

BAHRIJA: ITS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Keith Buhagiar

Bahrija covers a land surface area of around four and a half square kilometres and is a region of diverse geology and landscapes. Garigue, rocky steppe, maquis, clay slope outcrops and cliffs all intertwine to form an area of great natural significance and scenic beauty. All rock layers constituting the basic Maltese geological stratigraphy are represented in the region, and the Upper Coralline plateaux of the Tal-Pitkal Member type, are deeply scarred by the river valleys of Wied Rini, Wied tal-Marċa,¹ Ta' Wied iż-Żebbuġ and Wied Gerżuma. The topography of the area was also shaped by considerable land faulting.

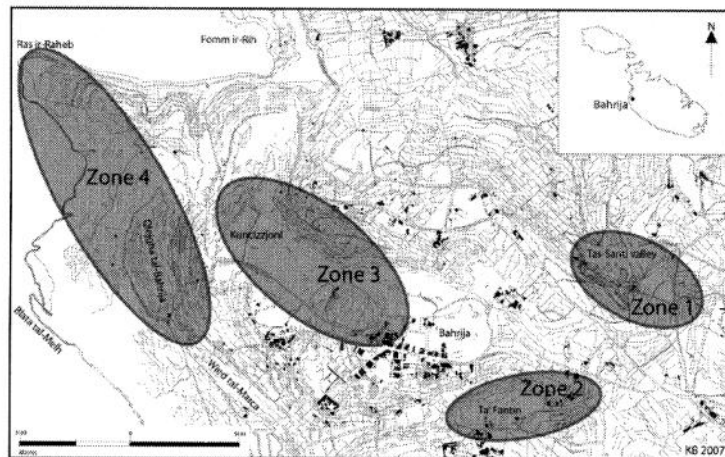


Fig. 1. All major archaeological remains noted from the Bahrija region were grouped into the various highlighted zones

It is the aim of this study to bring to the forefront the archaeological significance and importance of the region, and makes reference to previously unrecorded sites, noted by the author during field work sessions held in recent years. The paper should nonetheless not be regarded as an exhaustive study of all archaeological remains present within, and a more systematic landscape survey will certainly lead to the discovery of cultural remains, which have so far escaped scholarly attention. For the sake of practicality, the Bahrija region was divided into four distinct zones (Fig. 1), with the archaeological remains present within each zone, listed in chronological sequence. Past cultural remains at Bahrija span from the Prehistoric to the Late

1. Also listed in several map publications as Wied il-Bahrija.

Medieval period. Human settlement was encouraged by the presence of impermeable Blue Clay deposits and the overlying ground water sources. Terra Rossa soil and chert, amongst other mineral deposits, further boosted the settlement potential of the region. A surprising concentration of chert nodules lie exposed in the nearby coastal zones, particularly, in between the Il-Blata tal-Melh wave-cut platform, and the Ras ir-Raheb promontory.

Chert nodules occur locally in the lower sections of Middle Globigerina deposits, by the replacement of limestone with cryptocrystalline quartz, and result from the fact that some organisms use silica rather than calcium carbonate for their shells.² Chert forms more readily in cold submerged environments, but can also result, as is the case with Maltese geological deposits, when shells are deposited along with abundant calcium carbonate deposits. These will form impurities in limestone sediment and collect as nodules.³ Chert formations are the only easily identified hard silicone formations in the Maltese archipelago and have been used by prehistoric civilisations for the manufacture of stone implements.

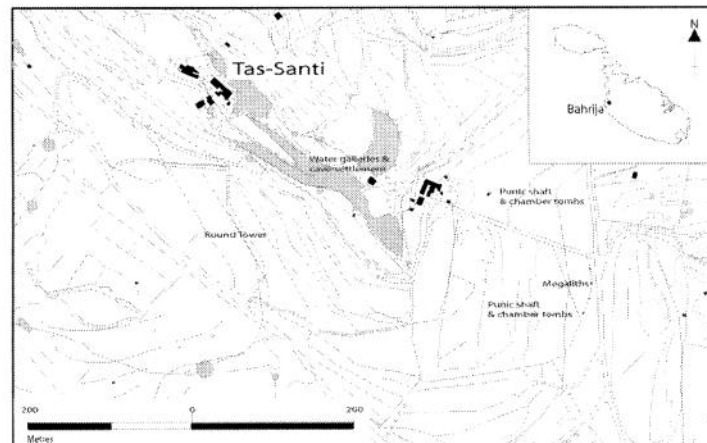


Fig. 2. Map detail of Tas-Santi valley and the surrounding archaeological remains.

Zone 1 – Ix-Xaghra tax-Xini and Tas-Santi

The Tax-Xini area (Map ref. 423728), is a windswept expanse of garigue landscape, east-north-east of Bahrija centre (Fig. 2). Tax-Xini lies at an altitude of ca. 225 metres above sea level and commands breathtaking views of the underlying Tas-Santi valley, Ras il-Pellegrin promontory, and the western Gozitan coast. A ca. twenty metre stretch of megalithic stone wall, a section of which was incorporated within a field rubble wall, perimeters the western side of the road at Tax-Xini, which from Bahrija heads towards Fort Bingemma (Fig. 3). The same area contains signs of ancient surface quarrying works, within which are located around six Punic

2. G. Zammit-Maempel, *An Outline of Maltese Geology*, Malta 1977, 25.

3. A. Dolgoff, *Physical Geology*, New York 1996, 226.

rectangular shaft and chamber tombs. As all tombs are either overgrown or else contain an in-fill of stone chippings and domestic waste, none could unfortunately be investigated (Fig. 4).



Fig. 3. Remnants of an apparent megalithic wall incorporated within a dry-stone partitioning field wall.



Fig. 4. A partly overgrown Punic rectangular shaft and chamber tomb containing an in-fill of stone chippings.

Shaft and chamber tombs are difficult to date with any accuracy and probably first appeared locally during the course of the eighth century BC,⁴ and remained in use till the late Roman period. Such tombs basically consist of a shaft which gives access to one or two burial chambers. Access to the bottom of the shaft was facilitated by means of footholds or narrow rock-cut steps. It is worthwhile noting that many such tombs, survived largely intact until the 1700s, when gripped by a fascination for the ancient world, collectors looted numerous tombs in search for ancient *objets d'art*.⁵

Several stretches of parallel grooves in the bare rock-face more commonly known as cart-ruts, are also present in the Tax-Xini area (Map ref. 424729). These are unevenly distributed over the Maltese landscape in areas of exposed Upper Coralline, Globigerina and Lower Coralline Limestone. Cart-ruts run in pairs, and represent traffic long before the present settlement patterns and road network was established. The ruts were worn by the passage of a primitive vehicle, which might have consisted of (a) cart or wagon; (b) sledge; (c) slide-car in which poles are supported at one end, and dragged along the ground at the other.⁶ The dating of such cart-ruts is a subject of controversy amongst archaeologists. David Trump favours the later Bronze Age,⁷ whilst Anthony Bonanno and other scholars, associate the presence of ruts with ancient quarrying works dating to the Classical Age.⁸

The Tas-Santi ravine and valley (Fig. 2), both located at close quarters to the Tax-Xini area, contain another surprising agglomeration of archaeological remains. A small partly mutilated family hypogeum is located within a rectangular-shaped enclosure accessed through a three-centred arch doorway (Map ref. 420729).⁹ Two window tombs, each containing a rock-pillow with headrests survive (Fig. 5). Faint traces of mortar applied to sections of the rock walls of the window tomb are still visible. In absence of tomb furnishings, such archaeological features are once more difficult to date with accuracy. The rock-pillow with head-rests was a late development in Punic tomb architecture. Head-rests remained a characteristic feature of tomb architecture throughout the Roman and Byzantine occupation of the Maltese islands.¹⁰

4. D. H. Trump, *Malta: An Archaeological Guide*, Malta 2000, 60.
5. C. Sagona, *The Archaeology of Punic Malta*, Leuven 2002, 5. See also *Museum Annual Report* 1925-6, ii. Rock-tombs of a late Punic date were reported from elsewhere in Bahrija, but their exact location is unfortunately not mentioned.
6. Trump 2000, 33-7.
7. D. H. Trump, *Malta Prehistory and Temples*, Malta 2002, 264-9.
8. A. Bonanno, *Malta Prehistory and Temples*, Malta 2005, 338-9.
9. Dr Anton Bugeja had originally indicated the location of the window tombs and the presumed tower remains at Tas-Santi.
10. M. Buhagiar, *Late Roman and Byzantine Catacombs and Related Burial Places in the Maltese Islands*, Oxford 1986, 43.



Fig. 5. The surviving remnants of a window tomb on the west side of Tas-Santi valley, containing a pottery niche, head rests, rock pillow, and an elevated rock couch.



Fig. 6. The large ashlar masonry blocks, partly perimetering the side of a field at Tas-Santi, are the apparent remains of a circular tower.

Large ashlar masonry blocks (Map ref. 421729), partly perimeter a field close by, and are the apparent remains of a circular tower (Fig. 6). The site was recorded as a 'broken wall' in the 1973 edition of the 1:2500 map of the area,¹¹ but has so far, never been the subject of further archaeological investigation. Another five cylindrical towers have been recorded from elsewhere in Malta. Four are located in

11. GR 4209 7286, Scale 1:2500 map, Sheet 4272, 1973 edition.

south-east Malta and consist of Ta' Ġawhar, Ta' Wilġa, Tal-Bakkari and It-Torrijiet. The Ta' Ċieda tower is located at San Gwann. Only the structures at Ta' Ċieda, Ta' Ġawhar and Ta' Wilġa were ever subjected to an archaeological investigation, and the significance and dating of the remains has never been satisfactorily addressed. Whilst proposing a Punic date for these structures, Anthony Bonanno is rather hesitant in attributing the Tas-Santi remains as belonging to a cylindrical tower.¹² Basing himself on the late Roman material which was recovered from within the Ta' Ġawhar tower, and the fact that the Ta' Ċieda site was during later centuries converted into a Muslim burial ground, Mario Buhagiar, on the other hand, proposes a late Roman date.¹³

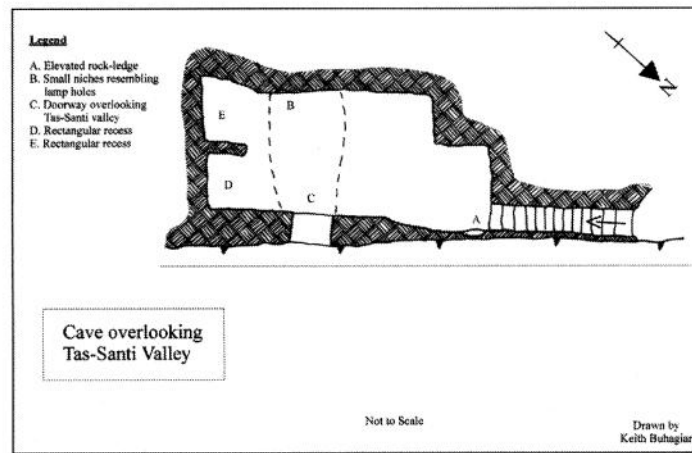


Fig. 7. Rock-hewn cave overlooking Tas-Santi valley.

A cave on the western side of Tas-Santi valley (Map ref. 421729) is accessed via a flight of rock-cut steps, which lead down to a square-headed doorway (Fig. 7). The cave interior is roughly rectangular in plan and contains a second doorway (Fig. 8), which overlooks the Tas-Santi valley 'C'. At least two different tool types were noted from within, and suggest that the cave experienced an organic type of development. The doorway overlooking the valley was probably the only means of access into the original chamber, which also had much smaller proportions than the current cave. Its setting and location makes it tempting to suggest the former presence of a rock tomb, typologically similar to the hypogea at Bingemma, and which possibly dated to the Roman or the late Roman period, but this remains a mere hypothesis.

12. A. Bonanno, *Malta: Phoenician, Punic and Roman*, Malta 2005, 91-2.

13. M. Buhagiar, *The Christianisation of Malta: Catacombs, Cult Centres and Churches in Malta to 1530*, Oxford 2007, 18.

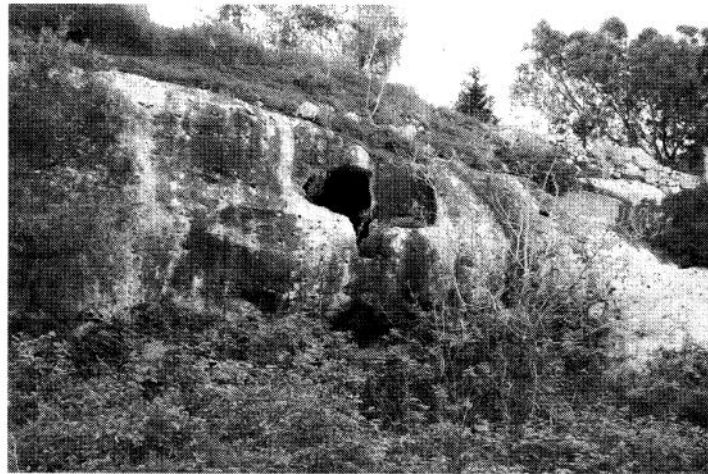


Fig. 8. The large ashlar masonry blocks, partly perimetering the side of a field at as-Santi, are the apparent remains of a circular tower.

The Tas-Santi valley bed owes its formation to land subsidence, and forms part of the westernmost extent of the Great Fault. Upper Coralline Limestone formations delineate the valley sides, whilst the valley bed contains exposed Blue Clay and Globigerina Limestone deposits. Four distinct subdivisions of the Upper Coralline formation have been identified locally, and it is within one of these strata, technically known as the Mtarfa Member,¹⁴ that two adjoining caves were excavated in the western side of Tas-Santi valley. Mtarfa Member is surprisingly brittle. It is much easier to quarry than Globigerina Limestone and does not make cave-excavation and enlargement a labour intensive and time consuming process.¹⁵

Two distinct types of medieval cave-settlements have been identified in Malta. These consist of (a) the adaptation of a natural karst depression for settlement purposes, and (b) cliff-face settlements.¹⁶ Cave usage varies from (a) cultic worship, (b) human habitation, and (c) animal pens or storage spaces often connected to agricultural usage. The caves within Tas-Santi valley are of the cliff-face type, and were probably used for the purpose of human habitation. Evidence for the presence of a cave-church within the region under study, is so far lacking. Cliff-face settlements are located within the sides of ridges and valleys and involve the occupation of a

14. Geological Map of the Maltese Islands, Sheet 1, Scale 1:25,000, resurveyed by M. H. Pedley, published by the Oil Exploration Directorate, Office of the Prime Minister, Malta 1993.

15. K. Buhagiar, *Medieval and Early Modern Cave-Settlements and Water Galleries in North-West Malta South of the Great Fault – A Field Survey and Gazetteer*, unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Malta, 2002.

16. Examples of karst feature settlements are Ghar il-Kbir in the l/o Dingli and Latmija, l/o Dirkewwa. These involve the occupation of one or more caves hewn into the sides of a natural rock-hollow more technically known as Subsidence Structure. Karst subsidence structures form due to the erosion of calcium carbonate deposits, which readily dissolve by the action of rainwater, and gradually lead to the formation of subterranean caves. See Buhagiar 2002, 48.

series of natural or man-enlarged caves, most of which are excavated into Mtarfa Member deposits.

Finely built dry-stone walls partly screen the entrance to both caves at Tas-Santi, and the only means of access to their interior, is via two square-headed doorways. The caves are fronted by a large man-made terrace overlooking the lower valley sections (Map ref. 421729). This is a feature typical of the cliff-face settlement typology where frequently, two or more caves are connected together by means of an artificial terrace. Present within one of the caves, is a water gallery yielding perennial water supply. Galleries are narrow tunnels commonly excavated into Mtarfa Member deposits, and are hewn at right angles to the rock-face. Water galleries can be easily identified from their rectangular shaped rock-cut entrance which averages 0.8 by 1.5 metres, and their function is that of tapping perched aquifer water sources. A masonry canal at the gallery entrance, channels the retrieved water to an open air water reservoir, from where water is used to irrigate the underlying fields. Most galleries provide adjoining settlements and underlying terraced land with a perennial water supply. These water extraction tunnels are rural engineering works, aimed at improving the hydrological potential of a specifically selected area, and are difficult to date, but it appears that the some of the local galleries are eleventh or twelfth century AD interventions on the landscape.¹⁷

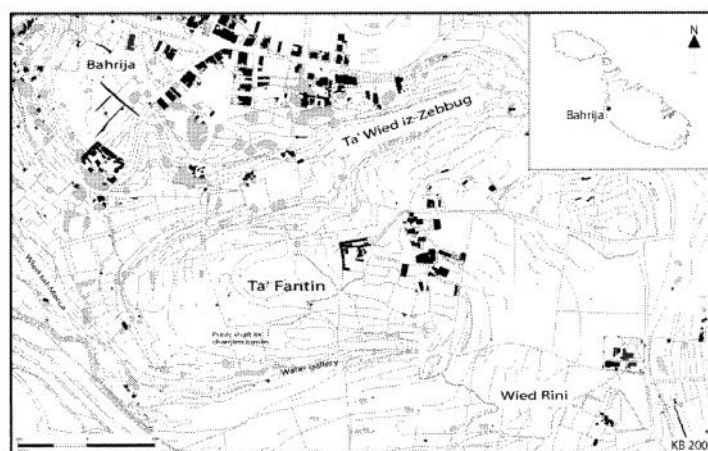


Fig. 9. Map detail of the Tal-Fantin promontory and the surrounding archaeological remains.

Zone 2 – Wied Rini & Tal-Fantin

A headland known as Tal-Fantin dominates the topography of the area (Fig. 9). Tal-Fantin has an altitude of ca. 200 metres above sea level and slopes gently in a westward direction (Map ref. 416723). Its western tip overlooks the fertile Wied tal-Marča area. Ta' Wied iż-Żebbug and Wied Rini, flank its northern and southern sides respectively. The strategic settlement potential of Tal-Fantin, has so far escaped the attention of the field archaeologist, but it contains a surprising density

17. On water galleries and their impact on the surrounding landscape see Buhagiar 2002, 60-80.

of archaeological remains which possibly range from the Bronze Age to the Late Medieval period. Cart-ruts dot various sections of the headland, and a cluster of three Punic shaft and chamber tombs, partly destroyed by later surface quarrying works, were noted in the area by the author. One tomb still preserves traces of two rock-cut headrests and a recessed pottery niche.¹⁸

Dug into the southern side of the headland is a gallery of unknown antiquity. It taps the perched aquifer and yields a perennial supply of water, which boosts the agricultural potential of the area (Fig. 10). As is the case with the Tas-Santi gallery, masonry canals channel the collected water to a series of open air reservoirs, from which it is redirected to fields in want of irrigation. To the left of the gallery entrance, is a small aedicule portraying St Simon Stock receiving the scapular from the Virgin of Carmel,¹⁹ and seemingly implies that the gallery and adjoining land, is property of the Carmelite Order.



Fig.10. A water gallery of unknown antiquity,
dug into the southern side of the Ta' Fantin promontory.

To the east of Tal-Fantin promontory (Map ref. 420724), overlooking Wied Rini, is a closely knit unit of three giren or corbelled stone huts, the fronting area of which is enclosed by a dry-wall precinct (Fig. 11).²⁰ Giren are unevenly distributed throughout Malta, mainly to its north and west, but are rarely seen in Gozo.²¹ The majority of the

18. The Museum Annual Report for 1959-60 reports the discovery of two Roman tombs at Wied Rini, having rectangular shafts and chambers at Map ref. 410718. These had been previously rifled, but were found to contain three miniature bilychnis lamps, numerous sherds and bone fragments. See *Museum Annual Report 1959-60*, 6.

19. Personal communication, Prof. Mario Buhagiar.

20. M. Buhagiar, *The Late Medieval Art and Architecture of the Maltese Islands*, Malta 2005, 46.

21. J. Quintin d'Autun, 'Insulae Melitae Descriptio', in *The Earliest Description of Malta*, Lyons 1536, translation and notes by H.C.R. Vella, Malta 1980, 31.

surviving giren are small in size, with their present usage being exclusively limited to the storage of agricultural produce and implements, or as a place of shelter from the occasional winter storm. Larger giren are nonetheless known to have been used for long-term human habitation, and were at times grouped into clusters, similar to the giren compound at Bahrija. Writing towards the very end of the Late Medieval period, the only countryside buildings Jean Quintin noted in the 1530s were the so called *capanne africane*,²² possibly a reference to rude stone structures, similar in appearance and method of construction to the girna huts.



Fig. 11. A cluster of three interconnected cobbled stone huts flanking the eastern extent of Wied Rini.

Zone 3 – Il-Qortin l-Imdawwar and Bahrija Centre

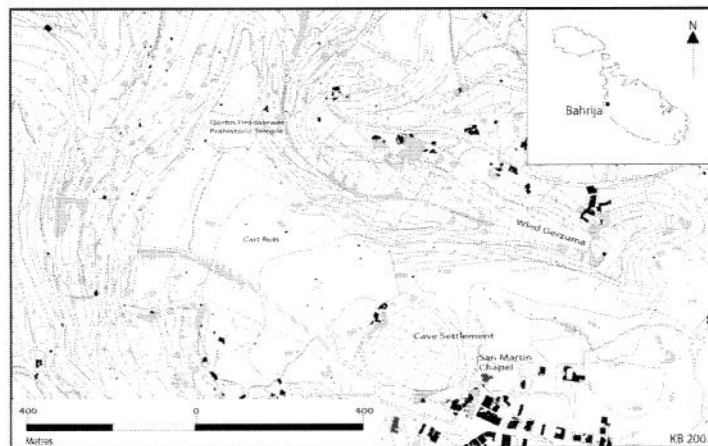


Fig. 12. Map detail of the Qortin l-Imdawwar area and the Bahrija settlement centre.

Commanding views of the Il-Qlejgha tal-Bahrija Bronze Age remains and Fomm ir-Rih Bay are megalithic remains known as Il-Qortin l-Imdawwar (Map ref. 405734;

22. *Museum Annual Report* (Malta) 1938-9, vi-ix.

Fig. 12). The site was investigated by the Archaeological Museum authorities in August 1938 under the supervision of Dr J. G. Baldacchino, and the exploratory campaign results were published in the *Annual Report* for 1938-9.²³ The remains are thought to belong to an apsidal building, and a considerable amount of cultural material was recovered from within the site (Fig. 13). Most of the recovered potter apparently belongs to the Tarxien Phase (ca. 3,150 – 2,500 BC), and most sherds contain decoration scratched after firing and also show the use of red ochre for the production of incrustated patterns and for the covering of the rims and handles. The excavation also yielded fragments of coarse wares. These were either plain, or covered on the exterior with the scale decoration characteristic of Tarxien-phase storage vessels.²⁴

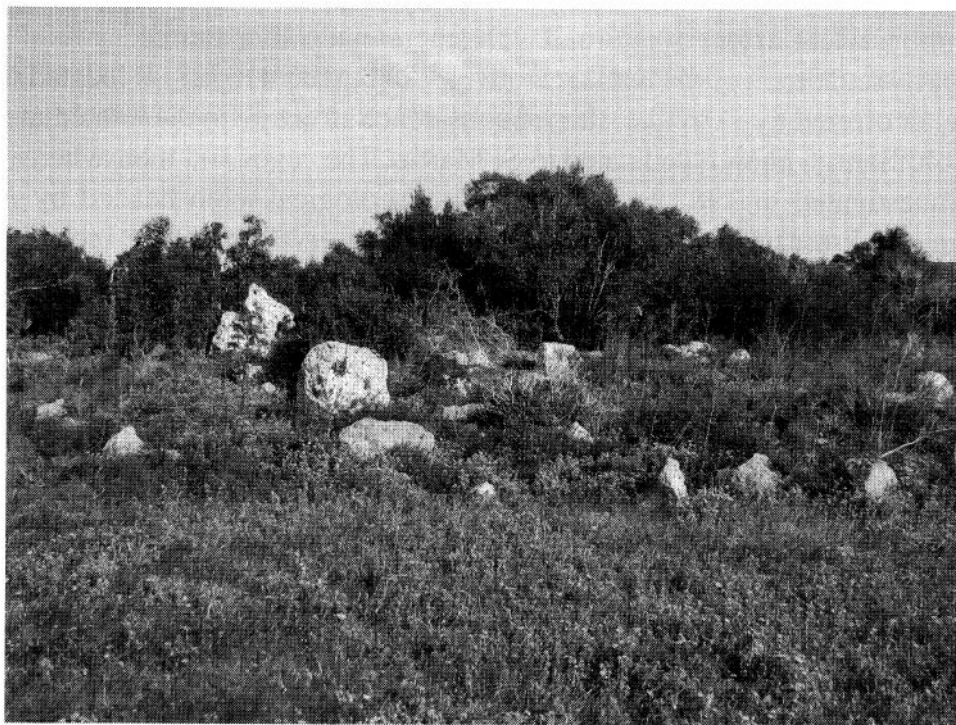


Fig. 13. The surviving structural remains of the Qortin l-Imdawwar prehistoric temple.

Flint implements were rare, but flaked chert tools were apparently numerous. Implements were chiefly scrapers of various shapes, with one or more retouched edges. A portable quern together with a number of rubbers was also discovered. One pebble, with a diameter of ca. twelve centimetres was fashioned into an axe. Perforated stone was also recovered, together with fragments of bone pertaining to ox, pig, sheep, goat and horse. The archaeological deposit was also noted to be full of small pieces of 'carbonised wood'.²⁵

23. *Museum Annual Report* (Malta) 1938-9, vi-ix.

24. J. D. Evans, *The Prehistoric Antiquities of the Maltese Islands: A Survey*, London 1971, 109.

25. *Ibid.*, 109.

Cart-ruts are visible in the whole of the Ix-Xaghra tal-Kuncizzjoni area. Other tracts of ruts were visible in Bahrija village square, where a bar on the south of the road had a fine pair of ruts right opposite its front doorway. These today lie buried beneath modern asphaltting.²⁶ Back to the Il-Qortin l-Imdawwar area, around two hundred metres to the south-east of the prehistoric remains, is Punic shaft and chamber tomb which due to the overgrown nature of the shaft, could not be investigated.

Dating to the Late Medieval or Early Modern periods, is a water gallery known by the locals as L-Ghajj ta' Snajnsna.²⁷ Located below the ravine at Il-Qortin l-Imdawwar (Map ref. 402731), is dug into an Mtarfa Member deposit, and is visible from the road which from Bahrija village square, gives access to the modern car park overlooking the Ras ir-Raheb promontory. It feeds a water reservoir located below the western extent of the road with a perennial water source.

A cave-settlement of the Karst feature type (Map ref. 410728) is located within the shelter offered by a circular-shaped subsidence structure to the immediate west of the old Bahrija church dedicated to St Martin. The caves and their whereabouts were investigated in 1987 by an Italian archaeological team headed by Ariela Fradkin and Emmanuele Anati, with their field observations being included in a 1988 publication.²⁸ Megalithic structures were noted in the vicinity of the cave, but personal fieldwork in the area only revealed the presence of large boulders, which got detached from the face of the ravine by the natural process of erosion.

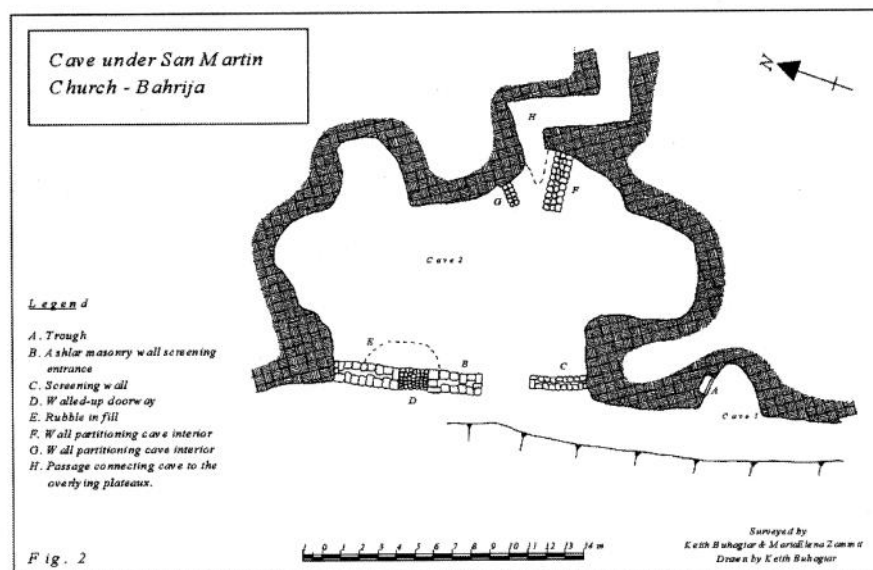


Fig. 14. Map detail of the Ras ir-Raheb and the Il-Qlejgha tal-Bahrija promontories.

26. Trump 2000, 138.

27. Personal communication, Mario Vassallo.

28. A. F. Anati and E. Anati, 'Malta: Appunti di Lavoro Sul Terreno', in *Missione A Malta – Ricerche e Studi Sulla Preistoria Dell'Archipelago Maltese Nel Contesto Mediterraneo*, Rome 1988, 206.

To the left of the St Martin church is a flight of rock-hewn steps giving access to the subsidence structure and the two caves present within. Full advantage was taken of the sheltered nature offered by this karstic depression, within which, an intricate network of rubble walls and fields were constructed. Cave 1 (Fig. 14) is of small proportions and trough 'A' is indicative of the fact that in its last phase of occupation, it was used as an animal pen. Cave 2 is considerably larger, with a fair section of the entrance being screened off by means a finely built masonry wall 'B', which today lies in ruins. The cave interior has an irregular plan and is surprisingly bare of any attempt at architectural elaboration and enhancement. Most of the cave was enlarged as a direct result of human intervention, and tool marks were observed almost throughout the interior. 'H' is a rock passage which connects the cave to the overlying plateau, and is possibly a World War II shelter or escape ways. The finely built screening wall and the absence of animal troughs on the interior are indicative that the cave was probably used for the purpose of human habitation in the Late Medieval and Early Modern periods.

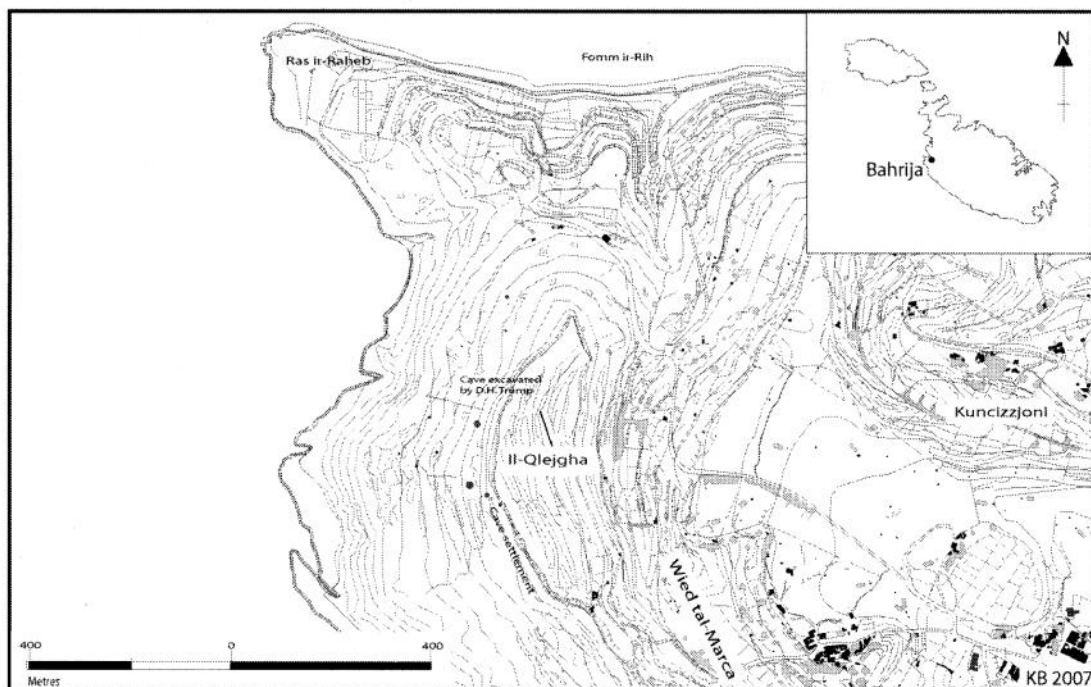


Fig. 15. This interconnected silo pith cluster, was utilised during the Late Medieval / Early Modern period, as an animal pen.

Zone 4 – Il-Qlejgha tal-Bahrija and Ras ir-Raheb

A cave below the north-west side of Il-Qlejgha was investigated by David Trump in February 1960 (Map ref. 399732; Fig. 15).²⁹ It yielded some Tarxien type material

29. D. H. Trump, 'The later Prehistory of Malta', in *Prehistoric Society Proceedings*, vol. 27, (1961), 253-62.

which was however unstratified and mixed with objects of many later periods. The cave was discovered in 1956 by Cmdr and Mrs A. Woolner.



Fig. 16. The northern most tip of the Il-Qlejgha tal-Bahrija promontory as seen from Fomm ir-Rih Bay.

Il-Qlejgha tal-Bahrija is a crescent-shaped Upper Coralline limestone plateau of the Tal-Pitkal Member type having a length and width of around 700 by 200 metres respectively (Fig. 16). Located at a height of ca. 170 metres above sea level, it is a distinct landmark and commands impressive views of the Ras ir-Raheb promontory and Fomm ir-Rih Bay. Cliffs flank Il-Qlejgha's western and northern sides. The terraced nature of the landscape makes its approach from an eastern direction less dramatic, but is nonetheless of difficult access to anyone not familiar with the relief of the area. The only easily accessible entry point is through a narrow tongue of land on the southern extremity of the promontory, from where a footpath meanders down towards Wied ta' Marca.

The plateau housed a Bronze Age settlement site, which was first excavated by Eric Peet in 1909.³⁰ The excavation yielded pottery sherds pertaining to a typology which was formerly unknown, and which was aptly called *Bahrija Phase* – the name of the area in which such a typology was first detected in. Pottery sherds consisted mainly of vessels made out of a grey fabric and decorated with incised geometric designs. Fragments of mud brick, the remains of a torba flooring together

30. E. Peet, Contributions to the Study of the Prehistoric Period of Malta, in *Papers of the British School at Rome*, V, 3 (1910), 141-63.

with a number of spindle whorls, were also detected by the excavations.³¹ A further archaeological on-site assessment was carried out by David Trump in 1959, where a field in the centre of the eastern side, the same trenched by Peet in 1909, was earmarked for investigation.³² Apart from a high incidence of pottery fragments, the 1959 excavation also yielded more artefacts linked to the textile industry.

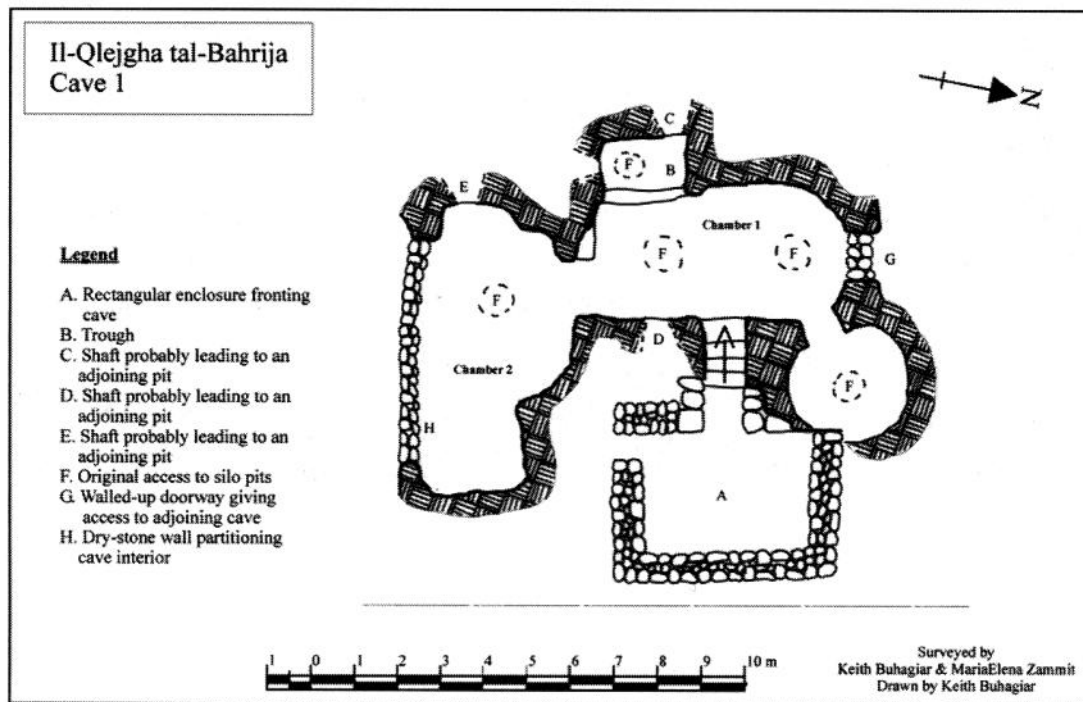


Fig. 17. Plan of the Qlejgha tal-Bahrija.

Other remains worth mentioning at Il-Qlejgha are megaliths, sections of which have been partly incorporated into field walls, clusters of which are present on the western and north-eastern sides of the promontory. Numerous silo piths were observed by the author to be agglomerated in the southern section of the site. Of particular interest is a previously unrecorded find consisted of two caves on the eastern side of the promontory, the interior space of which was reclaimed through the interconnection of more than six adjoining Bronze Age silo-piths. At an unknown date, the chambers were partitioned by means of dry-stone walls into two distinct units. Only one of these units (Fig. 17) could unfortunately be investigated and surveyed, as the other is still in use as an aviary for the rearing of poultry. The surveyed cave is fronted by a rectangular dry-stone enclosure 'A' and access to the interconnected chambers is down a flight of five rock-hewn steps. Surviving in situ within the cave are three silo-pith capping stones.

31. Ibid.

32. Trump 1961, 258.



Fig. 18. The headland of Ras ir-Raheb as seen from Il-Qlejgha tal-Bahrija.
The Ta' Ċenċ Cliffs are visible in the background.

Dating to the Punico-Roman period are the remains at Ras ir-Raheb, a remote and windswept headland also known as Ras il-Knejjes (Map ref. 395739; Fig. 18). At an altitude of 45 metres above sea level, close to the north-west cliff-edge of the headland are the ruins of a building, the nature of which so far has not been satisfactorily determined.³³ When the site was brought to the attention of Temi Zammit in 1922, he acknowledged the importance of the remains and noted that, 'the site should be kept in mind as one that could be excavated with profit'.³⁴ The site's archaeological investigation was held between 1961-2 by a team of officers from the Royal Navy, under the direction of Capt. D. Scott and Senior Comdr. P. Pugh.³⁵

The surviving foundation stones make it possible to reconstruct the partial plan of the building, which appears to have been composed of a cluster of rooms grouped round a central courtyard.³⁶ It had a pavement of small white marble cubes embedded in concrete, and a few diamond-shaped tiles were recorded from one

33. M. Buhagiar, 'Two Archaeological Sites – Ras ir-Raheb, Malta, and Ras il-Wardija, Gozo', in *Melita Historica*, x, 1, 1988, 69-87. See also Bonanno 2005, 322-3.

34. *Museum Annual Report* (Malta), 1922-3, v.

35. D. Scott, 'Excavations at Ras ir-Raheb 1961-1962', unpublished report, National Museum of Archaeology Archives, dated 1962.

36. Buhagiar 1988, 70.

of the rooms. A circular hole dug into a block of limestone gives access to a long and narrow cistern located in the north-eastern corner of the site. The building was integrated within the structure of two rough stone megaliths, which are presumably the relics of a prehistoric structure.³⁷ The remains at Ras ir-Raheb probably faced west and commanded extensive sea views.³⁸

A whole spectrum of pottery representing the Roman occupation of the island was recovered from the cistern,³⁹ and a coin of Constantinus II dating to AD 337-361 was unearthed during the 1962 excavation campaign. Its presence suggests the possible utilisation of the site in early Christian times. Two coins were vaguely classified as 'Siculo-Punic', and amongst other recovered archaeological material are an ivory plaque with a low relief of a crouching bull, two clay satyr masks on vessel legs, a small grotesque head of a bald old man and several pieces belonging to clay figurines.⁴⁰ An archaeological reassessment of the remains will hopefully help shed more light on the function and use of the site and will possibly help establish whether it can be associated with the Temple of Heracles mentioned by Ptolemy.⁴¹

Back to the Il-Qlejgha tal-Bahrija plateau, the base of the eastern and western cliffs delineating the extent of the Bronze Age village, are dotted with caves dug into an Mtarfa Member deposit (Fig. 15). In their present semblance, many of these caves date to the Late Medieval period, and their function must have varied from human habitation, animal pens, storage space for agricultural produce and tools and even possibly, places of temporary shelter in case of bad weather.

The cave-settlement which merits most attention is hewn into the west side of Il-Qlejgha, and commands unobstructed views of the underlying terraced land, cliffs and the Ras ir-Raheb promontory (Map ref. 400728). It is composed of six distinct cave-units, which amount to a total of sixteen caves.⁴² The importance of these remains and their surrounding landscape lies in the fact that they are one of the best preserved examples of a Maltese Late Medieval landscape and cliff-face settlement to survive to date. The exterior of several caves preserve the traces of a wooden roof structure, which even though probably not predating the turn of the twentieth century, gives an idea as to how late medieval caves and houses were roofed over (Fig. 19).⁴³ Two water galleries located in the underlying terraced land provided the settlement with this vital resource.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. *Museum Annual Report*, Malta 1962, 6.

40. M. Buhagiar, 'Two Archaeological Sites – Ras ir-Raheb, Malta, and Ras il-Wardija, Gozo', *op. cit.*, 71.

41. N. C. Vella, 'The Lie of the Land: Ptolemy's Temple of Hercules in Malta', in *Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 39, 2002, 83-112.

42. Buhagiar 2002, 117-25.

43. Ibid., 51-2.

Conclusion

Bahrija is an archaeological paradise for the enthusiast and professional field archaeologist alike. The remains it preserves within range from the prehistoric to the late medieval. Also worth noting is the fact that so far, most of its surrounding landscape has escaped large-scale development – a factor which during the course of the past centuries, has aided the survival and preservation of the flourishing ecological habitats and archaeological remains present within. A considerable percentage of land at Bahrija, was the property of the Stagno Palermo family, whose keen interest in past cultural remains, led to the reporting of several discoveries made at Bahrija during the interim 1920 to 1922 period, to the concerned cultural heritage authorities.⁴⁴ The family's relocation to Sicily, and the subsequent purchase of their landed wealth at Bahrija, by a locally registered company, has in recent years, however, led to considerable land defragmentation and speculation. Uncontrolled dismantling of field terraces, the levelling of large tracts of land, and the opening of concrete-paved vehicle access roads, are causing widespread havoc to an otherwise pristine landscape. Such trends should be halted before further harm and irreversible damage to our ecological, geological and archaeological heritage takes place.



Fig. 19. Medieval Houses at Ras ir-Raheb Promontory

44. *Museum Annual Report 1921-22*, v.