BUILDING A SENSE OF BELONGING. 
THE FOUNDATION OF VALLETTA IN MALTA

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A landmark in the history of the Maltese islands, the victory of 1565 represented a turning point in the struggle of Christendom against the Ottoman Empire. As early as October 1564, rumours circulated about an attack of the Ottomans on the island of Malta. The Grand Master of the Order of St John of Jerusalem, Jean Parisot de La Valette, immediately ordered the return of all Knights to the Convent – the headquarters of the Order in Birgu – and appealed for assistance in preparing the imminent siege.¹ To the Turks, the conquest of Malta would have cleared the path for their advance towards Italy and Central Europe, threatening directly the Holy Roman Empire.

The Turkish Armada that besieged the Maltese archipelago between 18 May and 8 September 1565 consisted of some 200 galleys and 40,000 men, among them the Janissaries, the personal bodyguard of the Sultan. Despite the overwhelming power of the Turks, the Great Siege of Malta resulted in the victory of the Order of St John of Jerusalem.² Among the most celebrated events of the sixteenth century, it was perceived as a decisive turning point in the struggle over the Mediterranean between the Christian and Ottoman Empires [Map 5]. Having always been an arena for conflicts and exchange, the political structure of the Mediterranean was deeply transformed during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. With the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the Mediterranean was contested between the Ottoman and Habsburg empires, each representing different cultural and religious values. Fear and intolerance towards the ‘Other’ developed the notion