

MALTA ARCHAEOLOGICAL REVIEW

THE JOURNAL OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY, MALTA

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

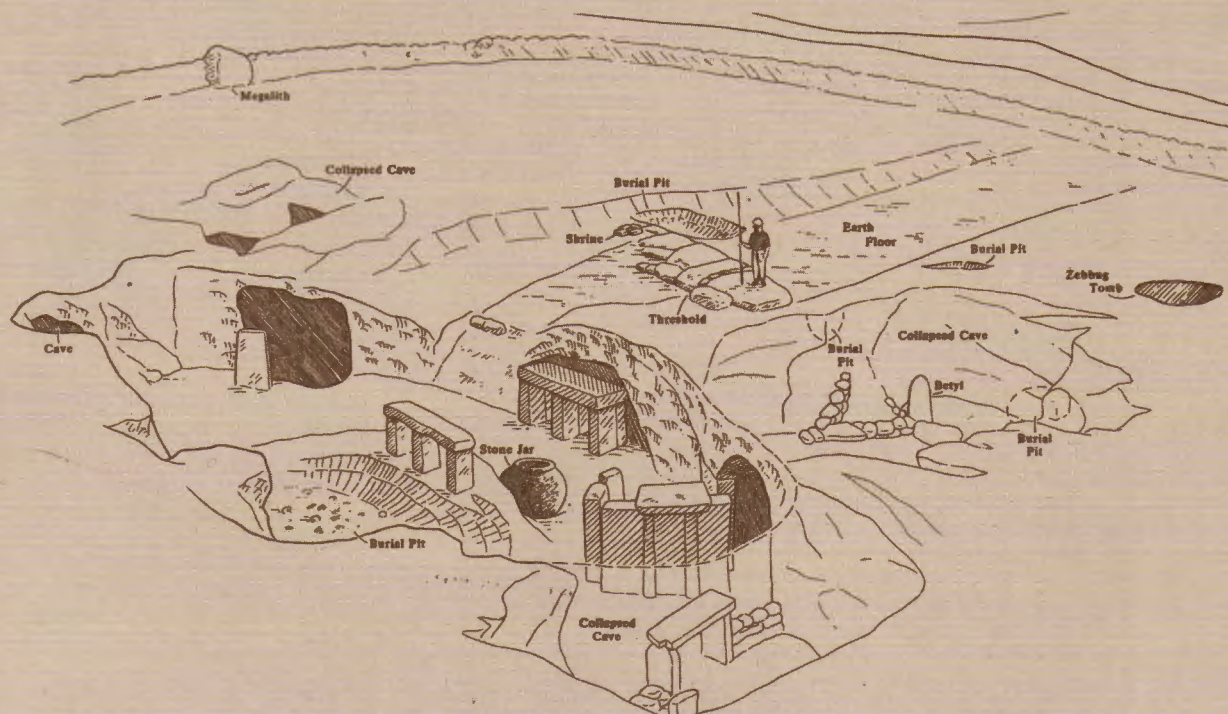
This is the first issue of the **Malta Archaeological Review**, published by The Archaeological Society. The Society was founded to encourage, promote and facilitate the study of archaeology in general and in particular that of the Maltese Islands.

The Society has held a number of very well attended meetings, and its membership has grown steadily. One of the key aims of the Society has been to promote cooperation between all those with a genuine interest in archaeology, and to support the work of the Museums Department and that of the Archaeology Department at the University. The state of preservation of our archaeological heritage and the need for radical changes in some of the museums will require enormous resources: it will also require the goodwill and cooperation of all concerned, underpinned by the informed interest of the public at large.

Malta is immensely rich in its unique archaeological heritage. The relatively vast numbers of tourists that visit the sites could make a substantial contribution to the funds available for archaeology if the Museums Department were allowed to retain the entrance fees and this would provide a continuing incentive to making the sites meaningful and attractive. The inevitable hazard of mass tourist access would of course have to be carefully controlled.

However the vitally important restoration and preservation of some of the unique archaeological sites of world importance require funds of quite a different order, from both local and foreign sources. Perhaps a percentage of the funds generated by the national lottery could worthily be earmarked for the preservation of this unique and irreplaceable heritage that is at once both a rare and rich resource, and an onerous responsibility.

The Society is not a pressure group, but it could not but view the existing situation with regard to the state of many



Artist's reconstruction of the Brochtorff Circle.

The dynamic initiative of the Minister with responsibility for Museums and archaeological has already created a new atmosphere of hope and determination. Government funds have been substantially increased and a radical restructuring of the archaeological museums is already being put into effect. A much needed grant from the prestigious Getty Foundation will greatly help the refurbishment and modernisation of the National Museum of Archaeology and one hopes that other grants will be forthcoming.

of the archaeological monuments and most of the museums with anything but dismay. It is therefore with great enthusiasm that it welcomes the concrete initiatives recently announced which at long last will make real progress towards preserving the archaeological sites and conserving and displaying the immensely rich collection of artefacts in a manner that does them justice. The plans for the restoration and management of the sites and the restructuring of

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EXCAVATIONS IN GOZO 1987-94

CAROLINE MALONE & SIMON STODDART

Few tourists can visit the Maltese Islands without becoming aware of the Neolithic Temples. Images of the great megalithic structures are used to great effect by the media and tourist agencies to convey the antiquity and mystery of early Malta, and to that end, such images have dominated archaeological thinking about ancient Malta as well. For two centuries archaeologists have been aware of the temples, and until recently, of little else of the early inhabitants of the islands. Temple size, construction and inexplicable mystery have traditionally been used to demonstrate the highly individual nature of early Malta. Undoubtedly these interests have a validity in the exploration of the prehistoric past, but they are not the only, or indeed the most useful means of studying the islands. Thus when we and our colleagues David Trump and Anthony Bonanno were invited by Tancred Gouder of the National Museum to design a research plan for new archaeological fieldwork, we decided to concentrate our efforts on the unstudied burial rites, landscape and settlement of prehistoric Malta. Gozo was chosen as the focus of study because of its manageable size and less developed landscape and lack of prior archaeological research.

Research priorities were soon directed toward urgent rescue work of two sites which we excavated. One was a remnant of a Temple period house on the road to Ghajnsielem. Here we uncovered half of the ground plan of an oval house with mud-brick walls and torba floors, only the second domestic structure of the Neolithic temple period to be excavated. Unfortunately, few finds were associated, and it appears that the inhabitants of the house had been meticulous in cleaning and rubbish disposal. There is nothing archaeologists like better than an ancient rubbish heap, because therein lies the economic and often the social evidence of a lost society.

The second site was the circle at Xaghra, long suspected by local amateur archaeologist Joe Attard, to be the site portrayed

in the series of paintings and drawings by Charles Brochtorff, (housed in the National Archive) which show an "excavation" in progress in about 1825. The site was threatened by speculative development and although saved for posterity by the intervention of Dr. Tancred Gouder of the National Museum of Malta, it seemed a suitable site to explore. We made a series of Geophysical studies of the buried deposits with French, Spanish, Italian and Scottish colleagues which indicated that there was a large cavity in the centre of what, even today, is a remarkably circular field.

We opened a number of trial trenches into the surface plough soil of the field and found the rock edge of the cavity. After several seasons (each of a month or more) with a growing team of young excavators from Europe and Malta, about a thousand cubic metres of rock and later deposits had been removed to expose the buried site. Unlike any site yet explored in Malta, the "Brochtorff Circle" as it is now known has slowly emerged as a series of ruined natural caves. The rock roofs of the caverns had collapsed in antiquity, in spite of attempts to prop them up with megalithic stones, and the caves had been entirely filled to ground surface. Explorations in the 1820s by Otto Bayer, the Lieutenant Governor of Gozo, had clearly emptied out a good deal of the central cavern, and had disturbed an unknown quantity of archaeological deposit. This cavity too, had been refilled to the ground surface.

Throughout the fill we found remnants of early activity, thoroughly disturbed through a combination of natural and human processes. The remnants consisted of pottery fragments, flint, chert and obsidian and occasional polished stone axes, shell ornaments, and great numbers of broken human bone. Only in the final 50-70cm of deposit did we find intact deposits; left as they had been placed by prehistoric man 4500 years or more ago.

The base of the caves (we excavated two adjoining caverns) was not flat and smooth, but instead presented a moon-scape of hollows, ridges and different levels, carved out millennia before by water action. Neolithic man had then modified the interior of the caves with the construction of rough walls and steps closing off side niches. There had been standing megalithic stones forming altars and a fine screen of smoothed megaliths partly enclosing a deep carved hollow containing



Fig. 1. Limestone statuette of two seated figures one holding a smaller figure on its lap.



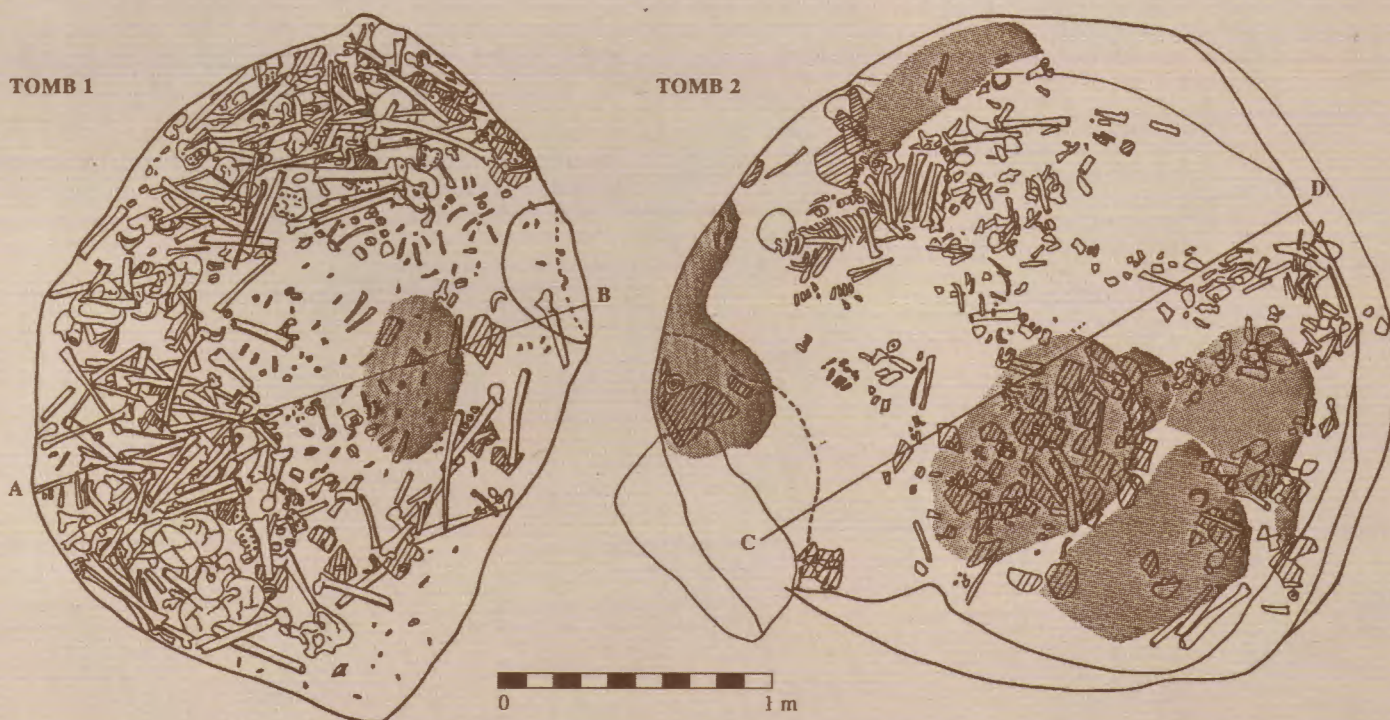
Fig. 2. Five of the nine schematized cult figurines.

a large stone bowl. Within the individual niches and hollows there were dense concentrations of human bones, many partially articulated, and representing successive generations of burials from the nearby community of Xaghra and perhaps all Gozo. Few bodies had remained intact, because the burial rite had been communal and collective which is typical of many contemporary societies in the Neolithic Mediterranean. Each new burial in the site involved the disturbance of earlier ones, with bones and skulls pushed to the sides and generally tidied up, thus it is not surprising that perhaps as few as 20% of the bones were still semi-articulated. Some of the most intact burials lying at the base of the deposits, some 5m below the ground surface, also had simple Neolithic grave goods. These included a few complete Tarxien period offering bowls, shell and bone beads and pendants, flint and chert blades, polishing stones, and in one particular hollow, a number of small clay figurines of the familiar corpulent form. These finds were all exciting, because they provided the first secure context for them. Early finds, most indeed of the magnificent material housed in the National Museum, come from early work on the temple sites and Hal Saflieni, where workmen noted down almost nothing of the finds' location, and in consequence, we can understand little about their significance or meaning.

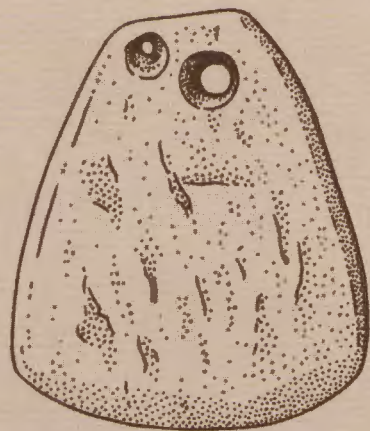
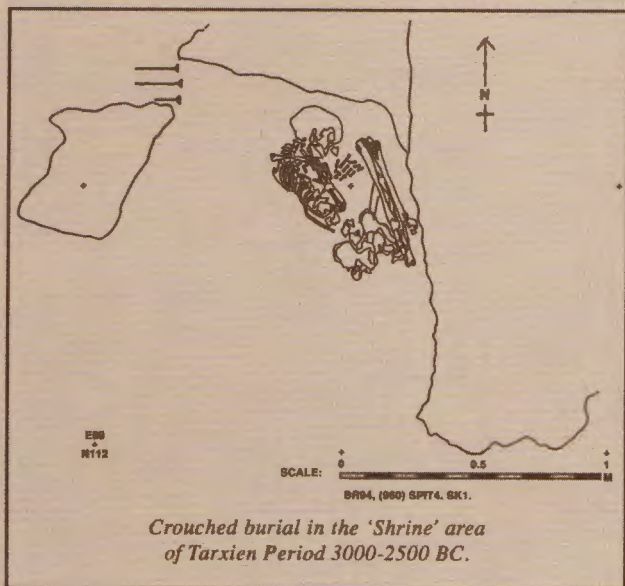
At the Brochtorff Circle, every find is located to the nearest centimetre on a three dimensional grid, and thus it should be possible to relate minute finds to their original context, such as beads of a necklace around the neck of an actual individual. The most spectacular discoveries are generally thought to be the group of nine cult figures which were found in tight bundle beneath the fallen cave roof near a megalithic altar. Six figures are schematic oblong figures with carved heads in varying stages of completion. Some have the skirts and belts similar to some of the familiar figurines in the National Museum. The carved faces are unparallelled and surely must be contenders for some of the most accomplished art in ancient Europe. The other major find, and one that seems to be getting more than its fair share of publicity is the small stone carving

of two seated figures on a bed. Again the standard of carving is very fine, and added to this is the polychrome finish, suggesting the figures had been coloured with red ochre and black carbon. This figure was found close to the cache of nine, beside the stone bowl. This central area of the main cave appears to have been some sort of shrine where the greatest density of complete burials have been found together with the ritual and cult figures.

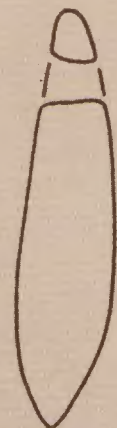
The nearest structural parallel to the Brochtorff site is of course the unique and magnificent man-made construction, the Hypogeum of Hal Saflieni. Yet, this site was carved from soft Globigerina limestone, and enlarged several times to deeper and deeper levels to accommodate the corpses of generations of Neolithic Maltese. It was estimated, on the basis of admittedly, the bones from one chamber only, that Hal Saflieni might have contained as many as 7000 burials. At Brochtorff, we believe we may have recorded as many as a thousand, but in scattered and broken form. Study of this mass of material takes great skill and experience and vast amounts of research time. Each bone must be cleaned, and then sorted and identified. Records are made of size, age, physical condition, diseases and trauma, so that eventually we should be able to provide a complete analysis of this early Maltese population. However, it takes time and money, and the latter in particular, is not plentiful, so our researches will take many months as the bone specialists work through the material. Yet, the end result will be far more important scientifically than all the figurines put together. Almost no prehistoric cemeteries in the Mediterranean have been subjected to the level of care and analysis that has been invested in the Brochtorff Circle, so the results will be important at not only the local Maltese level, but internationally. The broken bones may hold more clues about the figurine worshipping temple builders than can be obtained from artefacts and monuments alone. The Brochtorff Circle revealed an unexpected cave of death that offers us a first secure glimpse at how the early Maltese perceived death and the afterlife, and how the early art might have assisted them in their beliefs.



Human bones at the base of the Rock Cut tomb of Zebbug Period (4000-3700 BC). (Shaded areas are Red Ochre).

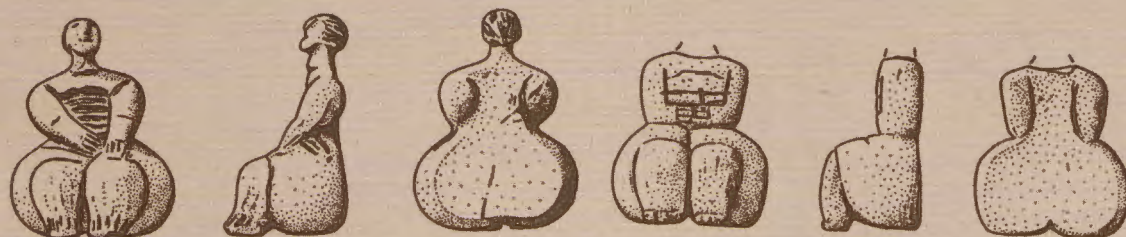


Greenstone Axe-Amulet



0 2cm

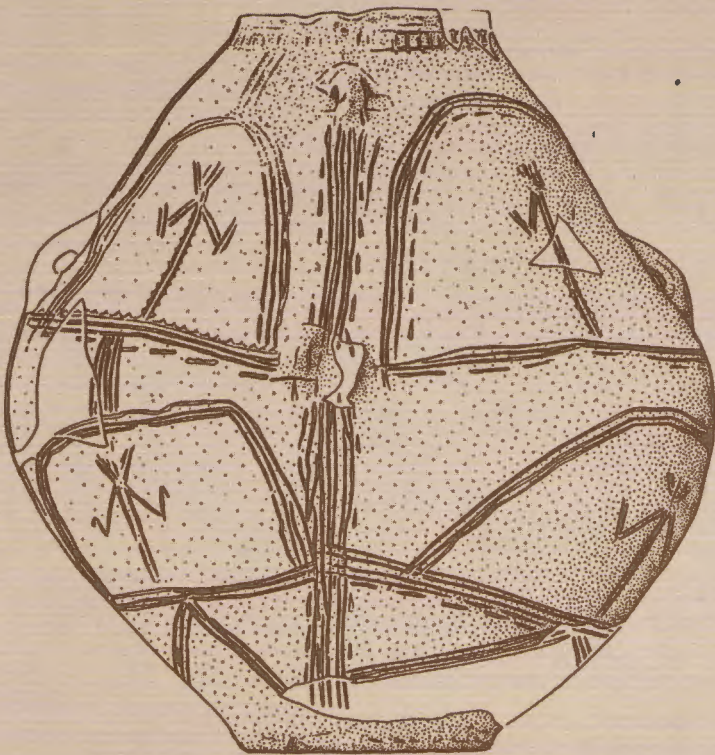
Carved bone phallus



0 4 cm



Clay figurines

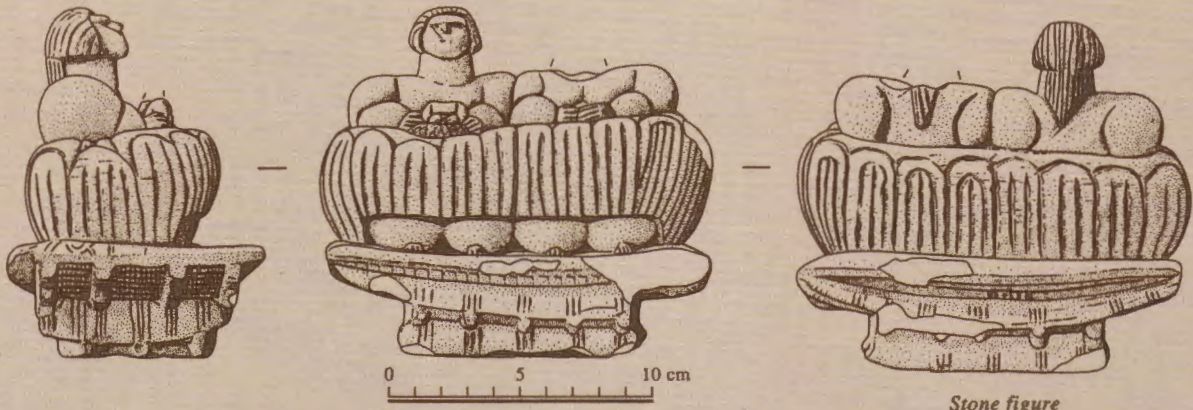


Zebbug jar from rock cut tomb

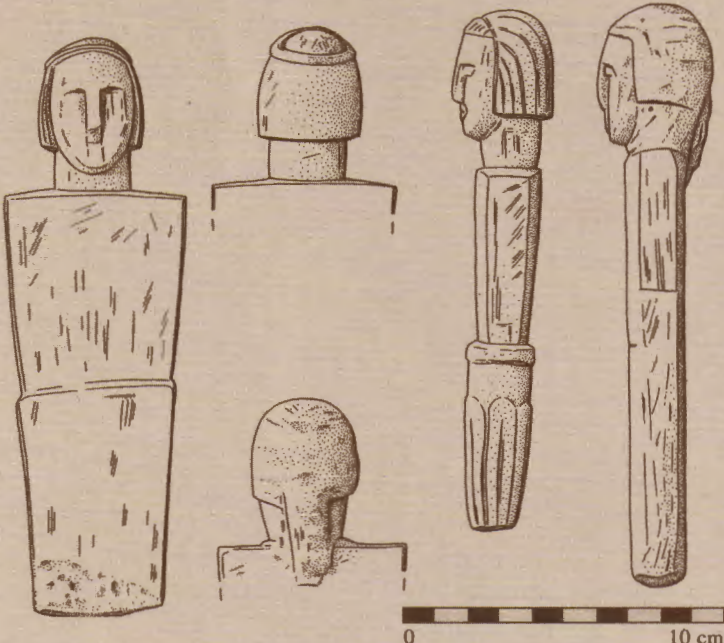


0 10 cm

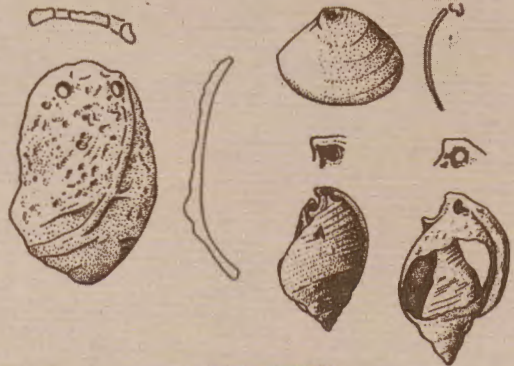
Stone Zebbug stele/statue from rock cut tomb



Stone figure

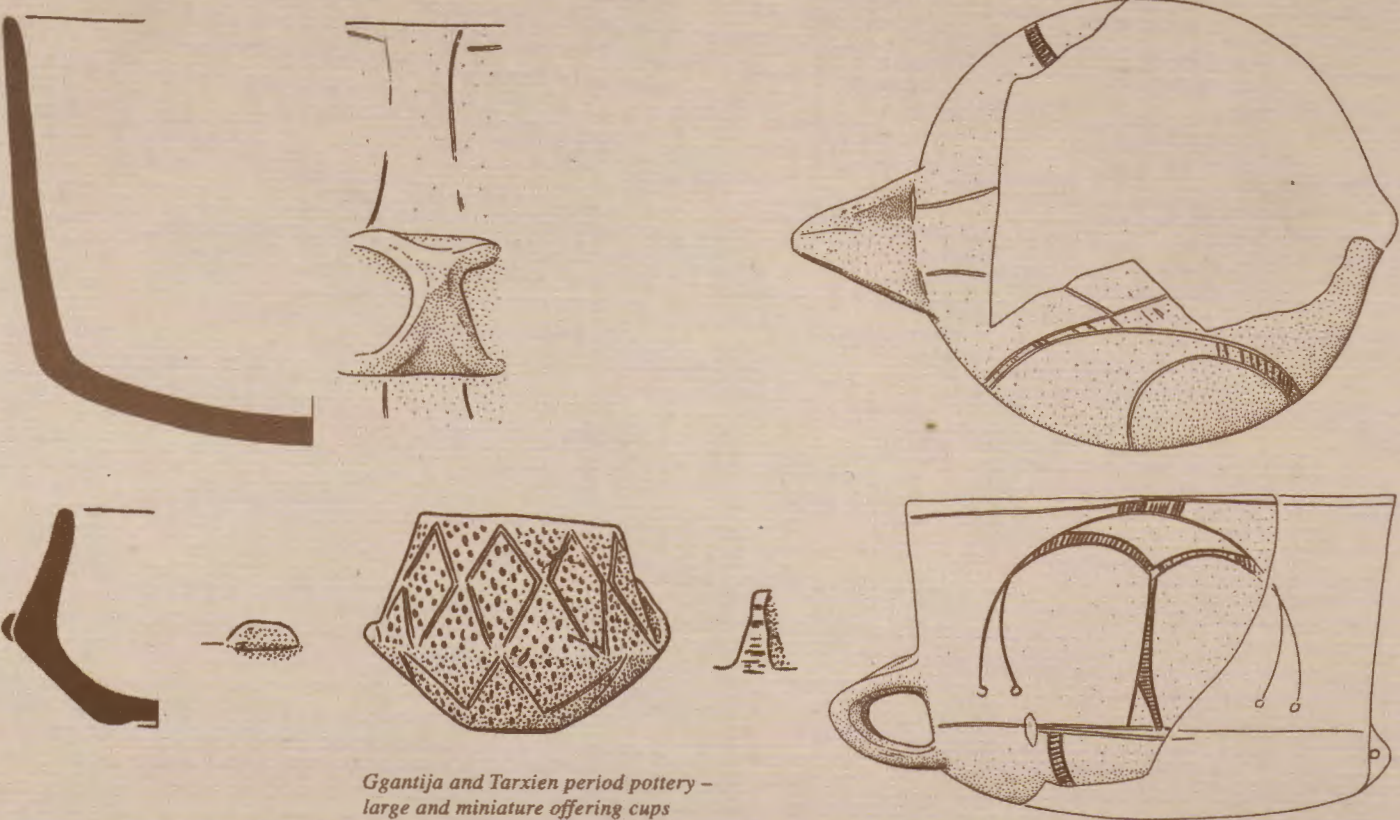


Front, side and back views of three of the stone cult figures



Shell pendants

All drawings by Stephen Ashley



Ggantija and Tarxien period pottery - large and miniature offering cups

THE STUDY OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN MALTA

ANTHONY BONANNO

The University of Malta has made a late entry in the field of archaeology. The first graduate courses started only in 1987. One recalls with satisfaction, however, that Professor Temi Zammit, the distinguished Maltese archaeologist, was Rector of the Royal University of Malta between 1920 and 1926, and that for a short period, in the years 1938-1939, John Ward Perkins, then at the beginning of his brilliant and influential career, was appointed Professor of Archaeology. Furthermore, John Evan's work on the prehistoric antiquities of the Maltese islands in the fifties, published in his widely read *Malta* (1959) and his monumental *Survey* (1971), was monitored by a Committee set up to administer a grant made available to the Royal University by the Inter-University Council for Higher Education Overseas and chaired by the then Rector, Professor J. Manché.

A full-time lectureship was instituted in 1969 and it was filled by an Italian archaeologist from Palermo, Dottoressa Rita Virzi. During her term of office in Malta (1970-1971) Dottoressa Virzi conducted full-scale excavations on the prehistoric site at Ras il-Pellegrin and some minor and partial explorations at Ghar ta' Iburdan and a cistern at Il-Bidnija, limits of Mosta. It is most unfortunate that, apart from a very short account of her exploration at Ghar ta' Iburdan published in *Kokalos* (1976-7), no report of the excavations has been published. What is even worse is that both the photographic documentation and measured drawings of the excavations were taken away and never returned, with the net result that virtually nothing can be done by anyone to attempt an academic publication of the excavated material which is still housed at the University. Attempts made by the undersigned to acquire this documentation proved futile, and any help on this matter would be appreciated.

The undersigned was appointed Assistant Lecturer in the Department of Classics in March 1971 with duties to teach in both the Classics and Archaeology. But Archaeology was not destined to develop and flourish for the next sixteen years. In the early 1970s we barely managed to introduce Archaeology as a subsidiary area of study in the evening B.A. course. After that course was completed, Archaeology had to wait for the change of government in 1987 to re-emerge, first as a subsidiary area, but soon after, as a main area of study within the B.A. programme.

The first two graduates were Mr Anthony Pace and Mr George Said, both of whom proceeded with their post-graduate studies in Archaeology abroad. Mr Pace won the post of Assistant Curator of Archaeology at the Museums Department and was promoted to Curator soon after. Two other graduates from our Department, Mr Nathaniel Cutajar and Mr Reuben Grima, joined the Museums Department as Assistant Curators of Archaeology in 1992. Both of them have since then undertaken postgraduate courses abroad.

Meanwhile, the Department of Classics, which was reinstated together with the Faculty of Arts in 1987, changed its name to the Department of Classics and Archaeology in 1992. This was made possible after Dr Anthony Frendo joined the staff of the Department. Archaeology started being offered as a B.A. Hons subject in 1992, and last November we had the first three Hons graduates, along with four others graduating B.A. Two of last year's graduates are pursuing further studies in England, providing further confirmation of the recognition of both our degrees overseas. As from this year we have also our own post-graduate students, one being registered for an M.A., the other for an M.Phil.

The above historical account reflects directly the present situation in terms of courses and levels at which Archaeology can be studied at this University. In brief, all levels are available, from B.A. to Ph.D. As from next year, in collaboration with the International Office of the University, it is our intention to hold also "Summer Schools" to cater for the international market. These will involve practical sessions which will see the participants in these courses working along with our own students in the Department's dig.

This leads me to the subject of the Department's current involvement in excavation activity. Up to last summer, as one can make out from another article in this issue, this Department has been involved in a joint research programme focussed on Gozo. The excavation part of it is now concluded. What remains to be done is the post-excavation processing and eventual publication of the data. The research project included also a regional study of Gozo based on a field walking survey of a transect across the whole of Gozo. This part of the project is still on and the Department will keep its commitment to it until its completion.

All this means that from this year the Department will need its own site to conduct annual summer excavation campaigns, mainly to provide a proper field training for its students. I am pleased to be in a position to announce that we have had the approval in principle to our request for the southern section of the Tas-Silg site, both from the Ministry for Justice, Youth and Culture and from the Department of Museums. All we need to do now is to settle the conditions and details of responsibilities connected with the site itself and its excavation.

The declared objectives of the undergraduate course programme in Archaeology is to provide our students with as broad a base for this discipline as possible. The programme starts with a four-credit, compulsory, introductory study unit, followed by a series of other study

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SOCIETY REPORT FOR 1994

SEMINAR ON THE BROCHTORFF CIRCLE

During 1994 the Society continued to grow steadily in membership, and attendance at meetings open to the public demonstrated the extent of interest in archaeology.

The Society is greatly honoured by having the President of the Republic as its Patron. The Hon. Dr. Michael Refalo now Minister with responsibility for Museums and Archaeology has shown characteristic vigour in setting in motion a radical change in the management of archaeology which is of immense importance.

Professor John Evans who has done so much for archaeology in Malta and whose classic volume *The Prehistoric Antiquities of Malta* remains the standard text, is an Honorary Vice-president of the Society.

During the year a number of meetings were held at the National Museum of Archaeology, which were very well attended.

Professor Anthony Bonanno, Professor of Archaeology at the University of Malta, gave a talk on **Roman Malta** in which he outlined the wide range of remains dating from nearly 600 years of the Roman imperium, ranging from sophisticated villas to large country estate establishments.

Dr. George Zammit Maempel, Honorary curator of the Ghar Dalam Museum, spoke about the geology and fossil fauna of **Pre-Human Malta** and how the remains of dwarf elephants and hippos, as well as giant swans and dormice, had adapted to the environment of islands cut off by a rise in sea levels.

The Archaeology of the Emergence of Ancient Israel was the topic chosen by Dr Anthony Frendo, Lecturer in archaeology at the University. He described the archaeological evidence for the conglomeration of the tribes that formed Israel probably after the widespread series of population movements initiated by movement from the north of what is now Greece and the Aegean Islands.

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units covering almost the whole of the chronological divisions of Mediterranean archaeology from Prehistory to Medieval. Study units focussing on Maltese archaeology of the same periods are also provided. Other units are concerned with aspects closely related to Archaeology, such as Photography, Surveying and Draughtsmanship, Principles of Conservation and Scientific Applications of Archaeology.

In September the Society held a one day conference to mark the end of the final season of excavation by a joint Anglo-Maltese team on the burial complex at Xaghra, Gozo known as the Brochtorff Circle.

As this coincided with the visit of a Bristol University summer school the first part of the meeting consisted of an update overview of the archaeology of the Maltese Islands, mainly for the benefit of our visitors. An audience of about two hundred, headed by the President of Malta attended. Minister the Hon. Dr Michael Refalo opened the proceedings with a speech which emphasised his intention of tackling the many administrative and funding problems facing archaeology in Malta.

The first paper was by Dr David Trump, now of Cambridge, a leading authority on the Pre-History of the Mediterranean, who has had a long and fruitful involvement in Maltese archaeology. He set the scene by a masterly review of Mediterranean pre-history during the period covered by the use of the Brochtorff burial complex, from the Zebbug to Tarxien periods (4000-2500).

Professor Patrick Schembri gave an account of the probable natural environment of the burial complex during its period of use, deduced from a study of the remains of snails and other species; he came to the conclusion that it was somewhat arid and not very different to present conditions.

The Phoenecian and Punic period in Malta were reviewed by Dr Tancred Gouder and Professor Anthony Bonanno covered the Roman period. Dr Mario Buhagiar spoke on the little known era when Malta was part of the Byzantine empire. The change in landscape from an essentially agrarian one to the beginning of urbanisation that followed the arrival of the Order of St. John was described by Dominic Cutajar.

The afternoon session concentrated more closely on the Brochtorff Circle excavations. Dr Tancred Gouder explained how the Anglo-Maltese Gozo Project came about. Dr Caroline Malone then gave an account of the excavations on the site from 1987 to 1994.

The fascinating art objects found during the course of the excavations were described in terms of their context by Professor Bonanno, while Andrew Townsend spoke about them in relations to other comparable objects from the rest of the Mediterranean. With the help of the Curator of Archaeology many of these unique artefacts were on display for the first time during the seminar.

Carol Brown, John Dixon and Robert Leighton were the authors of a paper that analysed some of the artefacts and particularly the exotic symbolic axes found in the burial complex. Another paper by Cristina Sampedro gave an

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initial account of the vast collection of skeletal remains, much of them very well preserved, gathered during the excavations. These constitute potentially the most important material from the project and will require an immense amount of study. They date from the Zebbug period to the Tarxien though there seemed to be significant gaps in the Temple building period.

The final paper was by Dr Simon Stoddart who spoke of Rites of Death Amongst the Prehistoric Maltese in which he examined evidence from the Brocktorff Circle and the Hypogeum burial complex at Hal Saflieni where unfortunately the bulk of the skeletal remains had been discarded without proper examination.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

the museums will aim to fulfill the custodial and scientific functions of the Museums Department and at the same time offer a coherent, informed and attractive display, that will no doubt enhance the public interest and awareness that is vital for the future of archaeology.

The excavation of the Brocktorff Circle was of major importance and once more puts the Maltese Islands on the international archaeological map. The excavations, carried out to the highest modern technical standards, were an excellent example of the cooperation that is essential if sufficient resources and expertise are to be mustered. One of the most interesting aspects of this excavation might well at some future date be a study of genetic material from the enormous collection of bones recovered from this necropolis.

OVERSEAS SITE VISIT TO AEOLIAN ISLANDS

The first overseas site visit was to the Aeolian Islands. Six members sailed to the Islands in the Presidents sloop SAN MICHELE. They visited the acropolis in Lipari where layers of remains from neolithic to Roman times have been excavated, as well as the excellent museums containing material from Lipari and the other islands as well as the mainly wrecks that have been excavated in the surrounding sea. They also visited the dramatic setting of a village on the promontory of Punta Milazzese that spans the fourteenth century B.C., and the site at Capo Graziano on the island of Filicudi. Obsidian from Lipari was imported into Malta from some time early in the 5th millenium; it was agreed that an approach by sea gave a new perspective to appreciating some of the problems of the prehistoric culture of the islands.

At last the winds of change seem to be blowing favourably; the setting up of a Department of Archaeology at the University will make a very major contribution to the future of Maltese archaeology, and indeed one hopes further afield. Already its graduates, having undertaken postgraduate studies abroad, occupy key posts in the Museums Department; others are also completing specialised studies at the present time. The strong leadership of the Minister concerned will no doubt harness the enthusiasm and new ideas of these to accomplish the Herculean task confronting them.

This cannot be achieved without public backing and co-operation. In the reality of life today, archaeology can no longer be regarded as an arcane and esoteric mystery, sacred to its initiates, but must perforce reach out and embrace the understanding and educated sympathy of the public.

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The Archaeological Society, c/o National Museum of Archaeology,
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