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This handbook was prepared by
Maxine Anastasi
Mevrick Spiteri
Nicholas Vella
3 June 2008

Updated by
Maxine Anastasi
Nicholas Vella
8 June 2009
**Description of the site**

The Roman villa lies within the grounds of the Carlo Diacono state secondary school for girls in Żejtun. Traces of ancient masonry were discovered in 1960 when land was being cleared for the construction of a new village school. Archaeological excavations were taken up in 1964 when a large cistern with water channels leading to it was uncovered, together with a stone paved area. The cistern, whose roof was supported on three arches, contained an accumulation of debris. In 1972 excavations were resumed, revealing various parts of the stone apparatus used in Roman times for the production of olive oil. These include a large stone block used as counterweight for the pressing wooden beam, a section of the press bed, and a stone vat. A second cistern was discovered, as well as two rock-cut “silos” containing Bronze Age pottery. Short excavation campaigns were conducted up to 1976 showing that the remains belong to a typical Roman rustic villa containing a residential area with an area for pressing olive oil. A detailed report of the excavations was never published.

*Excavations underway in the 1970s*
*(Photo: National Museum of Archaeology archives)*
Aims of the project

The primary aim of the project is to resume fieldwork at the site with a view to assess, record and publish the architectural remains and cultural material revealed in past excavations and other data arising from limited excavations on the site. An attempt will be made to recover data with which to attempt a reconstruction of the economic and environmental history of the site and its environs.

The extent of excavation by the UOM in 2007.

**Area A (Grid Reference: 110E/120N – 120E/130N)**

Area A and its immediate surroundings produced some of the most interesting structural and diagnostic features found on site. When the University of Malta began its excavation in 2006, the majority of these features were already exposed. Such features include three floors paved using lozenge-shaped ceramic tiles, a large stone block anchor for the pressing of olives or grapes, and a large stone vat which lies towards the centre of the area.

Within the first season, the team’s main aim on site was to draw up a detailed plan of the area and to reassign SU numbers to the stone features and tiled spaces. Besides the plan, the excavation of the few remaining baulks within area A was to commence. The detailed excavation and recording of these baulks left over from the previous excavation’s trenches (1970s) was all that was available in order to try and piece together any form of stratigraphic sequence within the deposits that would help understand the nature and dating of the site.

To date several fired bricks have been collected from the two excavated baulks together with fragments of worked marble. Even though it is still early days, it is possible that we may be dealing with a destruction layer or, as is more likely, an abandonment layer whereby part of the structure may have collapsed for some reason. Another interesting feature that was uncovered during the recent excavation is a worked flat stone slab (SU 16) containing two worn depressions and has a dressed border on three of its edges. On one side, remains of plaster lying at a right angle to the slab gives the impression that this slab may have been placed against a plastered wall or was used as a trough of some sort with plastered edges. A lot of attention has been given to the surrounding deposits and features of this slab but its use is still unknown and nothing else has been seen resembling it. Its most likely association is the pressing of olives as there are several other features that are known for olive pressing in the area.

Besides the main features just mentioned, pottery, marine and land snails and shells, two coins (ZTN06/049/1) and worked stone fragments (ZTN06/036/16 and ZTN06/036/30) have been uncovered from Area A. A series of cut features have been exposed lying on bedrock whist an interesting subterranean channel is being investigated. This may run right through the area.
In 2008, all the structural elements (walls, anchor block and vat) in Area A were assigned SU numbers. The excavation of baulk 4 and the area directly east of wall 18, 19 and 61 commenced in the hope of understanding the area immediately outside of the walled spaces. It appears that the ground was once paved with round stone slabs.

The pavement slabs (SUs 76–81) were also investigated in 2008. It was noticed that a series of preparation deposits lay between the large rectangular slabs and a large flat stone slab (SU 85) sunk into a cut (SU 86) in bedrock. The slab (SU 85) is showing several similarities to block, SU 16, excavated in 2006. It is hoped that further excavation can enable the function of these features to become clearer.

The aims for the 2009 season will be to:

• Open up the area of investigation northwards and westwards in particular, beyond the stone anchor block to establish the 1970s excavation limits and to decide whether there are any undisturbed layers.
• Draw several plan and section drawings of several remaining walls that enclose the spaces.
• Excavate the remainder of baulk 4.
• Excavate further the area around SU 85 in order to understand its function.
• Draw a north-south section running through SU 16.
Area A showing the flat stone slab (SU 16) and the excavated baulk 1 (July 2007).

Area A showing the anchor block (SU 63), two walls (SUs 58 & 61) to the north and east of the trench, and block SU 62 containing a square cut (July 2008).
Area B
(Grid References: 120E/110N – 130E/120N)

The Area B trench lies within an area that contains many of the 1970s trenches. During the recent 2006 University campaign, all the area was planned prior to any digging in order to record all the old trench limits. Each of the trench sides (standing sections) were cleaned. Trench T is one of the few remaining trenches excavated in the 1970s that is known to us. This trench lies directly within Area B. Knowing this information is crucial in trying to understand the nature of the 1970s excavation limits, whilst also trying to reconstruct the stratigraphic sequence of layers from the remaining baulks.

Within the first few days of the 2006 excavation campaign, an ashlar block (SU 508) was uncovered, whilst bedrock in Trench T was reached immediately. This was taken as a sign that the 1970s excavation reached quite a substantial depth. Most of the deposit that was being removed contained many modern elements such as plastic sweet wrappers and glass cola bottles. These items allowed the excavators to assess the extent of the disturbed layers.

As the second season progressed, several large stone bocks were uncovered in the southern part of Area B which seemed that they were in continuation with the same type of blocks being uncovered within the same alignment in the adjacent area C. Finds such as a stone loom weight (ZTN06/526/1) were discovered in Area B as well as some very interesting diagnostic Punic and Roman pottery from SUs 517 and 526, dated between the 6th century BC to the 4th/3rd century BC; these sherds have already been partly studied. During the 1970s excavation, an inscribed Punic sherd was discovered within Trench T. The inscription may invoke the goddess Astarte or Anat-Astarte (Frendo 1999). The presence of such a find within the site, makes one wonder about the use of the area, as a few kilometres away lies the multi-period sanctuary of Tas-Silġ where such inscriptions are common.

Also of interest in the area is the retrieval of a number of pottery sherds which have been recognized as being of Bronze Age date (Borg in-Nadur ware). This suggests that there may be unexplored prehistoric deposits at the site. It is thought that the hollow feature in the bedrock, to the north of Area B, may be a silo pit of Bronze Age date. This should be explored in more detail this season.

The series of walls (SUs 506 and 512) that have been uncovered in Area B point to an unusual masonry technique in which the semi-dressed blocks of Globigerina Limestone are placed directly on smoothened bedrock with no apparent foundation cuts or fills, which is the usual practice. It is hoped that
Further excavation might allow a better understanding of this type of wall construction technique as well as allow its accurate dating. Area B is of great importance to the site as it contains some very complex stratigraphic sequences which may provide a useful base upon which the pottery can be dated.

Further excavation of trench T was conducted in 2008, uncovering several sealed foundation deposits, until reaching bedrock. Of particular interest were two Attic black gloss pottery sherds (ZTN06/548/15 & ZTN06/551/1), which belonged to foundation fills for wall SU 508. The pottery sherds are significant for dating purposes and suggest that the wall was constructed between the 5th and 4th century BC.

Investigation around the ‘silo pit’ and the detailed recording of all the structural features (namely the walls) was done in 2008.

The aims for the 2009 season will be to:

- Continue excavating the pottery-rich deposits from around the main wall structures.
- Draw several elevation drawings of all the walls.
- Explore in more detail the “silo pits”.

Detail of trench B
Area B from the North (July 2007)

Area C
(Grid References: 120E/100N – 130E/110N)

Trench C is located to the south of the site. In the previous excavations digging in trench C was only limited to some parts of the trench. Understanding the limit of excavation reached during the previous excavations was one of the main tasks during the first two seasons of digging.

Attention was mainly focused on the western part of the trench, where some ashlar blocks were uncovered. As seen in old excavations photographs, some of the blocks uncovered were already found during previous excavations.

An alignment of stone blocks, SU 1010 and SU 1011 were uncovered to the northern part of the site. This alignment seems to be a continuation of blocks found to the north, outside area C. Deposits indicating a possible robber’s trench was excavated between stones SU 1010 and SU 1011, from where other stone blocks might have been looted.

To the north-west of the trench, two ashlar blocks (SU 1002) running in a north-east/south-west direction were also uncovered. As seen in old photographs, these blocks were already uncovered in previous excavations. A water channel is seen butting against one of the ashlar blocks. Here, the limit of previous excavations was reached, however the water channel is no longer in situ.
In 2008 several more ashlar block alignments were uncovered (SU 1031 and 1039). The ashlar blocks are laid out orthogonally and at right angles with each other. To the north-east of the trench, a fill contained between these blocks was composed of rubble and limestone chipping deposits, suggesting that we are dealing with foundation fills for a series of structures laid out orthogonally (similar to the *basis viilae* on Roman villa sites). However the standing structures which might once have stood there, have now been removed, possibly in antiquity.

Several fragments of pottery, construction building material (C.B.M.) and two architectural carved stone pieces have been found. The pottery will eventually help in the dating of the structures that it is associated with, whilst the C.B.M and architectural elements can help explain the nature of the structure, and the site as a whole.

The aims for the 2009 season will be to:

- Continue excavating towards the southern part of the trench in order to understand the relationship between areas C and D.
- Investigate the alignment of ashlar blocks to the north-west of the site so as to understand the nature of the structure and whether it continues into Area B.
Detail of trench C

Areas C and D taken from the north-east (July 2007)
Area D
(Grid References: 120E/90N – 130E/100N)

The fourth trench, D, is located to the southern part of the site. A large water cistern was reported to have been discovered during past excavations. No previous excavations were carried out here, because the investigation of the water cistern was considered to be too risky to undertake.

Since 2006, the first layers of soil were removed from practically the whole area of the trench. In some areas the bedrock was already uncovered under a few centimetres of soil. An alignment of stones [SU 1506-1510], running in a north-west/south-west direction was uncovered. Although their exact purpose is not yet clear, it seems that this alignment may correspond to the cistern entrance. Part of the fill [SU 1504] in the cut bedrock [SU 1502] surrounding the alleged cistern was already excavated, and the study of some of the pottery, in particular a trefoil mouth jug, found here such that the alleged cistern was built after the 4th century BC.

To the north-west of the trench the end limits of parallel truncations in bedrock were uncovered. Towards the end of last season, two blocks of stones were uncovered to the north-west of the trench. These blocks are laid out in a
complete different orientation to the rest of the structural remains found within the area.

In 2008, one of the three rock cut truncations, was excavated to reveal a complete and sealed drain gutter, complete with stone plugs and mortar (SU 1563). The drain lies on an east axis and is slightly inclined westwards, in keeping with the hypothesis that it empties into the adjacent cistern. This season the ashlar blocks that plugged the cistern were removed and excavation on the fills contained within the cistern commenced.

The aims for the 2009 season will be to:

- Continue excavating the fills contained within the cistern entrance.

Detail of trench D
Area D from the South, showing the large blocks blocking the alleged cistern entrance (July 2007).

View of the covered drain (SU 1563) sloping towards the cistern (July 2008).
Composition of the team

**Project directors:** Professor A. Bonanno, Dr N. Vella

**Area A:** Maxine Anastasi (trench supervisor)  
Ella Samut-Tagliaferro (3rd year)  
Christine Montebello (2nd year)  
Chantal-Marie Cassar (1st year)  
Sara Napolitani (visiting)  
Eva Castellucci (visiting)

**Area B:** Rebecca Farrugia (trench supervisor)  
Katja Zahra (graduate)  
Chris Busuttil (3rd year)  
Michelle Padovani (3rd year)  
**Erdener Pehlivan (visiting)**

**Area C:** Luisana D’Amato (trench supervisor)  
Abigail Zammit (graduate)  
Sabrina Camilleri (3rd year)  
**Bertrand Zammit (3rd year)**  
Noel Seguna (1st year)  
Lisa O’Rourke (visiting)

**Area D:** Renata Zerafa (trench supervisor)  
**Christina Busuttil (3rd year)**  
Juan Correa Caceres (1st year)  
Steven Hess (1st year)  
Barbara Cizler (visiting)

*Highlighted names have not yet confirmed their placement*
Overall logistics: Chris Gemmell (mornings only based at University)

Special Finds co-ordinator: Abigail Zammit

Bone analysis: Carmel Mifsud (to be confirmed)

Store supervisor (farmhouse): Katja Zahra

A lecture aimed at introducing participants to the sites and excavation methods will be presented by Prof. Anthony Bonanno (Zejtun Villa) and Dr Nicholas Vella (Ghar ix-Xih, Gozo). The lecture will be held at the Archaeology Centre on Thursday 11th June 2009, at 2pm. Attendance by all is recommended.

TO KNOW MORE:

Information and updates on the progress of the site, together with any relevant links to public lectures given about the site can be found on the Archaeology Department’s website at http://www.um.edu.mt/arts/classics-archaeo/projects.
Essential equipment required by team members

Trowel
Sun hat or head covering (hard helmets provided by the University may have to be worn on occasions)
Sturdy shoes covering toes
Sunglasses
Sun cream
Drinking water (at least 2 litres)
Knee pads
Clipboard where you can place the stratigraphic unit sheets and other notes
Measuring tape – *rutella* (5 metre is enough)
Pencil – hard type 2H; clutch pencils are too soft unless you buy 2H points
A few clothes pegs in order to attach measuring tapes to a baseline (string); for this task masking tape WILL NOT be used!!

Daily work schedule

07.00  Work begins on site
09.45  15-minute break [you should bring your own light lunch as there will be no time for any shopping]
12.00  End of fieldwork and return to the University
13.45  Afternoon activities: pottery washing, inking etc – mostly carried out on the Żejtun material
16.00  Progress report by team members
16.45  End of day’s work

The hours are long and the sun hot and bright. It is recommended that participants get enough sleep and rest. Fatigue has a cumulative effect and can disrupt a rewarding experience. Participants who choose not to wear their hats will not be allowed to excavate.

The project operates with few rules and regulations. Serious misconduct or irresponsibility which endangers others could result in dismissal from the excavations. Gladly this never happened on any of the department’s excavations.

- The site code for the excavation is **ZTN06**.
- The next Stratigraphic Unit in:
  - Area A is 119; Area C is 1047;
  - Area B is 556; Area D is 1564.
  - Bedrock is given SU **999**.
- **ATTENTION SUPERVISORS:** ALL REDUCED LEVELS WILL HAVE TO BE WORKED OUT ON SITE AND TRANSFERRED ON THE PLANS, SECTIONS, SPECIAL FINDS SHEET ON SITE. TRENCH AREA SUPERVISORS SHOULD HAVE WITH THEM A POCKET CALCULATOR.
Recording Methods

The following information has been adapted from the Archaeological Site Manual published by the Museum of London. Every trench has a copy of this manual (red ring-file). It is strongly recommended that you become familiar with this manual when filling in record sheets and preparing illustrations.

The primary route to an understanding of the activity represented in the archaeological record is through the “stratigraphic sequence”. The majority of archaeological sites are composed of stratified sequences. In other words, they have been formed by a process of stratified deposition and removal. Any single action, whether it leaves a positive or negative record within the sequence, is known as a Stratigraphic Unit, abbreviated SU (this is equivalent to the London Manual’s context).

As all excavation necessarily involves the destruction of most stratigraphic units, it follows that the only surviving record of the archaeological sequence is the field, find and environment record. This will become the primary source of information for the study of the stratigraphic sequence.
The written record

Every DEPOSIT or CUT has a separate written description compiled on a general STRATIGRAPHIC UNIT RECORD SHEET. Each sheet has an individual number which has to be noted in the SU REGISTER (BLUE NOTEBOOKS) for each area. Your supervisor will guide you through the prompts that you have to fill. You are also strongly urged to look at the London Manual for additional help. Your supervisor will also be keeping notes on a separate AREA NOTEBOOK (GREEN). You are advised to read through the notebook to keep abreast with developments in other areas of the trench where you are working. Special finds are given a progressive number for every STRATIGRAPHIC UNIT. This is recorded on a SPECIAL FINDS SHEET which will be attached to the SU sheet. These two should be kept together. The SUPERVISOR IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ENSURING THAT EVERY SPECIAL FIND GETS GIVEN A NUMBER AND RECORDED ON THE SPECIAL FINDS SHEET BEFORE IT IS HANDED OVER TO THE SPECIAL FINDS SUPERVISORS.

Having your own notebook where you can jot down notes and questions will help you participate actively in the excavation. You are also urged to take your own photographs on site.
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Additional notes/comments:  

Finds (tick)

None  Pot  Glass  Metal  C.B.M.  Stone
Lithic  Wood  Shell  Bone  Leather

Other (specify)

Sketch plan (show approx. scale, North point, grid reference, dimensions)

Interpretation:

Discussion:

Suggested period:  Suggested Date:  Site Phase:

Post-Evacuation Comments:

Data filled in by:  Date:  Data checked by:  Date:

Excavation of S.U. renewed in subsequent excavation season:  Relevant references to Area notebook:
**Special Finds List**

* Leave blank if find was recovered whilst sieving or during post-excavation analysis.
# Write **SIEVING** if find was recovered whilst sieving deposit or **ANALYSIS** if find was recovered during post-excavation analysis.
~ **Date** should correspond to date when find was excavated.
* SF supervisor’s **signature** to appear here.

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Continues overleaf (tick)
The drawn record

Each SU or a group of SUs are planned on sheets of gridded draughting film. The drawing area on the pre-cut sheets that we use on site represents an area of 5.0 x 5.0 m. at a scale of 1:20 (the standard recording scale). This 5.0 m square relates to the archaeological site survey grid established across the entire area of excavation and marked by metal dowels. A separate plan number is given to each plan and recorded in the PLAN AND SECTIONS REGISTER (RED NOTEBOOK).

Please be aware that gridded pre-cut drawing sheets are VERY EXPENSIVE and care should be taken to ensure that none are wasted!

Plans are drawn using standard conventions. These can be found in the London Manual.

Sections or elevations are also drawn when necessary. These are usually at a scale of 1:10. The sections/elevations have a numbering system that has to be noted in the PLANS AND SECTIONS REGISTER (RED NOTEBOOK) whenever a new section is drawn.

It will be necessary to note heights above sea level on plans and sections. Your supervisor will teach you how to take levels and to jot down the readings in a LEVELS BOOK (COLOUR TO BE DECIDED). The drawings reproduced on the following page will help you understand the calculations that have to be made.
### WORKED EXAMPLE

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<th>INITIALS</th>
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<th>REDUCED LEVEL</th>
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#### Remarks should include:
- Area, Plan or Section No.
- SU Numbers, and the list of Levels.
Gaining credits for the fieldwork

First year students are encouraged to register for a study-unit entitled Monitored Fieldwork in October 2009. The credits gained will count for the second year.

Study-unit title: Monitored Fieldwork

Code, value: 

- **ARC 2015** = 8 credits (2 weeks on dig & 2 weeks on survey – Zejtun or Gozo)
- **ARC 2025** = 6 credits (2 weeks on dig – Zejtun or Gozo)

Assessment: Fieldwork 20% Report 80%

Tutors: Prof A. Bonanno, Dr N. Vella

Submission deadline for report: end of October 2009

Students who are participating in the Department’s excavations at Zejtun and/or Ghar ix-Xih and/or in the Malta Survey Project are encouraged to start working on their report straight away. Only students proceeding to the second or third year of the BA (Gen)/BA (Hons) course are eligible for this module, provided they have not obtained a Monitored Fieldwork study unit before.

You should endeavour to include the following in your report:

1. a **critique** of the archaeological method used on excavations in Malta (and abroad if you like), with particular reference to Zejtun/ Ghar ix-Xih;
2. a **critique** of the field walking method used in field survey in Malta (and abroad if you like), with particular reference to the Malta Survey Project.
3. a description of the excavation strategy in the trench where you were working, including your own first-hand observations; here you should review the research questions being asked (in consultation with your supervisor or directors), and the conclusions to be drawn in your own words from your own point of view; you are **not** requested to present a day-by-day journal of your experience on site;
4. a description and appraisal of the survey strategy, including your own first-hand observations from the work conducted this season.
5. a description of post-excavation and post-survey methodologies or specialisations (environmental archaeology, pottery studies, etc) that you have been involved with during the excavation or field survey.

Your report should **not** be more than 5,000 words in length (at 1.5 line spacing); lists of items catalogued, or works consulted, can be extra, but mere length is no virtue. Illustrations are essential, but must be relevant to the text, and preferably will be your own drawings/sketches and technical photos, rather than copies from published sources or general snapshots. If photos are borrowed from colleagues due acknowledgment should be made in the usual way. You need to submit only one copy of the report, but you are kindly requested to present a photocopy of the marked version to the Department. As with essays and dissertations, references must be correctly and fully cited and listed, using the author-date system, and always giving full attribution of the source for any statement which is not your own. There will be no extension of the deadline for submission, so you should plan to complete your report ahead of the deadline in case there is a last-minute hitch.

In summary, the aim of this exercise is to combine first-hand observations with the discussions on methodology that you have been taught in your first year at University. It is a good idea to go and “dig up” those notes!

**Useful reading sources:**

**Archaeological Method and Theory**


**Roman Malta**


**Roman farming**


**Excavation techniques and recording systems**


Survey techniques and recording systems

There is no standard manual on archaeological field walking techniques. Here is a selection of sources (and their appraisals) which the Malta Survey Project team has consulted in designing the fieldwork.


