

Pharaohs and palm trees in Valletta



Photo: Darrin Zammit Lupi.

As public transport buses roared out of the terminus in Valletta, yesterday, the ditch below City Gate was transformed into a desert for the filming of *Agora*, the largest movie ever shot in Malta. Although the lack of an adequate water supply in Valletta in the early 17th century had spurred Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt to build an aqueduct all the way from Rabat, the city never looked like a desert as it did yesterday.

In fact, the area below City Gate was transformed into a part of ancient Egypt for the filming of scenes for the largest movie ever shot on the island, *Agora*.

Complete with partly collapsed statues of pharaohs, sand and the odd camel or two, the roadway by the bastions was turned into an Egyptian desert. Extras dressed as villagers, peasants, and merchants mingled in the crowd. Carts and camels carrying straw mats and other objects were led around the elaborate set where palm trees had been "planted" looking like they had been standing there for generations.

The film, directed by Alejandro Amenábar, includes well known stars such as Rachel Weisz (*The Constant Gardener*) and 22-year-old Max Minghella, whose father, British director Anthony Minghella, died on Tuesday, aged 54. The actor, in fact, left the island after the death of his father was announced.

Curious onlookers, including tourists, gathered at City Gate to watch the extras standing around waiting for directions or trying to look as natural as possible acting like villagers from ancient Egypt.

