

The Oracle

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THE ORACLE

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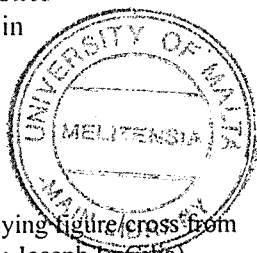
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COVER PHOTOGRAPH

Low relief of sign of Tanit/flying figure/cross from
Ras il-Wardija, Gozo (Photo: Joseph L. Cilia)

Editorial

The idea of publishing a periodical has long been considered by the committee members of the *Grupp Arkeologiku Malti*. Finally this wish has materialised in print and can certainly be considered as a step in the right direction from the attempt that was made over ten years ago through the distribution of the small journal 'Menhir' to the group's members.

The contents of the present journal should be an assertion that what has been the knowledge of a small number of people, can contribute considerably to the already rich archaeological heritage of our islands. It will also hopefully provide a space for the amateur and professional alike to communicate their knowledge over this unique aspect of our patrimony.

The choice of the 'Oracle' as the title of this periodical is not coincidental and should reflect the purpose of this work. In the Maltese Archeological context the Oracle Hole is a feature of temples and underground hypogea, through which a voice can be made to reverberate into the surrounding chambers. Challenged in recent years, this proposal has attracted considerable interest abroad leading to a study of the acoustic properties of megalithic buildings (see *Antiquity* 70: 665-666).

A more accepted explanation for the Oracle Holes describes them as a medium of contact and transaction between different ritual spaces of the temple complex.

The objective of embarking on the publication of a journal by the *Grupp Arkeologiku Malti* embraces both these proposed functions of the Oracle Hole. Its aim is to provide a tangible medium through which insight on the archaeological remains of our islands could be appreciated by a wider public. It also aims to voice information that would have otherwise been lost through failure of publication.

The articles in this first issue are very promising. Research on skulls recovered from the St. Agatha Catacombs provides interesting and useful insights on the populations that inhabited the Maltese Islands since antiquity. An equally interesting article considers a new interpretation of an otherwise forgotten stone carving found at the Tarxien Temples. On a more regretful note but still significant is the work on lost archaeological sites; insights from this article will hopefully lead to appropriate action to be taken in the near future. Finally but not least, the field notes provide information on discoveries made in recent years and which were likely to be overlooked if they were not described in this review.

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The Anthropomorphology of Classical Skulls from Malta

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ABSTRACT

A series of human skulls dated by archaeological context to the Classical age are studied anthropomorphologically and compared to previous studies of Maltese skulls from several other historical periods. The cranial indices of the St. Agatha population was shown to have no statistical differences from indices of skulls pertaining to the Early Modern Period, but were significantly different from the Prehistoric skull indices. The Prehistoric skulls were shown to be generally dolichocephalic, while the Classical and post-Classical skulls were mesocephalic. There were however statistically significant differences between the facial indices of the Classical skulls when compared to the Early Modern skulls, with the Classical skulls showing narrow and slightly longer facial structure. Two skulls showing the congenital variation of persistence of the metopic suture are described and discussed.

KEYWORDS

anthropomorphology; skulls; classical period; melitensia

Introduction

The anthropology of cranial remains from Malta dated to the Prehistoric, Medieval and Modern periods has been repeatedly assessed and discussed (Zammit et al. 1912; Bradley 1912; Dudley Buxton 1922; Pace 1972; Pace & Ramaswamy 1990). A series of 23 skulls labelled Romano-Maltese of unknown provenance have been previously studied and measured (Dudley Buxton 1922). This present study deals with the anthropological assessment of a series of skulls dated by archaeological context to the Classical Age. The Classical period in Malta is generally accepted to include the Punic-Byzantine period when the political influence of the Islands fell under the respective dominion of Phoenicia, Carthage, Rome and Byzantium. It lasted from about the ninth century BC until 870 AD when the Islands fell under Arab rule heralding the beginning of the Medieval period.

Material and Methods

The study is based on the series of 23 skulls held in the St. Agatha museum and catacombs (Plate 6). The

skulls were collected from the catacombs and tombs in the vicinity of the St. Agatha Church. These tombs have been dated by their archaeological context to the period encompassing the late Punic to the Early Palaeochristian age (circa 200 BC to 200 AD), thus pertaining to the Classical period. Maltese skull specimens from other sites in Malta, and dated archaeologically to the Classical Age, now kept in Cambridge (Plate 2) and the Gozo Museum (Plates 1&3), were also studied and measured. These former two skulls were obtained from Ghajn Tuffieha [c.1865] (Camb.1) (Plate 2) and Bingemma [1932] (Camb.2). Other Maltese skulls in the Cambridge collection do not have particulars as to provenance and were not considered in this review. The measurements published by L.H. Dudley Buxton pertaining to a series of ancient skulls (Dudley Buxton 1922), most of which were excavated by Sir T. Zammit, and held in 1920 in the Museum of Valletta and the Rabat Roman Villa Museum, have also been reviewed.

Standard cranial measurements were made using a craniometer and tape measure. Skulls showing interesting anatomical features were photographed. Since sexing of skeletal material was considered to be generally based on arbitrary grounds, it was

decided to treat the specimens as a whole, non-sexed population. The data was transcribed onto a specifically drawn Access database, and all calculations and statistical analysis performed using Excel and MedCalc statistical package. Statistical analysis of the cranial indices of these Classical skulls were compared, where possible, with other previously published cranial indices measurements of Prehistoric (Zammit et al. 1912), Early Modern (Dudley Buxton 1922) and Recent (Dudley Buxton 1922) skulls using the student t test.

Results

The mean + sd cranial measurements of the 23 skulls kept at St. Agatha Museum and Catacombs are tabulated in Table 1 together with the measurements of other Classical skulls from alternate archaeological sites. While there appears to be some discrepancy in the mean values of the two major populations studied, these differences were probably not significant, though statistical analysis could not be performed since Dudley Buxton failed to give the standard deviations of his mean values. The mean

Cranial Index in the St. Agatha group was computed as 78.08, while the value reported by Dudley Buxton was 76.33. Both mean measurement place the skulls in the Mesocephalic group.

There appeared to be significant differences between the Cranial Index ($p=0.0008$), the Height/Breadth Index ($p=0.0391$), and the Palatal Index ($p=0.0028$) of the St. Agatha Classical skull collection and the Hypogeum Prehistoric skulls. There were no statistically significant differences when the Height/Length Index ($p=0.1293$), Upper Facial Index ($p=0.3588$), the Nasal Index ($p=0.1214$), the Orbital Index ($p=0.1798$), and the Gnathic Index ($p=0.8889$) were considered (Table 2). There were no significant differences between the Classical skulls and the Early Modern - Recent skull measurements when the Cranial Index ($p=0.228$) and the Nasal Index ($p=0.928$) were considered, but significant differences were noted when the Height/Length Index ($p<0.0001$), and the Upper Facial Index ($p=0.0008$) were considered. The Orbital Index of the Classical skulls showed statistical differences when compared to the Early Modern, but not to

CRANIAL MEASUREMENTS	St.Agatha collection (n = 23) mean + sd	Romano-Maltese after Dudley Buxton (n = 23) mean	Camb 1	Camb 2
glabella-occipital	179.79 + 8.50 (n = 21)	183.74 (n = 22)	187	181
baso-bregmatic	132.87 + 5.72 (n = 15)	134.08 (n = 19)	143	127
auricular length	114.94 + 8.98 (n = 17)	-	123	112
baso-prosthion	96.07 + 4.41 (n = 14)	-	121	92
baso-nasion	101.8 + 5.57 (n = 15)	99.18 (n = 20)	109	104
cranial breadth	140.24 + 8.12 (n = 21)	139.59 (n = 23)	145	135
frontal breadth	118.68 + 6.36 (n = 19)	96.67 (n = 23)	116	110
bizygomatic breadth	124.94 + 9.94 (n = 18)	131.50 (n = 6)	130	128
nasal breadth	23.83 + 2.04 (n = 18)	24.21 (n = 21)	25	24
nasal height	50.94 + 2.44 (n = 18)	50.00 (n = 22)	50	55
orbital breadth	37.83 + 2.56 (n = 18)	39.17 (n = 20)	38	40
orbital height	32.58 + 2.92 (n = 18)	32.97 (n = 19)	32	33
naso-prosthion	68.78 + 3.57 (n = 18)	65.30 (n = 20)	64	-
nasio-gnathion	117.5 + 3.14 (n = 10)	-	120	-
palatal breadth	39.91 + 2.71 (n = 17)	36.42 (n = 19)	-	-
palatal length	49.68 + 2.82 (n = 17)	48.88 (n = 22)	-	-
skull circumference	517.3 + 22.26 (n = 20)	-	540	510
parietal thickness	4.95 + 1.24 (n = 10)	-	4	-
Cephalic Index	78.08 + 4.56 (n = 21)	76.33 (n = 21)	77.54	74.59
Height-Breadth Index	86.66 + 12.64 (n = 15)	~ 96.05	98.62	94.07
Height-Length Index	82.75 + 10.93 (n = 15)	72.25 (n = 16)	76.47	70.17
Total Facial Index	93.77 + 6.31 (n = 10)	-	92.31	-
Upper Facial Index	54.80 + 4.23 (n = 17)	48.44 (n = 9)	49.23	-
Nasal Index	46.85 + 4.10 (n = 18)	48.57 (n = 21)	50	43.64
Orbital Index	86.33 + 7.6 (n = 18)	83.67 (n = 15)	84.21	82.50
Palatal Index	80.64 + 7.73 (n = 17)	~ 74.51	101.67	-
Gnathic Index	94.46 + 4.28 (n = 14)	-	111.0	84.46

Table 1: Measurements of Classical Skulls Collections

Prehistoric or Recent skulls ($p=0.0004$) (Table 2). The Cranial Index of the Classical (CI = 78.08), Early Modern (CI = 77.09) and Recent (CI = 79.1) skulls defined the skull shape as Mesocephalic, while the CI of the Prehistoric (CI = 71.88) skulls defined these as Dolichocephalic.

Two skulls [SA004 and SA008] from the St. Agatha Museum collection merit special mention. These

skulls belong to two adult individuals, probably male and female. The skulls are characterised by the persistence of the metopic suture. The measurement characteristics of these two skulls are given in Table 3. Another skull showed exostosis of the left temporal ridge (SA/J), while two skulls showed a relatively porous medulla (SA/T003; SA/T008).

Other skull fragment remains of note, though not

CRANIAL MEASUREMENTS	Prehistoric	Classical	Medieval	Early Modern	Recent
Cranial Capacity Dudley-Braxton formula	1391.1	1385.4	1238.4	1389.4	1378.1
Cephalic Index C vs P: $p=0.0008$ sig C vs EM: $p=0.2280$ ns C vs R: $p=0.3444$ ns	71.88 + 3.62 (10)	78.08 + 4.5 (21)	80.42	77.09 + 3.63 (463)	79.1 + 3.67 (41)
Height-Breadth Index C vs P: $p=0.0391$ sig C vs EM: not assessed C vs R: not assessed	103.49 + 1.88 (3)	86.66 + 12.64 (15)	90.04	~97.54	~94.39
Height-Length Index C vs P: $p=0.1293$ ns C vs EM: $p<0.0001$ sig C vs R: $p=0.0001$ sig	72.40 + 1.17 (3)	82.75 + 10.93 (15)	72.40	75.17 + 3.52 (461)	74.55 + 3.36 (40)
Total Facial Index C vs P: not assessed C vs EM: not assessed C vs R: not assessed	92.0 (1)	93.77 + 6.31 (10)	-	-	-
Upper Facial Index C vs P: $p=0.3588$ ns C vs EM: $p=0.0008$ sig C vs R: $p=0.0007$ sig	52.79 + 4.11 (5)	54.8 + 4.23 (17)	56.15	51.83 + 3.45 (247)	50.92 + 3.43 (38)
Nasal Index C vs P: $p=0.1214$ ns C vs EM: $p=0.9280$ ns C vs R: $p=0.2554$ ns	49.95 + 4.02 (6)	46.85 + 4.1 (18)	49.02	46.94 + 4.14 (448)	45.62 + 3.67 (42)
Orbital Index C vs P: $p=0.1798$ ns C vs EM: $p=0.0004$ sig C vs R: $p=0.2713$ ns	81.75 + 8.27 (8)	86.33 + 7.6 (18)	90.26	81.10 + 6.04 (462)	83.89 + 7.52 (31)
Palatal Index C vs P: $p=0.0028$ sig C vs EM: not assessed C vs R: not assessed	69.24 + 8.46 (8)	80.64 + 7.73 (17)	83.52	~ 73.32	~ 73.35 (30)
Gnathic Index C vs P: $p=0.8889$ ns C vs EM: not assessed C vs R: not assessed	94.7 + 4.53 (3)	94.46 + 4.28 (14)	-	-	-

Table 2: Comparative Index Measurements of Maltese Skulls

included in the measurements, are those belonging to an abortus with a frontal breadth approximating 5.3 cm making this equivalent to a 28 week gestation abortus (Plate 4).

CRANIAL MEASUREMENTS	SA004 female	SA008 male
glabella-occipital	169	177
baso-bregmatic	-	122
auricular length	105	113
baso-prostion	-	95
baso-nasion	-	96
cranial breadth	131	158
frontal breadth	117	128
bizygomatic breadth	124	144
nasal breadth	22	24
nasal height	54	50
orbital breadth	35	37
orbital height	31	31
naso-prostion	70	70
nasio-gnathion	-	119
palatal breadth	39	44
palatal length	47	52
skull circumference	500	520
parietal thickness	6	6
Cepahlic Index	77.5	89.3
Height-Breadth Index	-	77.2
Height-Length Index	-	68.9
Total Facial Index	-	82.6
Upper Facial Index	56.5	48.6
Nasal Index	40.7	48
Orbital Index	88.6	83.8
Palatal Index	83	84.6
Gnathic Index	-	99

Table 3: Individual Skull Measurements

Conclusions

The Maltese Islands during their history have seen several waves of recolonisation, sometimes preceded by a nearly total abandonment of the islands. The Classical Maltese inhabitants were probably the descendants of the Bronze Age colonisers who populated the islands after the end of the Temple Period (circa 2500 BC). The archaeological evidence suggests that environmental stresses forced the Temple Period inhabitants to abandon the islands and these were only re-populated after several centuries. The Bronze Age inhabitants continued populating the islands into the Classical Period with cultural and presumably biological influences from the Punic and Roman sphere of dominance. It has been suggested that the Maltese Islands were again practically abandoned during the Early Medieval Period, to be

again recolonised in the Late Medieval Period. These population movements and influxes would be expected to influence the skeletal characteristics of the various Maltese populations throughout the various historical periods.

The skulls from the various historical periods have been here shown to constitute separate morphological populations, though the statistical test results must be tempered by the scarcity of material available. The Classical skulls from St. Agatha's Catacombs have been shown to have important statistically significant differences from the Prehistoric skulls excavated from the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum ossarium in the Cranial, Height-Breadth and Palatal Indices. These indices did not show any statistical significant differences when the Classical skulls were compared to the Early Modern and Recent measurements. These same observations were noted by L.H. Dudley Buxton when comparing his Romano-Maltese skull collection of undefined provenance with the Hal Saflieni, Early Modern, and Recent skull collections (Dudley Buxton 1922). Dudley Buxton remarks that the cranial breadth has remained consistent from the Classical period onwards, while the Hal Saflieni skulls were noted to be extremely narrow. The glabello-occipital length was similar in the post-Classical skulls, but larger in the Hal Saflieni group (Plate 5). The estimated Cranial and Height-Breadth Indices based on these measurements suggest that there has been a gradual rounding of the cranium since the period represented by the Hal Saflieni skulls. The Palatal Index appears to have increased in the post-Classical skulls when compared to the Hal Saflieni skulls as a result of increasing breadth, the length having remained approximately steady. The mean Palatal breadth in the St. Agatha Classical skulls was slightly greater than the value given by Dudley Buxton for the Romano-Maltese skulls (Dudley Buxton 1922). The differences in the Cranial Index and Palatal Index noted in this study and that of Dudley Buxton suggests that the Prehistoric skulls (Plate 5) with their marked dolichocephaly and low palatal index were in fact a completely different population morphologically, while the Classical and post-Classical populations were overall similar in gross cranial morphology.

Significant differences have been noted between the St. Agatha Classical Period skulls and the Early Modern and Recent skulls in regards to indices which reflect cranial height. Another statistically significant difference was noted for the Upper Facial Index and the Cranial Height-Length ratio. Both these indices are significantly greater than the mean values obtained for the Early Modern Skulls, and the

Recent skulls. This observation is in contrast to that of Dudley Buxton who observed the reverse and noted that the Romano-Maltese skulls had a lower Upper Facial Index than skulls from earlier or later periods (Dudley Buxton 1922). The Upper Facial differences between the St. Agatha Classical Skull repertoire and the post-Classical periods skulls were dependent on a narrower bizygomatic breadth measurement in the former, while the naso-prosthion measurement was approximately equal in all the three groups. The Height-Length Index differences noted were dependent on a markedly lower baso-bregmatic height in the presence of relatively equal glabella-occipital length in the Classical skulls when compared to the post-Classical skulls. These differences suggest that the facial structure of the St. Agatha population was overall narrow and longer in contrast to later populations. The narrow facial structure of the St. Agatha population also accounts for the larger Orbital Index noted in this group. No statistical significance was noted between these indices in the St. Agatha skull repertoire and the Hal Saflieni group, even though the mean values were actually different being lower in the Prehistoric group of skulls. The lack of statistical significance can be explained by the fact that the number of observations relating to these indices for the Prehistoric group were below five readings.

The frontal bone is ossified in fibrous tissue from two primary centres which appear in the eight week of intrauterine life. From each of these centres ossification extends upwards to form the corresponding half of the bone. At birth the bone consists of two halves separated by the frontal or metopic suture, but union begins in the second year, and the suture is usually completely obliterated by the eight year. In a percentage of persons which shows some racial variation, the two halves of the frontal bone remain separate, and the metopic suture persists (Warwick & Williams 1973). In view of the relative infrequency of this condition, it is likely that the two individuals from St. Agatha catacombs showing this anatomical variation were related genetically.

The presence of skeletal remains pertaining to a late abortus estimated at 28 weeks of gestation (Plate 4) is not surprising in view of the fact that small loculi graves can be found hewn on the side walls both at St. Agatha's Catacombs and at St. Paul's Catacombs. These graves are horizontal recesses with their long axis in the direction of the catacomb gallery. These were probably made to measure, and cut whilst the prepared body was lying close by. After the corpse was laid in its recess, the front was sealed by a stone slab let in a groove in the rock, and cemented all

round with mortar. A very simple inscription was sometimes cut upon the slab or scratched in the wet mortar. Some of these graves are of very small dimension allowing only the burial of late abortions or stillbirths. Of a total of 409 interments at St. Agatha's Catacombs, no less than 104 (25.4%) belong to infants, a figure reflecting the high infant mortality rate (Camilleri 1984; Savona-Ventura 1997).

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Plate 1: Classical - Skeleton found under Roman amphora in Comino, Gozo Museum (Photo: A. Mifsud)

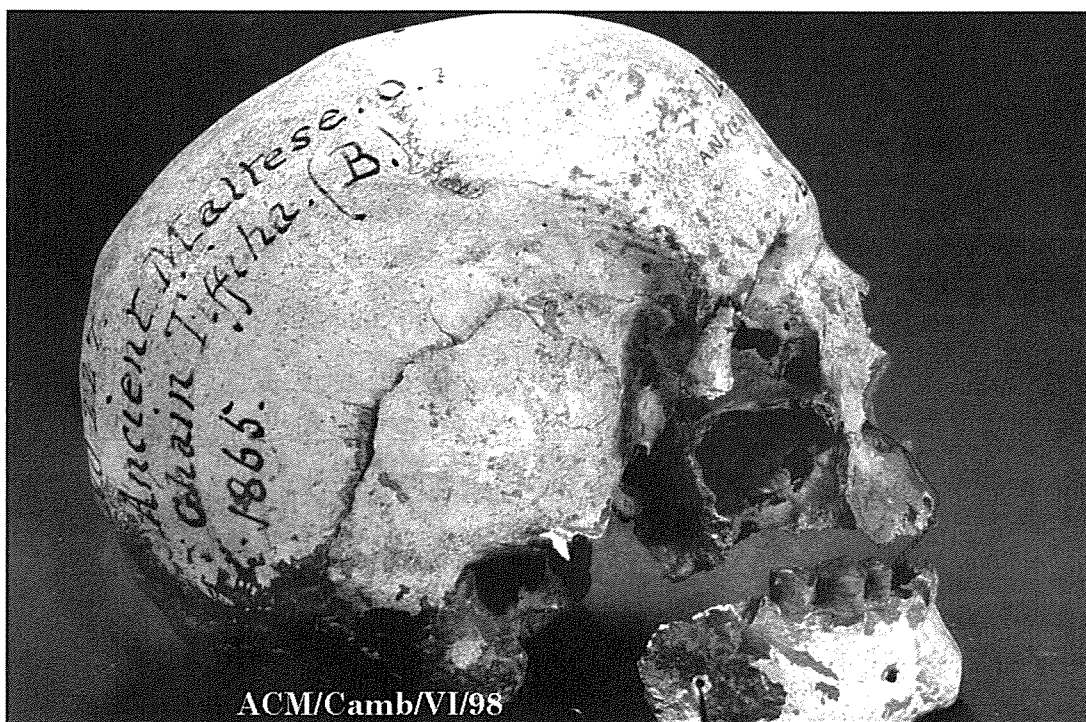


Plate 2: Classical - Skull discovered in a rock tomb at Ghajn Tuffieha in 1865 by Captain Schwann, Cambridge (Photo: A. Mifsud)



Plate 3: Classical - Skulls found in Punic Tomb in Gozo, Gozo Museum (Photo: A. Mifsud)

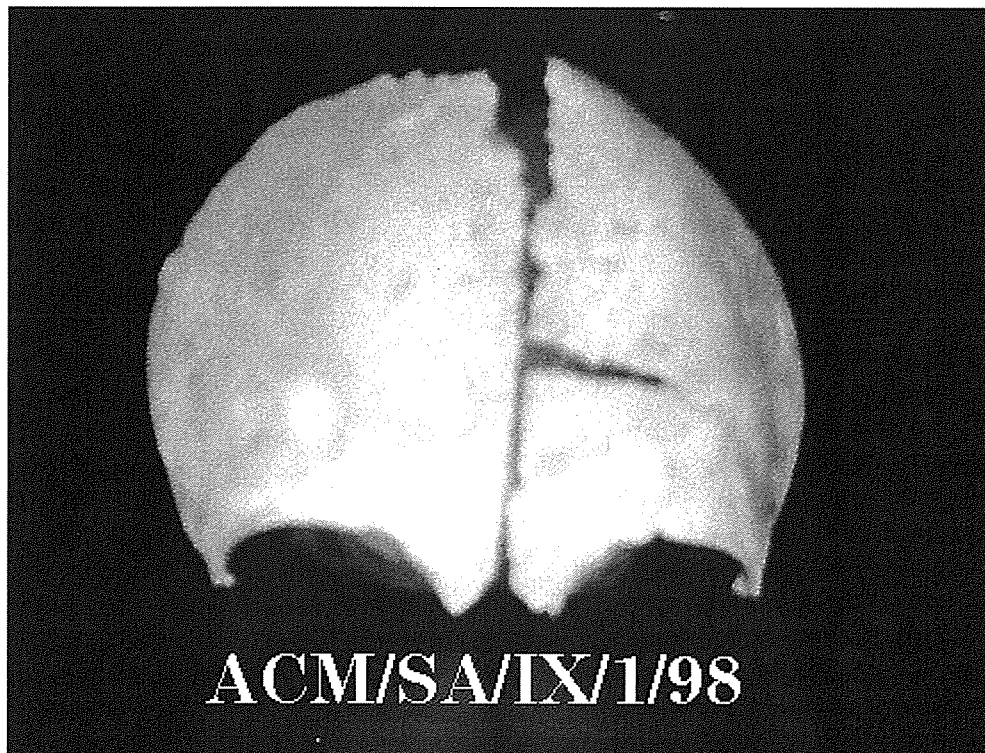


Plate 4: Classical - Skull of Foetus (28 weeks) , St. Agatha Museum (Photo: A. Mifsud)

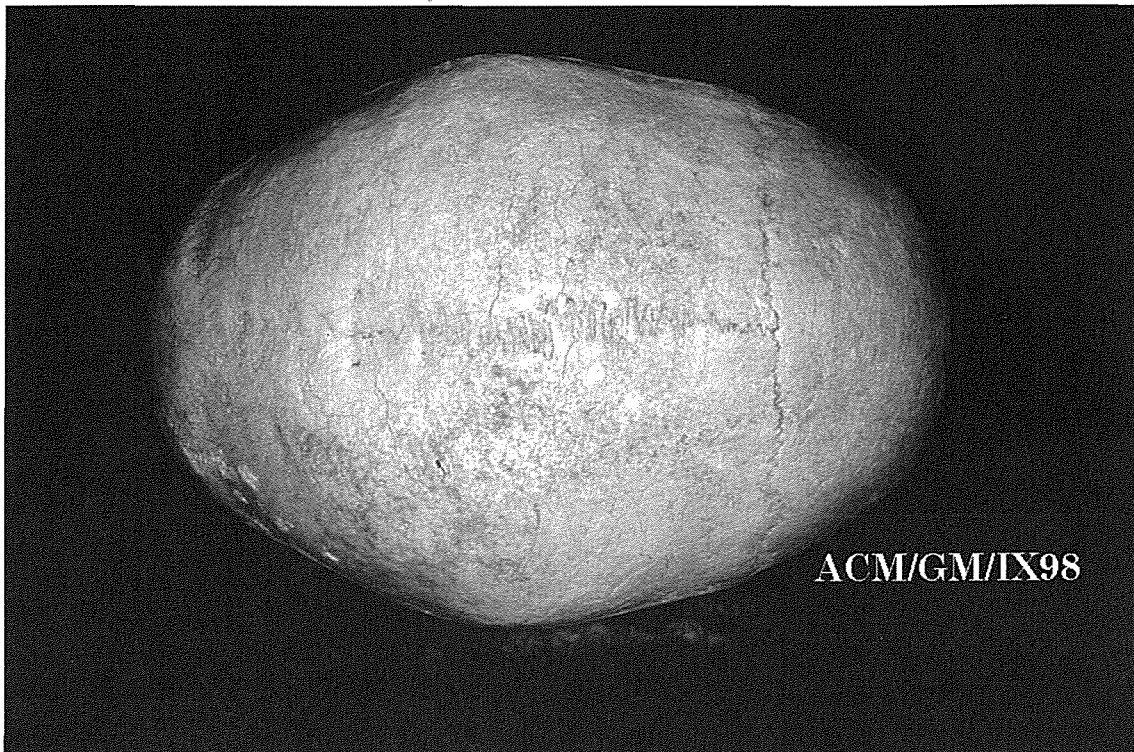


Plate 5: Prehistoric - Dolichocephalic skull, Gozo Museum (Photo: A. Mifsud)

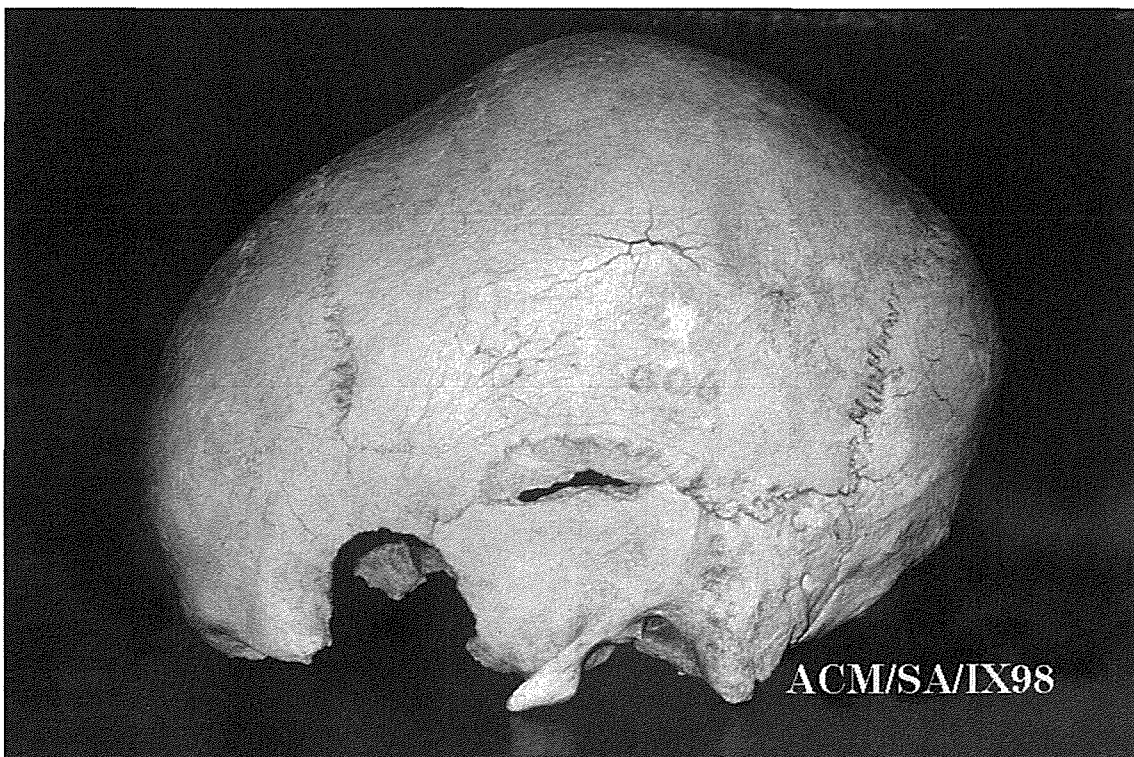


Plate 6: Classical - Early Roman Skull , St. Agatha Museum (Photo: A. Mifsud)

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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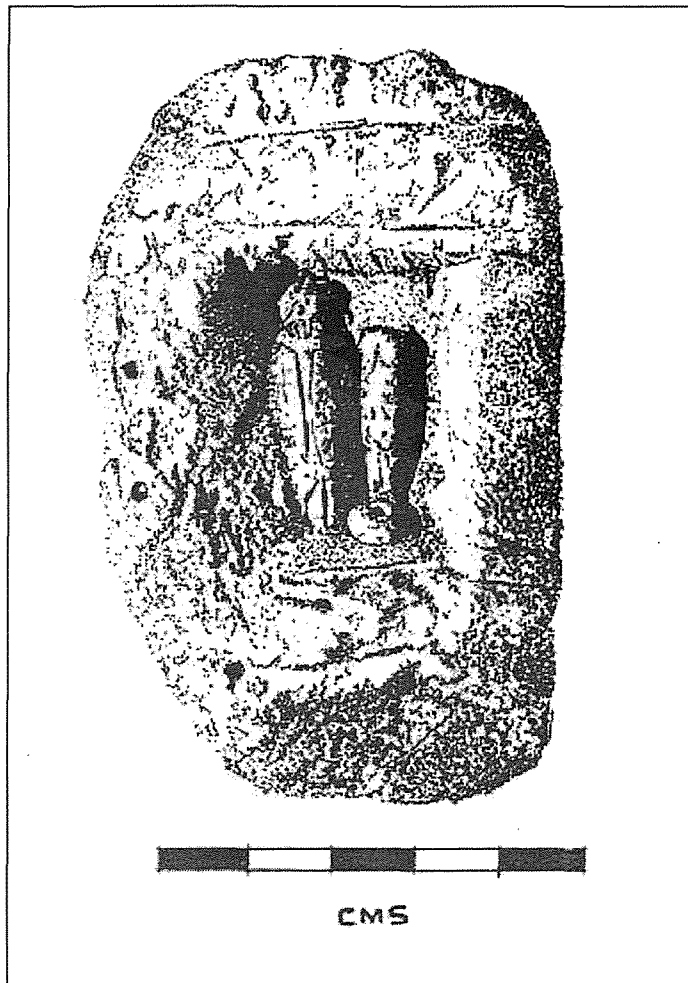


Figure 1: Model Niche T/S 17 - after photograph in Evans 1958

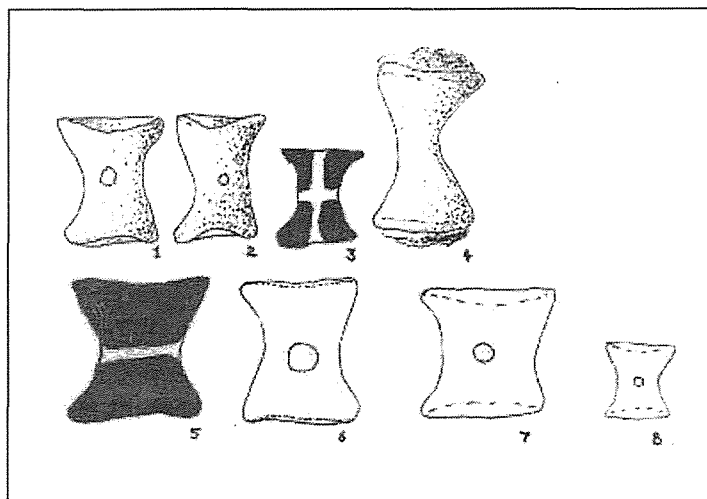


Figure 2: Clay Bobbins:- 1-4:- Mn P1004; four out of five found at Mnajdra: 5:- Hagar Qim
6:- Hal Saflieni: 7,8:- Tarxien Cemetery



Plate 1: Detail of the niche - after Formosa 1975

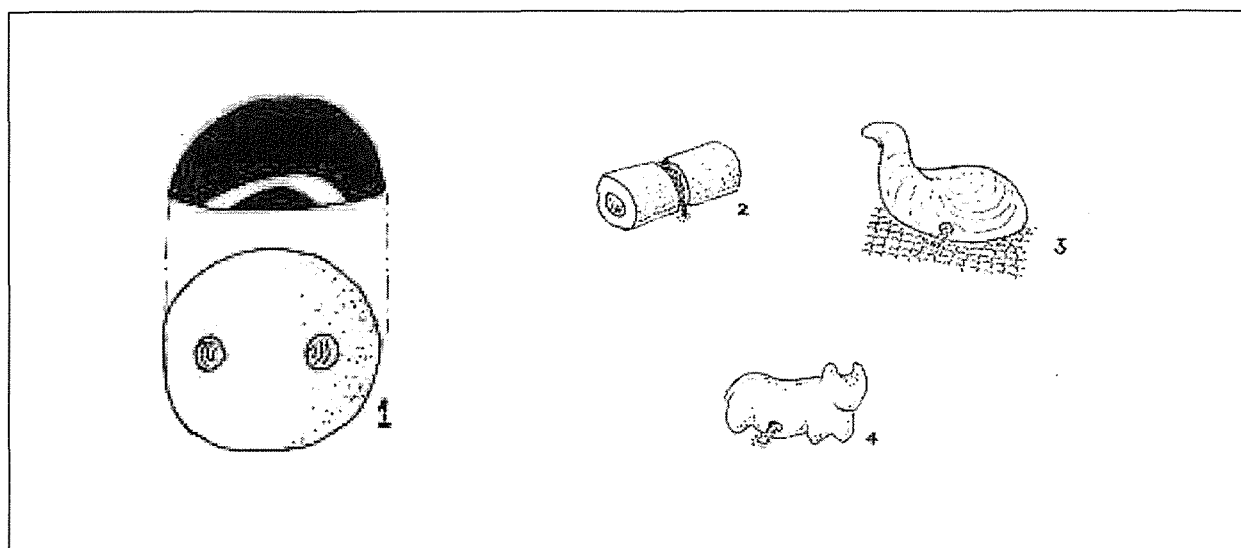


Figure 3: Buttons (not to scale):-

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

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

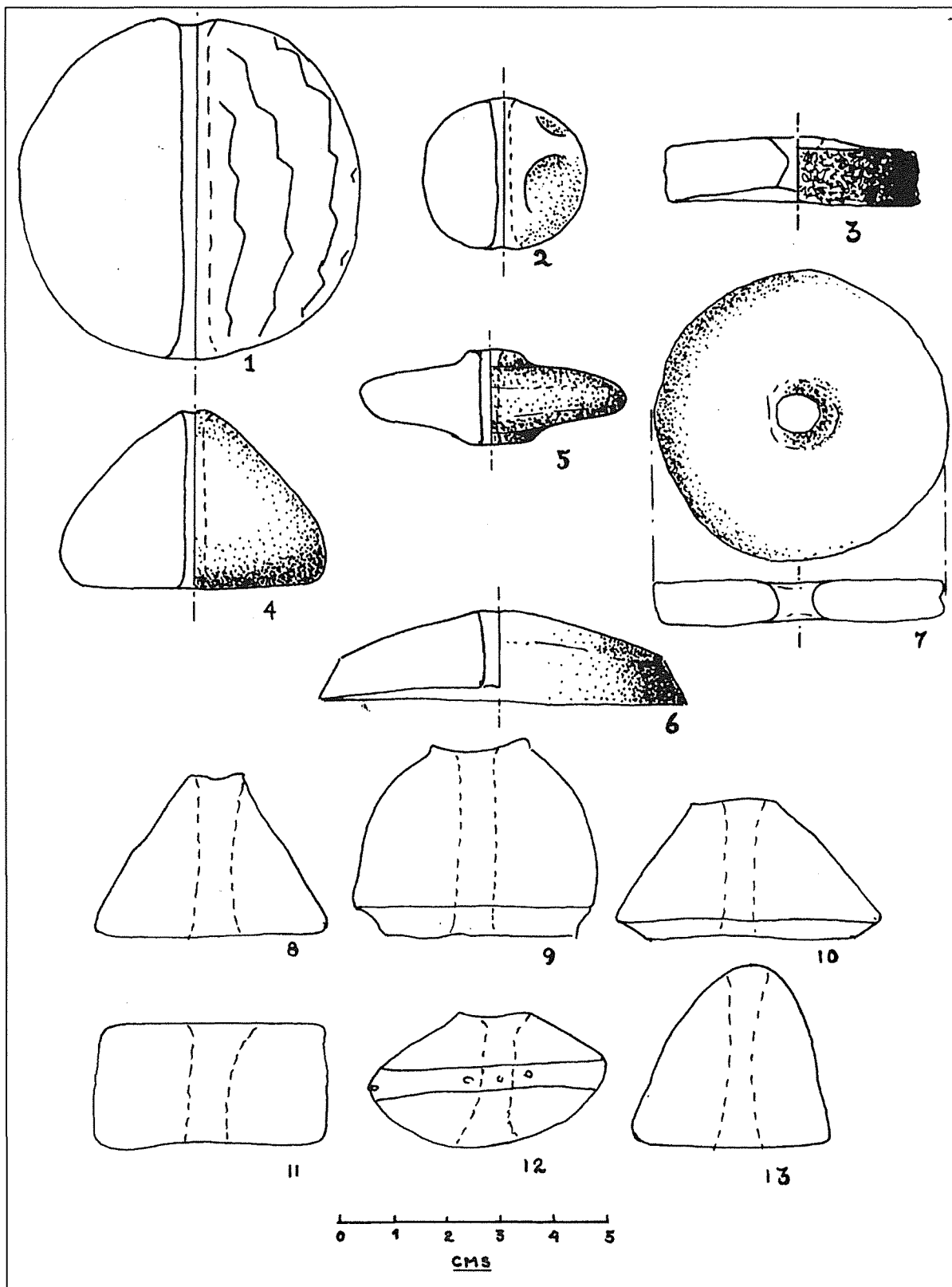


Figure 4: Spindle Whorls:-

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)

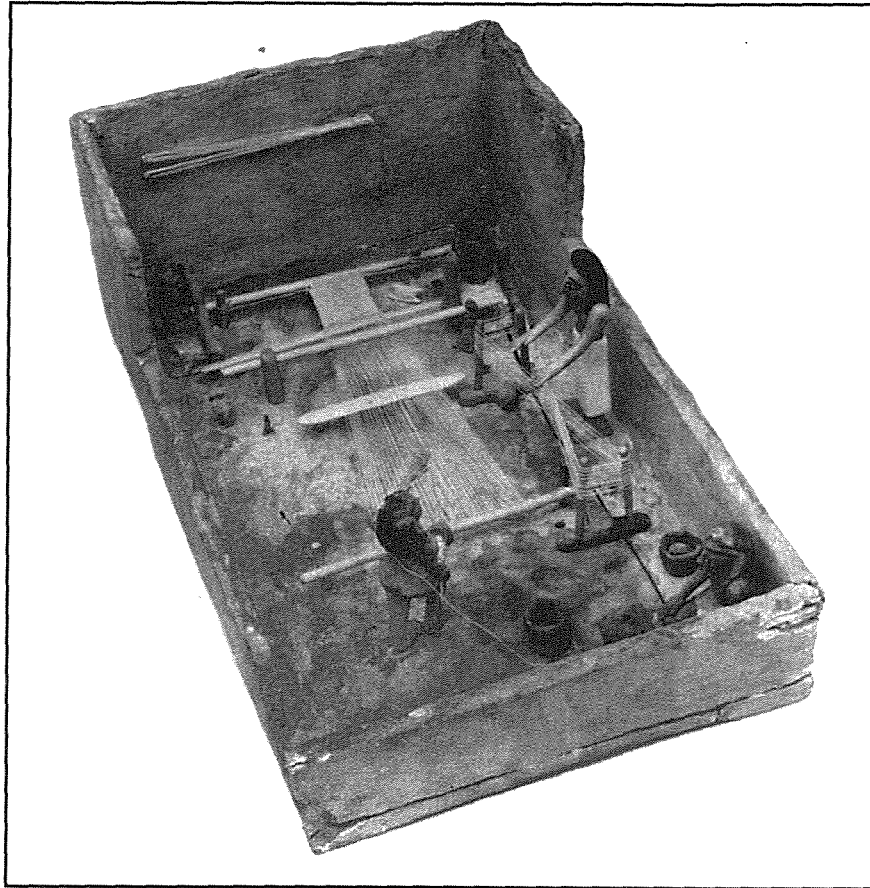


Plate 2: Model of a horizontal loom from a tomb at Thebes, Egypt (c. 1800BC)

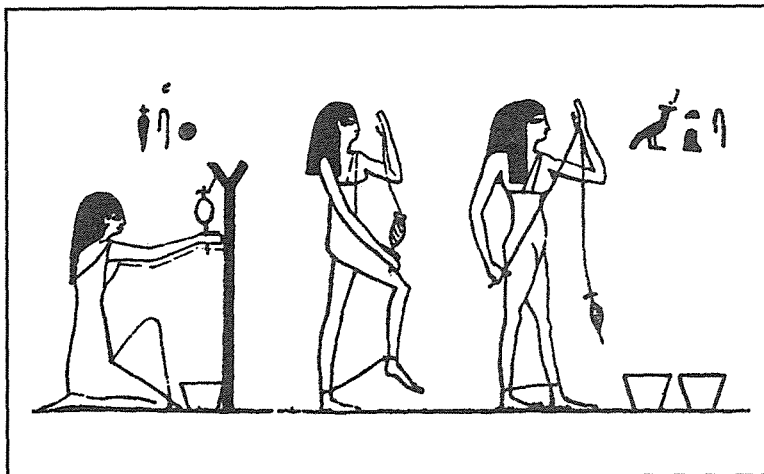


Figure 5: Use of the Spindle from an Egyptian Tomb at Beni Hasan (c. 1900 BC) (Gardner Wilkinson 1994)



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

An Orante that praises no more: a case for endangered archaeological sites

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INTRODUCTION

For more than twelve centuries a group of catacombs at Zabbar¹ remained virtually unknown. It was only in the early eighties that they were rediscovered and documented for the first time. Only one of the tombs was investigated, revealing an interesting graffito of a stylised human figure which was interpreted as a representation of an orante. As the other four tombs in the area were 'full of stones', further examination could not be undertaken. The nearby housing estate, already present at the time of discovery, continued to expand in the ensuing years, covering the area containing the hypogea. No action was taken to preserve the sites and it is likely that during the construction work a number of tombs were destroyed.

Today, just twenty years after their discovery, there is no trace of the Xaghra ta' Santa Duminka Hypogea.

Keywords: conservation, minor sites

Any future progress in understanding Malta's archaeological heritage depends on a revaluation of the remains pertaining to the cultures of the past. Preservation of the sites is of utmost importance, ensuring accessibility to further studies and examination by newer techniques or under different investigative objectives.

To accomplish this entails the knowledge of the site location and identity of the various remains, appropriate conservation of the artefacts found and architectural features present. Immediate and effective protection is also essential to protect the local heritage from the ever increasing pressures of insensitive development.

Site conservation is a priority today and much has been done in the past years to conserve the larger sites of the Maltese archipelago. The collapse at Hagar Qim and Mnajdra have been attended to and the stability of the facade at the Ggantija temples temporarily secured by the erection of a scaffolding. Despite considerable financial loss, a sensible decision to close the Hal Saflieni Hypogea for restoration purposes has been acted upon. There are also plans to provide a protective covering to the megalithic temples and catacombs near the Xarolla

windmill. Although much remains to be done, things appear to be moving in the right direction.

It is however the much larger number of sites scattered in our countryside that are in a greater danger of being destroyed. Their number is overwhelming, making Malta only second to Rome as the area with the highest density of archaeological sites. These remains include the larger number of the thirty-six temple remains, sixteen dolmens, at least six bronze age settlement sites, eight classical buildings and over six hundred phoenician tombs. Enriched by such a patrimony the authorities appear bewildered by the conservation needs of these sites.



Figure 1: Location of the five tombs at ix-Xaghra ta' Santa Duminka, Kalkara (Buhagiar 1986: 253)

Preservation of archaeological sites, no matter how insignificant and incomprehensible they appear at present, is of considerable importance. Future excavation of such sites might throw new light or even challenge present concepts of our reconstruction of the archipelago's past. Short of excavation, the mapping of these remains provides an understanding of community distribution on the local landscape (Renfrew 1973; Said-Zammit 1997).

Problems

The above considerations are certainly shared by a wide section of the more cultured section of the public but action is not always consistent with these opinions.

It is a fact that a number of monuments have been illegally destroyed over the years, the only evidence for which being the various rumours that occasionally reach the academic world (Table 1). As examples one can refer to the tombs known to have existed near the Zejtun school and a number of others that have been destroyed at Naxxar and Mgarr (Catania 1999; Deguara 1999).



Figure 2: Xaghra ta' Santa Duminka tomb location projected on modern map² (Survey Sheet - 5871)

This unfortunate situation has not been restricted to the illicit concealment of archaeological remains. The policy adopted in the past to continue construction works on minor sites following their excavation has certainly inflicted irreversible damage on the local heritage. In the eighties the museum authorities had allowed a local archaeological group to excavate a number of Phoenician tombs at Santa Margherita in the limits of Mosta. Following the excavation most of the tombs were destroyed when the area was built up as part of a social housing project (*personal communication* Joseph L. Cilia). The construction of a terraced house claimed the remains of a roman building at Iklin, which was only explored during a 'hasty excavation' (Bonanno 1983). Similarly two of the three remaining megalithic temples at Kordin were destroyed during factory building. The list of archaeological sites

succumbing in some way or another to building projects is unfortunately far from exhaustive.

For the surviving archaeological remains site relocation remains a difficult problem. The purpose of excavations in the earlier part of the twentieth century was concerned with the documentation of the pottery and architectural features of the archaeological remains, often omitting details on their site location. Site plans accompanying the Museum Annual Reports are exceptions resulting in a situation where the relocation of sites remains a difficult and often unsuccessful task.

Neolithic	Bronze Age
Mixta Caves	Xlendi Dolmen
	Racecourse Street Tomb
Temple	Marsascala Menhir
Xrobb l-Ghagin (part of)	Il-Hofra Menhir (?)
Buqana Tomb	Safi Dolmen
Hal Far Megaliths	Cave at l-Istabal, Marsa
Ta' Vnezja Tomb	Il-Brolli (?)
Busbesija Tomb	Hal-Farrug Niche
Id-Debdieba	
It-Tumbata	Classical
Ic-Cnus ta' San Gwann	Zejtun Roman Cisterns
Tat-Tomna	Ghar Barca Hypogeum
Ghajn Zejtuna	Xaghra ta' Santa Duminka
Kordin Temples I,II,IV,V	Birmigga Tombs
Marfa Stone Circle	Ta' Kandja Hypogeum

Table 1: Sites that have been lost, damaged or destroyed in the twentieth century

In a number of reports and publications where site plans are included, other problems are encountered in the final relocation of the sites themselves. The survey carried out by Evans in the early seventies remains the hallmark for the study of the prehistoric remains on the island (Evans 1971). This study however, has its difficulties when it comes to site relocation. The co-ordinates given for each site refer to an area of hundred square metres, often too general to find the particular remains. The map used in this survey is also rather difficult to obtain, let alone use to find the sites. Occasionally as in the case of Ghar Mir dum the co-ordinates given are erroneous. Despite thirty fruitful years of research and a number of new discoveries following the publication of this survey, no further general reassessment of the prehistoric antiquities has been undertaken.

The situation with the Phoenician heritage on the islands is not much better. Over the past centuries

over six hundred and fifty phoenician tombs were documented, most of them already rifled at the time of discovery (Said-Zammit 1997). Although this number of tombs is certainly a conservative number of the original, scores of these tombs have since been lost. The building industry has certainly claimed the majority, others being lost due to insufficient information on their whereabouts. Relocating the Phoenician burial sites remains problematic despite two recent doctoral publications on the period; the catalogue of the tombs and their contents is only available in spanish and the map indicating their location is hardly legible (Vidal Conzález 1996).

A similar problem faces the local Roman heritage. Construction of the runway at Luqa has claimed a number of hypogea (Trump 1990), while others were not available to a survey carried out in the mid-eighties (Buhagiar 1986).

It is only recently that the medieval heritage of our islands started to receive its merited attention, leaving sites belonging to this period particularly vulnerable. Ghar il-Kbir was for many years threatened by works in a nearby quarry but fortunately enough was saved in appropriate time. A less favourable situation appears to concern the Mixta caves in Ghajn Abdul and Ghar San Pietru. Quarrying and changes in the terracing have altered the landscape around the former site while quarrying has claimed the source of the spring's water to the latter cave (Buhagiar 1997). The possible cave church at Ghar Hanzir (Plate 1) may soon become inaccessible by rubble that is accumulating at the entrance (Haslam & Borg 1998: 172).

Back filling an archaeological site, whether for conservation purposes or otherwise, is useless, if the knowledge of its whereabouts is subsequently lost or forgotten.

The case of the Xarolla Catacombs lends itself as a typical example. The discovery in the mid-nineties of the Roman hypogea was an important find, but was not the first at this location. It is improbable that the hypogea were not noted during the construction of the windmill and later during quarrying activity in the area. They were mentioned by Caruana (1898) in the late nineteenth century and rediscovered again in 1928 when a note on them was included in the Museum Annual Reports. This however did not save them from destruction during shelter excavation in World War II and provision of services in later years. In this case it was not difficult to relocate the hypogea as they were known to exist under a well known landmark. It was rather the will to preserve or the framework for conservation that failed. Currently

being studied, the catacombs at Tax-Xarolla have to be considered as a rare example of site 'preservation', which unfortunately does not occur to many other remains.

Proposals

Awareness of the problems facing our heritage is diffuse but survival of the archaeological remains depends only on the implementation of possible solutions.

To avoid further destruction of vulnerable sites there is an urgent need to identify and catalogue all areas of archaeological importance. Such lists are already in existence but may not be comprehensive (Table 2) and new sites may still have to be added (Said-Zammit 1997: xi). In this respect it is very encouraging to hear that the Planning Authority intends to update its database of archaeological sites. Reports of new discoveries are now also being provided by the Maltese Archaeological Review, but these are unfortunately once more unaccompanied by details on site location and lacking in useful details that would be of value in any future studies referring to these remains.

On completion of cataloguing the different sites, a problem arises regarding the people who should have access to such information. It is a well known fact that in the past years looting of artefacts of value occurred following information on places of cultural interest given on the media. Sites of archaeological value were also targeted in acts of vandalism. The value of providing information for educational purposes and for creating greater awareness has always to be considered in the light of the eventual benefit to the sites themselves. The final solution to this problem rests on finding a balance between the possibility of site destruction (or loss secondary to insufficient knowledge on its whereabouts) and the damage possible through making such information available to the public.

The setting up of the Planning Authority has certainly gone a long way to protect sites of archaeological significance. The various remains are scheduled and classified according to their relative importance and development is refused, accepted or adapted according to the impact on the site.. This policy should certainly be continued in the future but improvements here are still possible. More effort should be made on site monitoring as it is not uncommon to encounter construction work without the necessary permits.

Areas with possible archaeological potential need also to be identified and any construction activity supervised. In this category one would include Mdina, the Citadel and Rabat (on both Malta and Gozo) because of their promising potential for classical archaeology. A buffer zone around the major sites does not only preserve a context to the site themselves but protects any uncovered remains that may still be present in the area. This policy should be extended at other sites such as Qallilija and Borg in-Nadur where recent agricultural and recreational activity respectively has encroached dangerously over these two sites.

A time has come to improve the compensation given for landowners of known or newly discovered archaeological sites. Incentives, including financial, may be necessary to encourage reporting of sites as it is well known that current legislative measures are often not enough to deter destruction of remains of archaeological importance. Education and sensitisation of the public together with promotion of reconciliation between organisations of contrasting interests will certainly assist in the reporting of newly discovered archaeological remains.

A need to change the current legislation regarding the involvement of local councils in the management of archaeological sites has long been overdue. The local councils can certainly monitor far more effectively the archaeological sites within their locality than possible by the limited staff at the museums department. Local councils may also provide the necessary manpower to open sites that are not usually open to the public. The opening of the Tal-Mentna catacombs to the public is a case in point. Certainly any decision by the local administration should be guided by the expertise of the Museums Department to ensure that no damage results during such activities.

Temple	Classical
Iklin Megalithic Remains	Xaghra ta' Ghar is-Sigra Tombs and others
Ta' Raddiena	Tas-Santi Roman Tower
Borg I-Gharib ³	
	Medieval
Bronze Age	Ghar San Brinkaw
Misrah Sinjura Dolmen	Ghar Hanzir
Ta' Ghammar Menhir	Ghar San Pietru
Hal Far Menhir	
Fuq Wied Filep Dolmens	Other
	Ta' Alla u Ommu Ruts

Table 2: Sites until recently not scheduled or marked as area of archaeological importance

An additional advantage that can be gained through the local councils is the channelling of financial resources to protect and preserve archaeological sites. Minor sites might serve to enhance the localities' identity and provide landmarks in any tours or walkways planned to promote the local heritage.

With most of the major sites probably already described, interest in recent years has focused on past social phenomena and landscape archaeology. Improvement in each of these two fields depends on the relocation of as yet undiscovered, much smaller sites including settlement areas. A comprehensive field survey to discover such sites might well provide the materials necessary to answer our questions of the near future.

Conclusion

Minor sites will certainly offer an opportunity to deepen our knowledge of the archipelago's heritage in the future. Although publications and hypothesis explaining our archaeological remains have been flourishing in the past years one only hopes that minor sites are preserved to a time when they are 'called' to reveal what has remained silent for so many years. Only in this way can we ensure to go beyond our culture-biased explanations and nearer to a real understanding of the Maltese Islands in antiquity.

Notes

1. Originally described in Kalkara, the area containing the tombs is now found within the limits of the Zabbar Local Council.
2. Some difficulty was encountered in trying to relocate the tombs on a modern map. The possibility of the tombs still existing in a field to the east of the housing project was investigated but no trace of the tombs was found.
3. Megaliths enclosing a field to the east of the scheduled site

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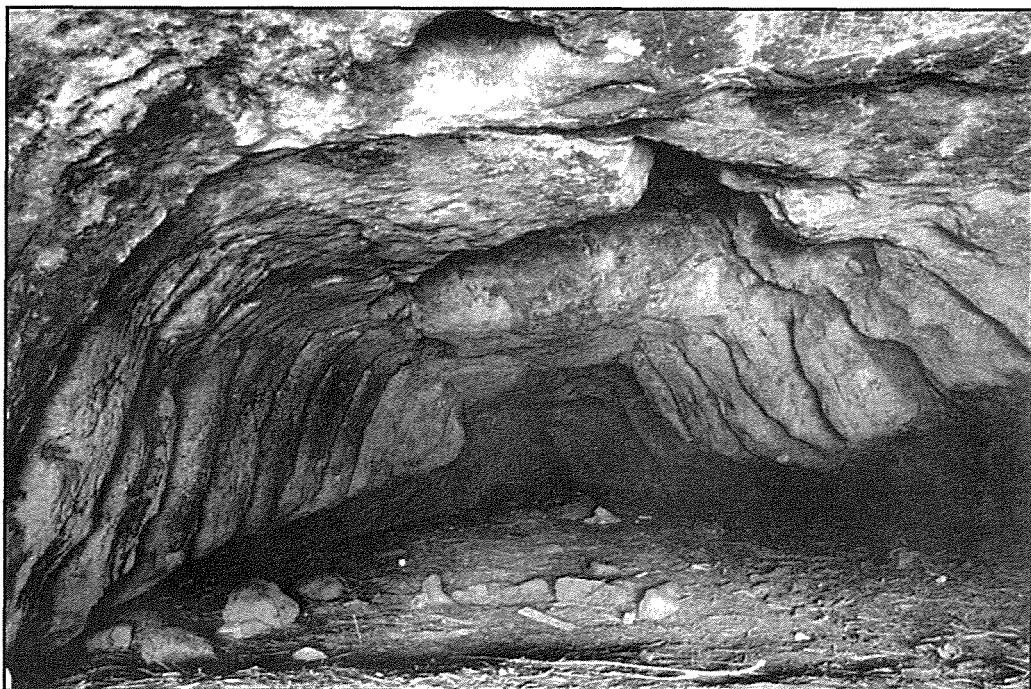


Plate 1: Ghar Hanzir, a medieval site that may soon become inaccessible (Photo: A. Bugeja)

Searching the Internet for Maltese Archaeology

During the last few years, a number of internet sites have focused on different aspects of the Maltese archaeological heritage. A few have distinguished themselves as serious and authoritative on the subject, while others have provided information not easily accessible elsewhere. The following description will hopefully introduce the Internet user to a number of these sites.

The Bristol University Site on the Xaghra Stone Circle

http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/Archaeology/html/research/co_mvis/brocht3.htm

This site provides an index to a number of web pages belonging to the archaeology department of the University of Bristol. From this page the internet user may access a number of three dimensional reconstructions of the Gozo Stone Circle obtained as part of the INSITE project. Opening the different pages, a virtual tour into the different parts of the underground hypogeum may be obtained. This webpage had also complemented the explanatory boards in the exhibition of the stone circle artefacts organised in Gozo by the Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti and the Museum Authorities. This site is certainly not to be missed!

Malta - cart ruts

<http://www.angelfire.com/ar/magrosalibarchaeo/>

This article by Magro Conti and Saliba was presented during a conference at Castellamare del Golfo. After a general introduction on the subject, the authors consider the different hypothesis proposed to explain the cart-rut phenomenon on the Maltese Islands. A description of the cart-rut system at Misrah Ghar il-Kbir (also known as Clapham Junction) and the special relationship between a rut pair and a quarry in the area is then discussed.

The article ends by an assessment of the problems that are currently endangering the site.

The evidence provided and the interpretation given will certainly be considered in any future discussion on the subject. Scientific in the approach and well presented, the study may be criticised for the degree of absoluteness claimed in its conclusion. This investigation which is the first of its kind on the ruts at Dingli, follows the survey by Tanti and Ventura

on the cart-ruts at T'Alla u Ommu, in what hopefully will develop into a new method of treating the cart-rut phenomenon on the islands.

Archaeology in Malta

<http://www.visitmalta.com/specials/archaeology/0arch.htm>

The launching of these pages coincided with the publication of *Celebrating An Island's Heritage* - a special feature in the July/August issue of Archaeology Magazine (Volume 50, 1997).

The site does not only include an overview of Maltese Prehistory, but also attempts to reconcile the interpretation of finds obtained from the Gozo Stone Circle excavation with the present concepts on Malta's earliest cultures. The social evolution during the Temple Period, the development of the Temples, and the reasons for the collapse of the Temple Culture are discussed. Considering that most of the results of the excavations at the Gozo Stone Circle have been published in various journals, often not easily accessible, this website provides an introduction to the information provided by the last grand-scale excavation of the Maltese Temple Period.

Palaeolithic man and his environment in Malta

<http://www.geocities.com/RainForest/3096/palaeol.html>

This study provides a summary of the main issues into the controversial claim regarding the presence of Palaeolithic man on the Maltese islands. The complex geological phenomena leading to the emergence of the Maltese Islands are described in a simple and clear manner. This is then followed by a discussion of the processes of faunal and floral colonisation of the archipelago. The framework for the alleged evidence of Palaeolithic man on the islands is then considered. The web page ends by a description of paintings, artefacts and skeletal

material that point towards the presence of man on the archipelago during the Magdalenian. Historically, this site represents the internet advertisement of the first public lecture on the presence of Palaeolithic Man on the Maltese Islands.

Malta Museum of Archaeology

<http://www.magnet.mt/home/museums/>

This page provides an overview of the past history and current work performed by the museum authorities to conserve the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum. It includes information on the excavations of this monument, the figurines found and the spiral motifs decorating this well known underground prehistoric cemetery. Certainly of interest is a photograph showing the megaliths of a surface structure recently rediscovered above the hypogeum.

Malta Homepage

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Agora/5685/index.html>

This webpage contains a number of links that describe different themes discussing the local natural and archaeological heritage. Included are a summary on Maltese Prehistory, a description of a number of minor temple sites and a discussion on the main controversies regarding cart-ruts. The link describing the Maltese Dolmen is rather comprehensive and well illustrated as are the web pages illustrating photographs of archaeological interest.

Celebrating an Island Heritage

<http://www.archaeology.org/9707/abstracts/malta.html>

After a brief introduction on the development of prehistoric research on the islands and the history of the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum, a summary of the main insights on temple period cultures as achieved through the excavations at the Brochtorff Circle is presented.

An Analysis of the Photographic Representations of the Melitensia Quinta (CIS, 1, 132)

<http://www.angelfire.com/yt/ELIPOLDARIARCHAEO/index.html>

The Melitensia Quinta is an inscription of considerable importance to the study of the phoenician period on the Maltese islands. Alleged to have been found in Gozo, the Melitensia Quinta provides insight into the deities worshipped, the places of cult and prominent persons in the social hierarchy of this period. The review presented

argues for a local provenance of the stone by claiming that it is carved on a slab of coralline limestone quarried near Zebbug, Gozo. It also analyses the photographic representations of this inscription and proposes an explanation for the differences found in the photographs of the Melitensia Quinta.

The Maltese Neolithic domesticated mammals

<http://www.geocities.com/RainForest/3096/cattle.html>

A summary of the available evidence on the prehistoric animals that lived on the Maltese islands can be obtained through this site. Included are a list of representations, the analysis of bones found during excavations and evidence for the presence of various animals (including the ox, sheep, goat, horse, dog and pig) found in prehistoric contexts on the Maltese Islands. The webpage attempts to seek the origins of these animals and compares them to those breeding today in the islands. The information is obtained through a consideration of skeletal evidence and artistic depictions. Original in its scope, it is a rare source of information available on the subject

The influence of Neolithic man on the Maltese Environment

<http://www.geocities.com/RainForest/3096/neolit.html>

Irrespective of the possibility of Palaeolithic man coming to Malta, significant human impact on the environment appears for the first time with the advent of the Neolithic. In this account Savona Ventura presents an excellent study of the available evidence for plants living in prehistoric Malta. An agricultural model is forwarded, explaining the changes observed in the flora and fauna found in the different phases, and proposes an explanation for the collapse of the Temple culture.

The Megalithic Temples of Malta

http://www.infinito.it/utenti/malta_mega_temples/

Daniel Cilia, a leading Maltese photographer, has produced an excellent webpage on the megalithic temples of the Maltese Archipelago. Advanced internet features such as computer reconstructions, virtual tours, movies and pronunciation of the temples' name are included, complimenting the rich information provided. Needless to say the photographs, which include a number of aerial views of the temple remains, are of excellent quality.

Grupp Arkeologiku Malti

The Grupp Arkeologiku Malti (Archaeology Group of Malta) is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation with an aim to contribute, educate and foster knowledge on the archaeological heritage of the Maltese Islands.

Founded in the eighties by the Ministry of Education, the Group was instrumental in the recognition and excavation of the catacombs at Tar-Raghad in Mgarr and excavation of the Phoenician tombs at Santa Margherita in Mosta. Assistance was also given to the excavations at the Sancier chapel and the megalithic remains at Ta' Raddiena.

After 1987, the group's activities were redirected towards the provision of information to the general public. In fact the group distinguishes itself as the organisation that regularly visits the more remote and less known archaeological sites on the islands. Field visits provide a first hand opportunity to educate those attending, by focusing on particular aspects of the local archaeological heritage, at the same time providing information on the variety of archaeological remains scattered around the islands.

In the mid-nineties, a walk organised by the group, along the Victoria Lines, was attended by over seventy people and can be considered as one of the first organised heritage walks along this trail.

Over the past five years the group has visited a considerable number of the known archaeological sites on the islands. Various walks and tours have taken the group's members to the temples at Xemxija and Tal-Qadi, the Punic Sanctuary at Ras il-Wardija, the *dolmens* of Misrah Sinjura and Ta' Hammud, the medieval cave settlements of Ghar San Pietru and Ghar San Brinkaw, and many others.

Activities organised during 1998-9

Over forty sites of archaeological interest were visited during the walks and visits organised during this period.

The group had the opportunity to attend a guided tour to the Megalithic Temples at Hal Tarxien and the newly refurbished Museum of Archaeology. The

megaliths at L-Iklin and Ta' Raddiena together with the temples at Kordin and Qortin l-Imdawwar were other temple sites visited during this period. A number of dolmens featured among the sites visited and included the Wied Znuber and Ta' Hammud dolmens. A visit was also made to the cairns and the megalithic wall at Wied Moqbol and the dolmen at Ta' Hlantun. The significance of visiting the latter monument discovered by Gravina is that it is not usually included in Maltese guide books making it rather difficult to relocate.

Through the courtesy of Fr. Karm Farrugia, the group had an opportunity to enter in the Domus Curialis at Zurrieq, to see the remains of the punic building, which is not usually open to the public.

Other sites of interest belonging to the Classical period included the remains at Ras ir-Raheb in the limits of Bahrija, and the tombs at Qallilija. Members of the group also attended a tour to the multi-period sanctuary at Tas-Silg and participated in the lectures organised by the Zejtun Local Council.

Four Roman 'Towers', namely Tal-Gawhar, Ta' Bakkari, Tat-Torrijiet and Tal-Wilga towers were included in this year's programme.

Through the courtesy of the Museum Authorities and the Mqabba Local council a tour to the catacombs at Tal-Mentna (Plate 1) was also possible. Fr. Camilleri was more than helpful in the organisation of a tour to the catacombs and museum at Saint Agatha, Rabat. The tombs recently rediscovered at tax-Xarolla proved to be equally interesting, while the visit to Tar-Raghad catacombs literally made headlines in January 1999. A visit to the troglodytic dwelling at l-Ghar ta' l-Iburdan (Plate 2) was also included in the activities.

Medieval sites visited during this period included the remains of two chapels at Tal-Bakkari, the cave chapel of St. Leonard and the troglodytic dwellings at San Niklaw, Ghar San Pietru and Ghar San Brinkaw

No archaeological remains is overlooked in the group's site visits - a stop at the alleged Roman remains at Safi and Nahhalija was also included in

the group's programme of activities. A pleasant track along the coast of the Maghlaq Fault provided the scenario for a geological walk. A more encouraging number of members attended the social activities

organised by the group which included abseiling activities and various night-hikes.

A public lecture on underwater archaeological remains of World War II was also well attended.

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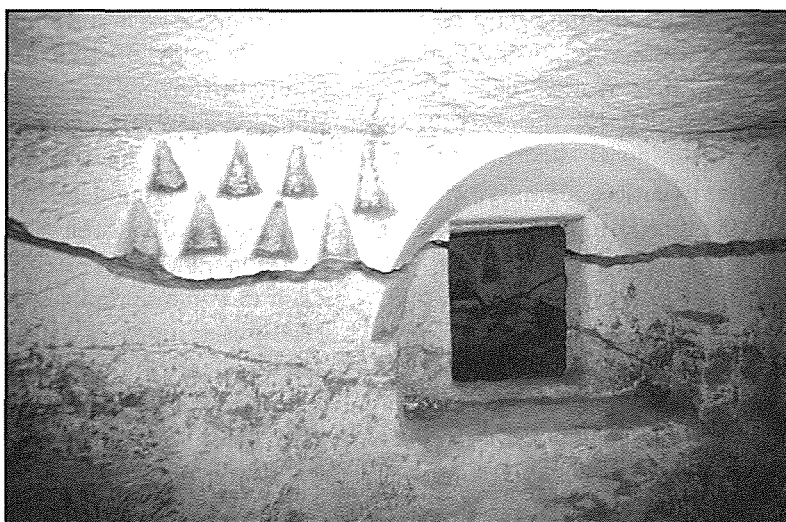


Plate 1: Window tomb from the catacombs at Tal-Mentna, Mqabba (Photo: A. Bugeja)

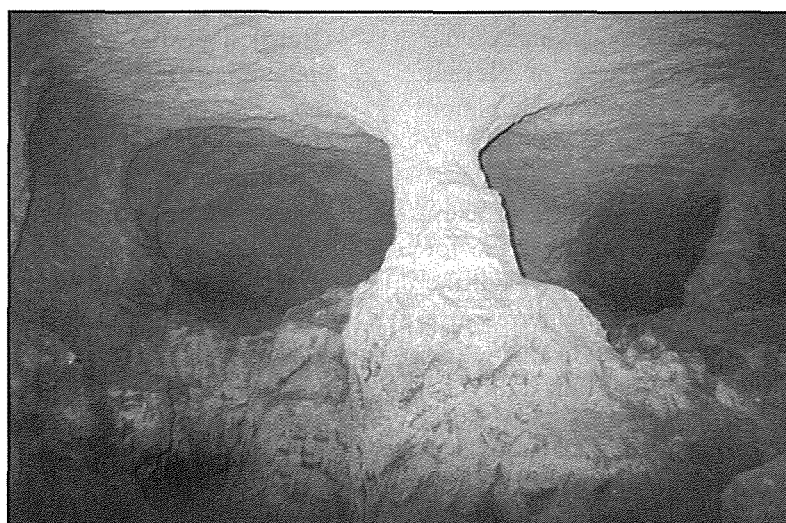


Plate 2: Detail from I-Ghar tal-Iburdan, in the limits of Rabat (Photo: A. Bugeja)

Articles of Archaeological Interest

A review of published books and articles of archaeological interest in 1999 is provided in this section

Facets of Maltese Prehistory 1999

Anton Mifsud and Charles Savona Ventura (editors)
Prehistoric Society of Malta

An appropriate assessment on the first publication of the Prehistoric Society of Malta is impossible in such a limited review. The contributions made by the articles are numerous and far reaching and only the main issues addressed in the works can be highlighted here.

Written at the end of the twentieth century, the introduction describes the milestones in the development of prehistoric research on the islands, thus setting the background for later articles.

The claim for Palaeolithic human presence on the islands is discussed in the light of recent interest in the relationship between archaeology and epistemology. Through the application of Longerhan's epistemological tenets, Frendo reassesses the dental evidence in this controversy and concludes that the evidence supports pre-neolithic human presence on the Maltese Islands.

A similar importance to original records prevails in Vella's study of the trunkless statue from Tas-Silg. The context around the statue is reassessed to explore for the origins of the surface markings on the stone. After a study of the ritual practices of relevant prehistoric and historic cultures, the author's opinion declines from the thesis of ritual continuity.

The same attitude is encountered in other articles. Quoting Zammit extensively, the Mifsuds argue for the presence of a sanctuary in the early stages of the Hal Saflieni underground monument. Sciberras in a separate article, reviews the reports available on dolmens and concludes that at present the dating and function of these monuments remains problematic.

The methodology used in these articles has to be compared to the work by Charles Savona Ventura to understand the scope of research subjects and methods permitted by the editorial board. Savona Ventura discusses the role of magic, myths and rituals in prehistoric hunting and farming practices,

referring frequently to finds from the Maltese archaeological context.

A development in the thinking of two well known archaeologists is also observed in this volume. Bonanno continues to explore the transition between the Bronze Age and Temple periods. Contrary to the views held by other excavators at the Gozo Stone Circle, difference in cultural manifestation had led Bonanno (1993) to argue against continuity. In his present article he develops on a previous article (1991) by delving deeper into the problem through a consideration of three sites relevant to the problem, and concludes by calling for a reassessment of Zammit's photographs and excavation reports. David Trump initially concerned with explaining development of Temple forms and their relationship to ritual (1981), now explores the human endeavours and rituals that can be deduced from the temple's architecture.

Facets also provides a rare opportunity for the publication of three articles on the pleistocene period of the islands. Reviewing information gathered over recent years, Hunt and Schembri provide an excellent article that revises current concepts on quaternary environments. An analysis of the mammalian (Galea Bonavia) and avian Pleistocene (Borg) deposits is also included, the latter author elaborating further to propose an environmental model for the period.

The history of the Gozo Stone Circle over the past four centuries is given in a article by Attard Tabone. What marks this paper is a first person account of how Attard Tabone identified the site and brought his claim to the archaeologists for excavation. This is followed by another essay by Simon Stoddart on mortuary customs in prehistoric Malta, this paper including comments on the role of new interpretative technologies and use musical instruments in rituals.

If radiocarbon dating had showed that the Maltese Temples were much older than Stonehenge, England's considerations reveals that they are also architectural in function unlike other well known European monuments. The well known Maltese

structures are reviewed from a metaphysical perspective with an exploration of temple shape, location, art and cult. The Maltese megalithic phenomenon is seen as the architectural expression of a peaceful society living in harmony with nature.

Contrasting with this view is Townsend's assertion that prehistoric art could have been a way to "express and circumvent social tensions and stress". In this article the megalithic monuments are utilised as a reference to categorise the social context of the prehistoric artistic heritage of the archipelago.

The article by Magro Conti is original, in treating the defensive and aggressive aspects of Maltese prehistory. Beyond discussing well known concepts of the hostile setting prevailing during the Bronze Age, the archaeological repertoire is called upon to indicate the presence of possible artefacts that could have been used as weapons in the preceding Temple period.

Facets available as hard bound or soft bound, is well illustrated and the page presentation compliments the scholarly nature of the work. The Prehistoric Society of Malta has brought together an outstanding collection of fifteen articles from different scholars, an achievement which the local archaeological literature has not seen for a number of years. If the standards reached by the publication are reproduced in the forthcoming years, the society's contributions will certainly turn out to be an annual appointment to review contemporary thinking on Maltese prehistory.

Anton Bugeja

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The First Christian Churches in Malta

Mario Buhagiar

(Treasures of Malta Vol. V no. 2 pp 47 - 53)

Through the publication of the *Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti*, Dr. Mario Buhagiar provides a scholarly review of the available evidence for early Christian cult places on the Maltese Islands. The development of churches from the first known at Tas-Silg through the Byzantine period is discussed in the context of the available documentary evidence for the period.

This article reasserts the emphasis placed on the complete disappearance of Christianity during the Arab period and the indications for the elaboration of the Pauline cult in the post-Sarcenic period. A relationship between Basilian monasticism and rock-cut churches is proposed, leading the author to suggest an eschatological significance for the underground floor levels of medieval churches. Original is the author's suggestion that the curling of end volutes of hood mounds to medieval doorways knows its origin to the decoration found in Roman tombs.

The study is accompanied by a number of photographs of quality, including a very rare view of the cave church at San Gorg at Gebel Ciantar

Anton Bugeja

'Malta: Microcosmo Mediterraneo'

Anthony Bonanno

(*Archeologia Viva XVIII, No. 75*, pp 20-37)

May/June 1999

This seventeen page article, written by Prof. Anthony Bonanno, gives a very good overview of the Maltese archaeological and historical heritage from the first human habitation to the presence of the Order of St. John in the Maltese Islands. Published in an Italian journal with a wide readership, from the academic to the general public, it gives a concise but comprehensive portrayal of what went on in the Maltese Islands in the past 7,000 years.

The author puts the reader in the picture not only through presenting the most significant archaeological evidence pertaining to the particular historical period he is describing, but he also writes about the natural environment. Moreover, he points out some lacunae in our present knowledge of Maltese history, including the palaeoenvironment of the Maltese Islands, Moslem Malta, and archaeological excavations of Medieval sites.

Moreover, besides, the main text of the article, there are also text boxes which give detailed insights into some aspects of Maltese archaeological and historical heritage. Among others, these include prehistoric domestic architecture, the geology of the Maltese Islands, urban and rural Malta in Roman times, and the excavations of Hal Millieri.

The article is also supported by illustrative photographs by Prof. Bonanno himself as well as Anna Marx, and Pietro Pruneti. These further enhance the text in a way as to retrace Maltese history in images.

Marlene Galea

Malta Archaeological Review

Patricia Camilleri (editor)

Archaeological Society

(Issue 3 - 1999)

The third issue of the journal of the Archaeological Society has not only standardised its presentation and provided colour photographs to illustrate its contents, but also provides a number of original articles that highlight current research and thinking on the local archaeological heritage. The paper by Reuben Grima on the Sleeping Lady found in the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum discusses current perceptions involved in the interpretation of this prehistoric figurine. The author discusses possible artistic conventions that prevailed during the Temple period and proposes a novel explanation for the exaggerated features of the figurine from the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum.

Molinari and Cutajar study the medieval pottery available in the Museum and obtained during recent excavations. They attempt a preliminary classification providing a framework for future studies.

Following the international exhibition of Phoenician artefacts at the National Museum of Archaeology in 1998, it is not surprising that three articles are dedicated to this period. Vidal-Conzalez discusses the phoenician trade and history and its effects on the developments of phoenician Malta. Other studies are provided by Gouder and Ciasca, the latter not surprisingly giving particular emphasis to the sanctuary at Tas-Silg.

Very much welcomed is a preliminary description of the classical burial site rediscovered recently near the Xarolla windmill. One only hopes that this summary will develop into a detailed report as the site continues to be excavated. A glimpse of the heritage still hidden in the soils of the Maltese Islands is provided by the Museum news.

Approaching the end of the twentieth century, David Trump summarises the problems that are presently challenging local archaeologists, questions which hopefully will be answered in the next hundred years.

Anton Bugeja

FIELD NOTES

A particular silo pit at il-Qolla

Appreciation of the preoccupation with security prevalent in the Mediterranean in the middle of the second millennium has led to the identification of Borg in-Nadur settlements through the description of a five features.

The remains of these communities are found on easily defensible topographical areas. In-Nuffara and the site today occupied by the citadel (Gozo) are example of hilltop settlements, their higher altitude with respect to the surrounding area providing advantage in case of hostilities. Triangular promontories also presented inaccessible cliffs to any invaders and were safe once their connection to the rest of the land was secured. In such cases massive cyclopean walls were constructed to defend the site in its most vulnerable area. The best examples of such a transformations may still be observed at il-Wardija ta' San Gorg and Borg in-Nadur.

Beyond the geographical location and the presence of megalithic walls, pottery and hut structures reveal the settlement purposes of these sites and their Bronze Age dating.

A final feature characteristic of these villages is the presence of bell shaped silo pits. In the absence of conclusive evidence grain or water storage has been proposed for their function, presumably to provide for the eventuality of prolonged aggression on the settlements themselves.

Il-Qolla (GR 457767) is a promontory formed by the trisection of the eastern Wardija uplands by the Wied Qanotta tributaries. The geographical setting, six silo pits and the typical sherds collected from this site (MAR 1946-47) reveal that this is another Borg in-Nadur settlement site.

Three interconnected silo pits turned out to be of particular interest because of an unusual access into their chambers, provided through a rectangular chamber opening into the southern pit. This silo pit has what appears to be the covering slab still in situ (Plate 1), closing a circular opening 0.45 m. in

diameter. The walls of the pit slope downwards to the flat circular base 2.30 m. in diameter, at 2.40 m. below the lower surface of the closing slab. The silo's wall does not reveal any trace of covering, and is considerably flaky, typical of the Mtarfa member of upper coralline limestone formation found in the area. East and opposite the present access into this silo pit, are connections to two other silo pits.

These remains are described because:-

- a) this is an unusual find containing an example of a silo pit with the covering slab still in situ. This may provide a possibility to investigate the techniques of closure of such underground cavities.
- b) the silo pits at il-Qolla are another group of interconnected silo pits similar to those at Bir Miftuh and it-Tumbata (Evans 1971).
- c) about 0.3m of soil are still covering the surrounding area and this may still conserve intact deposits.

Anton Bugeja

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The silo pits were first noted and investigated by the author on 19/09/98, during field walking in the area with Mr. Keith Buhagiar. The plans were prepared by Mr. Joseph Cilia.

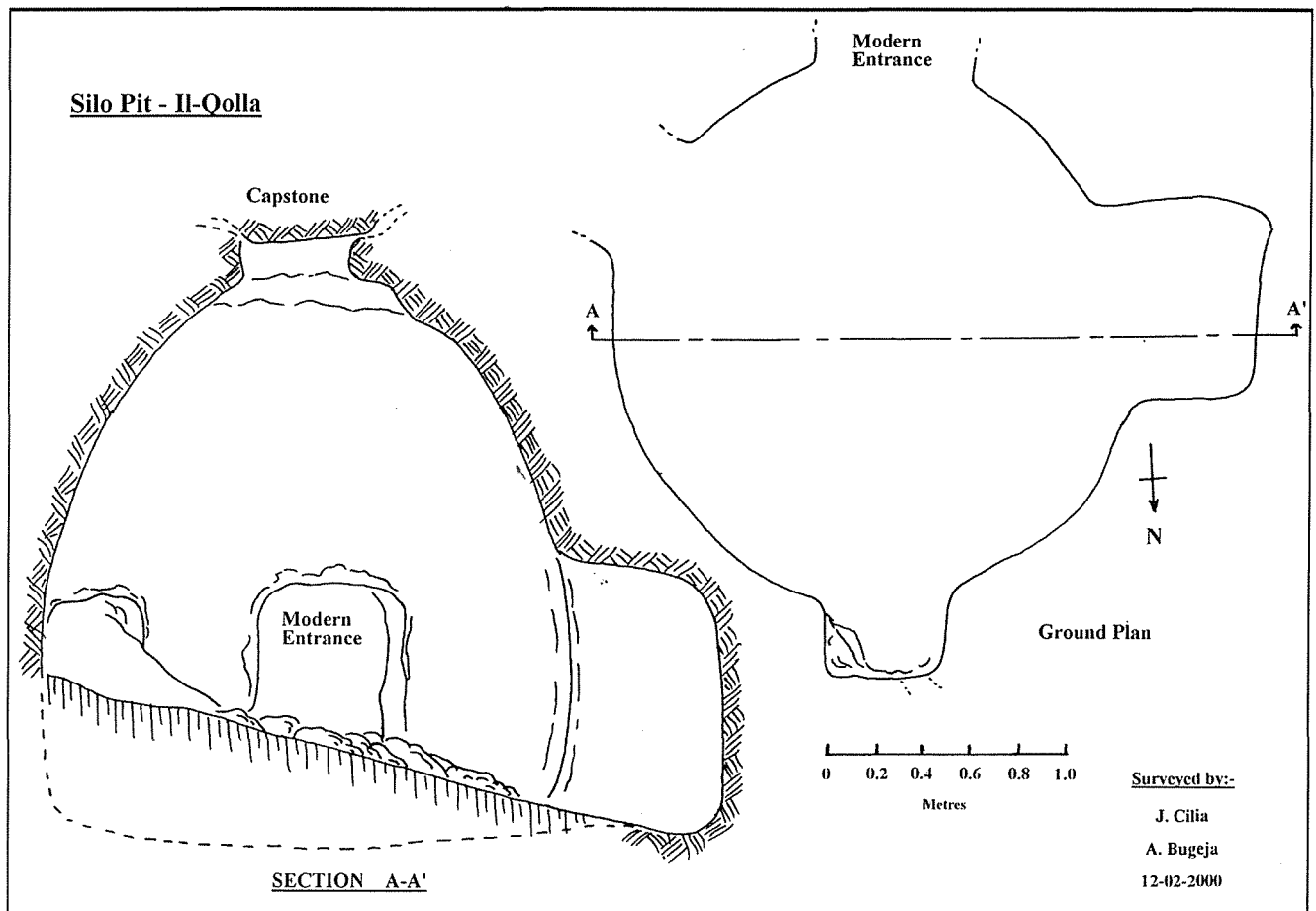


Figure 1: Sections of the silo pit with the covering slab still in situ



Plate 1: Capstone seen from interior of silo pit at il-Qolla (Photo: A. Bugeja)

Cart-Ruts at Monopoli

Mr. Timmy Zammit has located a group of cart-ruts near Monopoli in south-east Italy. This group of ruts are in their details very similar to those on the Maltese Islands and can be followed for a number of metres. This group, which to date has not been documented locally, brings the total number of cart-ruts found outside Maltese Islands to thirteen.

Ruts found on foreign land include:-

- 1) Cyrenaica¹
- 2) Donnaz, South-East of Aosta¹
- 3) Agrigento, near Temple of Hercules¹ (Plate 1)
- 4) Monopoli (Plate 2)
- 5) Syracuse, above Greek Theatre¹ (Plate 3)
- 6) Near Fortress of Euryalus¹
- 7) Cap Couronne, West of Marseilles^{1,2}
- 8) Cagliari, Sardinia²
- 9) Necropolis of Cerveteri, Italy²
- 10) Monte Sirai, Sardinia³
- 11) Anse de Sante Croix, Massilia⁴
- 12) Pompei
- 13) Greece

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³Barreca, F. and Garbini, G. 1964. Monte Sirai - Il Rapporto preliminare della Missione archeologica dell'Università di Roma e della Soprintendenza alle Antichità di Cagliari

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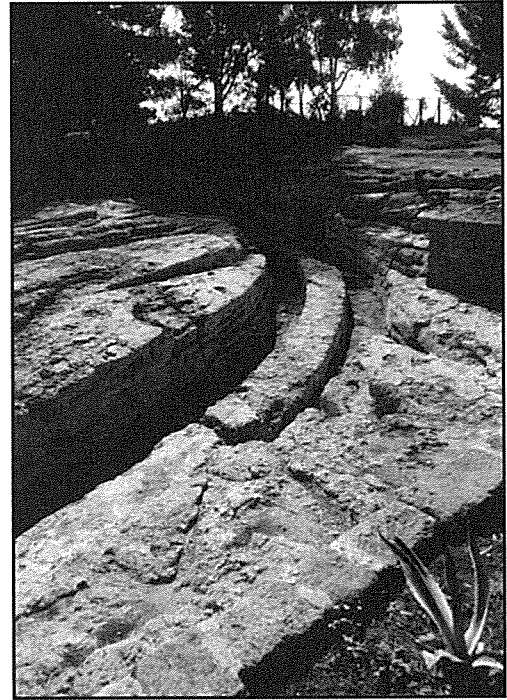


Plate 1: Cart-ruts at Agrigento (Photo: A. Bugeja)

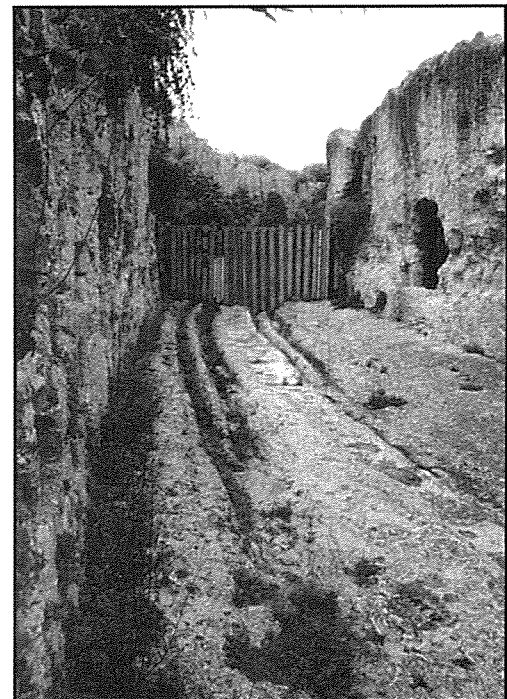


Plate 3: Cart-ruts at Syracuse (Photo: A. Bugeja)

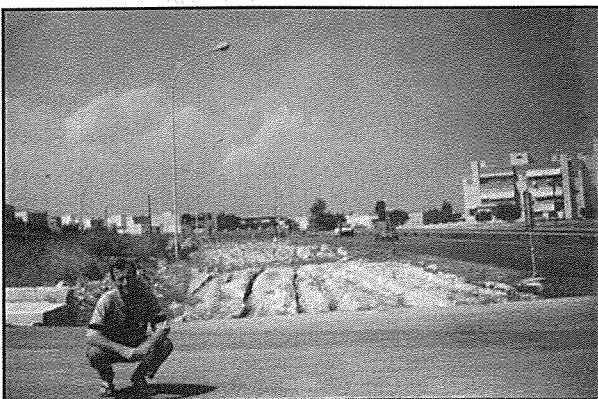
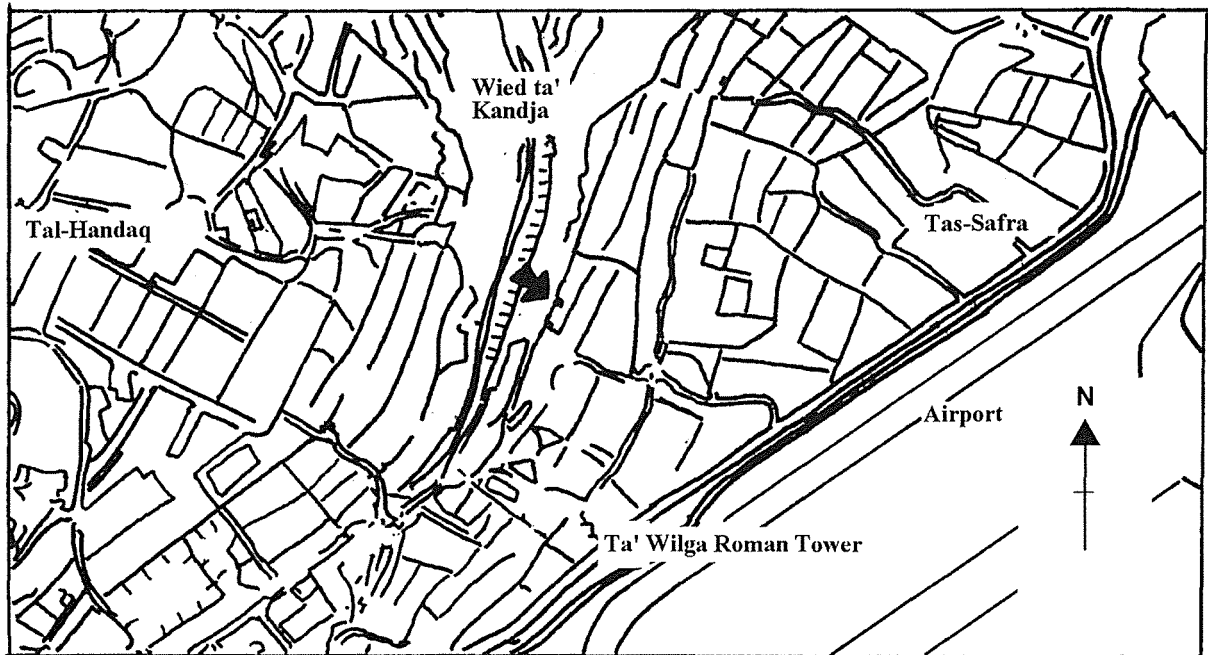


Plate 2: Cart-ruts at Monopoli (Photo: T. Zammit)

Floor Tomb at il-Wied ta' Kandja



Detail from Survey sheet 5067 (Scale 1:6250)

Il-Wied ta' Kandja is a little known valley starting in the area around the western limits of the runway at Luqa airport and follows a northern direction to join Wied Xkora in forming Wied is-Sillani

A Roman floor tomb (GR 512678) has been noted on the eastern side of the northern part of this valley. This tomb aligned in a NE-SW direction (long axis at N50 degrees), measures 1.70m by 0.60m reaching a maximum depth of 0.30m. A stone pillow 0.12m in height occupies the northern 0.20m of the tomb and contains a single central head rest. There are no signs of recesses for a closing slab and no bones or datable pottery was noted in the area.

In the area surrounding this tomb a number of surface features were noted but being debris-filled, no further comment on their function can be claimed at present. The tomb lies about 200m away from the Torri ta' Wilga. The closest known significant roman catacomb known in the area was Ta' Kandja catacomb located about 80m to the south-east from the above mentioned tower (Buhagiar 1986:321). Other classical tombs (both roman and phoenician) have also been recorded from the area (MAR 1960). Similar open air-floor tombs have been described from Salina where over twenty-five floor such tombs have been documented (Buhagiar 1986:24).

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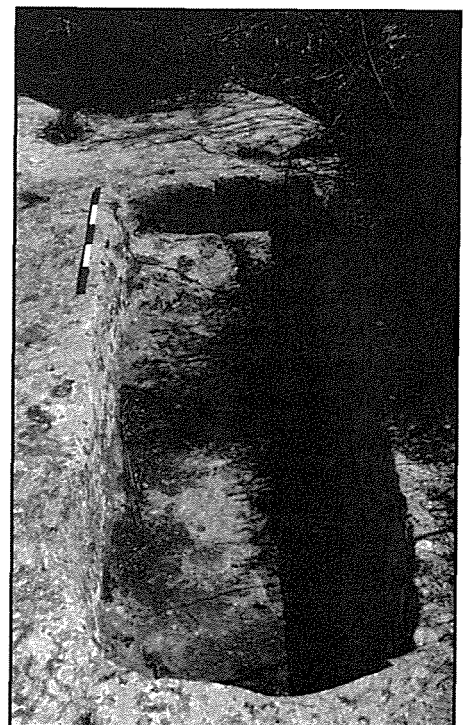
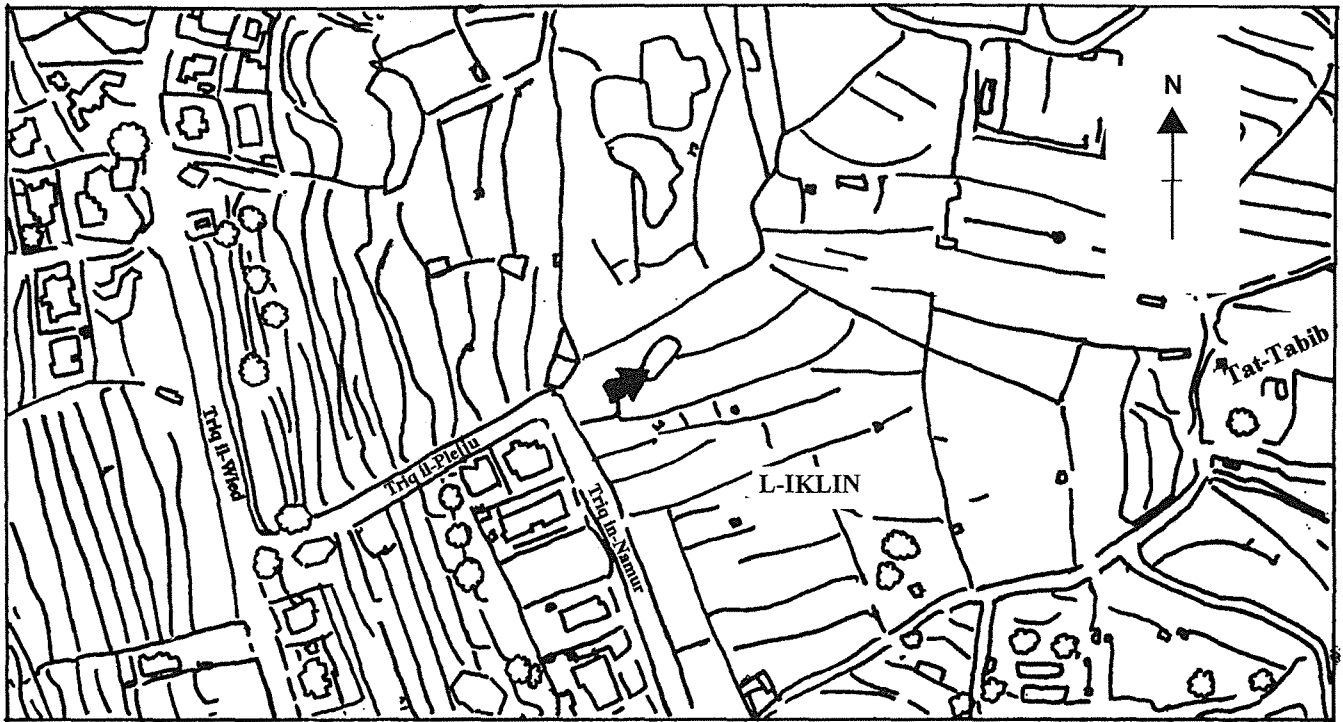


Plate 1: Floor Tomb at il-Wied ta' Kandja
(Photo: A. Bugeja)

REDISCOVERING FORGOTTEN SITES

A Megalithic Site at L-Iklin



Detail from Survey Sheet 5074 (Scale 1:4100)

Even L-Iklin had its megalithic temple. This monument lies to the north and west of the fields known by the toponyms of l-Iklin and tat-Tabib respectively. The discovery of the site dates back to the late sixties, and was made by the teenagers of Din l-Art Helwa and two private schools (Anon., 1967). Despite initial coverage by the local newspapers, the remains were soon forgotten. No note of the find was made in the Museum Annual Reports and the site was not included in the survey carried out by Evans in the early seventies (Evans, 1971).

It was only after another decade that the area received its merited consideration when an examination of the remains was conducted by Professor Bonanno, who proceeded to describe and propose an explanation for the finds (Bonanno, 1983). A few prehistoric sherds and the remains of a statuette, surviving in part, were also found and documented from the area. Following this discovery it was hoped that one day the site would be scientifically excavated. This suggestion, however, was shelved indefinitely leaving the remains largely unknown to the academic world and particularly vulnerable in the process.

On the 14 th August 1998, Mr. Keith Buhagiar and the present author managed to relocate the temple just a few metres to the east of the junction between triq il-Pleju and triq in-Namur. Some difficulties were encountered during the search as the position and site location of the remains did not correspond to those indicated by the article. The megalithic remains corresponding to the only plan available of the site were in fact positively identified with an elliptical field (GR 508774) about 200m away from the site location (GR 510745) originally described.

The area surrounding the megaliths, especially the slope towards Iklin has changed considerably from that revealed in the survey sheets. Certainly it is surprising how building activity did not claim this site over the years, stopping only forty or so metres away from the temple remains. In the late nineties it was sheer luck once again that saved the monument. During ground levelling for the access road to the nearby television antenna the size of the megaliths probably discouraged their destruction. The path connecting the road to the antenna passed to the northern side of the field, leaving the megaliths unharmed. The next year it was the fields immediately to the south that were cleared, miraculously leaving the megaliths untouched once more.

Despite the humble nature of the remains, the site is one of considerable importance. The megaliths and the adjoining rubble wall still enclose about a metre of deposit, offering a unique opportunity for the study of the islands' prehistory. Due to its archaeological potential the remains at I-Iklin could easily follow those at Borg il-Gharib, Borg l-Imramma and l-Imrejsbiet in joining the list of Class A scheduled buildings.

Examination of the immediate area around the field, indicates that the remains probably extended to the north. Excavation here might reveal the true nature of these remains. Future studies at the site will confirm or refuse the identification of the remains as those of a temple. They may also shed new light on the anomalous 'orientation' of the remains and possibly provide new insights into the understanding of similar temple period structures.

The remains at L-Iklin are not the only prehistoric remains in the area. The exterior wall of a megalithic temple is still standing at Ta' Raddiena unnoticed by the hundreds of car drivers passing through the B'Kara bypass daily. The occurrence of two sites within a kilometre of each other is not coincidental.

Through the insights gained from excavations at the Xaghra Stone Circle, it is likely that the area around these structures was in use by a temple period community over 4500 years ago. The occurrence of these communities often reveals itself through clustering of megalithic sites. Temples like modern parish churches provided rival locations for ritual display, contrasting with burial monuments which provided unity within a community (Bonanno 1990; Trump 1998). This situation is best appreciated at Xaghra, where a number of megalithic remains (Ggantija, Ghar ta' Ghejzu and Santa Verna) are

found on the same plateau surrounding a single burial monument identified in the Gozo stone circle. Similarly the area around the grand harbour has the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum as the burial ground for a number of temples (five at Kordin and the Tarxien temples). This analogy continues at Xemxija where a single burial site is found in the proximity of a temple site.

The relevance to the remains at l-Iklin and Tar-Raddiena should immediately be apparent: if these megaliths are the last remains of prehistoric temples, than the surrounding area still hides an as yet undiscovered burial ground.

Anton Bugeja

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Plate 1:- Megaliths at l-Iklin (Photo: A. Bugeja)