

In The Footsteps of Grandmaster Antonio Manoel de Vilhena.

A Guided Tour for Portuguese and Brazilian Tourists.

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"Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other".

Abraham Lincoln

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1. Introduction

Since the start of mass tourism to Malta in the late 1950's, the UK source market has played a major role in the steady growth of visitor numbers to the islands and as a result, most tourist guides have tended to focus on English speaking visitors.

With a large increase in the number of flights to Malta from all over UK/Europe with the likes of Easyjet and Ryanair in the last 15 years, the UK source market has continued to grow, but at the same time Malta is now attracting many new and repeat visitors from many countries that had not had direct airline service before.

This growth of visitors has led to an increased offering in multi-lingual guide services for many visitors, but there still remains a gap in the market for some of the less obvious or well-known source markets to Malta, with Portugal and Portuguese speaking visitors definitely falling into that category.

The Islands of Malta have a rich history that have been influenced by many foreign powers that ruled and visited the islands. The influences from Great Britain, Italy, and Spain are well known and obviously play a large part in any guided tours of Malta, but there is a considerable but not so well-known Portuguese influence on Malta.

The author being a Portuguese speaker living in Malta has shown the interest in creating tours specifically for Portuguese-speaking visitors to highlight these historical and cultural connections between Malta and Portugal.

The Knights Hospitallers of the Order of St John had only three Portuguese grandmasters who ruled the islands, but for the most part their influence, achievements and legacies were significant.

Fra Luis Mendez de Vasconcelos (1622-1623), 55th Grand Master of the Sovereign and Military Hospitaller Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, Rhodes and Malta, the first of the three Portuguese Grand Masters (Albuquerque, 1998), to be headquartered in Malta. Mendes was, at seventy-nine, apparently the oldest Grand Master ever elected (Sire, 1994). His reign only lasted six months with his death in March 1623.

Grandmaster Manuel de Pinto Fonseca (1741-1773) was the longest ever serving Grandmaster of Malta and the last Portuguese Grand Master of the Order of Malta, whose destiny he guided for over thirty years. He was a true Sovereign of the Century of Enlightenment – reforming and regulating all areas of public governance, from commerce, industry, health and justice. The Auberge de Castille, one of the most significant buildings in Valetta, and today the Office of the Prime Minister of Malta, was completely rebuilt under Fonseca's rule in 1744 (Albuquerque, 1998). His coat of arms and bust are on the front of the building. The founder of what is the modern-day University of Malta in 1769, Fonseca had also introduced the first ever printing press to Malta in 1756. Pinto Wharf on the promenade of the Valetta Waterfront still carries his name today. He launched many great works, restoring places, monuments and public buildings, and supported many causes for the improvement of life in Malta. Grandmaster Fonseca's rule was marked by magnificence and very high spending, which unfortunately ultimately caused the financial collapse of the Order of St. John after his death. He died in 1773 at the age of 91, and his tomb can be found in the Saint John's Co-Cathedral - one of the island's main visitor attractions (Albuquerque, 1998)

For all of Fonseca's contributions however, this research, will focus on the first significant Portuguese Grand Master of Malta - Antonio Manoel de Vilhena (1722-1736) - his life and major projects, their historical significance at the time, and their benefit to the Maltese people long after he was gone.

It was only in 1722 that he was elected Grand Master of the Order by vote of all the electors, being one of the most notable in the position for his valour in battles and for his integrity in Public Administration. Vilhena was loved by his contemporaries for having tried to improve the situation on the island of Malta, where he created numerous charities. In addition, he created Floriana, a suburb of Valletta where a statue in his honor still stands today. He also built Fort Manoel and Manoel Theatre, which is considered to be the second oldest theatre in Europe that is still in use today. When he dies in 1736, he was buried in the Co-Cathedral of Saint John, his tomb being considered the largest and most sumptuous of all mausoleums of the Grand Masters of the Order of Malta (Albuquerque, 1998)

Fort Manoel - one of the most famous landmarks and tourist destinations in Malta. Occupying a large part of the Manoel Island, dominating the entire Marsamxett Bay, it was built in 1726, and was considered one of the Europe's best defensive fortresses. It would help to protect Malta from foreign invaders for more than two centuries.

Borgo Vilhena / Floriana – an early blueprint for looking after the needs of a growing city, whilst also understanding the needs of the residents, and especially those citizens in need. One of the earliest examples social welfares being a key part in new urban development.

Manuel Theatre - this building was an important cultural stage at the time it was built and has seen many changes and challenges - plagues, competitors and wars over the last almost 300 years. Today it is considered a masterpiece of architecture, as well as centre of culture in Malta.

These projects, well known both nationally and around the world, are still very much in use today and are the result of Vilhena's vision, leadership and commitment during his reign as Grand Master.

2. Literature Review

This chapter is dedicated to one of the three Portuguese Grandmasters that reigned in Malta, Antonio Manoel de Vilhena, and the benefits and constructions that was done in his reign. Elected in June 1722, in September 1722 he went to Mdina in the traditional ceremony, in the same year he ordered the renovation of part of Mdina that was destroyed on the earthquake on 1693. He commissioned a French military engineer to do the work in the city and other places in Malta, for example the three gates in Vitoriosa. The Grandmaster commissioned the building of Fort Manoel, Borgo Vilhena and Manoel Theatre, beside the renovation project of Mdina.

2.1. Grandmaster Antonio Manoel de Vilhena

Antonio Manoel de Vilhena was born in Lisbon, Portugal, on the 28th May 1668. He was the son of General Dom Sancho Manuel de Vilhena, the count of Vila Flor, and Anna de Noronha.

Antonio Manoel de Vilhena was elected Grandmaster on 19th June 1722 after Grandmaster Zondadari's death. He was welcomed in Mdina during a symbolic traditional ceremony on the 20th September 1722, where the grandmaster would be offered the keys of the city after taking an oath that he would respect the privileges of the Maltese (Albuquerque, 1998).

In the same year, he embarked in a renovation project of Mdina following the destruction of parts of city that were damaged by an earthquake that struck the islands in 1693. He entrusted the French military engineer Charles François de Mondion with this project. He designed other places such as the three gates of Birgu, and Fort Manoel on Manoel Island, which both carry the name of the grandmaster.

Furthermore, the Grandmaster commissioned the building of Manoel Theatre in Valletta, built in 1731, to entertain the people of Malta. He founded the suburb of Floriana where we find his bronze statue which reminds us why the city has been given the name of "Città Vilhena". Amaral (2015) mentioned that the Grandmaster Vilhena also built houses for the older and sick persons in Floriana which, he named Borgo Vilhena, but the inhabitants still call it Floriana today. During his first year, the Grandmaster had to deal with some hostile fleet, in a particular battle, Vilhena managed to get out without shedding one drop of blood.

Grandmaster Antonio Manoel de Vilhena died on December 10, 1736 at the age of 74. He is buried in the Co-Cathedral of Saint John, where he has a marvellous monument (Amaral, 2015).

His epitaph says, "Monuments of his piety, munificence, foresight, and charity." This saying meant he was a wise man with a good heart (Amaral, 2015). Very different from most of the Grandmasters who were often considered arrogant and out of touch with the people, Vilhena led a prosperous reign and seemed to be loved and respected by the people of Malta.

2.2. Borgo Vilhena / Floriana.

The history of Floriana dates back to 1634, when engineer Pietro Paolo Floriani from Macerata - Italy, who was brought to Malta by Grandmaster Antoine de Paule to design additional fortifications as an outer defence line for Valetta – the Floriana Lines (Rizzo, 2010). The initial phase was completed in 1640, but improvements and additions to defences continued for another 80 years.

In 1724, in order to meet the increased demand for housing in Valetta, Vilhena founded the suburb of Borgo Vilhena. Built in the area between the now completed Floriana Lines and the Valetta Front, the town is now known as Floriana. With the construction of new houses, the population began to grow in Floriana. One of the valuable services that Vilhena had installed was the Lion Fountain, which was erected in the centre of the town in 1728. It provided clean water supply for the people (Rizzo, 2010).

In addition to providing much needed accommodation for the people of Valetta, Grandmaster Vilhena saw Borgo Vilhena as an opportunity to provide the community with social and medical assistance. In 1729 with the request for the use of the old Floriana gunpowder stores built in 1665 by the French knight Blondel, as a place of residence intended for the care of older and infirm population, the Casa di Carita was founded (Tonna, 1967).

This accommodation however was completely unsuitable and in 1732 Vilhena founded a new building in the vicinity for those in advanced age in need of care and attention. The new Casa di Carita was divided into two divisions: one for the older men and the older women. Later subdivided into three sections: the gineco (older women), the reclusorio (convicted women), and unmarried women. Casa di Caritas began to be called Hospice in the time of the Grandmaster of Rohan in 1785. There was a time when this house obtained shelter not only for the elderly but also for women with questionable character. This house continued to serve its primary purpose at the time of cholera in 1837. It later began to be used for many other civil and military needs, like a hospital, a post office, and the Police Headquarters till today (Tonna, 1967)

The building later called Montgomery House located in Floriana, is said to have been the third edifice to be constructed during the magistracy of Grandmaster de Vilhena. Initially built as a personal country house by Vilhena, it became a marketplace, as the street on one side of it, Market Street, indicates, following his death. It served as a market for the livestock and agricultural products, as a matter of fact, the wall-rings to tether animals can still be seen in the basement of Montgomery House. Later the building was chosen to hold the Università dei Grani as administrative offices to control the grain imported into Malta (Tonna, 1967).

In 1826 the building was sold to the British military authorities and was used as an officers' mess and barracks. It housed the officers of the numerous British Army regiments to be stationed in Floriana over the years.

Leading up to the Allied invasion of Sicily in 1943, the building became known as Montgomery House. General Montgomery used the building as a headquarters from which he and other senior officers planned Operation Husky which led to the successful Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943. (Tonna 1967)

In February 1945, Montgomery House hosted secretive meetings between British Prime Minister Churchill and American President Roosevelt. (Tonna, 1967). The Malta Conference as it became known, was used to plan the final defeat of Nazi Germany as well as agree that central Europe should not be left to the control of Stalin and the Soviet Union (Office of the Historian, n.d.).

Vilhena left a lasting legacy with his vision and efforts in Borgo Vilhena/Floriana and the town's emblem is still based on Vilhena's family coat of arms.

2.3. Manoel Island and Fort Manoel

Manoel Island in Marsamxett Harbour was initially known as l'Isola del Vescovo or il-Gzira tal-Isqof in Maltese (literally translated as "the Bishop's Island"). In 1643 Jean-Paul Lascaris, built a hospital called Lazzaretto to quarantine the travellers before landing in Malta, when the plague and cholera were around different places surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. (Muscat, 2008)

Muscat (2008) states that in 1726 Grand Master Vilhena built Fort Manoel with the original project of the military engineer Louis d'Augbigne Tigné. The design had been changed by his colleague Charles Francois de Mondion, who worked with Grandmaster Vilhena in various constructions around Malta and is buried in the crypt under the Chapel of Saint Anthony of Padua within Fort Manuel.

Tourists and architecture lovers still admire the French Baroque design. The Fort is star-shaped, as were many forts constructed by the Order of St John. Within the outer walls of the fort there is a parade ground, an impressive main square and housing that could sleep over 500 soldiers. The fort is considered to be one of the best examples of 18th century military architecture in the Mediterranean region.

Even in World War II the fort has used as part of Malta's anti-aircraft defence against German and Italian bombers, and would sustain heavy damage as a result. I like to believe that Vilhena would have been very pleased by its service to Malta almost 200 years after it was originally constructed.

In the decades following World War II, Fort Manoel was neglected and became virtually a ruin. Thankfully since it's major restoration project began in 2001, Fort Manoel has again become an important part of Maltese culture and history, whilst attracting tens of thousands of visitors annually. It has even become part of popular global culture with its use as in the Game of Thrones television series.

2.4. Manoel Theatre in Valletta

Prior to there being any sort of public theatre, knights used to perform comedies, tragedies, and tragicomedies in their own residences. This entertainment was only available to a select few, with women often not being allowed to attend. In 1730 Grandmaster de Vilhena decided to build a theatre for everyone to enjoy and commissioned the Italian engineer Romano Carapecchia to design it. Under the guidance of Francesco Zerafa and Antonio Azzopardi, the project was completed in less than a year (Xuereb, 1994).

“Ad honesta populi oblectaconem – for the honest recreation of the people.” This still visible Latin motto can be seen at the entrance to the theatre and highlights Vilhena’s idea and purpose when the theatre opened with a performance of Merope by Scipione Maffei in January in 1732.

Although Vilhena's successor as Grand Master, the Majorcan Ramon Despuig, never went to the theatre, later Portuguese Grand Master Manoel de Pinto Fonseca, was very much a theatre-lover, and even celebrated the anniversaries of his election with an evening of drama and music at the theatre (Xuereb,1997)

Throughout the rule of the British in the early to mid-1800’s the theatre underwent many re-designs and remained a centre of culture and entertainment on the island. With the construction by the British in the 1860’s, the Royal Opera House became the main theatre in Malta, and the Manoel Theatre lost appeal and glamour, and would for the most part be used for many purposes other than as a theatre, including as a homeless shelter, hosting Carnival events, and as a cinema for most of the next century.

With the bombing and destruction of the Royal Opera House in World War 2, the Manoel Theatre was eventually restored and returned to its former glory.

Now one the oldest working theatres in the world, the Baroque style and design of the hall are not only amazing to look at, but also produce incredible acoustics for up to 600 spectators.

3. Data Collection Methods and Criteria for Sample Selection

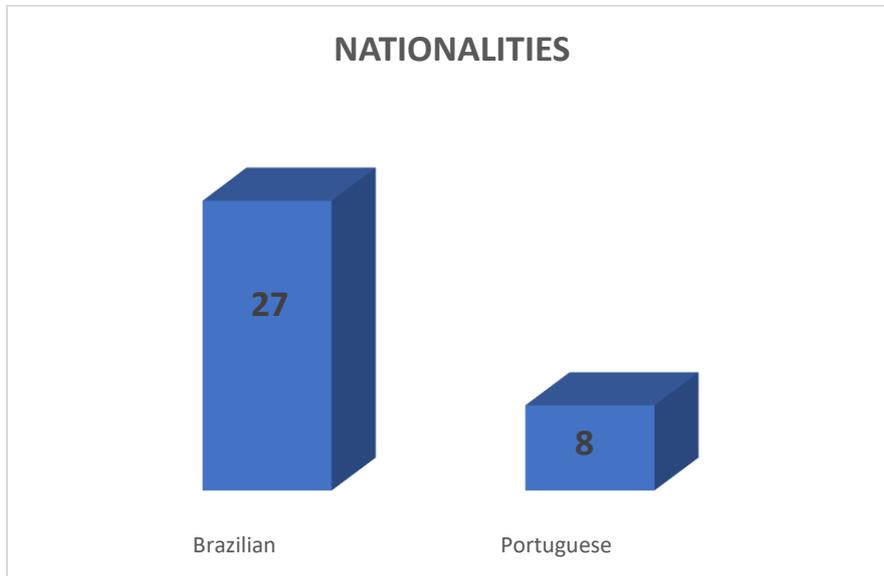
The purpose of this study is to show that excursions focusing on the magistracy of Portuguese Grand Masters, held in the Portuguese language can be carried out for the enjoyment of tourists coming from Portugal and Brazil.

Data to obtain information for this study was collected through the use of a quantitative method using questionnaires distributed to various friends living in Malta and abroad, to Portuguese-speaking tourists and residents. The questionnaires were distributed through electronic mail and in public places. Furthermore, secondary data was collected through the research of published studies.

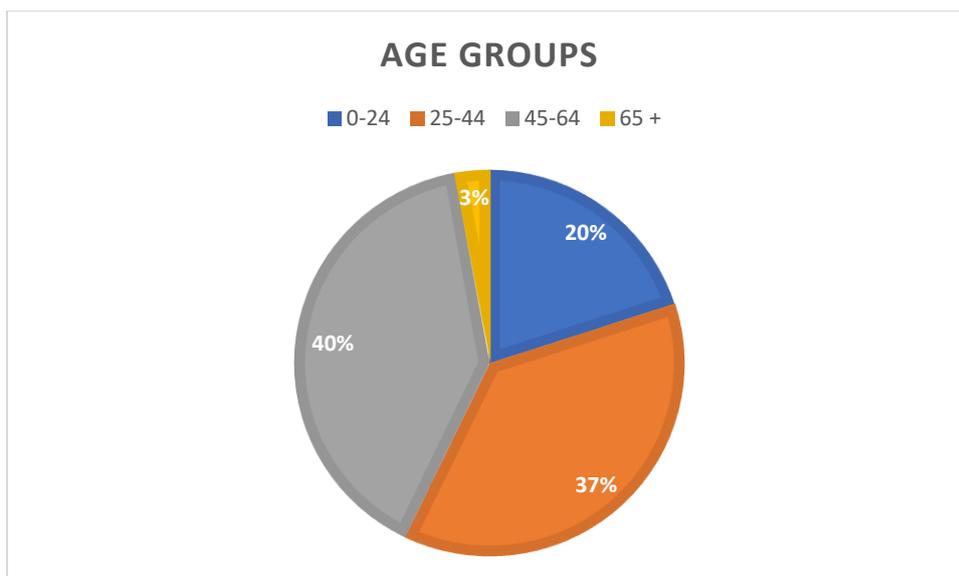
Two limitations were encountered: people weren't so willing to participate in the questionnaire and there was also limited information on published studies that focused on Grandmaster de Vilhena.

4. Analysis of the Quantitative Research

This chapter consists of the analysis of the quantitative research and the results obtained. Questionnaires were distributed to 35 Portuguese-speaking people who came from the following countries.

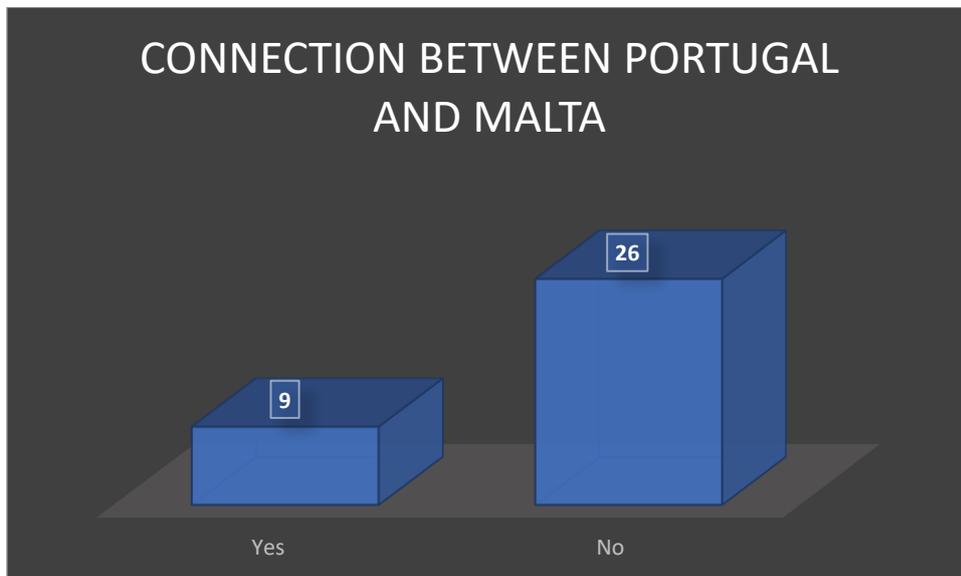


The graph below shows that their ages were between 25 to 64, indicating that the tour is of interest to various age groups.



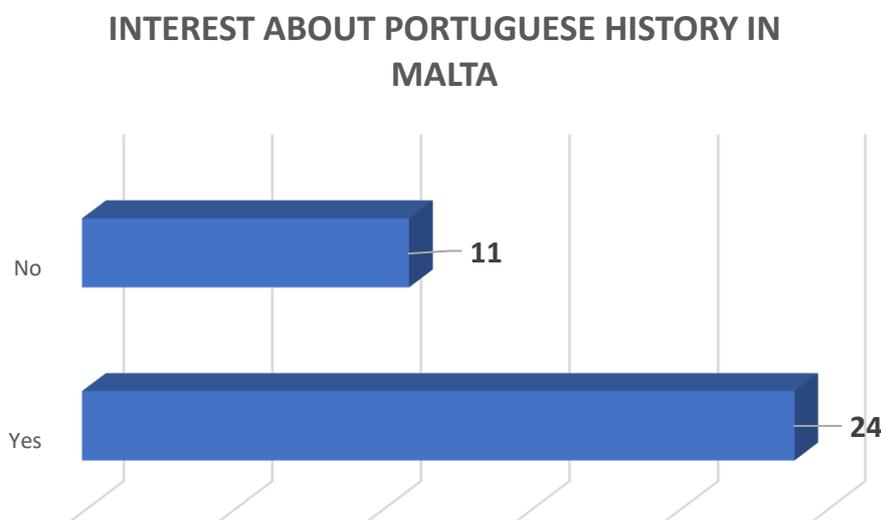
Comparing with the UK tourists coming to Malta the average age for the Portuguese tourists is a group of young people.

When asked about the connection between Portugal and Malta most people who answered the questionnaire did not know of any connection between the countries.



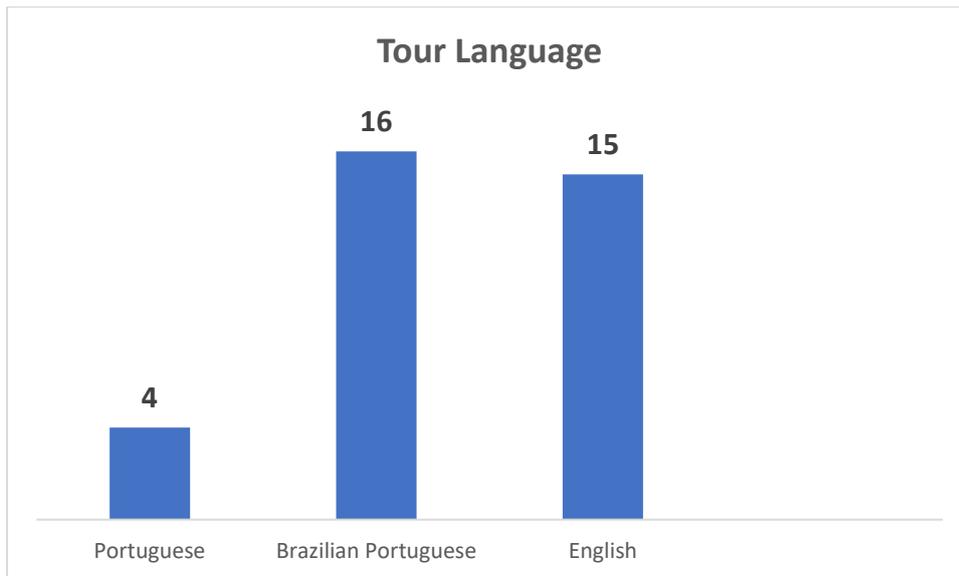
Of the thirty-five respondents only nine knew of any historical connection between Portugal and Malta. Indicates little general knowledge of Portuguese history in Malta. Indicates more can be done to highlight with potential Portuguese visitors. Almost 75% didn't know any connection.

When asked whether they are interested in knowing about the connections between Portuguese history and Maltese history, the majority answered positively in the graph below.



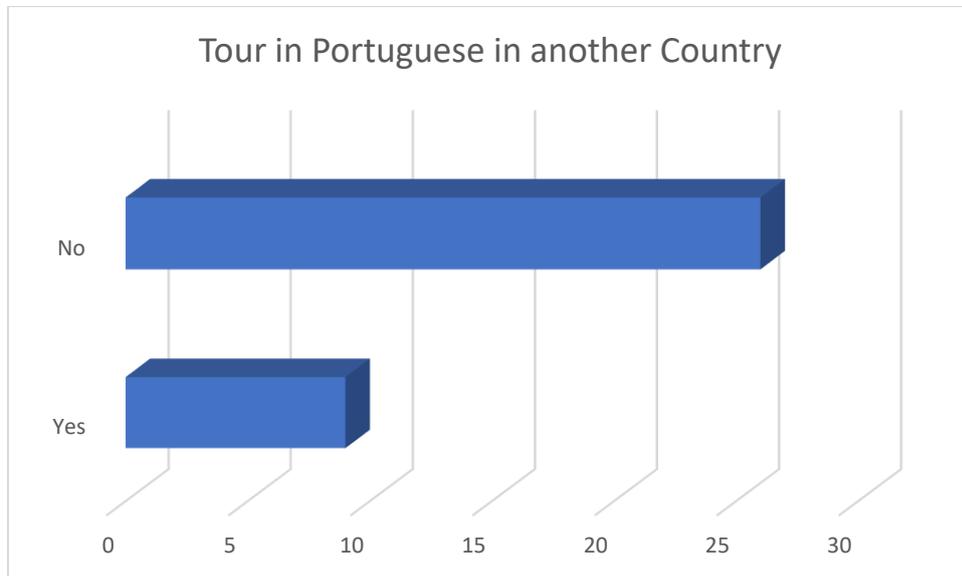
Even though the 74% of the respondents did not know about connections between Portuguese still 69% wants to know about the Portuguese History in Malta.

In the below graph, when questioned in what language they would prefer the commentary of the tour, the Brazilians who lived in Malta, opted for a tour delivered in the English language. This would have served as an opportunity to learn English. However, the Portuguese prefer that the tour would be delivered in their native language.



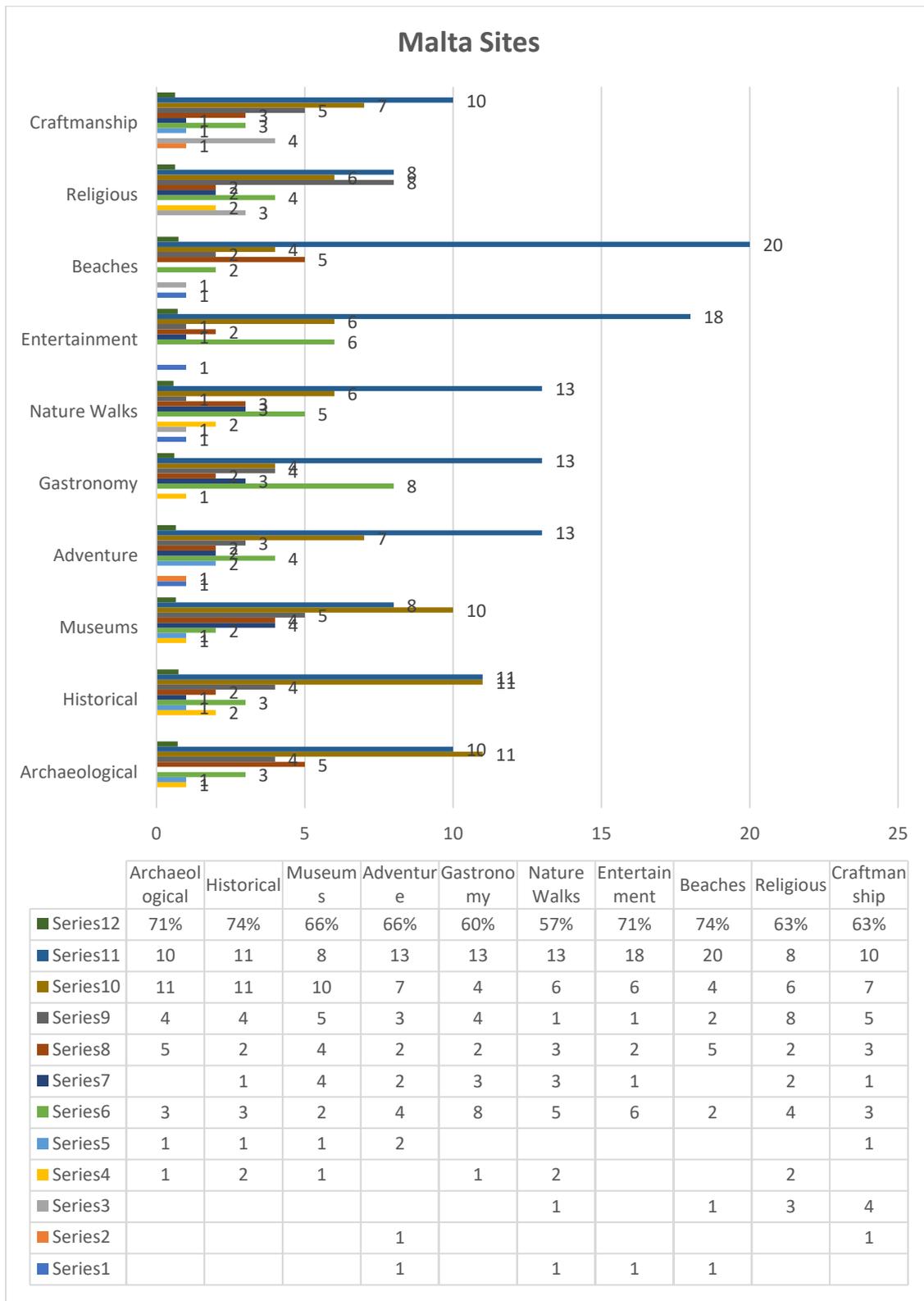
Between the opportunity to have a tour in English or Portuguese the many choose tours in English as it would be a chance to learn English. However, a majority of all pax (57%) would prefer Portuguese as the tour language. Results indicate that the majority of Portuguese speaking visitors would prefer that tours be conducted in Portuguese.

To know about any experiences that would have in another country, it was asked if they had any tours in Portuguese prior Malta. As showing on the below most of them did not have any excursions on another Country.



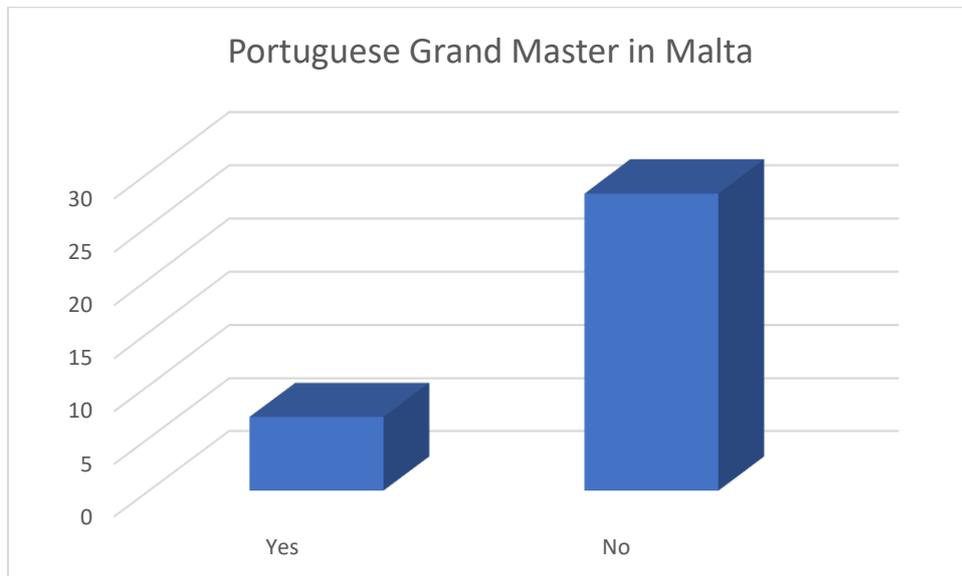
75% have not had Portuguese language tours in other countries. This indicates a willingness to take tours even if not in Portuguese. Based on this Malta should be attractive to them as there are so many different tours available but if we can add even some tours in Portuguese it would only help to make Malta more attractive for these visitors.

Questioned about what sites in Malta are appealing to them, beaches were the top priority in the graph below. This indicates that most of the people like outdoor entertainment.

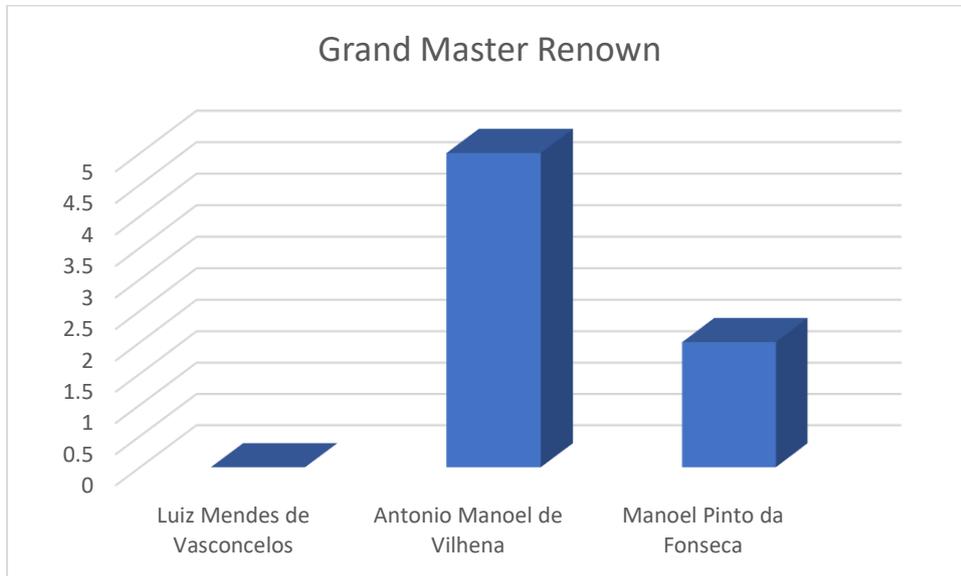


It was given different sites to see what was the most interesting for the responder and as much they like historical sites they like beaches as well.

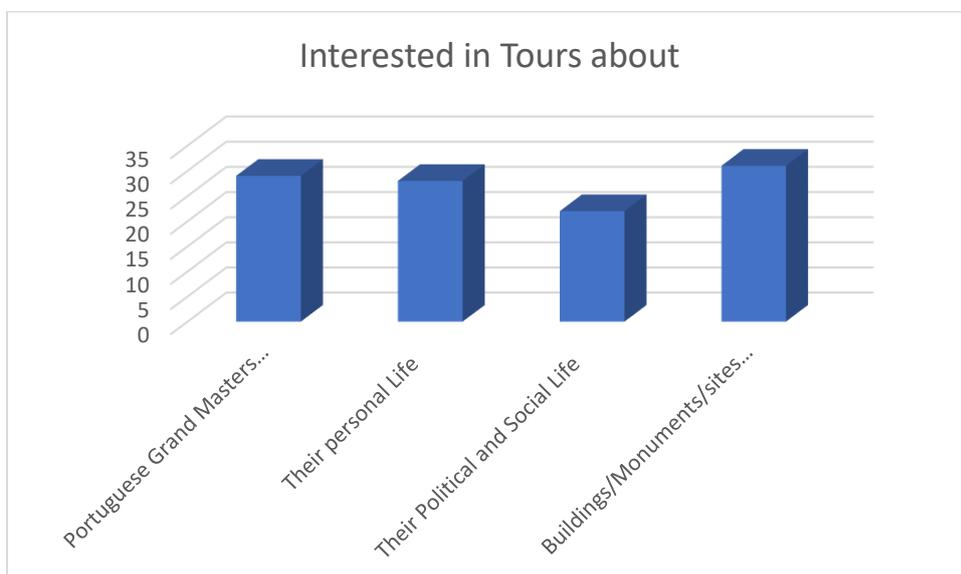
To know if the people knew about the Portuguese Grand Master in Malta, they were questioned about it. The graph below shows that most of them did not know about the Portuguese reigned in Malta as a Grand Masters of the Order of Saint John.



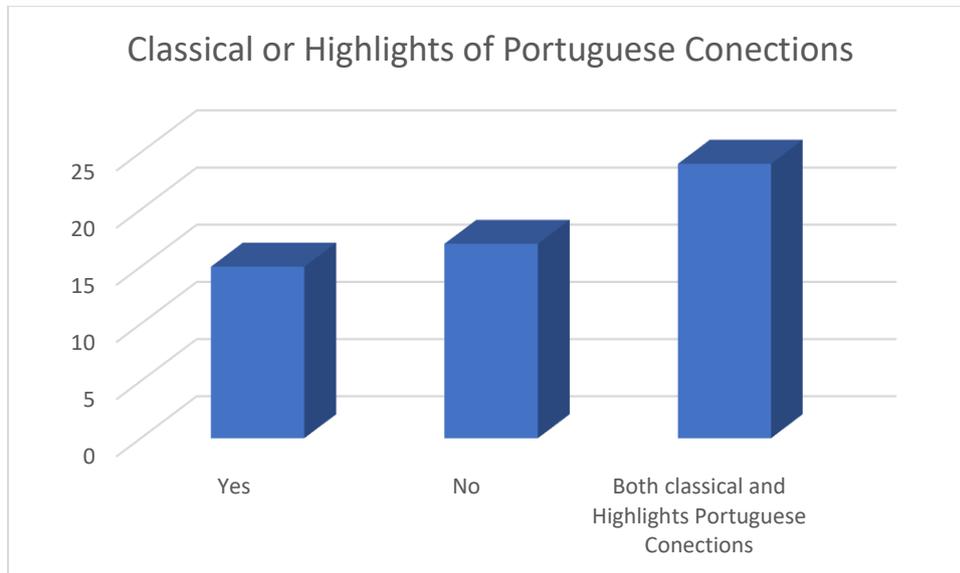
For those who answered positively when asked if they knew the name of one of the Grand Masters, Antonio Manoel de Vilhena was the most well-known among them.



Asked how they would be interested to the tour to be about the Portuguese Grand Masters, their personal life, their Political and Social life and/or Building/Monuments/Sites that are related to them. It seems that they have equal interest as they almost answered the same as it is seen below.



Questioned about if they would come to Malta specifically for tours which highlights Portuguese connections only and gave them three options for it, what happened was some of them answered no however, marked yes for the classical and those which highlights Portuguese connections, the same happened with the people who answered yes.



In conclusion, after analysing the graphs, it can be seen that even without knowledge of the connections between Malta and Portugal, there was interest to do excursions in Portuguese with emphases on the historical part that link Malta and Portugal.

5. Conclusion

In the two hundred and sixty-eight years that the Order was in Malta, all the twenty-eight Grandmasters contributed to some extent, and in various ways to enhance, as well as defend the Island, but according to the author's opinion, de Vilhena deserves a special place on that list. Vilhena played a significant role in the history of the island as proven by the long list of edifices and contributions to Malta left by him. Even almost 300 years after his death, his legacy and commitment to Malta lives on in many ways, but especially in the projects highlighted in this essay.

Whether it is the luxury and splendour of Manoel Theatre, the majestic strength and security of Fort Manoel, or the idea of looking after citizens with social support as established in Floriana, the people of Malta and its many foreign visitors can see, touch and experience what Vilhena built and contributed during his time as Grandmaster.

Although a majority of all the persons surveyed (57%) would prefer Portuguese as the tour language, the fact that only 25% of those surveyed have done a tour in Portuguese in other countries indicates to me a willingness to take tours even if they are not conducted in their mother tongue. Based on this, Malta should be attractive to them as there are so many different tours available but if we can add even some tours in Portuguese it would only help to make Malta more attractive for these visitors.

Overall, there appears to be very little knowledge of the history of the Portuguese in Malta amongst Portuguese speaking visitors. Although there is some name recognition (20%) of Vilhena and Fonseca amongst those surveyed, almost 75% of those surveyed were not aware of any connection. This very limited understanding and the fact that 69% of pax surveyed would like to find out more about the historical connections indicates to the author that there is a gap in the market for Portuguese content tours. At the same time, most of those surveyed would prefer a mix of Classic Tours and Portuguese Connection Tours. This is not surprising as Malta's famous highlights attract visitors regardless of any cultural or historic connections. A mix of both tours can offer a unique tailor-made product, making for an even more memorable experience for the visitors.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire:

1. What is your nationality? _____
2. Gender ___M ___F
3. Are you coming from a country that speak Portuguese as mother tongue? Yes ___ No ___
4. Age group___ 0-24 ___ 25-44 ___ 45-64 ___ 65 or more
5. Do you make preliminary research about the country that you are going to visit? Yes ___ No _____
6. Before coming to Malta have you researched about the country? Yes ___ No ___
7. Do you know of any Portuguese connection in Malta?
Yes _____ No _____
If yes specify _____
8. Are you interested in learning about Portuguese history or/and heritage in connection with the foreign country you are visiting? Yes ___ No _____
9. Are you interested in a tour highlighting connections between Malta and Portugal? (Tick a number from 0 to 10, with 0 being the less interested in and 10 being the most interested in for the following)
0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
10. Have you ever participated in a tour which highlights Portuguese connections in other countries? Yes_____ No _____
If yes, how do you rate your experience in terms of interest in such tours?
(Tick a number from 0 to 10, with 0 being the less interesting and 10 being the most interesting for the following) 0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
10. Which language would you prefer the tour be conducted in?
Portuguese _____; English_____; Brazilian Portuguese _____; Spanish _____
11. What are you interested to visit / participate in Malta? (Tick a number from 0 to 10, with 0 being the less interested and 10 being the most interested for the following)
Archaeological sites 0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 - 10
Historical sites 0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 - 10
Museums 0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 - 10

Adventure	0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 - 10
Gastronomy	0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 - 10
Nature Walks	0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 - 10
Entertainment	0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 - 10
Beaches	0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 - 10
Religious sites	0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 - 10
Craftmanship	0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 - 10
12. Did you know that The Order of the Knights of St John had three Portuguese Grand Masters ruling Malta? Yes _____ No _____	
13. If yes, mention them or at least the ones you know. _____	
14. Would you be interested in tours with information: (You can tick more than one option)	
About the Portuguese Grandmasters that ruled in Malta? _____	
About their personal life _____	
About their political and social life _____	
About the buildings / monuments / sites that are related to them. _____	
15. Would come to Malta specifically for tours which highlight Portuguese connections only? (Tick your preference)	
Yes _____	
No _____	
I would attend both the classical tours and those which highlight Portuguese connections _____	

Appendix 2

Half Day Tour

Meeting point – At Pope John XXIII Square, where visitors can see the statue of Portuguese Grandmaster Vilhena who's this tour is dedicated to, and also just on the left-hand side the visitors can see the building that was one of the houses that was commissioned by Vilhena.

Montgomery House – During Grand Master Vilhena's reign it was meant to be a market place, the tradition that it served as a market place for the sale of both livestock and agricultural products, still persist in Floriana and the wall-rings to tether animals can still be seen in the basement of Montgomery House to bring water for the animals they just need to turn on the light and strait a head where we can find the Lion Fountain

Lion Fountain – the fountain was erected in 1728 to provide water for the increasing population of Floriana, it's a baroque style topped by a lion that is holding Vilhena coat of arms and the lion is pictured on Floriana flag. As the population was increasing in Floriana Grand Master Vilhena built houses for the poor and needy people that was arriving in Floriana and been accommodated in the improvised quarters of the old Polverista.

Casa de Carita (House of Charity) – Was divided into two divisions: one for the old men and other for the old women, the latter was sub-divided in three sections for different categories: for the elderly women, convicted women and unmarried women, this house changed several times for different purpose and today is the Head Quarter of the Maltese Police department. On front of this building was once the bust of Vilhena and today it is showing at the entrance of Fort Manoel which is our next stop.

Hasting Garden – As we will not going actually to Fort Manoel and see it from the view of Hasting Garden explanation will be apply. The garden is located on top of St John's and St Michael's Bastion where one can enjoy a view of Floriana and also other city as Pieta, Msida, Sliema, Marsamxett Harbour and as well the stanning view of the Fort Manoel.

Fort Manoel – It is the joy of Vilhena, build in a Baroque style by Military Engineer Charles Francois de Mondion, who supposed to be buried in the crypt under the fort Chapel. Vilhena laid the first stone in 1723 and the fort was an active military establishment by 1734. It was used for different purpose like as a hospital. The central part is the Piazza d'Armi where the Statue of Vilhena was supposed to be, on the entrance one can find the bust of Vilhena that once was at the Casa de Caritas. The Order did not live only for the battles they did had entertainment as well, saying that the last stop but not least is Manoel Theatre.

Manoel Theatre – One of the oldest theatres in Europe that still in operation, it was constructed by Grand Master Vilhena in a record time of less than one year. It was altered over the years but still have many of features of it old architecture. It was built to have one place for the knights to perfume. It is look like Vilhena wants them under his wings to not do anything wrong.