

2. Understanding the past: Borġ in-Nadur in antiquarian and early archaeological literature

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Abstract. Over the past five centuries various parts of the site of Borġ in-Nadur were documented, cleared and excavated. Borġ in-Nadur was originally grouped with other sites and believed to form part of the temple dedicated to Hercules mentioned in ancient sources. Different areas have now been identified within the site, considered to consist mainly of the remains of a Late Neolithic megalithic building and a fortified Bronze Age settlement. Using the available antiquarian and early archaeological literature this paper provides a review of the history of Borġ in-Nadur.

Keywords: history of archaeology, Temple of Hercules, Temple of Melcarte.

2.1. Introduction

The archaeological remains at Borġ in-Nadur are situated on a roughly triangular sloping rocky promontory to the south-east of Malta (Fig. 2.1). Two valleys, Wied Żembaq¹ and Wied Dalam, created as a result of Pleistocene river systems, mark the western and eastern aspects of the area, with the nearby cave of Ghar Dalam (Site A in Fig. 2.1) formed when the river that fashioned the latter valley carved its way through an underground chamber². Borġ in-Nadur

¹ Wied Żembaq is the easternmost part of Wied Has-Saptan.

² MAR 1937: xxii-xxiii; MAR 1938: xiii.

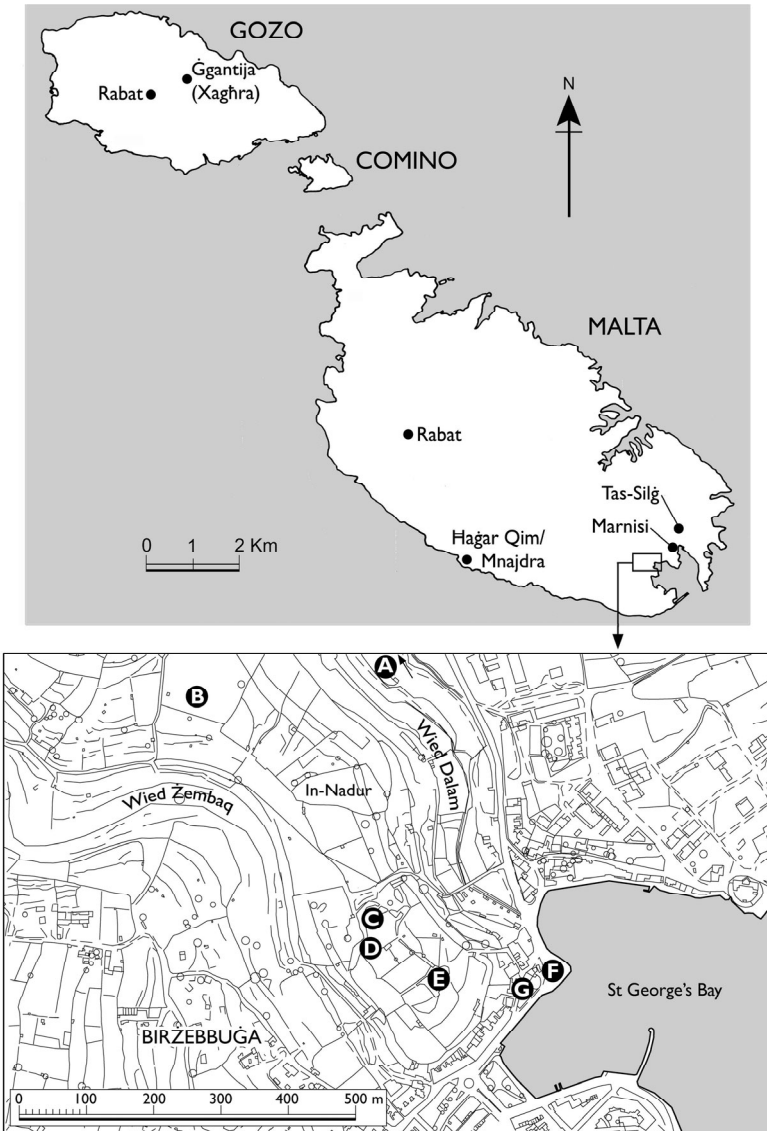


Figure 2.1. Main sites mentioned in the text: (A) Ghar Dalam, (B) Ta' Kaccatura villa, (C) Borg in-Nadur megalithic bastion, (D) Borg in-Nadur huts, (E) Borg in-Nadur temple, (F) cart-ruts and pits, (G) St George's chapel (drawn by Maxine Anastasi).

lies close to Marsaxlokk Harbour and there is convincing evidence that it is slowly coming closer to an imperceptibly encroaching shoreline³.

Generally the area has witnessed a long history of human activity and constitutes a rare landscape where the remains of different periods can still be observed within a kilometre of each other. Indeed, one can find evidence for the Early and Late Neolithic (Għar Dalam and Borġ in-Nadur) and the Bronze Age (Borġ in-Nadur and dolmens), as well as remains of buildings or burials belonging to the Punic and Roman periods (area of Ta' Kaċċatura), together with stretches of cart-ruts of an indeterminate and highly debatable age. This paper will only focus on the remains at Borġ in-Nadur, which today are considered to consist mainly of a Temple period megalithic complex and a Bronze Age defended settlement.

As with other archaeological sites, the study of the remains of Borġ in-Nadur has produced scholarly debates on their age, nature, function, and use throughout the centuries. Travellers and scholars have also used different approaches and methodologies to study the remains at this locality. Moreover, the remains at Borġ in-Nadur have been considered as part of a larger antiquarian complex scattered around the Marsaxlokk harbour, an opinion that was rejected in the course of last century when Borġ in-Nadur was found to consist of different archaeological remains dating to different periods. This evolution in the scholarly understanding of Borġ in-Nadur is quite exceptional and will be given particular attention in this paper.

2.2. Late Medieval times to the eighteenth century

2.2.1. Late Medieval toponyms

A reference to Borġ in-Nadur as a toponym in late medieval documents has still to be discovered. This may suggest that Borġ in-Nadur as a place-name was coined rather late. An early reference to the area may well be contained in the mention of 'nadur, clausura

³ This conclusion has been reached by human-made sub-aerial features which are at present underwater.

in *contrata gadir*' made in 1548⁴. A chapel dedicated to St George (Site G in Fig. 2.1) in the vicinity has been an often quoted landmark guiding travellers to the ruins at least since the seventeenth century, and together with a spring used for the retting of flax features in the toponymy of Early Modern Malta. Both the chapel and the spring are referred to in the place-name *San Ġorġ [tal-] Ġhadir* documented in 1520⁵. Two other minor localities of the site, namely *Ġnien ta' Ġhadir* (1520)⁶ and *Ġhajn Kittien* (1555)⁷, relate to the water source and retting activity in the area. Other place-names, such as *Ta' Ċapċap* (1585)⁸ and *Ġnien ta' Dalam* (1541)⁹ relate to areas now known to contain archaeological sites, namely *Ta' Kaċċatura* (Site B in Fig. 2.1) and *Ġhar Dalam* respectively.

2.2.2. *Quintinus*

Probably the earliest published reference to the archaeological remains under study is that provided in 1536 by Jean Quintin d'Autun, better known as Quintinus, chaplain of the French Knights and auditor to the Grand Master of the Order of St John. Quintinus described ancient remains of stupendous height and width around Marsaxlokk Harbour¹⁰ and identified them with the ancient Temple of Hercules given a set of co-ordinates in Ptolemy's *Geography*¹¹. He considered the ruins to be spread over an area with a circumference three miles long¹². Unfortunately, a certain degree of uncertainty surrounds this reference as Quintinus does not provide recognizable

⁴ Wettinger 2000: 409.

⁵ Wettinger 2000: 493.

⁶ Wettinger 2000: 154, literally the garden of the pool or garden of the small lake.

⁷ Wettinger 2000: 185, Maltese translation for the spring of flax. For the significance of a spring close to a Temple-period megalithic site see Grima 2004a: 341-342; Bonanno 2009: 25-31.

⁸ Wettinger 2000: 90. The contract, preserved in NAV, Not. F. S. Camilleri R138: 2722-2729 (12.xii.1881), related to the acquisition of *utile dominium* of fields at *Ta' Ċapċap* following archaeological finds in 1881 reveals that *Ta' Ċapċap* is an older name for the area known in the twentieth century as *Ta' Kaċċatura*.

⁹ Wettinger 2000: 152.

¹⁰ Quintinus uses the term '*Euri Portum*' meaning the Harbour of the East which is usually considered to be Marsaxlokk Harbour.

¹¹ Vella 2002.

¹² Quintin 1536 in Vella 1980: 23, 55-56 fn. 91.

landmarks to pin down the location of the remains. Nonetheless, scholars¹³ generally concur with the idea that the remains at Borg in-Nadur were included in those described by Quintinus. This is supported by the fact that in the mid-seventeenth century a tradition existed whereby the Temple of Hercules could be identified with the ancient ruins behind St George's chapel in modern Birżebbuġa¹⁴.

Quintinus' idea of a temple covering a large area shaped the opinion of later writers for a full century¹⁵. Indeed his ideas were referred to by scholars such as Fazello¹⁶ and Haxiaq¹⁷. Thevet also followed Quintinus when he described the Temple of Hercules as made of large stones located in the Eastern harbour, but placed the ruins in the fortified promontories of the Grand Harbour¹⁸. The importance given to Quintinus' account was such that it was often quoted and debated by later writers when describing the antiquities in the area, his attribution of the remains to the Temple of Hercules, the Roman God equivalent for the Phoenician Melqart, later adopted almost to the point of becoming the toponym of Borg in-Nadur and the surrounding area. Furthermore, Quintinus' search for references to Malta in ancient classical sources as well as his attempts to identify the monuments referred to by ancient writers with visible antiquities on the islands became the principal method of studying antiquities until the end of the nineteenth century.

2.2.3. Giovanni Francesco Abela

Against this background, the description of Malta published by Giovanni Francesco Abela in 1647 emerges as a significant development. This author's detailed knowledge of the Maltese islands allowed him to identify different ancient sites in the area where Quintinus had previously identified a single monument, namely the Temple of Hercules. Abela instead placed the Temple of Hercules in another part of the bay, namely at 'Kasar', now known

¹³ Evans 1971: 7; Bonanno 1982: 195.

¹⁴ Abela 1647: 22.

¹⁵ Bonanno 1982: 194-195.

¹⁶ Fazello 1558: 10.

¹⁷ NLM Library ms. 465: 42r; for further discussion see Bonanno 1982: 195.

¹⁸ Thevet 1575: 25.

to be a seventeenth-century toponym associated with the archaeological site of Tas-Silġ¹⁹. Around Marsaxlokk Bay megalithic remains were also seen by Abela to the north-east of Marnisi, specifically at ‘il Ghar’ close to the Cavallerizza built by the Knights of St John. He compared these to the megalithic remains that can now be identified as Haġar Qim and/or Mnajdra and the Xewkija temple remains in Gozo²⁰. Abela also mentioned the ancient ruins behind St George’s chapel in another part of Marsaxlokk Bay, undoubtedly a reference to Borġ in-Nadur. Abela was quick to reject the tradition that would have the ruins here form part of the ancient Temple of Hercules. By also mentioning ancient cisterns close to the shoreline (Site F in Fig. 2.1), Abela’s account is an early attempt to make a distinction between the different antiquities in the area of Borġ in-Nadur²¹.

Abela’s account influenced the writings of later authors. Giovanni Antonio Ciantar’s account, published posthumously in 1772, relies heavily on the conclusions reached by Abela; he copies the description of the remains behind St George’s chapel²² and those at Tal-Kasar²³, and like Abela identifies the latter with the site for the ancient Temple of Hercules. Another account by Ciantar suggesting that explorations may have been carried out at the Temple of Hercules²⁴ was later considered by Caruana²⁵, Ashby²⁶, and Evans²⁷ to refer to the remains on the Borġ in-Nadur promontory. Nonetheless, a careful reading of the relative text makes it clear that it is much safer to identify the remains described by Ciantar with the archaeological site of Tas-Silġ²⁸.

¹⁹ Abela 1647: 108; Bugeja forthcoming.

²⁰ Abela 1647: 21.

²¹ Abela 1647: 21-22.

²² Ciantar 1772: 99-100.

²³ Ciantar 1772: 319-320.

²⁴ Ciantar 1772: 461-462.

²⁵ Caruana 1882: 18.

²⁶ Ashby 1915: 50 fn. 3, 52.

²⁷ Evans 1971: 7, 18.

²⁸ The presence of a road cutting right across the remains links Ciantar’s description with Tas-Silġ rather than the ruins near Borġ in-Nadur. For a more detailed discussion see Bugeja forthcoming.

2.2.4. *Jean Houel*

A more useful description of the remains at Borg in-Nadur is that provided by the French traveller Jean Houel, who compares the antiquities there to those of the Giants' temple (that is Ġgantija) he saw in Gozo. Although his account is brief it marks a further development in the recording of the remains at Borg in-Nadur by providing a description of the megalithic structures inclusive of measurements.

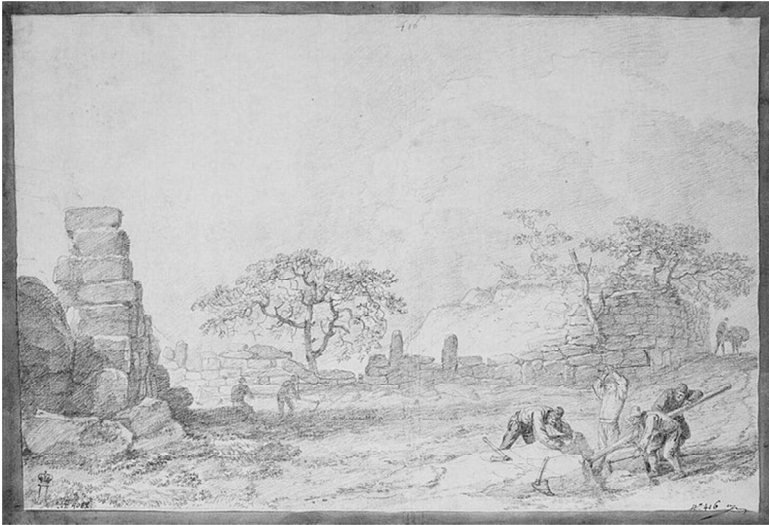


Figure 2.2. Late eighteenth-century drawing (416) of Borg in-Nadur by Jean Houel (source: reproduced by courtesy of the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg; inv. no. OR-4082).



Figure 2.3. A photograph of the part of Borg in-Nadur depicted by Jean Houel (source: the author).

Indeed, in his publication, Houel described two circular structures between 23 and 27 m in diameter²⁹, joined at right angles by a wall of around 23 to 27 m, the latter wall tangent to one of the circles and stretching beyond it for 15.5 to 20 m. He stated that the other side of this wall formed the radius of the other circular structure.

Further documentation of the site was provided by Houel in a drawing (416) now preserved at the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Russia (Fig. 2.2)³⁰. Although the drawing is described in an official online source as depicting ruins at Casal Caccia, that is Xaghra (Gozo)³¹, and two standing megaliths are comparable to those previously present at the Brochtorff Circle at Xaghra³², arguments can be made to identify the remains depicted with those at Borġ in-Nadur. The wall shown in the centre of the drawing may be identified with the wall joining the two curved walls mentioned in Houel's description. The viewpoint can still be identified on the outer and eastern aspect of what is now considered to be the defensive wall of the prehistoric settlement at Borġ in-Nadur (Fig. 2.3). The profile of the wall, shown in cross-section in the foreground and to the left of the drawing, can still be identified on site (Fig. 2.3, left) whereas the outline of the remaining walls in Houel's illustration are traceable even though later walls and the growth of trees obscure details in some parts (Fig. 2.3, centre and right). A megalith embedded vertically in a rubble wall at Borġ in-Nadur (Fig. 2.4) is part of one of the two standing megaliths prominently visible in Houel's drawing. When considered in the context of the realism known for Houel's illustrations³³, the drawing turns out to be a truthful representation of the Borġ in-Nadur remains in the late eighteenth century. It is, in fact possible that the two standing megaliths marked an entrance

²⁹ Houel uses the 'toise', a French unit of measurement equivalent to 1.949 metres.

³⁰ I am grateful to Mr Joseph M. Attard Tabone for sharing this observation with me. Ironically Houel's illustration is used in an article by Attard Tabone (1999: 171) to illustrate the destruction of a megalithic site at Xaghra, but the author assures me that this was an unintended editorial insertion.

³¹ www.arthermitage.org/Jean-Pierre-Laurent-Houel/The-Ruins-of-a-Phoenician-Structure-in-Casal-Caccia.html. Accessed on 14 January 2011.

³² These megaliths were probably destroyed in the early nineteenth century. See Attard Tabone 1999: 177.

³³ Grima 2004b: 13.



Figure 2.4. One of the megaliths embedded in a rubble wall at Borg in-Nadur (source: the author).

to the village of prehistoric huts located beyond. The activity which appears in the foreground in Houel's drawing provides additional confirmation that the location of the remains is in fact Borg in-Nadur. While a person on the right tills the land overlooked by a seated man, four men on the left vigorously attempt to break stone from the underlying rock surface. This scene illustrates the manner in which the Maltese cleared barren rock, seeking low spots, cracks, furrows, and cavities with little soil, and then proceeding by levelling any protruding stones, and filling hollows with the debris produced to create a horizontal surface, before spreading the soil. Houel specifically states that he observed this activity at the ruins behind St George's chapel at Marsaxlokk³⁴ and describes it in a short paragraph which is followed by an account of his departure from the village and a visit to the tower Tal-Ġawhar³⁵. Thus this

³⁴ St George's chapel and the archaeological sites of and immediately around Borg in-Nadur now form part of Birżebbuġa. This village was declared a parish relatively late (1913) compared to other villages, explaining why remains at or immediately around Borg in-Nadur were in the past described as occurring at Żejtun, Ghaxaq or Marsaxlokk.

³⁵ Houel 1787: 93. Further supporting evidence for the identification of the ruins depicted in drawing 416 comes from the numbers adopted to catalogue Houel's drawings at the Hermitage. The numbers do not follow the order adopted in the

drawing emerges as the earliest known illustration of Borġ in-Nadur. It remains the sole representation for decades perhaps because it was not included in the engravings which illustrate Houel's final publication; consequently, it was not reproduced by later writers such as Boisgelin³⁶ and Lacroix³⁷, known to have based most of their illustrations on Houel's.

2.3 Nineteenth century

2.3.1 Early nineteenth century

In the first half of the nineteenth century a number of authors refer to the site but other than reproducing ideas from the accounts provided by Quintinus, Abela, and Houel, little new information is added. Boisgelin mentions antiquities behind the small chapel of St George and, unlike Abela, calls the place *Kasar*. The rest of the account may be considered as a mere translation in English of Houel's text, particularly for the comparison of the ruins with the Giant's tower in Gozo (that is Ġgantija) and the description of the remains.³⁸ On his part, Bres does not provide anything new other than for an Italian translation of parts of Houel's account³⁹. Guidebooks for travellers are likewise laconic. Giuseppe Periccioli Borzesi identifies the site with the ruins of the ancient temple of Hercules but claims that 'there is little or nothing there to admire.'⁴⁰ Thomas MacGill simply states that the temple of Hercules is at Marsaxlokk, interestingly also

published book but grouping of images occurs. For instance, while drawings 413 to 439 relate to Malta and drawings 440 to 449 concern Gozo, the description of Malta follows that of Gozo in the text. In Houel's account the visit to Borġ in-Nadur (drawing 416) follows Tas-Silġ, the latter identified in drawing 415 described as 'The Ruins of the Temple of Jupiter to the East of the Harbour of Marsa Scirocco on Malta'. It also precedes the visit to the round building at Tal-Gawhar, the latter identifiable as drawing 417 'Ruins of Ancient Tower of La Giarda'. In contrast, the ruins at Xaghra in Gozo are depicted in drawings 442 to 446.

³⁶ Boisgelin 1804.

³⁷ Lacroix 1842.

³⁸ Boisgelin 1804: 58.

³⁹ Bres 1816: 137.

⁴⁰ Periccioli Borzesi 1830: 72.

mentioning marble remains at a farmyard 'Ta-Harbat', possibly Ta' Kaċċatura, but confusion with another locality cannot be excluded⁴¹.

2.3.2. Cesare Vassallo

A slightly more detailed account is provided by Cesare Vassallo in 1851. He compares the remains at Borġ in-Nadur to other megalithic structures in Malta, identifying the former with those of the temple of Melcarte (Melqart), the Phoenician equivalent of the Roman Hercules. Vassallo considers the temple of Melcarte as the earliest amongst the megalithic structures due to the inferior execution of the design⁴². The description provided by Houel, namely the general appearance of one large heap of stones and the two curved walls joined by a straight wall, is included in the description, but Vassallo also mentioned a trilithic megalithic structure closer to the shore, giving its dimensions, providing a rudimentary sketch and documenting its contemporary use as an animal pen (Fig. 2.5)⁴³. Vassallo also mentions the pits along the shoreline and, after discussing the ideas of previous scholars, proposed that the pits were furnaces to contain the ritual fires related to the temple of Melcarte on the hill⁴⁴. He also described, measured and published a sketch of a large cistern at Ta' Medewwiet further inland, suggesting that it was connected with the same temple⁴⁵. Through his work, Vassallo was reviving the idea of a temple scattered over a large area, as proposed by Quintinus (section 2.2.2 above), but he was now including with it the megalithic remains, the pits and the large cistern at Borġ in-Nadur and the immediate surroundings. Vassallo's narrative was immediately accepted and soon became a reference point for information on the ruins at the site as may be seen in Tallack's book on Malta⁴⁶.

⁴¹ MacGill 1839: 139.

⁴² Vassallo 1851: 3.

⁴³ Vassallo 1851: 4-6.

⁴⁴ Vassallo 1851: 6-8.

⁴⁵ This is the large reservoir located at Ta' Kaċċatura; Vassallo 1851: 31-32.

⁴⁶ Tallack 1861: 127-133.

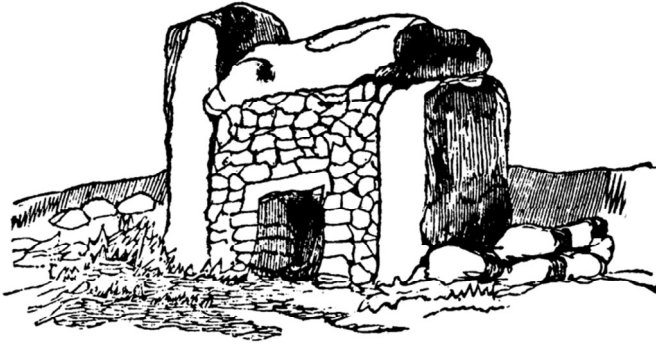


Figure 2.5. An illustration of Borg in-Nadur published in Vassallo 1851.

2.3.3. Society of Archaeology, History and Natural Sciences

The formation of the Society of Archaeology, History and Natural Sciences in 1866 presented an opportunity to investigate the site. In one of its first meetings, three members were chosen to form a committee to report on what they considered as the Phoenician, Greek and Roman antiquities of the islands⁴⁷. No evidence has been traced to suggest that a serious study of Borg in-Nadur was undertaken by this committee, but three photographs of the megalithic remains are included in a photographic album left by this society. It does not appear that this photograph (Fig. 2.6) was taken as part of investigations into the remains at Borg in-Nadur but rather as one of a series of the Maltese megalithic sites to ‘show in the most effective way the style of building adopted and details of the monuments’⁴⁸. For more details one needs to refer to the work of Andrew Leith Adams, vice president of this society. Already in the inaugural lecture delivered to the society he had brought to the attention of all those present the neglect present on site, particularly with ‘the filling up of stones, in and around these remains’ which was obscuring their outline⁴⁹. In a later publication he reports damage caused recently (‘the moderns’) by the ‘carting of stones and rubbish’

⁴⁷ NLM, ms. 588: 11.

⁴⁸ Furse 1869: 411.

⁴⁹ Adams 1866: 14.

on the remains to the point that only a chamber was visible, the rest ‘covered by stones collected from the neighbouring fields.’⁵⁰ Besides providing information on the appearance of the site, Adams’ account emerges as important for it reveals that by 1870 the curved megalithic wall shown to the right of Houel’s drawing (Fig. 2.2) was covered by stones, hence dating this heap of stones amassed against the megalithic wall to the nineteenth century⁵¹. Adams also notes the cavities on the shoreline nearby⁵², comparing them to the pits discovered at Rabat (Gozo) and proposing for the former an age contemporary with the ruins of the Temple of Melcarte (that is, Phoenician). He records the presence of ruts (running across the opening of some cavities) along one part of the shoreline and also traced the ruts on the opposite side of St George’s Bay. Rather than supporting a gradual submergence of the islands, Adams attributes the occurrence of underwater cavities to erosion⁵³.

2.3.4. Works by the Permanent Archaeological Commission in 1881 and 1882

Most of the aforementioned authors who wrote about Borġ in-Nadur based their work on that of previous writers, with some visiting the place and providing a new contribution by describing parts of the site not previously noted. Contrary to what happened at some megalithic sites in the Maltese islands, no excavations or clearings are known to have been carried out at Borġ in-Nadur before the late nineteenth century. The formation of a Permanent Archaeological Commission in 1881 changed this situation.

⁵⁰ Adams 1870: 249. A nineteenth-century amassing of small stones against the large wall at Borġ in-Nadur has also been suggested by Trump 1961: 256-257.

⁵¹ Although Adams witnesses the carting of stones one cannot exclude that the formation of the stone heap was started before. More generally the formation of the stone heap can be dated to between 1787 (publication of Houel’s account on Malta) and 1866 (Adams’ departure from Malta).

⁵² Only a few of these features remain visible today. Plan 100A/62, dated 1921, at the Chief Draughtsman’s Office, Project House of the Ministry of Resources and Rural Affairs at Floriana, reveals that at that time 75 pits could be counted and 73 were subsequently surveyed. It is reproduced by Grima in this volume (Fig. 9.8) where he also provides the historical context for the necessity of surveying these features.

⁵³ Adams 1870: 249-250.



Figure 2.6. Photograph of Borġ in-Nadur taken by the Society of Archaeology, History and Natural Sciences of Malta in 1868, forming part of an album *Antiquitates Phoeniciae in Insulis Melitae et Gaulos* (source: reproduced by courtesy of the National Library, Malta).

Formed through the events in the aftermath of the discovery of the mosaic pavements of a Roman House at Rabat (Malta), the Commission embarked on a programme to study and investigate other archaeological remains on the islands⁵⁴. As the prevalent view then was that the megalithic remains of Borġ in-Nadur and the nearby remains at Ta' Ċapċap (later called Ta' Kaċċatura) were considered as parts of the temple of Melcarte they were both included for a clearing operation which was the first task this Commission performed mainly between April and May 1881, with more limited works carried out in 1882. No formal or published report was issued of the works done and it is only through a study of contemporary documentation that snippets of what was discovered obtained and the conclusion reached that the related material is scattered and much has been lost.

Two archival documents provide us with an overview of the work done and reveal the rudimentary level of documentation prevalent at

⁵⁴ For an overview see Bugeja 2004. See also Grima, this volume (chapter 11).

the time⁵⁵. From these documents it emerges that clearing the remains by shifting the debris accumulated over the previous hundred years to the side was the methodology of exploration employed. This was done to expose what is now believed to be the Bronze Age D-shaped megalithic enclosure of Borġ in-Nadur. The mound of debris which resulted from this operation remains heaped close to the wall until this day, similar to the heap Ashby found on the remains at Ta' Kaċċatura⁵⁶. It is clear that workmen cleared the site without supervision, and the site was visited by knowledgeable antiquarians every few days or so. In the end, few finds, 'deemed insignificant', were made on site, and with 'nothing of interest' discovered everything was 'covered again' as witnessed at the close of the century by Mayr⁵⁷.

One of these archival documents reveals that two photographs were made of the remains at Borġ in-Nadur, as well as a further photograph of the cistern at Ta' Kaċċatura; unfortunately these were not found in the relevant file when consulted⁵⁸. Despite the fact that several sets of photographs are recorded to have been made in this document, none have ever been traced. Unless challenged by new evidence it is the opinion of the present author that these photographs were photographic reproductions of plans and drawings of the areas explored⁵⁹.

⁵⁵ NAM, CSG01-11040/ 1882 and NAM, CSG01-12585/1882.

⁵⁶ Ashby 1915: 52. Ashby suggested that excavations had occurred here in the eighteenth century basing himself on a coin of Grand Master Pinto (1741-1773) found on site and an account provided by Giovanni Antonio Ciantar. Arguments have been put forth to suggest that the remains mentioned by Ciantar with reference to the Temple of Hercules (1772: 461-462) correspond to Tas-Silġ (see Bugeja: forthcoming) rather than Ta' Kaċċatura. It is here suggested that the heaps Ashby saw were produced by the clearings of the 1880s.

⁵⁷ Mayr 1908: 63.

⁵⁸ When the files at the National Archives (Malta) were being consulted, nineteenth-century photographs in files were removed to a new folder by archivists for preservation purposes. The photographs related to Borġ in-Nadur in NAM, CSG01-11040/1882 were not traced even though a request to see this folder was granted.

⁵⁹ The description of two photographs in the archival document fits that provided by the photographs of drawings of Borġ in-Nadur and the cistern at Ta' Kaċċatura included in Caruana's report (1882: opposite 18 and one of the photographs after 22 respectively). The remaining photograph is likely to be the photographic representation of a plan of Borġ in-Nadur found by Grima this volume. The sets of photographs mentioned in the archival document are probably photographs taken

The drawing, reproduced photographically by Formosa (Fig. 2.7) and signed MB (probably Michele Busuttill the younger)⁶⁰, shows an elevation of the megalithic remains of what is now considered as the temple remains at Borġ in-Nadur (Site E in Fig. 2.1). A comment on the height of one of the megaliths indicates that measurements were made during the clearings of the 1880s. The plan of the remains cleared at Borġ in-Nadur drawn by Emanuele Luigi Galizia which Mayr later reproduced in his publications (Fig. 2.8)⁶¹ further confirms this and reveals that one of the main objectives of the explorations was the surveying and planning of the remains. The absence of the original drawings in the archival holdings related to the Public Works Department, namely the National Archives at Rabat and the plans in the Chief Draughtsman's Office (Project House of the Ministry of Resources and Rural Affairs at Floriana), suggests that finding further information on the excavations in public holdings remains bleak.

Two accounts of the remains published by Antonio Annetto Caruana⁶² provide little details. Appearing under the heading 'The Melcarte Monument'⁶³, Caruana's accounts summarily refer to the narratives by Quintinus, Bosio, Abela, Houel, and Vassallo. He refers to finds recorded by Cianfar as having been made in the Temple of Hercules, but, as pointed out above, these concern the site of Tas-Silġ. All that Caruana mentions of the 1881 explorations is that columns and tiles were discovered and that the underground sacred spaces of the monument were uncovered⁶⁴.

by Giuseppe Lorenzo Formosa to be sold and included in Caruana's report (1882 Guide after vii). These photographs were sold to the public from the photographer's shop in 56 Strada Teatro Valletta, explaining how Mayr (1908: 63) came to know of Galizia's plan of Borġ in-Nadur at a photographer's shop.

⁶⁰ Although possible, Michele Bellanti is unlikely to be the author of this drawing having retired a few years earlier and known to suffer from ill-health at this time (Vella 2010: 128). On the other hand, Busuttill's likely authorship of this drawing emerges from the fact that in 1881 he was an employee of the Public Works Department.

⁶¹ Mayr 1901: 687 fig. 11, 688 fn. 3.

⁶² Caruana 1882: 17-19; Caruana 1899: 149-150.

⁶³ In Italian in the 1899 publication.

⁶⁴ Probably referring to the remains at Ta' Kaċċatura, in particular the cistern.

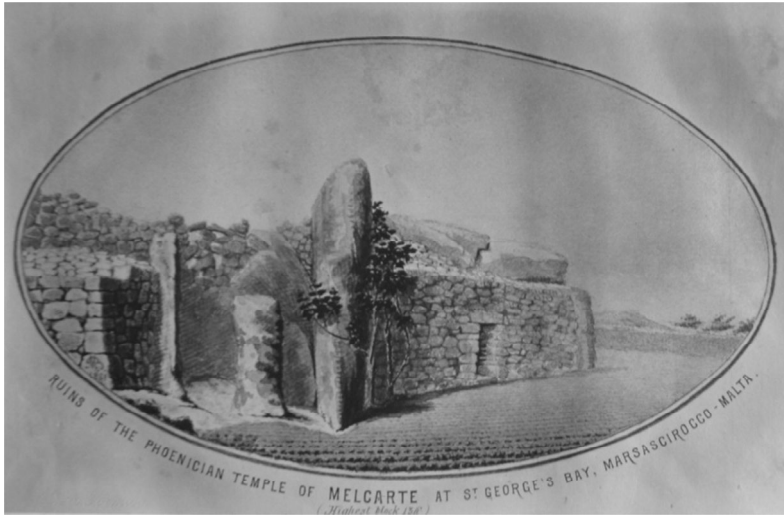


Figure 2.7. Late nineteenth-century photograph of a drawing of Borg in-Nadur.

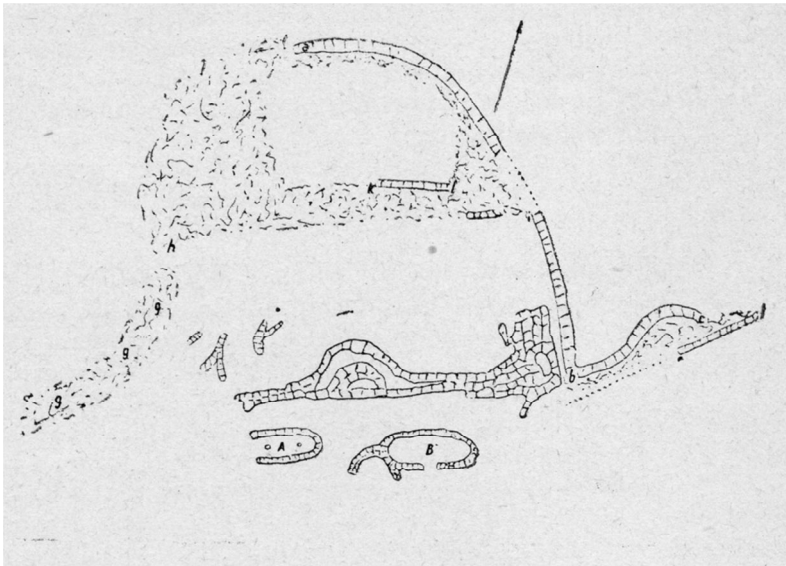


Figure 2.8. Mayr's (1901) copy of the plan of Borg in-Nadur by E. L. Galizia.

He also notes that an apse of the Melcarte monument – to be taken to mean the D-shaped wall – was still visible and provides some measurements of the remains. When one considers that Caruana reserves a full separate report on the explorations of the Roman Domus in Rabat⁶⁵, it is surprising that he did not issue a separate report for the ‘Melcarte Monument’ greatly ‘renown[ed] in antiquity.’⁶⁶ Equally puzzling for all those who attribute excavations at Borġ in-Nadur in 1881 to Caruana should be the fact that Caruana bases his account for the report submitted to the Colonial Office on a single day’s visit to the site when explorations were drawing to an end⁶⁷. Indeed, these are some of the considerations which lead me to believe that it was the Permanent Archaeological Commission which was responsible for exploration of Borġ in-Nadur and Ta’ Kaċċatura in the early 1880s. Truly Caruana was a member of the Commission but his role appears marginal in the 1881 works, taking a more central role a year later following the impact achieved through the publication of the report on the antiquities of the Maltese islands⁶⁸.

Judging these works summarily, it appears that the nature of the remains at Borġ in-Nadur and late nineteenth-century investigative practices adopted in Malta resulted in few artefacts being discovered at the time. It appears that in the early 1880s the remains of the nearby reservoir at Ta’ Ċapċap proved more attractive. This can be surmised from contemporary accounts⁶⁹, from the decision to limit works to the latter site in 1882⁷⁰ and from the fact that land expropriation was only undertaken for the remains near the underground reservoir⁷¹. Nonetheless, it is clear that attempts were made to preserve the remains of the D-shaped wall. In line with his philosophy for the preservation of antiquities⁷², in September 1882, Caruana proposed the ‘rebuilding of the megalithic wall exteriorly’

⁶⁵ Caruana 1881.

⁶⁶ Caruana 1882: 17.

⁶⁷ Caruana 1882: 18.

⁶⁸ Referring to Caruana 1882.

⁶⁹ Debates of the Council of Government, 17 (6 .v.1881): column 548.

⁷⁰ NAM, CSG01-12585/1882.

⁷¹ NAV, Notary F. S. Camilleri R138: 2722-2729 (12.xii.1881).

⁷² Referring to the 600-word document transcribed by Grima (this volume), a copy of a document by Caruana.

(Fig. 9.5) and the ‘construction of retaining wall ... interiorly’ for what was considered as the remaining apse of the Temple of Melcarte⁷³. This remains a landmark event in the preservation of the islands’ archaeological remains, which together with the building of the wall around the reservoir at Ta’ Kaċċatura, was ready by February 1883⁷⁴.

2.4. The twentieth century

2.4.1. *Albert Mayr and the early twentieth century*

No other significant accounts are given in other late nineteenth-century publications about the area of Borġ in-Nadur. In describing Phoenician architecture for a multi-volume *World History of Ancient Architecture*, the Frenchmen Perrot and Chipiez make reference to the site by repeating what Caruana had said, providing an engraving of part of the remains which is of little use (Fig. 2.9)⁷⁵.

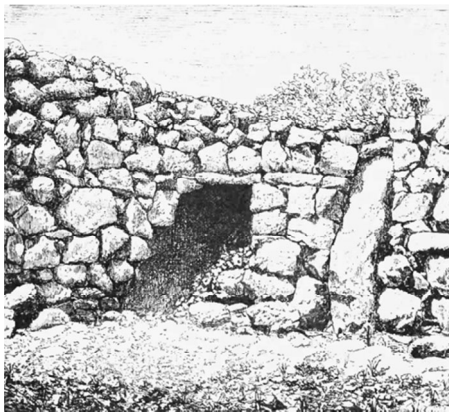


Figure 2.9. Illustration of part of Borġ in-Nadur appearing in Perrot and Chipiez (1885: fig. 46).

⁷³ NAM, CSG01-12585/1882. This is in actual fact the D-shaped part of the Bronze Age wall of Borġ in-Nadur.

⁷⁴ NAM, CSG01-12585/1882, correcting Bugeja 2004: 59 fn. 22.

⁷⁵ Perrot and Chipiez 1885: 316-317. The engraving is based on one of the photographs of Borġ in-Nadur commissioned by the Society of Archaeology, History and Natural Sciences.

An important contribution, however, was provided by Albert Mayr who visited the islands in 1897-1898⁷⁶. Mayr's work is characterised by an erudite and critical use of available documentation and by a more extensive survey and direct study of the remains. This allowed him to provide further details, give measurements as well as distinguish different areas that make up the site. His conclusions are significant. In the long curved megalithic walling (Site C in Fig. 2.1), rather than the remains of the Temple of Melcarte, Mayr recognised a building with a defensive purpose. He also proposed that 'two small oval enclosures' uncovered in the late nineteenth century were the remains of huts or primitive dwellings. Interesting is his conclusion – still uncontested today – that the plateau of Borġ in-Nadur was a stronghold within which were various buildings, namely huts and sanctuaries⁷⁷. His rejection of the idea that the remains belonged to the Temple of Melcarte, which came in the wake of attributing megalithic remains to prehistory, led Mayr to refer to them under the toponym of the area, namely 'Borj-en-Nadur' by which name the remains would be described during the twentieth century⁷⁸.

2.4.2. The archaeological reports by Margaret Murray

An extensive archaeological campaign at Borġ in-Nadur was only carried out in the 1920s by a young Englishwoman, Margaret Murray, who was invited to excavate in Malta by Themistocles Zammit when the two met in London⁷⁹. By this time the practice and organisation of archaeology in Malta had changed radically from that prevalent in the late nineteenth century. The Museum under the curatorship of Zammit had been set up and now it was common practice for local enthusiasts and foreign archaeologists to collaborate in various excavations carried out throughout the islands, contributing their expertise and opinion which slowly but dramatically changed the understanding of antiquities in Malta. The

⁷⁶ For a general discussion on Mayr's contribution to Maltese archaeology see Stöger 1999.

⁷⁷ Mayr 1901: 687-690; Mayr 1908: 61-66.

⁷⁸ The toponym was already used by Perrot and Chipiez 1885: 316.

⁷⁹ Vella and Gilkes 2001: 359.

knowledge gained during this period was such that a number of publications were issued to describe the individual sites⁸⁰ and also to provide overviews of specific historical periods⁸¹. The publication by Thomas Ashby on Roman Malta⁸² is of particular importance for the present study because it established a Roman date for the remains at Ta' Kaċċatura, distinguishing them from Borġ in-Nadur, clearly prehistoric. For centuries considered as parts of a single 'temple', Ta' Kaċċatura was now recognised as the site of a Roman villa equipped with underground water cistern, an opinion which prevails today.

Murray's work at Borġ in-Nadur formed part of a larger enterprise, comprising several sites in southern Malta and an all-female team which included Gertrude Caton Thompson, Dorothea M. A. Bate and K. A. Burke⁸³. Caton Thompson worked at Ghar Dalam, a site made famous by the discovery a few years earlier of a tooth believed to belong to *Homo neanderthalensis*⁸⁴. The destruction of an ancient site at Tal-Bakkari on the outskirts of Żurrieq resulted in works at this locality⁸⁵ while threat from development led to emergency excavations at Santa Sfia⁸⁶. Borġ in-Nadur, however, took the lion's share of Murray's work in Malta⁸⁷. A trench dug on 20th August 1921 revealed several Neolithic and Bronze Age sherds and when further works were done three days later and walls were uncovered, a proposal to clean and survey the area was already being contemplated by Zammit⁸⁸.

In the early twentieth century, beyond interest in architectural details and prestigious finds, equal attention was given by archaeologists to all the items recovered during the excavations, no matter how fragmentary. Murray classified her finds according to type namely spindle whorls, flint, bronze objects, bones, and stone

⁸⁰ Zammit 1918; Zammit 1926.

⁸¹ Bellanti 1913; Bellanti 1924.

⁸² Ashby 1915: 23-80.

⁸³ The volumes represent an early and landmark contribution by female scholars in the study of Maltese Archaeology

⁸⁴ Murray 1923: 6-13; Murray 1925: 1-18.

⁸⁵ MAR 1921: II; Murray 1923: 16-20.

⁸⁶ Murray 1923: 14.

⁸⁷ Murray 1923: 21-32; Murray 1925: 19-27; Murray 1929: 1-8.

⁸⁸ Zammit, T. 1921-1924, ff. 4-5.

objects, the latter further subdivided according to shape. A stratigraphic approach was used in which the sequence, nature, contents, and thickness of the deposits were recorded and described by area. The three reports published by the London-based Quartich include scientific reports on vertebrates⁸⁹, soil analysis⁹⁰, as well as a chemical and microscopical analysis of deposits from the excavations⁹¹. All the volumes related to the work were generously accompanied by photographs and sketches. Dating the remains and finds was also on the agenda. No date or purpose could be proposed for the semicircular megalithic wall (Site G in Fig. 2.1)⁹². In contrast, the temple at Borġ in-Nadur was included among the other megalithic temples and by comparing the architectural forms considered to be of the most primitive architectural set-up⁹³.

Murray subdivided her pottery into two chronological periods – Stone Age and Bronze Age⁹⁴. Special attention was given by Murray to the Bronze Age pottery, less well published than the Neolithic group, dedicating an entire volume in the series to a corpus which included the Bronze Age pottery from other sites in Malta⁹⁵.

When compared to the pre-twentieth century accounts, a radical change in the approach to the study of the site is perceived. Rather than consult the classical sources and debate works by previous authors to throw light on the antiquities under study, these antiquities were being excavated to uncover remains and artefacts that were indispensable for throwing light on the remotest past of the islands.

⁸⁹ Murray 1923: 12-13.

⁹⁰ Murray 1923: 46.

⁹¹ Murray 1929: 31-36.

⁹² Murray 1929: 20.

⁹³ Murray 1929: 22-24.

⁹⁴ Zammit 1916: 135.

⁹⁵ In this monograph, a report on the excavation of a Phoenician tomb was included to indicate the distinction between the pottery of the Bronze Age and the subsequent Phoenician period (Zammit 1934: 5-6). This was also done, it seems, to give publication space to a young Charles Zammit, Themistocles' son, at the beginning of his archaeological career.

2.4.3. Excavations by David Trump

Generally, in the years following the excavations at Borg in-Nadur the classification of prehistoric pottery according to colour, type, and decoration continued but little progress was registered in the dating of prehistory⁹⁶. Ugolini's work stands out by providing a valid contribution through comparative work and study of stratigraphic sequences in the 1930s⁹⁷. Further developments were achieved two decades later when Evans was invited to compile an inventory of all the prehistoric material stored at the Museum⁹⁸. By attempting to build a pottery sequence (according to typology and with the help of tomb-groups and few stratigraphic sequences available) as well as through comparison with the Sicilian culture sequence, a year later Evans was able to come up with a culture-sequence for the prehistory of the Maltese Islands⁹⁹. The full-scale excavations conducted at Skorba and sondages made at a number of megalithic temple sites by David Trump, curator of archeology, the sequence proposed by Evans for the Neolithic period was confirmed and enlarged but for the Bronze Age results from excavation at other sites was needed¹⁰⁰.

Trenches dug at Bahrija and Borg in-Nadur by Trump proved useful for this purpose. At the latter site six exploratory trenches were dug, of which one was further extended to reveal two huts (Site D in Fig. 2.1) and seven different phases.

From the report published by Trump it emerges that finds similar to those deemed insignificant in the 1880s were now crucial to support the view that Borg in-Nadur was a Bronze Age settlement. The D-shaped wall was dated and assigned to the Middle Bronze Age following the discovery of pottery of standard Borg in-Nadur style in its interstices¹⁰¹.

⁹⁶ Zammit 1929: 21-25.

⁹⁷ Ugolini 1934: 95-100, 159-161, 212-215.

⁹⁸ For a background to this initiative see Evans 1971: 4-5; Bugeja 2006: 35-37.

⁹⁹ Evans 1953.

¹⁰⁰ Trump 1966: 20-44.

¹⁰¹ Trump 1961: 260.



Figure 2.10. Photograph of Trump's Hut 2 at Borġ in-Nadur (source: private collection).

Like Murray, Trump employed a stratigraphic approach and in his report provides a descriptive sequence of different layers whilst noticing the type of pottery contained in each layer. This not only provided a culture-sequence for the different levels present on site but was also instrumental to determine the Maltese prehistoric pottery culture-sequence. In contrast to earlier views, particularly those of Quintinus and Vassallo, it was recognised that Borġ in-Nadur was not part of a larger complex in the area but was one of a series of Bronze Age settlements scattered across the islands. With the best preserved defensive wall and with huts (Fig. 2.10) recorded so well by Trump it comes as no surprise that Borġ in-Nadur soon became the type-site for this culture.



Figure 2.11. Excavations at Borg in-Nadur in the 1920s by monitored workmen (top) (source: Murray 1925: pl. 13) and in the 1950s with archaeologist David Trump (bottom centre) excavating (source: private collection).

Undoubtedly part of the success registered at Borg in-Nadur followed the developments in the understanding of Maltese prehistory and excavation methodology. Further achievements were made through a major development in work practices during excavations. It has already been noted how in the late nineteenth century work on site was often left to workmen, who uncovered the remains to be later documented by knowledgeable antiquarians¹⁰². No major difference appears to have been registered in the

¹⁰² NAM, CSG01-12585/1882.

excavations of the 1920s (Fig. 2.11 top)¹⁰³ when only a handful of workmen had experience because they had participated in previous excavations¹⁰⁴. This picture contrasts with that prevalent in the 1950s where together with the experienced workmen¹⁰⁵ one finds the archaeologist and trained individuals on site daily, not only monitoring but also actually excavating and documenting the remains (Fig. 2.11 bottom). The outcome was that a more detailed documentation of finds was possible as well as achieving significant results with a more conservative uncovering of the remains.

Abbreviations

NAM	National Archives of Malta
NAV	Notarial Archives, Valletta
NLM	National Library of Malta
NMA	National Museum of Archaeology, Valletta

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¹⁰³ Repeated requests to use a motor car by Themistocles Zammit to visit Borg in-Nadur suggest that he was not on site every day. See NMA, Reference Book A: 230, 238, 242.

¹⁰⁴ Murray 1923: 1.

¹⁰⁵ The person in the background in Fig. 2.12 bottom is 'Toni l-Baħar' who had already participated in excavations at other archaeological sites.

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