

■ This is the tenth issue of the *Malta Archaeological Review*, and the second one that I have the honour to edit on behalf of the Society. Readers will have noted that the quality of the publication has risen in leaps and bounds over the years. The first issue, produced in 1996, was a slim eight-pager but it contained within it the enthusiasm for Maltese archaeology that our founder president, Prof. Antony H.B. de Bono hoped the Society would convey to its members and the Maltese public more widely. We hope that we are still delivering with the same spirit. On behalf of readers I would like to take this opportunity to formally thank the previous editor, Patricia Camilleri for giving us six informative issues of the *Malta Archaeological Review* between 1999 and 2011, years in which she had a busy professional schedule at the University of Malta alongside the commitments of the Society of which she was also president between 2004 and 2010. Ann Gingell Littlejohn was, and remains, an invaluable deputy editor who is silently responsible for ensuring that the final product is of a very high standard and that ideas and results are expressed in plain language. Anton Bugeja and Maxine Anastasi continue to respond to calls of help about content and design promptly and efficiently.

■ The death in 2011 of Prof. John D. Evans and of Prof. Maria Pia Rossignani in 2013 is a blow to Maltese archaeology. Two scholars have kindly accepted our invitation to write an appreciation of their colleagues and the work that they accomplished in Malta during distinguished careers based in England and Italy respectively. We cannot fail to mention the sudden death of Prof. Klaus Schmidt (b. 1953) of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin, in July this year. Prof. Schmidt was a guest speaker of the Society in 2011 when he delivered a thought-provoking lecture about his excavations of the spectacular world-class monumental temple remains erected in the tenth millennium BC by

hunter-gatherers at the site of Göbekli Tepe in Turkey. This is indeed a sad loss for the world's archaeological community.

■ Readers will no doubt be aware that the application of scientific techniques to archaeology is throwing new light on many ancient problems. Indeed, many themes that recur in top science journals, like *Nature* and *Science*, often relating to topics concerning human origins, make it to local newspapers. In two of the articles in this issue, a different set of analyses has been put to good use in a discussion of prehistoric diet and of exchange. Although the results achieved in both cases might appear to some as insignificant in the larger scheme of things – as, for instance, if we were to compare them to the news, also carried in this issue, of a seventh-century Phoenician shipwreck discovered in Maltese territorial waters – we would like to emphasize that the value of such results lies in the ability to take interpretation to a higher level, often allowing archaeologists to establish facts. It is similar results that encourage us to think harder and explore new ideas.

■ Legislation is only as good as the attempts to enforce it. Unfortunately, blatant disregard for the provisions of the Cultural Heritage Act (2002) still makes news from time to time. Indeed, it appears that some religious orders do not seek the permission of the Church's Cultural Heritage Commission before intervening on cultural property owned by them. A case in point is the repainting of the apse of the cave church of St Leonard at Il-Lunzjata on the outskirts of Rabat, Malta, managed by the Carmelite Friars. In 2013 somebody decided to have the apse, built partly in ashlar and partly in wet-rubble, of this rare example of Late Medieval architecture covered with a ghastly painting (fresco?) depicting the Madonna and the saint (see illustration). Unfortunately, this act resulted in the complete obliteration of the traces of painted decoration of an early decorative scheme which



The apse of the cave-church of St Leonard (left) before re-decoration in 2013 (below). (Photographs reproduced by courtesy of Dr Keith Buhagiar [left] and Dr Anthony Charles [below]).



still survived on small areas of whitewash. The heritage value of this church has been well known for a while and one of our committee members, Dr Keith Buhagiar, has written and lectured extensively about it in the past (e.g. St. Leonard Cave Church, Lunzjata l/o Rabat, in A. BONANNO (ed.) 2008, *Malta and Sicily: Miscellaneous Research Projects* (KASA Project), DVD). We hope that this act does not form part of a grander scheme to turn the place into a tourist attraction and we hope that the Church authorities and the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage maintain an appropriate level of control in the presentation of the site and its landscape.

■ Change can be stressful at times. There has been a lot of talk lately of planned revisions by Government to the current cultural heritage legislation. It appears that these changes are not the result of a structured discussion amongst stakeholders but are what single entities would like to see to better their own situation or to see their concerns addressed. Although proposals may have been made with the best of intentions we foresee a problem in the ability to satisfy all wishes and views. While we wait for these changes to be made public and discussed in a national forum, the Society resolved to be pro-active and on 18th October this year brought together a number of institutional stakeholders to discuss the achievements of twenty years of archaeological practice in Malta and the many challenges that lie ahead. Some common concerns were made, not least the fact that increased surveillance of development being carried out by licensed archaeologists working under the direction of the office of the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage has led to an exponential rise in the number of archaeological discoveries: for instance, 550 monitoring briefs were issued between 2008 and 2011, and of the 248 cases followed in 2011 alone, 84 yielded discoveries worthy of examination and recording, an exercise paid for by the developer in the spirit of the European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Valletta, 1992) to which Malta is party. Unfortunately, as with the case of other European countries, the state appears

hesitant to pass on the cost of study of the uncovered and/or recovered remains to the developer, as the same convention requires. With the workload currently borne by the Maltese state regulatory team, and its limited human resources, this effectively means that no knowledge is being generated, and if it is, that knowledge is not entering the public domain in any form or shape. This is clearly an impasse that needs resolving sooner rather than later as the backlog is increasing every year. It was good to hear the Minister's speech at the end of the seminar acknowledge this and related problems. Other countries have had to tackle such problems and models exist which we can follow with profit (e.g. G. COONEY, M. O'SULLIVAN, and L. DOWNEY 2006, *Archaeology 2020: Repositioning Archaeology in the Knowledge Society: A realistically achievable perspective*. Dublin: University College Dublin/The Heritage Council). Of course, there will always be the issue of sourcing the funds to pay for the study and analysis of the data recovered, especially where costly specialist input is required. We fail to comprehend why the heritage fund, for which provision is made in current legislation, has remained empty since its creation in 2002. In this regard, we welcome the recent announcement made by the Ministry of Justice, Culture and Local Government that tax breaks will be given to entrepreneurs who contribute to the fund. We sincerely hope that the revenue generated will not be used solely for the sort of eye-catching initiatives that political expediency often resorts to so that progress is seen to be made but, more importantly, we hope that the dissemination of knowledge generated by more than twenty years of active archaeological fieldwork on a finite resource is also considered and given top priority. Moreover, the purse holders will need reminding that studying and publication are a time-consuming undertaking that cannot be done on the cheap. It is our collective duty to support and facilitate initiatives that do it properly.

Nicholas Vella
Msida, 1 December 2014