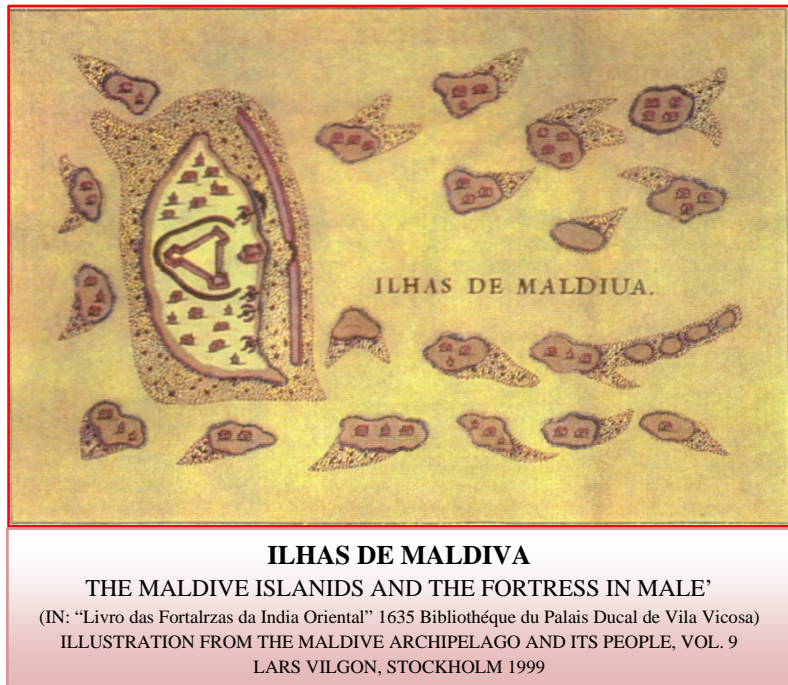


Fura Male'

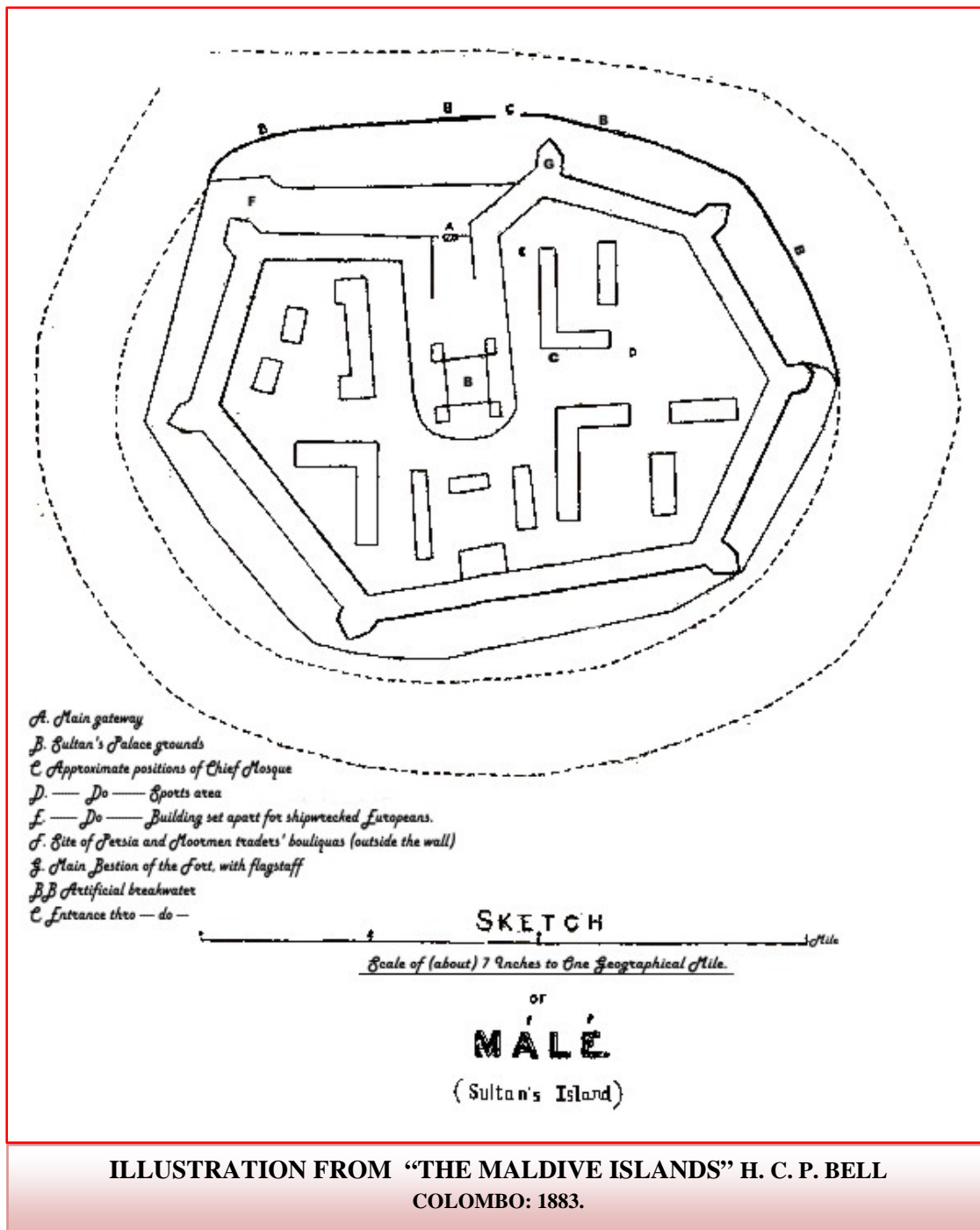
Male' has been the capital of Maldives for more than a thousand years. In early written accounts from foreign sources. Male' has been called "Ambria" and in some others, "Mahl", but traditionally, Maldivians have from ancient times, called their capital "Fura Male", translated as Pre-Eminent Male'. This capital island was always the centre of government as the Maldivian kings and sultans resided here.

When Ibn Batuta arrived in Maldives in 1343 A.D. Queen Rehendi Khadeeja was the ruler, and her residence was in Male'. The location of the Sultana's palace is not mentioned in his writing, but from the descriptions given in his narrative, it seems likely that it was in the same place as the Palace later used by the Sultans of Maldives.

According to the ancient history and later writings, the palace of the Sultan was in the centre of the island. The stores of cowrie shells that formed the wealth of the country were kept buried in pits dug near the palace compound. When buyers for cowries arrived, the Sultan's men would open the storage pits and take out the required number of cowries. Some of these cowrie deposits still lie undisturbed in the ground where they were buried so many centuries ago.



In the 17th century, Sultan Muhammad Imaduddin I, fortified Fura Male' against invaders, building forts and strong protective walls along the eastern, western and northern sites of the island. Male' always had a breakwater enclosing the inner harbour on the northern side of the island. The inner harbour was used by fishing vessels and small dhonis (boats), usually those travelling to Male' from the islands. The outer harbour was the sea enclosed by the islands of Hulhule, Funadhoo, Dhoonidhoo and Vilin'gili. Large sea-going vessels coming to Male' dropped anchor in the outer harbour.



In the 17th century, this breakwater was rebuilt with entrances that were closed at night, and during enemy attacks.

Male' is approximately two square kilometers in area, but this is after the reclamation of the shallow lagoon around Male' in the latter half of the twentieth century. In earlier years Male' was less than "one square mile in size", when measured from reef to reef. The population of Male' in 1888 was 2148, but by 1967 the number had increased to

11,453 and ten years later to 29,522. The chief reason for this growth was better healthcare and a better standard of living. The increasing number of people needed to be housed, and provisions for administration and governance had to be made.

In order to satisfy the need for additional land for the fast growing population, at first the large cemeteries attached to most of the mosques in Male' were cleared, and prepared for housing. Burials were made only in the cemeteries in each of the four wards of Male'



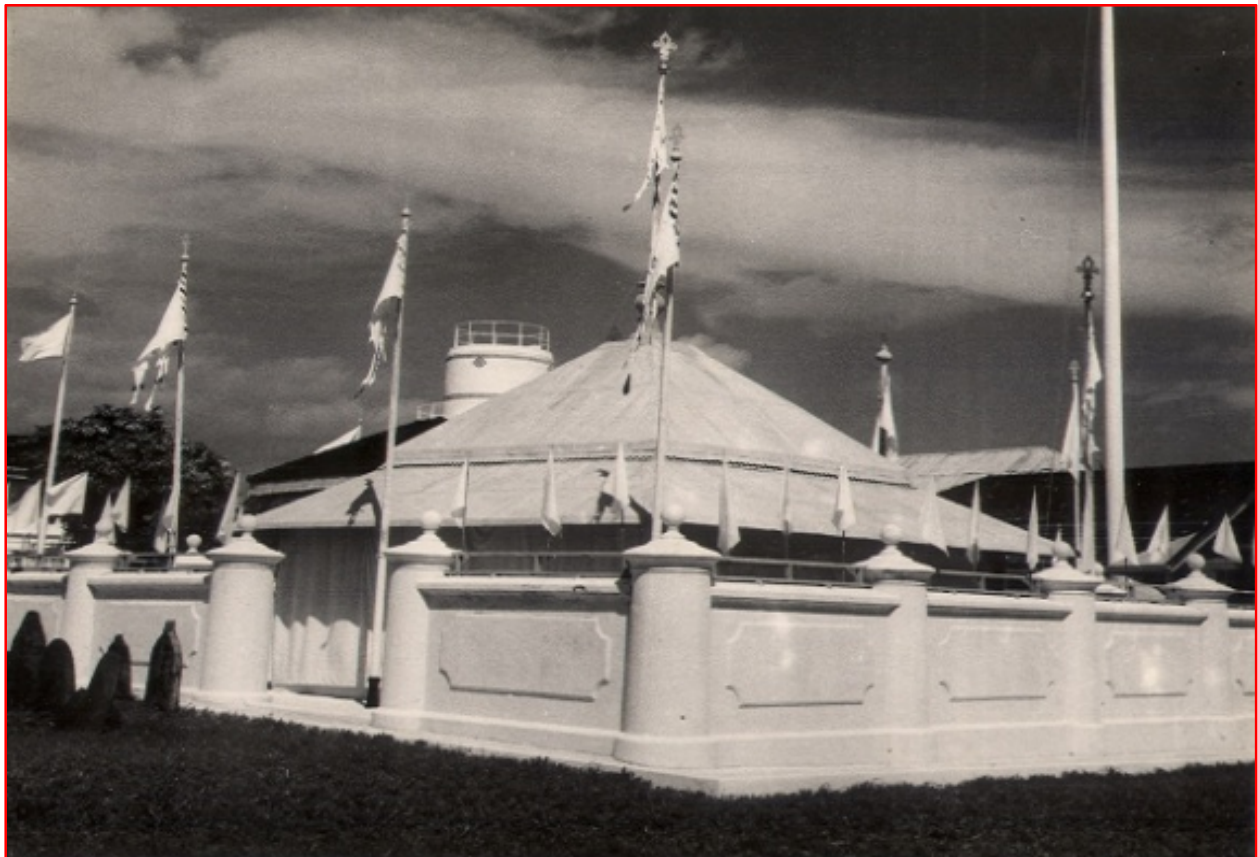
Male' Bodu Buruzu in 1960

which were reserved for that purpose. Adequate tanks were built in each ward, so that the impure well water from the mosques did not have to be used for drinking.

When the above measures proved inadequate for the pressing land needs, land reclamation from the shallow lagoon around Male' was begun. Many people filled in areas given to them and half of this property became their own, while the other half was Government land but on which they could make their home. This reclamation work started in the 1970's, first by private individuals and later by the Government. The reclamation of the lagoon was completed by 1986.

The increasing demand for land led to the dismantling of the old forts (buruzu) and the walls that connected them, that had formed a system of defense. The largest of these was the Bodu Buruzu that formed the first defense against enemies. The protective walls built

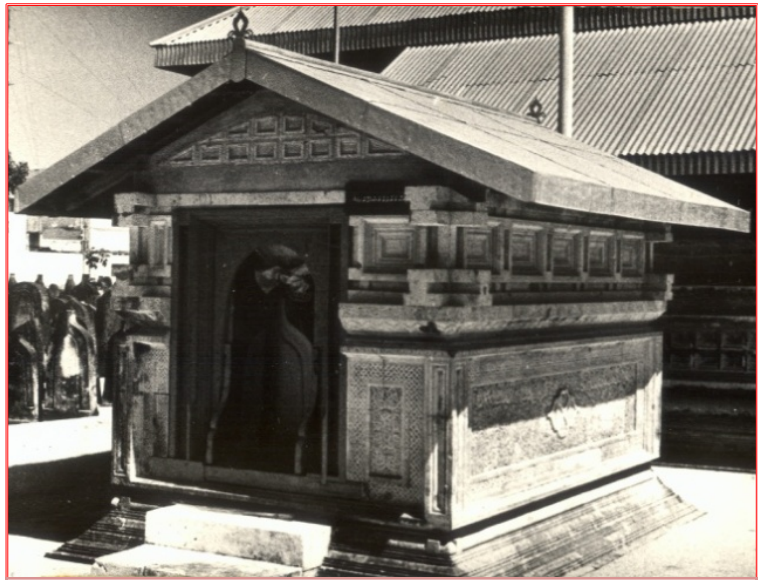
in the 17th century were dismantled in the early 20th century during the reign of Sultan Muhammad Shamsuddin III, as they were crumbling and presented a danger to the local population. New walls were built on the same foundations, but these were not as high or as thick as the ancient structures. This project was carried out through November 1925 nor June 1927. Existing roads were widened and straightened, new structures were built and more land was given to landless people of Male'. In the 1960's, most of the old palace was dismantled. The old palace was situated in what is now Sultan Park. Many of the buildings were old and in disrepair, but there were some that could have been saved, using present-day techniques. The only structure that was retained was the three storied building which is now the National Museum. This building was the residence of the last Sultan of Maldives, Sultan Muhammad Fareed I.



Medhu Ziyaaraiy in 1958

Male' has many places of historical interest. The most revered place in Male' is the Medhu Ziyaaraiy, the tomb of the saint Shaikh Abul Barakath Yusuf, who converted Maldives to Islam in 1153 AD. The tomb is inside the enclosure but is not open to viewing by the public.

Across the road from Medhu Ziyaaraiy is the famous Hukuru Miskiiy, the old Friday Mosque of Male'. The first Friday Mosque at this site was built by Sultan Muhammad Ibn Abdullah in the 12th century AD, soon after Maldives' conversion to Islam. In 1338 AD, the mosque was rebuilt by Sultan Ahmed Shihabuddin. The present Hukuru Miskiiy was built in 1657 AD by Sultan Ibrahim Iskandar I, using wood and coral stone. The work was done by



Ziyaaraiy of Sultan Ibrahim Iskandar I

Maldivian builders and craftsmen. The coral stones are measured and cut precisely to fit one into the other without the use of mortar. Exquisite carvings and calligraphy in Arabic and Dhives Akuru can be seen on the coral. The centre of the mosque has a wooden dome, with lacquered beams decorated with fine calligraphy in Arabic, consisting mainly of verses from the Qur'an. The wooden beams in the interior are also similarly decorated.

The cemetery of the mosque was demarcated and the first burial in this cemetery was that of Sultan Ibrahim Iskandar's mother, Kan'ba Aisha. Her grave is inside the Kan'ba Ziyaaraiy in the cemetery. These tombs are made of coral stone, the walls inscribed with verses from the Qur'an. There are similar structures to be seen in this cemetery, all of them being the tombs or Ziyaaraiy of Sultans who had ruled Maldives. The best and most elaborate of these is the tomb of Sultan Ibrahim Iskandar I, the Sultan who built this beautiful mosque. According to historical records, his tomb was prepared for him before his death in 1687 AD.

The round minaret within the grounds was built by Sultan Ibrahim Iskandar I in 1675 AD.

Other historically important mosques in Male' are Dharumavantha Rasgefaanu Miskiiy, Eidu Miskiiy and Kalhuvakaru Miskiiy.



National Museum in 2008

The National Museum in Male' contains objects of interest from Maldives' long history. One section of the Museum is devoted to artifacts from Maldives' pre-Islamic past. Some of the objects displayed here are from 4th to the 10th century AD. Many of them are of Buddhist origin, mainly from the Vajrayana sect of Buddhism. Some of these were unearthed during digging and construction work in various areas of Male'. Most of these objects need further research in order to reveal their age, origin and details.

Other sections of the Museum are devoted to the Islamic period and the Sultans who ruled Maldives including thrones and a palanquin used by an early 20th century Sultan. One special section contains dresses and clothing used by royalty in the last two centuries.

Many centuries of history lie buried beneath the houses and streets of Male'. In Lonu Ziyaaraiykolhu there are ancient graves of Persians who according to tradition came in the 12th century, bringing with them their tambourines and songs that later became a part of Maldivian culture. Much of the old culture and traditions have become lost in the busy

rush of development that has overtaken the old Fura Male'. Yet, the old history and the memories of days gone by are there, buried just beneath the soil, waiting for us to bring them to light again.

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