

# 1. Introduction

Davide Tanasi – Arcadia University,  
The College of Global Studies, MCAS, Italy  
TanasiD@arcadia.edu

Nicholas C. Vella – Department of Classics and Archaeology,  
University of Malta, Malta  
nicholas.vella@um.edu.mt

For well over a century the study of Maltese prehistory has been dominated by the extraordinary megalithic buildings that are found on the two major islands of the archipelago. Defined as the ‘world’s oldest free-standing stone structures’<sup>1</sup> and inscribed on UNESCO’s world heritage list for their outstanding universal architectural value, these buildings, often called ‘temples’, have attracted attention, aroused curiosity and sparked debate. Indeed, it is common opinion that for almost a millennium, starting about 3600 BC, the Maltese islands set themselves apart from what was happening elsewhere in the Mediterranean<sup>2</sup>. In the view of many, difference was expressed by these Late Neolithic ‘temples’ – a term for which semantic breadth is preferred in order to accommodate different opinions, encourage diverging ideas and even allow unorthodox expressions<sup>3</sup>. By contrast, interest in the period successive to the Temple period, when the Maltese archipelago enters the fold of events in the south-central Mediterranean, has been largely absent<sup>4</sup>.

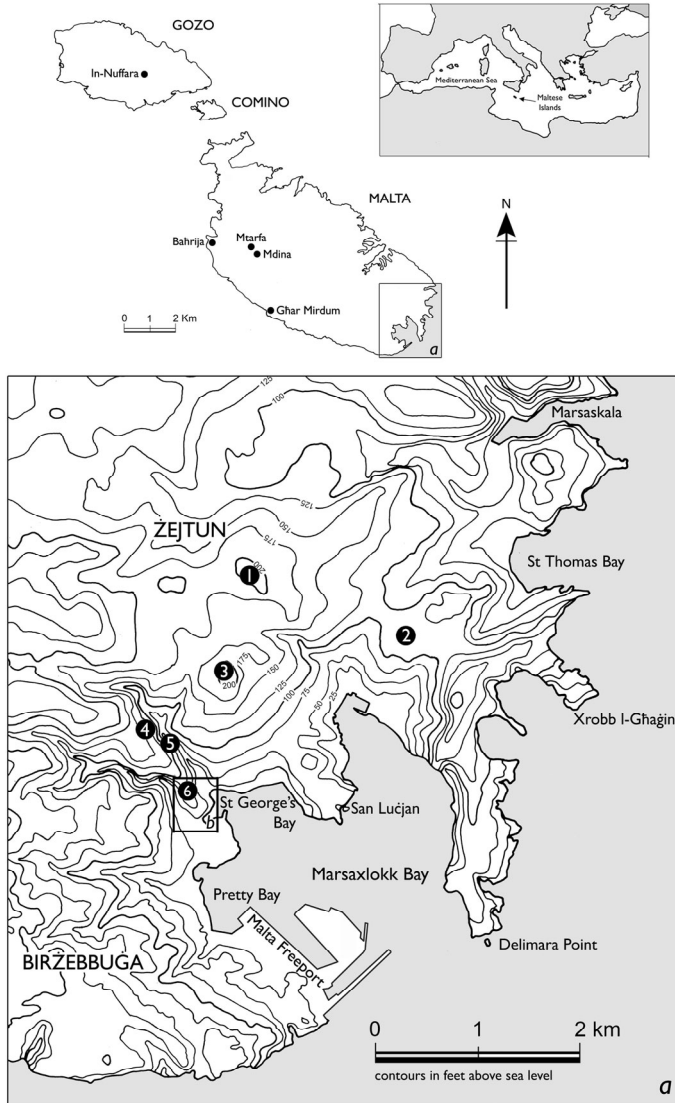
---

<sup>1</sup> Renfrew 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Robb 2007: 331.

<sup>3</sup> See the review of diverse views, academic and otherwise, in Skeates 2010: 26-75.

<sup>4</sup> See the issues raised by Bonanno (1993a; 1993b; 2008), Blakolmer (2005) and Cazzella *et al.* 2007.



**Figure 1.1.** The Maltese Islands and inset (a) corresponding to the area of south-east Malta with the sites and localities around Marsaxlokk Bay: (1) Żejtun villa, (2) Tas-Silġ, (3) Il-Marnisi, (4) Ta' Kaċċatura villa, (5) Għar Dalam, (6) Borġ in-Nadur. Inset (b) corresponds to Fig. 1.2 (drawn by Maxine Anastasi).

This collection of essays is an attempt at filling some gaps in the islands' history during the long second millennium BC by taking a cluster of archaeological sites around the area of Borġ in-Nadur in south-east Malta as the central point of description, discussion, and review.

In the archaeological literature the toponym Borġ in-Nadur refers to the sites located on a low, steep-sided spur or ridge of Globigerina Limestone between two converging deep valleys, the Wied Żembaq to the west and the Wied Dalam to the east, overlooking the small cove of St George's Bay in Birzebbuga (Figs 1.1-1.5). The sites consist of a Late Neolithic megalithic temple, explored by Margaret Murray in the 1920s, and a Bronze Age fortified village located 100 m to the north-west on the highest point of the plateau, explored by the antiquarian Antonio Annetto Caruana in the 1880s and later by archaeologist David Trump. The remains of a Roman villa and rock-cut tombs are located further inland at Ta' Kaċċatura whereas the rocky outcrop in between preserves traces of cart-ruts<sup>5</sup>. Along the coast, below the chapel which gives the name to the cove, a series of rock-cut pits were also discovered but most were destroyed by the construction of the road<sup>6</sup>. A pair of cart-ruts also exists nearby, sloping into the sea<sup>7</sup>. Excavations carried out by Trump at the Bronze Age village site resulted in the place-name being given also to a phase in the periodisation scheme of prehistoric Malta (Table 1.1) and also to the culture of which pottery and settlement pattern are defining elements<sup>8</sup>.

The idea of producing this book developed out of an award made to one of us (DT) by the Shelby White-Leon Levy Foundation of Harvard University (Program for Archaeological Publications) for 2010-11 to publish the finds, in particular the pottery, recovered by Murray from the temple area. This task forms part of an exercise with a wider scope and which has seen the study for publication of material from a number of Bronze Age sites, including Ghar Mirдум, In-Nuffara (Gozo), Mtarfa and also Baħrija<sup>9</sup>. It was realised

---

<sup>5</sup> A single pair of ruts has been documented (Magro Conti and Saliba 2005: 207, ref. no. MB\_0016); their position is shown in Fig. 1.2.

<sup>6</sup> These are discussed by Grima, this volume.

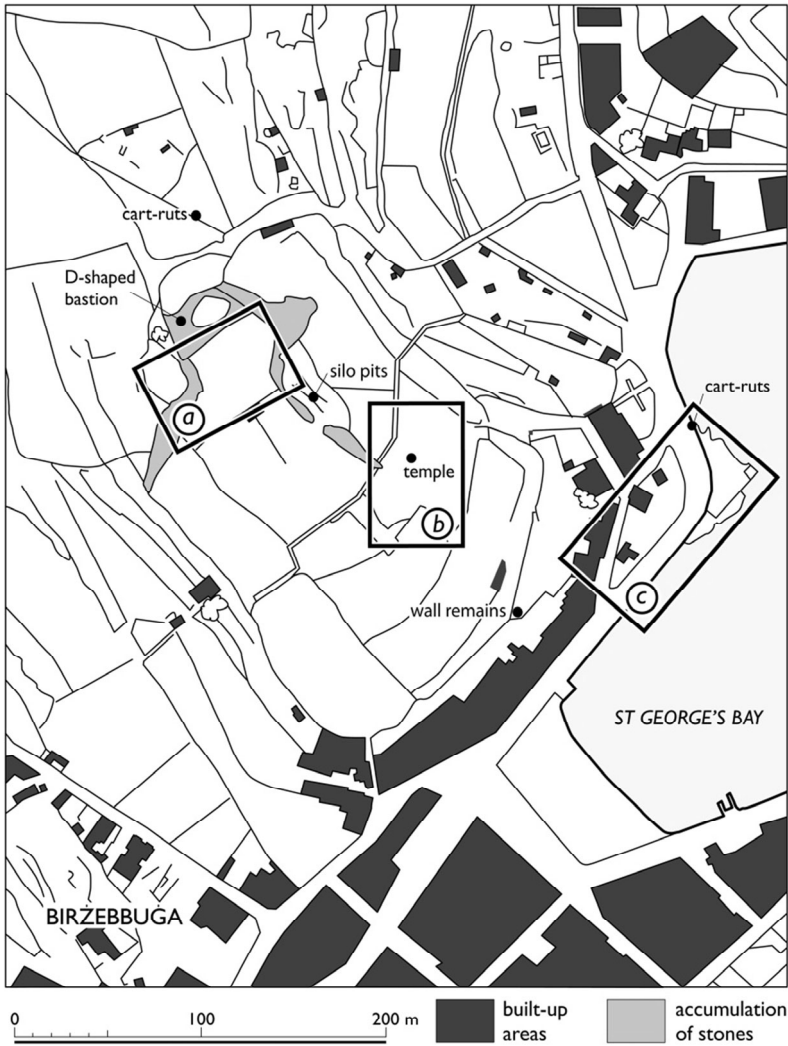
<sup>7</sup> Magro Conti and Saliba 2005: 207, ref. no. MB\_0018.

<sup>8</sup> Evans 1971: 225-227; Malone *et al.* 1994.

<sup>9</sup> See Tanasi 2009; 2010.



**Figure 1.2.** Aerial photograph of the Borg in-Nadur area with contour lines superimposed (digitised by Maxine Anastasi).



**Figure 1.3.** The archaeological remains at Borg in-Nadur. Inset (a) corresponds to Fig. 3.6 (rotated), inset (b) corresponds to Fig. 3.4, inset (c) corresponds to Fig. 9.8 (drawn by Maxine Anastasi).



**Figure 1.4.** Borg in-Nadur area with St George's Bay in the distance (probably 1958). The megalithic temple remains are arrowed (source: National Museum of Archaeology/Heritage Malta).

that there would be much to gain from putting the publication of the finds in a wide, interdisciplinary context and when a meeting was held in August 2010 with colleagues from Heritage Malta, the agency responsible for managing the site of Borg in-Nadur, a rationale for the publication plan was agreed upon. It was decided that sufficient weight should be given to the site and its landscape setting, besides the artefacts discovered during excavations, both in terms of what these tell us about cultural processes in prehistory but also about issues related to past and present public outreach and site management.

The book is divided into four parts. Part I deals with a history of the interest held by antiquarians in the area of Borg in-Nadur (Bugeja, chapter 2) and reviews the major archaeological explorations carried out there in the twentieth century (Vella *et al.*, chapter 3). Bugeja shows how the Borg in-Nadur ruins were thought to be the remains of the Temple of Hercules, the Phoenician Melqart, given coordinates in Ptolemy's *Geography*. No knowledgeable traveller to Malta would leave without having explored this corner



**Figure 1.5.** Westwards view of the Bronze Age D-shaped fortification wall (centre right). The Bronze Age huts explored by Trump are arrowed (source: National Museum of Archaeology/Heritage Malta).

of the island. In the case of the roving eighteenth-century artist Jean Houel, a sketch traced by Bugeja at the Hermitage State Museum reveals the condition of the fortification wall at the end of the nineteenth century. Vella *et al.* describe the remains explored by Murray in the temple area and those discovered by Trump behind the fortification wall. An analysis of Trump's unpublished fieldnotes and other documentation held in the archives of the National Museum of Archaeology shows that the archaeologist's reading of the stratigraphic sequence holds.

Part II is devoted to an exhaustive presentation of the artefacts including the prehistoric pottery (Tanasi, chapter 4), the small group of post-prehistoric wares (Anastasi, chapter 5), the lithics (C. Vella, chapter 6), and the small finds (C. Veca, chapter 7). All inventoried pieces are described, most have been re-drawn purposely for this publication, and a selection of them has been photographed. In order to facilitate the consultation of the inventoried prehistoric pottery (which totals 842 sherds) and the lithics (72 pieces), the

	SICILY		MALTA	S. ITALY	AEGEAN
2200	Early Bronze Age	Castelluccio	Tarxien Cemetery (II A)	Palma Campania	Middle Helladic
1700 1600		Capo Graziano		Middle Bronze Age 1-2 (Protoappennine)	Late Helladic I-II
1550	Middle Bronze Age	Thapsos I	Borg in-Nadur (II B1)	Middle Bronze Age 3 (Appennine)	Late Helladic III A1
1440- 1420		Milazzese I			Late Helladic III A2
1440- 1380		Thapsos II			Recent Bronze Age 1 (Subappennine)
1350		Milazzese II	Borg in-Nadur (II B2)	Recent Bronze Age 2 (Subappennine)	Late Helladic III B2
1310- 1300		Thapsos III		Final Bronze Age 1-2 (Protovillanovian)	Late Helladic III C
1270- 1250		Milazzese III		Final Bronze Age 3 (Protovillanovian)	Submycenaean Protogeometric
1180 1150	Late Bronze Age ( <i>Bronzo Tardo</i> )	Pantalica I (Pantalica Nord - Montagna di Caltagirone)	Borg in-Nadur (II B3)	I Iron Age 1a (Villanovian)	Early Geometric
		Ausonio I			I Iron Age 1b (Villanovian)
		Pantalica II (Pantalica Nord - Montagna di Caltagirone)	Bahrija (II C)	I Iron Age 2a-b (Villanovian)	Late Geometric
		Ausonio I			
1050	Late Bronze Age ( <i>Bronzo Finale</i> )	Pantalica III (Cassibile)			
900		Ausonio II			
850	Early Iron Age	Pantalica IV (Pantalica South)			
750					

**Table 1.1.** Chronological table for Sicily, Malta, southern Italy and the Aegean.



catalogue has been transferred to the accompanying DVD. Although an attempt was made to be as exhaustive as possible, several finds published by Murray have not been traced in the stores at the National Museum of Archaeology; these are presumed misplaced or lost. On the other hand, material came to light that was not possible to include here and we return to this matter in the concluding chapter in presenting an agenda for future research.

In part III an attempt is made to put the site in the local and regional setting both in terms of landscape and cultural processes. In chapter 8 Grima and Mallia explore using GIS-based analytical tools the types of connectivity enjoyed by two multi-period sites in the Marsaxlokk Bay area taking as a point of departure coastal and inland topography. The result is that Borġ in-Nadur marks a node where multiple terrestrial routes meet at a single outlet to the sea. The connections that existed between the Maltese archipelago, Sicily and the Mediterranean more generally between the mid-second millennium BC and the opening centuries of the first are considered in chapter 9 by Vella *et al.* The authors precede their analysis by discussing the relevance of a spatially-oriented history of archaeological thought and practice. In chapter 10 Tanasi takes up the Sicily-Malta connection through a case study, presenting the Borġ in-Nadur-type pottery vessels found in two rock-cut tombs at Cozzo del Pantano, not far from Siracusa in Sicily, considers their significance and offers an interpretation.

Part IV is devoted to issues of cultural heritage management and public outreach. Grima (chapter 11) reviews archaeological site management practices in Malta after the 1880s, considering their repercussions on the sites of Borġ in-Nadur and environs, and prehistoric sites more generally. Sultana (chapter 12) presents the plans for the opening of the Bronze Age room at the National Museum of Archaeology, Valletta, explaining the rationale behind the project. The use of virtual reconstructions as an effective medium to convey information about poorly-preserved prehistoric sites is highlighted by Stanco *et al.* (chapter 13). A 3D model of the megalithic temple at Borġ in-Nadur prepared by the University of Catania's Archeomatica Project is included in the DVD as a video with a sound track prepared for the purpose by the Maltese

musician Renzo Spiteri<sup>10</sup>. In addition, the model can also be explored interactively on this website: [www.archeomatica.unict.it](http://www.archeomatica.unict.it).

This book does not purport to be the final answer to the many queries posed by the sites, artefacts and landscape of Borg in-Nadur or, indeed, those related to the Maltese and south-central Mediterranean Bronze Age. That many outstanding issues and questions remain will be clear from a reading of the chapters. By way of conclusion (chapter 14) we bring these outstanding matters together in what we think might be a research agenda which could structure fieldwork and research activities in the near future.

It is obvious that this publication would not have been possible without the generous grant received from the Shelby White-Leon Levy Foundation. The award has made it possible to have this book available for free download from the publisher's website thereby ensuring that the ideas expressed here reach as wide an audience as possible. We would also like to thank Prof. Pietro Militello (Università degli Studi di Catania) who accepted to have this volume appear in the *Praehistorica Mediterranea* series which he directs. We are also grateful to Heritage Malta for facilitating the research and for allowing members of the curatorial staff to be involved in this project. Institutions, libraries and archives in Malta and abroad facilitated access to material in their care and allowed us and the respective authors publication; for that we are grateful. Especial thanks go to Maxine Anastasi for preparing most of the illustrations for publication. Finally we thank the contributors and ourselves for making the editorial process a learning and enjoyable experience.

---

<sup>10</sup> Between 2010 and mid-2011 Spiteri worked on a CD entitled 'Silence, Sounds and Spaces'. The music in the CD is not only entirely inspired by a number of archaeological sites in Malta and Gozo but most of the music has been recorded at the sites themselves; see [www.renzospiteri.com](http://www.renzospiteri.com) for more details.

## References

- Blakolmer, F. [2005] “Relations between prehistoric Malta and the Aegean: myth and reality”, in R. Laffineur and E. Greco (eds), *Emporia: Aegeans in the Central and Eastern Mediterranean* (Aegaeum 25), pp. 653-662. University of Liège and University of Texas at Austin, Liège and Austin (TX).
- Bonanno, A. [1993a] “Tarxien and Tarxien Cemetery. Break or continuity between Temple period and Bronze Age in Malta?”, in *Mediterrâneo* 2 (April): 35-47.
- Bonanno, A. [1993b] “The prehistory and protohistory of the Maltese Islands. Current problems and perspectives”, in G. Roselló (ed.), *La prehistòria de les illes de la mediterrània occidental* (X Jornadas d’Estudis Històrics Locals), pp. 215-241. Instituts d’Estudis Balàrics, Mallorca.
- Bonanno, A. [2008] “Insularity and isolation: Malta and Sicily in prehistory”, A. Bonanno and P. Militello (eds), *Malta in the Hybleans, the Hybleans in Malta/Malta negli Iblei, gli Iblei a Malta* (KASA 2), pp. 27-37. Officina di Studi Medievali, Palermo.
- Cazzella, A., Pace, A. and Recchia, G. [2007] “Cultural contacts and mobility between the south central Mediterranean and the Aegean during the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC”, in S. Antoniadou and A. Pace (eds), *Mediterranean Crossroads*, pp. 243-260. Pierides Foundation, Athens.
- Evans, J. D. [1971] *The Prehistoric Antiquities of the Maltese Islands: A Survey*. Athlone Press, London.
- Magro Conti, J. and Saliba, P. C. (eds) [2005] *The Significance of Cart-Ruts in Ancient Landscapes*. Midsea Books, Malta.
- Malone, C., Stoddart, S. and Whitehouse, R. [1994] “The Bronze Age of Southern Italy, Sicily and Malta c. 2000-800 B.C.”, in C. Mathers and S. Stoddart (eds), *Development and Decline in the Mediterranean Bronze Age* (Sheffield Archaeological Monographs 8), pp. 167-194. J. R. Collis Publications, Sheffield.
- Renfrew, C. [2004] “Foreword”, in D. Cilia (ed), *Malta before History*, pp. 10-11. Miranda Publishers, Malta.
- Robb, J. [2007] *The Early Mediterranean Village: Agency, Material Culture, and Social Change in Neolithic Italy*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Skeates, R. [2010] *An Archaeology of the Senses: Prehistoric Malta*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Tanasi, D. [2008] *La Sicilia e l’arcipelago maltese nell’età del Bronzo Medio* (KASA 3). Officina di Studi Medievali, Palermo.
- Tanasi, D. [2009] “Vasellame metallico in Sicilia e nell’Arcipelago maltese nella seconda metà del II millennio a.C. Forme egee per pratiche religiose indigene”, in *Orizzonti* 10: 11-27.

Tanasi, D. [2010] “Bridging the gap. New data on the relationship between Sicily, the Maltese archipelago and the Aegean in the Middle Bronze Age”, in *Mare Internum* 2: 103-111.