchio confines. The concept was abandoned when the new city of Valletta was built. The entrance to the main street of the collacchio at Vittoriosa was marked by a large round granite bollard planted in the ground opposite the German Auberge. The stone bollard still exists.

Soon after the arrival of the Order in Malta in 1530 and the establishment of their head quarters at Birgu, there was an urgent need for a review of the city's defences. A four-man defence commission was set up to make proposals for the renovation and constructions of the city walls. The commission was composed of four

