

A Carved Model of a Niche from Tarxien Temples Reconsidered

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ABSTRACT

A model of a niche at present on display at the National Museum of Archaeology is reassessed and compared with earlier descriptions. New interpretations of possible connections with the weaving industry are forwarded. The conclusions are discussed within the framework of available evidence for the industry of cloth making in the context of Maltese Prehistory.

KEYWORDS

weaving; temple period; art

Introduction

The model niche T/S.17, was discovered in 1918 by Sir T. Zammit during excavations of the Tarxien Temples complex and was included in the 1930 report on the excavations, grouped with the other limestone carvings interpreted as phallic symbols. Photographic representations of the niche appeared in various later publications. Evans (1959, 1971) agrees with the phallic interpretation, and Formosa (1975) included an inverted, more detailed photograph without proposing a description (Plate 1)¹. Reference to the niche is also made by the excavators of the Xaghra Stone Circle (Stoddart et al. 1993), the authors of this study again agreeing on the phallic interpretation of this carving because of the context in which it was found. Although not specifically mentioned or described, its find spot is marked on a plan of the Tarxien Temples. The most recent reference to the niche refers to it as a phallic symbol describing further the “quoit-like object”, i.e. the spherical pierced object on the niche floor, as symbolising “femaleness” (Evans 1996).

Redescription

The niche model is a rough lump of Globigerina limestone, 9 cm in height and 6 cm wide. It probably

formed part of a larger block as the left and lower aspects of the front part are rather rougher than the rest, giving the impression that it was fixed to the parent block by means of four small dowels. A miniature niche about 3.5 cm high is carved on the flatter side, the border of which through scored lines is reminiscent of a ‘megalithic entrance’. The right ‘orthostat’, the ‘lintel’ and the step are intact while the left ‘orthostat’ is damaged. The impression that the ‘lintel’ is supported on seven beams is provided by scored lines on the upper inner surface of the niche.

Inside the niche standing on the low step and resting against the back wall, are two elongated objects which on close examination, show a rounded top end and a cylindrical body which tapers towards the other extremity. Two low relief rings separate the cylindrical body from the upper rounded end and the lower tapering section. Additional marks are also visible on the objects. Scored shallow grooves occur on the taller object while tiny punctures are more evident on the shorter one. On the low step between the elongated objects and in front of them is a vertically pierced globular disc, with two radial notches on the top touching the central hole.

Suggested Interpretation

The detail of this miniature in stone is overwhelming. The prehistoric artist, monumental in

his architecture, showed a remarkable finesse in finishing the smaller artefacts that served his purpose. The detail on the carving and the different rendering of the various parts, makes it possible for the observer to interpret with a good degree of confidence the subject matter of this sculpture.

It is here suggested that the objects in the niche are not phallic symbols but the tools for the manufacture of thread and cord. The two so called phalli are nothing more than the representation of a pair of distaffs (in Maltese referred to as *maghzel*), covered with the fibrous material, which is held in place on the wooden stick by being tied with two cords at both ends of the distaff. The pierced disc is a representation of the spindle-whorl (in Maltese *dussies*). Other representations of phalli, discovered from the same site contrast with this sculpture by having a wider lower end and a rather smooth surface. The round head of the phallic symbols is only separated from the cylindrical body by a scored line or a curved separating fold, differing from the sculpture under review by lacking a clear representation of cord at both extremities. The 'decoration' rendered on the objects' surface gives an indication on the type of material used. The straight grooves probably represent a covering of fine flax fibres, while the rougher rendering of small punctures probably represents a covering of wool fibres.

The spindle whorl on the floor of the niche is structurally similar to the whorls discovered during various excavations done at temple sites. Spherical and globular whorls are reported from Tarxien (Zammit 1930; Trump 1966). The vertical hole transversing the whorl would take a wooden or bone pointed spindle and the radial grooves would accommodate a small dowel going through a small hole in the spindle and resting on the whorl.

Although the spindle whorl is commonly represented in many prehistoric contexts around the world, the distaff, being made of perishable material, usually does not survive. Even artistic representations are lacking and it seems that the earliest distaff depictions come from Greek Hellenic times, being also absent from the Pharaonic period of Egypt where the wool was usually placed in a container on the floor (Gardner Wilkinson 1994). This representation of two distaffs with different material for spinning, from the Tarxien phase of the Temple Period can easily turn out to be the earliest of its type.

Weaving Tools

The Distaff (*maghzel*)

The distaff probably consisted of a pointed wooden stick onto which bundles of fibres, either flax or wool were fastened to the top end by means of a cord usually made of the same material. It was held under the left arm while thread was spun using the slightly wetted thumb and first finger of the right hand (Guhl & Koner 1994). When not in use a second cord was tied at the lower end. The miniature shows exactly two distaffs leaning against the wall of the niche in a disused manner.

As mentioned earlier the distaff seems to be absent from the extensive pictographic and artistic representations of the Pharaonic period of Egypt, relating to the weaving industry. The woof is depicted as being spun directly from a container on the floor. Woven material turned up as early as 5000 BC from El Faiyum in Egypt and about a thousand years earlier from Catal Huyuk in Turkey (Hamblin 1973). The fineness of the work from the latter site, suggests the use of the spindle but evidence for the distaff is once again not available. The earliest use of the distaff is depicted on various Attic containers showing various divinities (such as Athene Ergane and Aphrodite Urania) represented as goddesses of fate weaving the thread of life (Guhl & Koner 1994) and protecting female endeavour. The distaff is here used as a symbol or emblem of domestic life. Noble ladies handling the distaff with the spindle are also described by Homer.

The Spindle Whorl (*dussies*)

The spindle whorl was usually made in different shapes and sizes throughout the ages. It was made of either stone or baked clay (i.e. pottery), with later examples being made of metal. It is not uncommon for Egyptian examples to be made of wood, cane or plaited rope work (Gardner Wilkinson 1994). During weaving the whorl was held in place by means of a couple of small dowels on the upper and lower ends of the hole going through the smaller holes in the spindle shaft, or else a few silvers of wood were passed vertically into the whorl's hole pressed against the spindle. Basically the whorl is a circular weight with a central hole through which a pointed and usually hooked spindle of bone or wood is passed (Figure 6).

As the thread is spun from the woof on the distaff, it is fixed onto the spindle's hook which rotates to even out the twisted fibres into a fine thread. The whorl

functions as a flywheel giving energy to the spin and was usually spun with the pointed lower end touching the ground or else dangling from the thread. The spun fine thread is then wound onto the spindle itself either below the whorl or covering it depending on the position of the whorl along the spindle shaft. New wool fibres are then hand twisted and attached to the spindle hook for the next spinning. A considerable number of spindle whorls are known from Maltese Prehistoric phases, the Ghar Dalam and Mgarr phases being notable exceptions (Figure 4). Thirty one were reported from the Tarxien Temple complex, the majority belonging to the Tarxien Cemetery culture (Zammit 1930).

Similarly four recovered from the temple at Borg in-Nadur probably belonged to the Borg in-Nadur phase as are seven other examples found near the Bronze Age defensive wall. Possibly belonging to the Tarxien Cemetery culture are other whorls discovered near Torri Falka and usually assigned to the Tarxien phase.

Two spindle whorls found at the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum are difficult to assign to any of the phases represented in the hypogeum, as their context association is unknown. The pottery of the hypogeum includes sherds from the Zebbug through the Borg in-Nadur cultures. The Tarxien culture produced the four spindle whorls recovered from the Hagar Qim temples.

Among all the sites so far investigated, only the Skorba site produced spindle whorls from seven phases of Maltese prehistory (Trump 1966). The results of the excavations at the Xaghra Stone circle are still unknown and no further comment can be included here. The spindle whorls of the Neolithic were made from chipped pottery sherds, the Grey Skorba culture producing the earliest examples. Other whorls were also recovered from Red Skorba phase deposits, including a rather large (6.5 cm in diameter) spherical and decorated whorl. Regarding whorl decoration, the Red Skorba example is not unique as other examples are known from Hagar Qim, Tarxien Cemetery and Bahrija (three examples). Decoration, when present, usually consisted of incisions, zigzags, curves, circles, perforations and lines. It is not uncommon to find these decorating elements filled with white paste.

The earlier Temple Period whorls were found at Skorba and belong to the Zebbug and Ggantija phases. An example from Ghar ta' Ghejzu also dates to the Ggantija phase.

Apart from the Borg in-Nadur and Tarxien Cemetery examples referred to above other Bronze Age whorls are known from Skorba, one belonging to the Borg in-Nadur phase and another to the Bahrija phase (Trump 1966). Three from Nuffara are also dated to the Borg in-Nadur phase, while another from the Qallilija settlement is rather problematic in its Bronze Age dating. Another clay spindle whorl of possible Borg in-Nadur phase dating was recovered from ix-Xaghra ta' Santa Margherita at Mosta in 1984 during excavations of a punic tomb opening at the side of a silo pit (*pers. fieldnotes*, Cilia).

Spindle whorls can be of various shapes with conical, biconical, spherical, globular, cylindrical, flat discs, truncated and plano-convex shapes all known and described. Trump (1966) illustrates the selection of shapes present at Skorba from different phase levels. This however cannot be taken as a classification according to the general shape used during each of the various phases. Spindle whorls were usually made out of local stone (Globigerina or Coralline), baked clay or clay mixed with other inclusions like stone, shell or pottery fragments. Spindle whorls made of chipped sherds have already been referred to above.

Other evidence for the manufacture of Cloth

Additional evidence for cloth manufacture comes from the presence of a number of dressed statuettes. A representation of a pleated gown or skirt occurs on twelve statuettes, the Tarxien colossal statue and the sleeping lady of the Hal Saflieni hypogeum (S/P. 1000) being notable examples. Other examples include the twin seated mother goddesses and two 'stick' figurines out of the nine from the so called 'shaman's' ritual cache found at the Xaghra Stone (Stoddart et al. 1993).

A fragment of a stone statuette from Tarxien (T/S 30) has small 'clothed' figures below its skirt. The 'Priest figurine' (T/P. 1006) is one of three baked clay statuettes in fragments from Tarxien which shows evidence for a pleated skirt decoration. One fragment of a seated draped statuette shows ornamentation with vertical lines and points, probably a rendering of either coloured or patterned material or else of pleated fine fabric.

An imitation of heavy clothing can be noted on two statuettes. A headless seated figurine (Q/S. 16) from Hagar Qim suggests an ankle length gown of quite heavy clothing, possibly wool, with long sleeves and a neck line. Another headless statuette (T/S. 26) from Tarxien also shows a heavy dress but the

limestone is quite eroded and could probably show an obese figurine. It is not improbable that wool was used by the Temple people. Artistic representations of sheep and goats as well as the bone remains of the same animals have been recovered from Tarxien and other prehistoric sites. Bones of sheep and goat are very similar in structure and need to be examined, separated and analysed before giving any conclusions about husbandry in prehistoric times.

A seated clay figurine from the Xaghra Stone Circle has a garment tied over the chest, the dress being represented by horizontal scored lines reaching down to the thigh just above the knees. The dress is coloured dark, leaving the rest of the body as a buff colour with traces of red ochre.

A fragment of a similar figurine from the same site, with the arms and feet missing, also shows horizontal scored lines covering the abdomen but sparing the chest. This area also has traces of dark colouring and the rest has traces of red ochre.

A number of bone, stone and shell artefacts interpreted as buttons provide physical evidence for dress accessories (Figure 3). All the buttons considered here are those of 'pendant' like artefacts which have either a 'V' shaped perforation or are pierced in such a way that if these are suspended like pendants the shape of the artefact would be inverted, and can only be the right way up if fastened by a thread to the garment. The shell of the *Spondylus* bivalve probably of the species *gaederopus L.* which used to be common around the Mediterranean sea shore appears to have been the preferred material for most examples of buttons, owing to its rather thick shell. Local or imported bone and stone, were also used for a number of buttons, especially those recovered from the Hal Saflieni hypogeum.

This latter site produced by far the largest number and variety of buttons. The typical 'V' perforated button, irrespective of the material used is a conical or hemispherical dome with a 'V' perforation on the flat, convex or concave surface. Perhaps the oldest example comes from Ghar Dalam (G.D./B1) and was found in layer 2, which contained a mixture of pottery and artefacts from most of the Prehistoric Phases, making the positive dating of this button extremely difficult to determine. Two other similar buttons come from the burial cave of Bur Mghez, which was in use in the Ggantija and Tarxien phases (MAR 1922 - 1923).

Five dome shaped *Spondylus* shell buttons, with 'V' shaped perforations on a flat base were found by Evans in Xemxija Tomb 5 (Xe5/B1, Xe5/B2,

Xe5/B3) (Evans 1958, 1971). Other 'V'-perforated shell buttons are known from the Tarxien Temples. T/B7 is a large (3 cm) typical button and T/S 10 is a medium sized (1.6 cm) stone button. Both artefacts are associated with seven axe pendants of dark green stone possibly Chrysolite, and were found in the oracular room 1 as the miniature carving described in this paper (Zammit 1920). T/B 20 is a representation of a sitting bird worked in bone or ivory, similar to another example found at Hal Saflieni (see below). A 'V' perforation is present on its flat base.

The amulet made in 'dark crystalline calcite' and interpreted as the representation of a temple (T/S 12) may well have been another button because of double V-perforations on one of its sides. One of the flat sides may well represent a kind of roofing and the base of the Temple, while the other indicates the long and short work of the outside megalithic wall, surmounted by the roof. The two v-shaped perforations appear on this latter side, their openings emerging on either side of the narrow slabs (Zammit 1930; Evans 1959).

Yet another button has been found at Kordin III (Ashby et al. 1913). Besides the typical V-perforated button (Z5/B9) from Tomb number 5 at Ta' Trapna, Zebbug, a rubbed and polished long bone (Z5/B10) (2cm long), incised by a groove all round, could be another type of button, in which the fastening thread is passed from the fabric around the tube into the groove and return again to the fabric. Similar tubular shell artefacts but without grooves were also found in Tomb No. 1 (1 bead), Tomb No. 3 (1 bead) and Tomb No. 5 (7 beads). These however were interpreted as beads and not buttons. The Ta' Trapna tombs have been dated to the Zebbug Phase (Baldacchino & Evans 1954).

As noted above the Hal Saflieni hypogeum produced a considerable number of buttons. Twenty nine are V-perforated, nine are pierced differently; thirty are made of shell; five of an unknown kind of stone and two made out of shell with stone inlays (Zammit et al. 1912). Of interest from the same site are the stylised bird and animal buttons. Nine are bird shaped V-perforated artefacts made out of *Spondylus* shell, and one with similar workmanship is made of hard green stone and well polished. Another bird button is carved out of a flat pebble of combined hard green and soft white stone, but instead of V-perforations it is pierced right through at its lower part. Suspensions through this hole would render the figure upside down.

Four animal representations interpreted as pendants could also be buttons. S/S9 are four artefacts

representing highly stylised horned quadrupeds (possibly cattle). With perforations at the lower part of the body, three are made of white-grey or dark grey-brown stone, the horns and tail of the quadrupeds being marked by lines. The fourth, made of hard green stone, is perforated at the head. S/B13 is a V-perforated button made out of honey coloured stone and appears to be shaped in the form of a snake's head. Another pierced hole is found on a small appendage on the 'neck'.

It is to be noted that similar V-perforated buttons are known from sites around the Western Mediterranean, and include examples from the Balearic Islands (Ciempozuelos Tombs), Los Millares in south-eastern Spain, from Angelu Ruju in Sardinia (Ozieri Culture), from Roaix (Vancluse) and the megalithic tombs of the Arles in France. Italian examples come from the Remedello culture site of Le Colombare, north of Verona (Trump 1980). Most of the sites from where the V-perforated buttons were recovered are tombs, burial sites and cemeteries, dated between 3500 and 2250 BC. The French and Spanish sites belong to the 'Beaker' culture, which together with the Italian Rinaldone and Remedello cultures, the Ozieri culture of Sardinia and the Majorcan tombs are all contemporaneous with the Ggantija and the Tarxien phases of Malta.

The only specimen of cloth reported from a Maltese Prehistoric site comes from the Bronze Age, namely the Tarxien Cemetery. The fabric has been identified as being made of 'flax or similar fibre' and consisting of a 'plain weave, but thicker fabrics showed traces of more complex weaving' (Zammit 1930; Evans 1971: note on p.150).

Industrial Evidence

Apart from spindle whorls, evidence for looms dating back to the temple period is lacking. The small number of bobbin shaped objects recorded is hardly sufficient evidence. If these artefacts were ever used in the weaving industry, their function and use is still uncertain. Eleven such artefacts are reported, five were found at Mnajdra, one each at Hagar Qim, Hal Saflieni, Kordin III and Skorba and two from the Tarxien Cemetery deposit (Figure 1). All are made of baked clay, and pierced through their narrower side. One is hollow with two opposed horizontal holes connecting perpendicularly to the hollow. Another one with rough broken ends is not perforated. The example from Skorba has splayed ends and four others have concave ends (Ashby et al. 1913; Zammit et al. 1912; Zammit 1913; Murray

1934; Trump 1966). These 'bobbins' appear to belong to any of the Ggantija through the Tarxien Cemetery phases and possibly also the Borg in-Nadur Bronze Age phase.

A new innovation in the Bronze Age appears to be the introduction of a new type of loom, with the employment of loom weights and perhaps, more efficient in producing cloth. The loom weights were possibly used to tighten the wrap threads. No loom weights are known from Temple period contexts unless the 'digging stick weights' are actually loom weights. T/S 65 and T/S 66 come from the Tarxien period while S/S43 from the Saflieni phase.

The Temple period loom was possibly of a horizontal type similar to those depicted and modelled in Egypt up to 1800 BC (Plate 2). Both loom types did not function through the use of weights and the possible difference could be that in Malta the wrap was separated in bundles perhaps using the bobbins in order to make a more complicated type of weave, lifting or lowering every time the same number of wrap threads wound around the bobbins. The woof would have been inserted between the wrap threads by means of a shuttle.

The Bronze Age loom weights are usually of a conical or pyramidal shape, pierced at the apex and made of baked clay. These can be used in a vertical type of loom in order to keep the wrap threads evenly tightened. In the horizontal loom, which was usually used only for a few centimetres above the ground, the tightness of the wrap was perhaps more difficult to maintain and keep evenly. Bronze Age loom weights are known from Bahrija and Borg in-Nadur in Malta and Nuffara in Gozo. Interestingly a rectangular one with a flat base and top was recovered from the last site (Murray 1923). Peet (1910) and Trump (1961) found more loom weights of the commoner type from Bahrija. Again from these two sites a number of anchor shaped clay objects are known. Their connection with some kind of loom and the weaving industry has already been suggested and discussed by Trump (1960). Murray (1925) found parts of at least fifteen clay anchors at Borg in-Nadur, while other parts of clay anchors are recorded by Peet (1910) from Bahrija. Similarly Murray (1929) also illustrated a substantial part of two clay anchors and six clay anchor shanks also from Bahrija. Trump (1960) referred to these finds and added other information on clay anchors recovered from his excavations at Bahrija (Trump 1961, 1962). Incidentally Trump also found a loom weight of exceptional size which was decorated with incised patterns typically found on the Bahrija phase pottery. The same archaeologist records the

discovery of clay anchors from a silo pit at Nuffara in Gozo (MAR 1960).

Clay anchors are also known beyond Maltese shores, and have been recorded in the Eastern Mediterranean. The sites of Thermi and Poliochni belonging to Troy I phase appear to be the earliest (ca 3000 BC). From the Aegean mainland we find the sites of Lerna, Eutresis and Raphina of the Korakau culture. From the Tiryns culture we have the sites of Lerna, Bobati, Raphina and Eutresis. Perhaps the earliest date from the Aegean mainland is that of Kritsano (ca 2800BC) in Macedonia. Also belonging to this period are examples from Sitagroi Vb phase. Later examples are from Agrissa of the early Thessaly phase II. The Bulgarian examples of Michailitech of Cenavoda-Egero culture also give a date earlier than the Maltese examples (Renfrew 1972). The distribution of clay anchors in the Mediterranean has been summarised by Evans (1956). It appears that all the clay anchors mentioned belong to the third and second millennium BC, contrasting with the Borg in-Nadur and Bahrija phases which date back to the second and first millennium.

Other items related to the weaving industry, worth discussing are the pins, needles, points and awls. These pointed tools are known from all prehistoric phases except from the Mgarr, Borg in-Nadur and Bahrija cultures. Many needles are made of bone, but a number of awls are made of copper fixed on a bone handle. These tools were probably used for sewing fabrics together in the production of dresses and garments. The use and function of pierced (eyed) needles is obvious. The eyes can be either on the opposite end of the point or else on the pointed end. Bird and lamb bones seem to have been the preferred material, but others are made of sheep or goat bones. The awl was probably used to pierce heavier materials perhaps even leather and could have nothing to do with the dress making industry. Awls, however, could have been used to decorate and incise stone and pottery.

A group of curved bone 'needles' with the eye on the opposite end of the point, are known from the Tarxien and Tarxien Cemetery phases and have been interpreted as pendants. Similar bone artefacts are known from Ligurain caves amongst other sites, and are also interpreted as pendants. These sites are dated to about 2730 BC (Guidi 1979).

Discussion

The miniature carving T/S 17, was found "behind the oracular room *l*" associated with find number T/S

1007, which is a miniature clay figurine of a sitting nude lady. As stated above two V-perforated buttons (T/B7 and T/B10) and seven axe pendants were found in the same space as the niche (Zammit 1930; Evans 1971)

Room *l* corresponds to the east temple, which is the earliest of the existing buildings at Tarxien. The "oracular room" lies behind apse number 24 and appears to have been constructed in the space between the inner and outer walls of the apse. This construction is similar to that found in Room 5 at the Mnajdra Temples. Irrespective of the real nature of the room *l*, the niche's find spot does not necessarily connect it with the oracular activity. It must be borne in mind that the carving could have formed part of some larger sculpture somewhat similar to the small human figure carved below the skirt of the draped seated statuettes T/S 28 and T/S 30; and could have had some covering held in place by four small dowels accommodated in the four holes present in the carving. Another possibility is that it was attached to a larger block by the same four dowels. It seems that the Temple Period artists knew well the technique of making the carving in several pieces. Such case appears to have occurred with the removable heads of some statuettes. Its connection with any fertility cult in an oracle room cannot be accepted.

It has been suggested that the reliefs on the monumental statue plinth at Tarxien signify a connection of the "Spinner Goddess" with the cults of the Tarxien culture (Cutajar 1986). Cutajar like Evans before him, incorrectly describes the pattern on the relief as an "egg and dart motive" which is usually connected with fertility and the mother goddess.

Spindle whorls can be egg shaped but darts are never bobbin shaped. The pattern was rightly described by Ridley (1971) as "horizontal ovoids with pointed ends, 'eggs' separated by vertical double axes or concave and convex lines". The connection between double axes and bobbins in their general outline can be better understood. Moreover true 'egg and dart motive' does not appear in Maltese Megalithic art. The depiction of bobbins and spindle whorls is the only possible explanation for the pattern on the plinth at Tarxien. The reference of the miniature carving T/S 17, to Cutajar's hypothesis is that the art of spinning and perhaps weaving could have had some cultic significance to the Temple community. Bonanno (1996) suggested that during the Temple period, artists had an important role in the community. Could this be said also for the spinners and weavers? Apart from burial places, most of the

evidence for spinning and weaving during the Temple period does come from ritual/ cultic sites.

It is here suggested that as stated by Evans (1959) and Mc Connell (1985), the textile industry was the major contributor for the procurement of foreign material, including food stuffs by trade. Such claim is supported by the survey carried by Mc Connell on the occurrence of imported materials during Maltese prehistory against the evidence for the cloth industry through the same periods. The results lead him to suggest a trade of imported materials between the different chiefdoms on the Maltese Islands during the same periods.

From the evidence provided by the above surveyed artefacts and Mc Connell's study, it is here suggested that:-

- 1) During the Neolithic and the Temple periods there was continuous trading ventures in the Central Mediterranean with artefacts and foreign materials arriving as far afield as Western Spain , the Aegean, Po valleys and Southern France but mostly going through Sicily which could have been the central source for such materials for traders from the Maltese Islands.
- 2) The weaving industry might have been the principal producer of fine and well made materials to be exported and traded further north (other locally manufactured materials and artefacts have as yet not been recovered from any northern sites except for a few from Sicily). The lack of evidence for this suggestion would be explained by the perishable nature of cloth and fabrics.
- 3) The few spinning and weaving artefacts recovered from the Neolithic suggests that the cloth industry during this period was restricted to home industry.
- 4) In the ensuing Temple period, foreign demand could have prompted the local authorities, possibly "priest-chiefs", to take over the control of production, by raising the standard and efficiency of cloth making and introduce a more advanced loom than the one used during the Neolithic and possibly by employing 'professional' weavers.
- 5) Occurrence of spinning and weaving artefacts in cultic and ritual areas is consistent with such control, the cultic association being deliberate to ensure the success of the trading ventures. By the late Tarxien phase, the local environment was degraded and unproductive. With local agriculture not yielding abundant crops and a number of drought years ensuing, foodstuffs could only be procured from outside sources.
- 6) By the end of the Tarxien phase and the beginning of the Bronze Age a possible Aegean competitor with more efficient looms and perhaps served by better trading and faster sea transport, took over the local trade, turning the local industry into a home venture again. This is attested by "indications of a change in spinning and weaving customs at the end of the 'Aegean' Neolithic", and by evidence for " the whole craft of textile production... clearly transformed by late Bronze Age times from a local household concern to a commercially exploited industry." (Renfrew 1972).
- 7) This fall of economy could have been one of the main contributing factor that brought the downfall of the Temple culture and the beginning of the local Bronze Age.
- 8) During the Bronze Age, new immigrants brought over their own trade and weaving industry, which coupled with the older concern for high standard and efficiency continued into the classical period when the high quality of the craft is acclaimed by Cicero (first Century BC), Diodorus Siculus (first century AD) and Hesychius (fifth century AD).

Notes

1. Plate 1 is an inverted reproduction of the photograph given by Formosa (1975).

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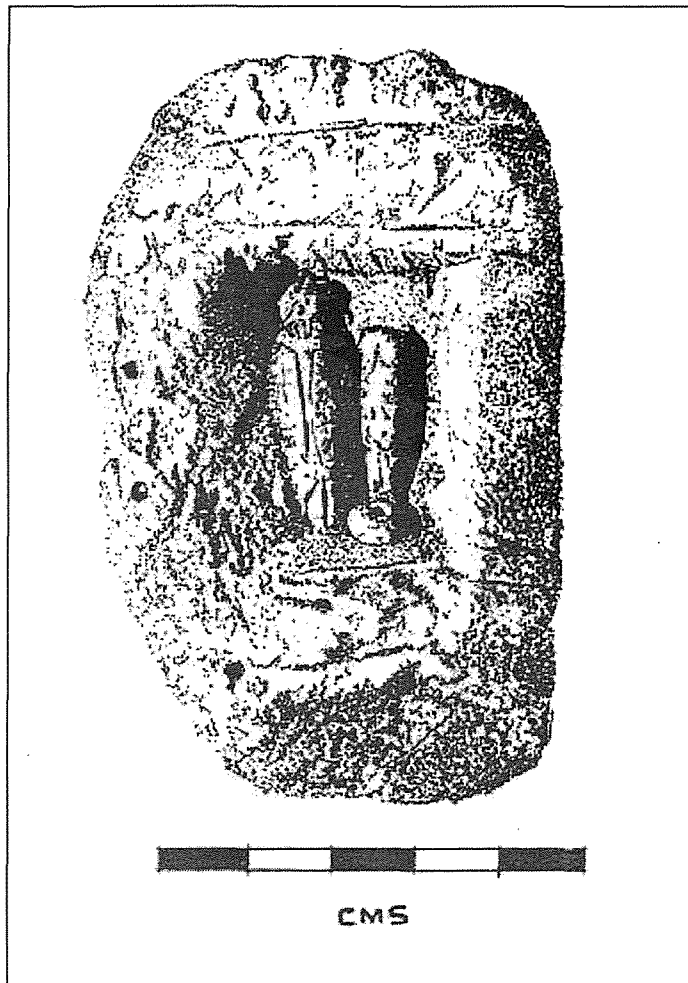


Figure 1: Model Niche T/S 17 - after photograph in Evans 1958

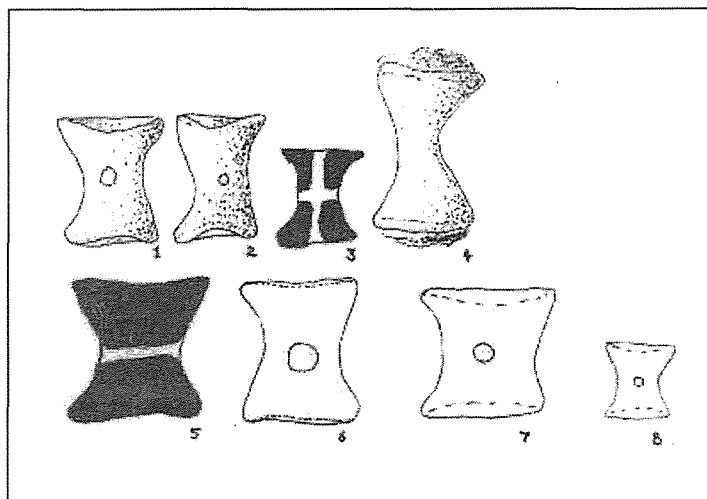


Figure 2: Clay Bobbins:- 1-4:- Mn P1004; four out of five found at Mnajdra: 5:- Hagar Qim
6:- Hal Saflieni: 7,8:- Tarxien Cemetery



Plate 1: Detail of the niche - after Formosa 1975

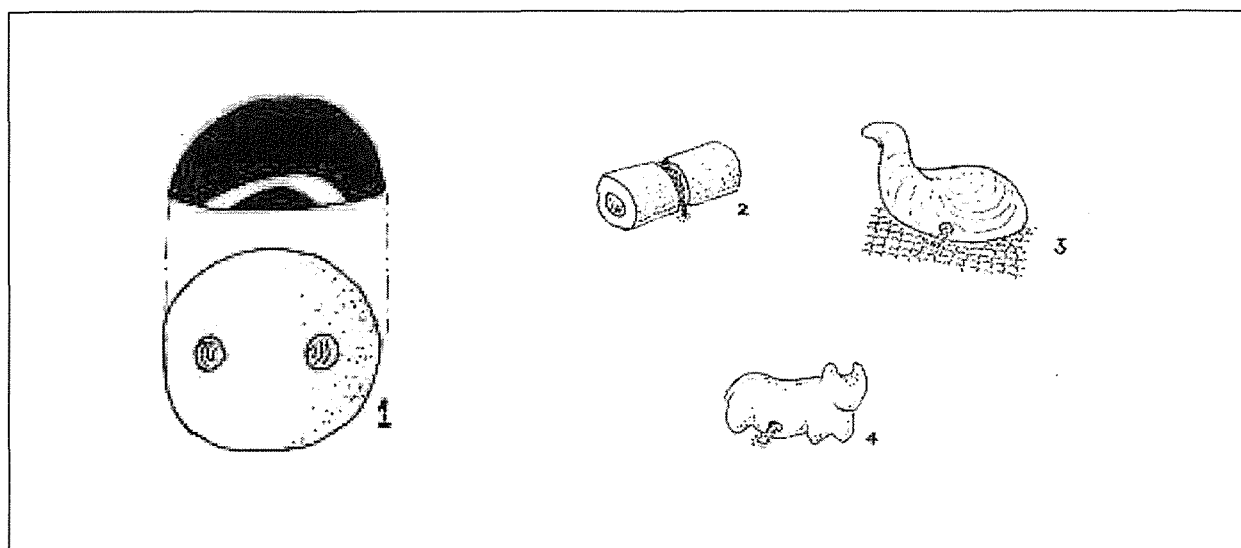


Figure 3: Buttons (not to scale):-

1:- Typical 'V' perforated shell button
3:- Bird Button (shell)

2:- Cylindrical Button (bone)
4:- Animal Button (stone)

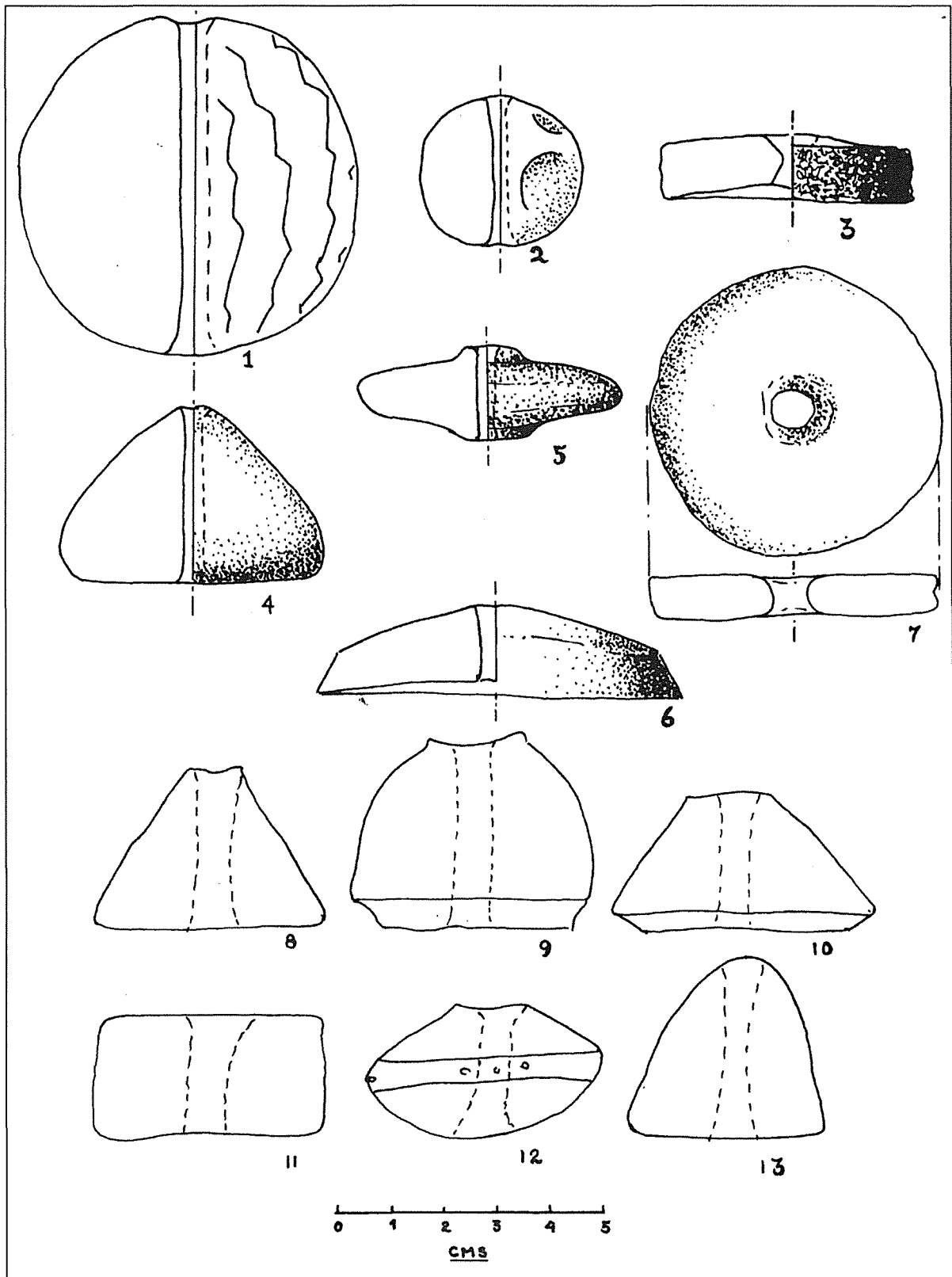


Figure 4: Spindle Whorls:-

Decorated:- 1:- Red Skorba Phase: 2:- Hagar Qim

Chipped Sherd :- 3:- Red Skorba Phase

Various Shapes :- 4:- Tarxien Phase : 5:-Zebbug Phase: 6:- Ggantija Phase: 7:- Hagar Qim

Whorls nos. 1, 3-6 are from Skorba

nos. 8 - 13 are from the Tarxien Cemetery

(Redrawn after Trump 1965 and Evans 1976)

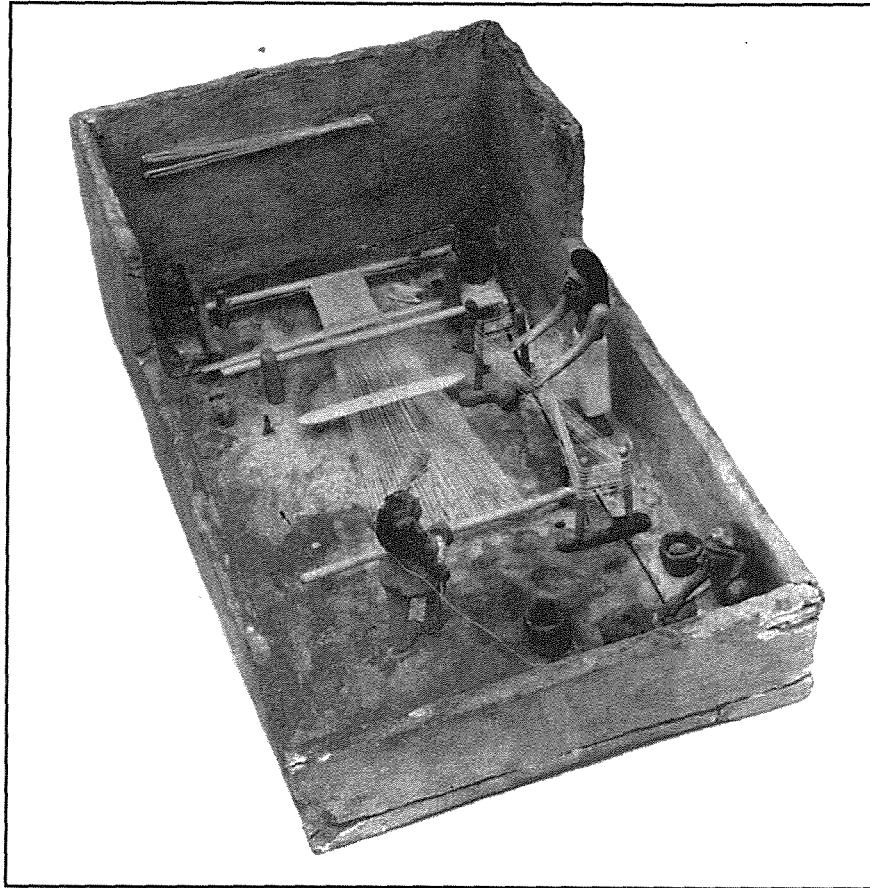


Plate 2: Model of a horizontal loom from a tomb at Thebes, Egypt (c. 1800BC)

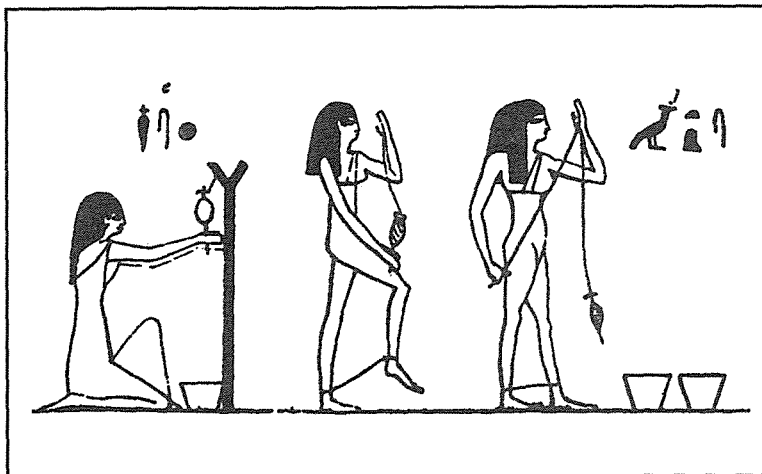


Figure 5: Use of the Spindle from an Egyptian Tomb at Beni Hasan (c. 1900 BC) (Gardner Wilkinson 1994)



Figure 6: Use of the Distaff from Hellenistic Greece (c. 800BC) (Guhl & Koner 1994)