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MALTA'S CHANGING ROLE IN
MEDITERRANEAN CROSS-CURRENTS

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Malta's Changing Role in Mediterranean Cross-Currents:

From Prehistory to Roman Times

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MALTA'S CHANGING ROLE IN MEDITERRANEAN CROSS-CURRENTS

From Prehistory to Roman Times

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The Mediterranean started to assume its fundamental role of a unifying agent between peoples, cultures and between the different lands that surround it - between east and west, between north and south - during the seventh millennium B.C., that is, when the earliest signs of trade appeared which were stimulated by the availability of surplus food brought about by the discovery and adoption of agriculture in the Near East.¹ Trade and agriculture interacted in such a way as to spread the new (or Neolithic) way of life, in all its facets, to the rest of the Mediterranean. Trade helped to spread the idea of agriculture to all the shores of the Mediterranean and beyond, and through trade the Neolithic farmers discovered increasingly more land to harness for agricultural purposes in order to feed the growing population.²

It is probably as a result of the same stimuli of trade and land-hunger that the Maltese islands came to be inhabited for the first time, around 5000 B.C., by farmers originating from the southern districts of nearby Sicily.³ As Malta

1 The first forms of trade can, indeed, be traced between early Neolithic cultures inhabiting the Mediterranean coast and others established further inland, such as sea shells from the Mediterranean and the Red Sea found on inland sites and obsidian from central Anatolia found in the earliest levels at Jericho.

2 For the questions of the origin of agriculture and its diffusion to the rest of the Mediterranean see D.H. Trump, *The Prehistory of the Mediterranean* (Harmondsworth, 1980), 22-57; S. Tusa, *La Sicilia nella Preistoria* (Palermo, 1983), 125-129.

3 J.D. Evans, *Malta* (London, 1959), 41-47; *id.*, *The Prehistoric Antiquities of the Maltese Islands: a Survey* (London, 1971), 208-209; D.H. Trump, *Skorba - Excavations Carried out on Behalf of the National Museum of Malta, 1962-4* (London, 1966), 21-24; *id.*, *Prehistory of the Mediterranean*, 86. New connections have more recently been identified with sites further west in southern Sicily. See R. Maggi, "Gli scavi nelle stufe di San Calogero sul Monte Kronio (Sciaccia) e i rapporti fra la Sicilia e Malta durante il Neolitico", *Kokalos* 22-23 (1976-77), 510-518: on the basis of this evidence the author suggests that the earliest colonists of Malta might have departed from the Agrigento/Sciaccia region of Sicily.

was then already an island - it had been so for about five millennia - the crossing of the hundred odd kilometres of sea that separated it from the larger island required sea-faring abilities that are not testified to before the great agricultural discovery.⁴

For this age and for a long time afterwards there could be no claim for any strategic significance for the Maltese archipelago; there were as yet no greedy ambitions of political expansion of one state, or power, at the expense of other, militarily less endowed, lands. Such aspirations would only emerge with the great empires of the Near East, one along the Nile and a succession of others in the land between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris around 3000 B.C. For the next two-and-a-half millennia after the first colonization⁵ of Malta the islands responded only to a more basic requirement of man the farmer: more land for cultivation. No prized raw materials were available on the islands that could attract open-sea trade navigation either from Sicily or from further afield.

To the early Neolithic farmer on Malta the sea served more as an isolating factor, although a certain degree of contact was maintained between the Maltese farmers and their Sicilian counterparts, mostly for the importation of regular supplies of hard-stone raw materials and some ideas of pottery fabrication.⁶ The Maltese farmers felt so safe from any possible threat from outside that they did not bother themselves with fortifying their villages in any way, contrary to what their Sicilian cousins were constrained to do.

The scenario in the central Mediterranean, as well as in Malta, did not change much until about 2500 B.C. Only, new cultures were introduced that are normally attributed to new waves of migrations of farmers basically differentiated from their predecessors by their new ceramic repertoire. In eastern Sicily the *Diana* culture is replaced by the *San Cono - Piano Notaro* one and similarly the *Red Skorba* culture in Malta is replaced by the *Żebbuġ* one around 4000 B.C. In the second period of Maltese prehistory there are two features that seem to distinguish the cultural development in the two islands. While

4 For a probable Mesolithic exception in the Aegean (the cave of Franchthi in the Peloponnese) see Trump, *Prehistory of the Mediterranean*, 21.

5 "Colonization" is here taken in its strictly etymological sense, namely, "settlement by farmers (*coloni*)".

6 On the relationship between *Red Skorba* and *Diana* cultures see Trump, *Skorba*, 45-46; Evans, *Prehistoric Antiquities*, 211.

7 The purpose of the *Għar Dalam* wall at Skorba, datable to this period, is not clear: Trump, *Skorba*, 10. A typical example of a Sicilian Neolithic village with a defensive moat is Stentinello: Tusa, *Sicilia*, 130-131, fig.2.

Sicily is inhabited by a population which appears to be in possession of the earliest metallurgical technology - for which reason we call this period in Sicily the Copper Age⁸ - the population of Malta appears so far to be unaffected by this new technology. It had set itself, however, on a path of cultural, religious, and artistic development unparalleled elsewhere and resulting in that extraordinary cultural phenomenon centred on the wonderful megalithic structures that have characterized the Maltese landscape ever since.

However, what is even more striking in the insularity and isolation of this splendid cultural flowering is the fact that contacts with nearby islands, in particular imports of lithic raw materials from Sicily, Lipari and Pantelleria, were never interrupted.⁹ What one would expect in these circumstances is, of course, *not* evidence of an influence from the more advanced Bronze Age civilizations of the eastern Mediterranean, as the diffusionists used to maintain¹⁰ - that view has been discarded once for all by the radiocarbon and dendrochronology datings¹¹ - but some sort of reflection, even minimal, of the Maltese Temple culture in neighbouring lands. But we note nothing, not before the following age, the Bronze Age, in Sicily.¹²

The only faint reflections of Maltese megalithic architecture have been identified in another of the larger Mediterranean islands, much farther away, and this virtually at the end of the Maltese Temple period, namely in the *Ozieri - San Michele* culture of Sardinia around 2500 B.C.¹³ This similarity is not

8 The term used mostly by Italian archaeologists is "*Eneolitico*". Even for Sicily the copper artifacts for this period are very few, less than a handful: Tusa, Sicilia, 188-204.

9 For the sources of these imports see Trump, *Skorba*, 49-50; A. Bonanno, "A socio-economic approach to Maltese prehistory: the Temple Builders", in *Malta: Studies of its Heritage and History* (Malta, 1986), 37-40.

10 J.D. Evans, "The prehistoric culture-sequence in the Maltese archipelago", *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 19 (1953), 41-94; *id.*, *Malta*, 162-167. A very independent stand, but equally diffusionistic, was taken in the 1930s by L.M. Ugolini, *Malta, Origini della Civiltà Mediterranea* (Rome, 1934). He favoured the view of an irradiation of Mediterranean civilisation from the centre (i.e., Malta) rather than from the east: "*Ex Medio Lux*" (pp.275-278). See also *id.*, "Malta fu culla della civiltà mediterranea?", in A.A. Bernardini *et al.*, *Civiltà Maltese* (Rome, 1940), 19-33.

11 C. Renfrew, "New configurations in Old World archaeology", *World Archaeology* 2 (1970) 199-211; *id.*, *Before Civilization. The Radiocarbon Revolution and Prehistoric Europe* (London, 1973), 48-108.

12 See, however, E. Procèlli, "Il complesso tombale di Contrada Paolina e il problema dei rapporti tra Sicilia e Malta nella prima età del bronzo", *Bollettino d'Arte* 9 (Jan.-Mar. 1981), 83-110. The author derives the shape and construction technique of the Sicilian Bronze Age tombs from the megalithic temples of Malta (p.104).

13 G. Lilliu, "Rapporti architettonici sardo-maltesi e balearico-maltesi nel quadro dello ipogeismo e del megalitismo", *Atti del XV Congresso di Storia dell'Architettura. Malta 11-16 Settembre 1967* (Rome, 1970), 99-172; G. Tanda, *Arte Preistorica in Sardegna* (Sassari, 1977), 7, 27, figs. 5-20.

restricted to architecture but is further corroborated by the shapes and decorative features in the pottery of the same culture that appear to be almost identical with their counterparts of the *Tarxien* phase.¹⁴ This connection with Sardinia has prompted me to suggest the hypothesis that the Sardinian manifestations could be the product of a remnant of the population of the Maltese Temple culture which, according to the same view, would have abandoned the islands somewhat abruptly in face of extreme adverse economic and, possibly, environmental conditions.¹⁵ It should be noted, however, that the chronology for the *Ozieri* culture has now been pushed back to c. 4000-3500 B.C. by radiocarbon dating and dendrochronology calibration.¹⁶ Consequently, the relationship between the Maltese Temple culture and the Sardinian *Ozieri* one has to be rethought.¹⁷

The population that re-inhabited Malta after the middle of the third millennium carried a much more advanced tool and weapon technology - they practised bronze metallurgy - but an impressively inferior artistic and artisanal culture.¹⁸ Unfortunately, of the *Tarxien Cemetery* people we do not have any standing structures except for the dolmens which seem to be contemporary. The *Tarxien Cemetery* people may have come from Sicily or South Italy, as is suggested by the close affinities with the pottery production of *Capo Graziano* in Lipari and with other pottery from Sicilian sites like Serrafelicchio, Manfria-Zichilino and Barriera, as well as the similarities in the 'dolmen' structures.¹⁹ Ultimately, however, they and their Sicilian and South Italian cousins belong to a movement of people and trade traffic originating in the Aegean. By the third millennium B.C. the prospecting for metal, namely

14 W.M. Bray, "The Ozieri Culture in Sardinia", *Rivista di Scienze Preistoriche* 18 (1963), 173-174; Trump, *Skorba*, 46; Evans, *Prehistoric Antiquities*, 222; E. Atzeni, *La Dea Madre nelle Culture Prenuragiche* (Sassari, 1978), pls.II, IV, VI. Atzeni (pp.49, 63) sees also close similarities in the idols of the two cultures. Cfr. D. Trump, "The collapse of the Maltese temples", in G. de G. Sieveking, et al. (ed.), *Problems in Economic and Social Archaeology* (Duckworth, 1977), 608: "Suggestions of Maltese influence in the *Ozieri* culture of Sardinia are receiving little corroboration from further work".

15 Bonanno, *Socio-economic approach*, 20, 40-41.

16 E. Castaldi, "L'architettura di Biriari (Oliena-Nuoro)", *Rivista di Scienze Preistoriche* 39 (1984), 119-153.

17 I am grateful to Dr. Bert d'Aragon for calling my attention to these developments.

18 Evans, *Malta*, 168-188; *id.*, *Prehistoric Antiquities*, 224-228; Trump, *Skorba*, 43-44; L. Bernabò-Brea, "Eolie, Sicilia, e Malta nell'età del Bronzo", *Kokalos* 22-23 (1976-77), 33-111.

19 J.D. Evans, "The 'Dolmens' of Malta and the origins of the *Tarxien Cemetery Culture*", *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 22 (1956), 85-101; *id.*, *Prehistoric Antiquities*, 224; Tusa, *Sicilia*, 360-373.

copper, in the lands washed by the Mediterranean (Cyprus in the east, Spain and north-west Italy in the west) had brought about an intensive seafaring activity linking the western basin of the Mediterranean with the eastern one. The major consumers of this raw material were the more advanced Bronze Age civilisations of the Near East, Egypt and Mesopotamia, but the Cretans, followed by the Mycenaeans, soon assumed the role of middlemen in this prolific trade and eventually created their own civilisations at the inspiration from these earlier ones.

Malta does not seem to have remained, this time, completely extraneous to this intensive movement of people and goods. A dark-stone cylindrical bead found at Tarxien is inlaid with gold symbols that are identical to Minoan Linear Script characters.²⁰ The 'disk idols' from the *Tarxien Cemetery* layer are also very close to the ones found in Mycenaean centres.²¹ The 'Cyclopean' construction technique of the Borg in-Nadur fortification recalls the similar structures in the Mycenaean world.²² All this suggests cultural currents reaching Malta from the Aegean in the third millennium. A sherd of a Mycenaean IIIB cup found at Borg in-Nadur constitutes a physical import from the same area, providing proof, albeit isolated, of commerce with the Mycenaean world.²³

Further proof of this interest of the Mycenaeans in the Maltese islands comes from the literary sources: namely the identification of Malta (or, rather, Gozo) with Homer's Ogygia, the island of Calypso on which Odysseus spent six years of his *nostos*,²⁴ and the reference in Lycophron to a settlement in Malta of a group of Greek warriors on their way back home from the Trojan

20 Evans, *Malta*, 164, pl.84; *id.*, *Prehistoric Antiquities*, 145, pl.51, 10; Bonanno, *Socio-economic approach*, 39.

21 Evans, *Malta*, 175-176; *id.*, *Prehistoric Antiquities*, 161, pls. 56-57; W. Tylour, *The Mycenaeans* (London, 1964), 70.

22 Evans, *Malta*, 185; *id.*, *Prehistoric Antiquities*, 14-16, pl.I, 2-3; Tylour, *The Mycenaeans*, 110-112.

23 Tylour, *The Mycenaeans*, 106; *id.*, *Mycenaean Pottery in Italy and Adjacent Areas* (Cambridge, 1958), 79-80, pl. 8, 5; Evans, *Prehistoric Antiquities*, 17, 227, fig. 42, pl. 32.6. Another Mycenaean fragment was reported in the excavations at Tas-Silġ: F. Mallia, in *Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta, Rapporto Preliminare della Campagna 1965* (Rome, 1966), 50, pl. 35, 20.

24 R. Pfeiffer (ed.), *Callimachus* (Oxford, 1949) (reprinted 1965), 355-356, frag. 470.

25 Lycophron, *Alexandra*, 1027-1033; A. Bonanno, "Lycophron and Malta", in *Miscellanea in Onore di Eugenio Manni* (Rome, 1979), 273-276.

war.²⁵ These, as I have suggested elsewhere, could be interpreted as vague recollections of historical situations of the Greek Heroic Age.²⁶

But this age, as illustrated both by Homer's epics and by the contemporary archaeological record, is not a quiet, peaceful age. The greed for greater riches, for more control over commercial routes and the crave for power had sown the seeds of expansionistic and empire-building ambitions. These were concentrated mainly in the lands of the great civilizations of the Near East but they soon sent rippling waves which affected the central and western Mediterranean. The Bronze Age settlements of the Maltese islands, planted on high, easily defensible, flat hills and their fortifications seem to reflect these waves of insecurity and a marked change in the international climate of the central Mediterranean, as do the fortified settlements of the *Thapsos* and *Castelluccio* cultures in Sicily²⁷ and the Nuraghi villages of Sardinia.²⁸

Given the total absence of mineral resources, especially metal ores, in the Maltese geological formation it is hard to guess why the Aegean traders could have been at all interested in these islands, lying as they did far out in the open sea, away from their major trading routes along the coast of Sicily and southern Italy.²⁹ The only physical link is provided for us by what appears to be a Maltese colony planted by the *Tarxien Cemetery* people, and later sustained by the *Borg in-Nadur* people, on the island of Ognina, south of Syracuse in Sicily.³⁰ It comes naturally to postulate that the Mycenaean cup mentioned above could have reached the Borg in-Nadur village indirectly through the agency of their cousins in eastern Sicily where the archaeological evidence of Mycenaean commerce abounds.³¹

The twelfth century in the eastern Mediterranean is marked by a series of

26 A. Bonanno, "The tradition of an ancient Greek colony in Malta", *Hyphen*, iv, 1 (1983) 1-17.

27 Bernabò-Brea, *Eolie, Sicilia, e Malta*, 33-99; G. Lena, B. Basile, and G. Di Stefano, "Approdi, porti, insediamenti costieri e linee di costa nella Sicilia sud-orientale dalla preistoria alla tarda-antichità", *Archivio Storico Siracusano* iii, 2 (1988), 29-38.

28 G. Lilliu, *I Nuraghi, Torri Preistoriche di Sardegna* (Cagliari, 1962); *id.*, *La Civiltà Nuragica* (Sassari, 1982).

29 Malta is not one of the numerous places in the central and western Mediterranean with their name ending in -oussa, such as Lopadoussa (Lampedusa) and Algotoussa (Linosa), on which archaeological finds have been made testifying to the penetration of Mycenaean commerce. See S. Marinatos, "Les Egéens et les îles Gymnésiennes", *BCH* 95 (1971), 8.

30 Bernabò-Brea, *Eolie, Sicilia, e Malta*, 67-99; S. Tusa, "Sicilia e relazioni tirreniche nell'antica età del Bronzo", *Libera Università Trapani* iii, 8 (Nov. 1984), 100.

31 S. Tinè and L. Vagnetti, *I Micenei in Italia* (Fasano, 1967); Procelli, *Complessi tombali*, 83-110; Tusa, *Sicilia*, 367-373, 400-425.

political upheavals that result in the collapse of empires (the Hittites), the end of a civilization (the Mycenaean) and the beginning of the Dark Age in Greece, the destruction of important and thriving cities (Ugarit) and the emergence of new political and ethnic entities on the Syro-Palestinian coast (the Phoenicians in the north and the Philistines in the south). These rapid changes are normally attributed to the activity of the Peoples of the Sea in that area.³² So far, however, no evidence has been forthcoming from the central or the western Mediterranean that could suggest reverberations from the Sea Peoples' activity in the east. It is only four centuries later that another wave of peoples will start moving in this direction with the colonization of the western Mediterranean by the Phoenicians³³ and Greeks.³⁴

The reasons why the Greeks did not try to establish a colony in Malta escape us.³⁵ One possibility is that Malta did not offer sufficient cultivatable fertile land as the typical settlements of Sicily and South Italy did. The most logical reason, however, seems to be quite simply that they were preceded there by the Phoenicians since these had started earlier their expansion in the West. Thucydides himself says so with regards to Sicily and appears to include Malta among "the small islands adjacent" to Sicily which had been settled on by the Phoenicians before the Greeks arrived there.³⁶ Whatever the reason, with the colonization of the greater part of Sicily by the Greeks in the second half of the eighth century and the seventh century B.C. Malta assumed for the first time a strategic importance in the contest between these two commercial, as well as military, power blocs - eventually the Etruscans were to constitute a third component - for the control of the sea trade routes and of the trade itself with the native inhabitants of the lands bordering the Mediterranean. Dion agrees that the Phoenicians had already taken control of the most direct route from the east (via Crete) to the west (to Carthage and beyond) through Malta, leaving the Greeks with no other choice but to take a more northerly one,

32 N.K. Sandars, *The Sea Peoples: Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean, 1250-1150 B.C.* (London, 1985).

33 The ancient historical tradition places the beginning of Phoenician colonization in the west as early as the late twelfth century B.C. but the archaeological record does not date it beyond the eighth century: S. Moscati, *I Fenici* (Milan, 1988), 46-53.

34 J. Bérard, *La Colonisation Grecque de l'Italie Méridionale et de la Sicile dans l'Antiquité* (Paris, 1957).

35 Whether they tried to do so is not possible to tell. The sources, however, do not in any way suggest that they did. On the presumed theory of such a Greek settlement, see Bonanno, *Tradition*, 1-17.

36 Thucydides vi, 2, 6.

namely through the straits of Messina.³⁷ This view is further corroborated by the statement of the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (V, 12) that the Phoenicians selected Malta as a place to settle on precisely because "as they extended their trade to the western ocean, they found in it a place of safe retreat, since it was *well supplied with harbours and lay out in the open sea*". From now on, as a matter of fact, it is the last two factors, its excellent harbours and its pelagic position, that enhanced the island's strategic value.

Rivalries between the two commercial and military blocs, an alliance between Etruscans and the western Phoenicians on one hand, and the various alliances between Greek independent city states on the other, came to a head in the mid-sixth century, mainly over Sicily, and in Sicily. Till then all western Phoenician colonies maintained strong political, religious and cultural ties with Phoenicia, the motherland. But with the loss of the political autonomy of the latter, Carthage, the most prosperous and powerful of the western colonies assumed the role of their champion and leader. It is at this stage that the Greeks, having colonies in Cyrenaica, Sicily, southern Italy, southern France and as far west as southwestern Spain, made an attempt to break up the Carthaginian control of the southern route by planting a colony on the river Cinypus in the Syrtic gulf. But the abortive expedition of Dorieus failed to achieve its aim.³⁸

At this stage, and maybe as a follow-up to this event, it seems that the Carthaginians decided to consolidate their presence in Malta. From a port of call, the island is turned into a full-scale colony.³⁹ The sanctuary at Tas-Silġ undergoes an ambitious building programme.⁴⁰ Although we are not well informed about developments in the major settlement areas, tombs with typical Carthaginian furniture become more frequent, especially around the Rabat/Mdina promontory.⁴¹

Meanwhile, the balance of power in the central Mediterranean was broken when the Etruscans and Carthaginians decided to go each their own way, with

37 R. Dion, *Aspects Politiques de la Géographie Antique* (Paris, 1977), 65-66. See also G. Vallet, "Rhegion et Zancle", *BEFAR* 189 (1958), 3; A. Bonanno, "Malta's role in the Phoenician, Greek and Etruscan seaborne trade in the western Mediterranean", *MH* (in the press).

38 F.P. Rizzo, "Malta e la Sicilia in età romana: aspetti di storia politica e costituzionale", *Kokalos* 22-23 (1976-77), 176-177.

39 It is likely that actual colonists were sent out from Carthage, as one can detect a more direct influence of Carthaginian styles in Maltese pottery.

40 *Missione 1963-1970* (Rome, 1964-1970): sections on Tas-Silġ.

41 *Museum Annual Reports 1905-* (Malta, 1906-).

disastrous results. The Etruscans suffered a serious naval defeat by a joint force of Syracusans and Cumaeans at Cumae in 474 B.C., while Carthage entered in a long-drawn war starting with a defeat at the hands of the Syracusans in 480 at Himera. Hostilities between the Greeks and the Carthaginians were suspended only towards the very end of the fourth century probably, at least partly, in consequence of the political developments in Greece itself, namely its invasion by Alexander the Great and its incorporation within the Hellenistic empire. Carthage relinquished its isolation and opened its doors wide to Hellenistic influence, an influence which is paralleled also in Malta from the beginning of the third century onwards. We now notice much stronger trading ties with Magna Graecia.⁴² Malta, in fact, assumes a role of an important trading link on the commercial route between southern Italy and Tripolitania. Not only buildings of a type particularly favoured in Hellenized Egypt - such as the Żurriq tower - are erected at this time; not only is Greek influence seen in the changing fashions of the typical local Punic pottery style; but even the Greek language finds itself in company with the Punic one on the bilingual candelabra.⁴³

The break of the balance of power between Greeks and Carthaginians at the outset of the fifth century paved the way for the gradual emergence and eventual rise of another power in the central Mediterranean, one that was indigenous to the Italian soil and one that was destined to dominate not only the peninsula itself but the whole Mediterranean and beyond.

By 264 Rome, by a series of forced alliances, had extended its control over the whole of the Italian peninsula; the outbreak of the First Punic War in that year was clearly geared towards the domination of Sicily. During that war the Romans had to fight several sea-battles and by the end of it they had become a sea power as well as a land power. In 255 B.C. Malta, being enemy territory, was raided and its countryside devastated.⁴⁴

As yet, however, Rome did not estimate the position of this group of small islands highly enough to try to secure them; their main and only concern throughout that war (264-241 B.C.) was Sicily, though the two other large islands of the west (Sardinia and Corsica) were annexed very soon after (238 B.C.). The Carthaginians, on the other hand, in view of these heavy losses,

42 A. Ciasca, "Nota sulla distribuzione di alcune ceramiche puniche maltesi", *Bulletin Archéologique* 19 (1983) fasc. B, 23-24, n. 30.

43 *CIG*, iii, 5753; *IG*, xiv, 600.

44 Rizzo, *Malta e la Sicilia*, 183-188.

took some measures to avoid a second invasion and, possibly, an occupation of the Maltese islands: in 218 B.C. Malta was guarded by a Carthaginian garrison of 2000 men under the command of Hamilcar, son of Gisco. But this proved to be inadequate, certainly not enough to ward off a naval expedition by one of the Roman consuls who won over the archipelago, apparently without even having to fight for it.⁴⁵

In 218 B.C., therefore, Malta was incorporated within the Roman commonwealth, thus preventing it from being used as a possible base for naval military action on the southern flank. Most naturally it was included in the newly-formed province of Sicily. Though most of the Second Punic War was fought on Italian soil and, towards the end, on African soil, close to Carthage itself, one feels that the Romans must have taken some pains to prevent any of the islands from being recovered by the enemy. With the loss of all of Carthage's territorial claims outside North Africa at the end of the Second Punic War, even more so with the complete annihilation of the city itself in 146 B.C., and the ensuing creation of *provincia Africa*, which was paralleled by that of *provincia Achaia* in the east in the same year, Malta lost its last shreds of strategic significance and, as Cary observes, it hardly figured in ancient history.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, if threats from outside the empire were eliminated, those from the inside were still lurking. We do not know what role Malta played in the civil wars that brought about the collapse of the Republican constitution in Rome. Most probably it was away from it all since Cicero was considering, at one stage, going into voluntary banishment on the island,⁴⁷ but E. Coleiro suggests that coin evidence seems to imply support given to Sextus Pompeius and his fleet in his resistance against Octavian.⁴⁸ On the other hand, we have a clear statement from the same Cicero that Malta was in those times (end of

45 Livy, xxi, 51. Although archaeological investigations are far from exhaustive and building activity must have deprived us of a high percentage of the vestiges of antiquity, it should be noted that no evidence has been identified of an effort by the Carthaginians to fortify the main inhabited centres of the islands - except, perhaps, the few round towers scattered in the east and south of the island of Malta - unless the ditch and the vestiges of fortifications observed by Abela in 1647, which we normally associate with the Roman city of Melite, go back to this earlier period, which is unlikely.

46 M. Cary, *The Geographic Background of Greek and Roman History* (Oxford, 1967), 148, n.3.

47 J. Busuttill, "Cicero and Malta", *Journal of the Faculty of Arts*, iv, 3 (1971), 193-196.

48 E. Coleiro, "Ricerche Numismatiche", *Missione a Malta, 1964*, 117-127; *id.*, "Rapporti di Malta con la Sicilia nell'età repubblicana: testimonianze numismatiche e letterarie", *Kokalos* 22-23 (1976-77), 381-4.

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second to beginning of first century B.C.) regularly used as a winter base for pirates.⁴⁹ Piracy infested the Mediterranean and jeopardized commercial seafaring on all seas surrounding Italy until Pompey put a definitive stop to it in 67 B.C.

Cicero again, followed by Diodorus Siculus, with reference to Malta, gives us a picture of quiet prosperity, which is reflected in the archaeological record - in particular that of the villas scattered over the Maltese countryside - and some degree of sophistication both in the industrial production of refined textiles and in the artistically ambitious constructions, of which the Roman *domus* of Rabat is a concrete and prominent example.⁵⁰

Culturally, Malta presents itself at this point in time as the melting pot of three diverse cultures and languages. The Roman administration imposed its own language (at least for official transactions), its own official religion and, inevitably, its own artistic fashions on the Punic ones which, however, appear to have survived till the first century A.D., if not for a long time afterwards. Together with these two currents another one is mingled, the Greek Hellenistic one, which had started to filter in the whole Punic world in the third century B.C., but which grew stronger as a result of the more intensive intercourse between Sicily and the Maltese islands.⁵¹

This situation appears to have endured with little change till the beginning of the sixth century A.D. when Malta was absorbed, together with Sicily and its islands within the Eastern Empire.⁵² This impression, I hasten to add, is determined by the total absence of literary evidence to the contrary and is liable to change with the discovery of new archaeological evidence, especially epigraphic. The available epigraphic evidence, in fact, already provides us with hazy glimpses of the involvement of the islands, more precisely of Gozo, in the political intrigues and hostilities in the imperial court: the struggle for power

49 J. Busuttill, "Pirates in Malta", *MH* v, 4 (1971), 308-310.

50 A. Bonanno, "Distribution of villas and some aspects of the Maltese economy in the Roman period", *Journal of the Faculty of Arts* vi, 4 (1977), 73-81; *id.*, "L'habitat maltese in età romana", *Kokalos*, 22-23 (1976-77), 385-395; T. Gouder, *The Mosaic Pavements in the Museum of Roman Antiquities at Rabat, Malta* (Malta, 1983).

51 A. Bonanno, "Malta in the third century", in A. King and M. Henig (eds.), *The Roman West in the Third Century* (Oxford, 1981), 505-513; *id.*, "The Maltese artistic heritage of the Roman period", *Proceedings of History Week 1984* (Malta, 1986), 1-12.

52 T.S. Brown, "Byzantine Malta: a discussion of the sources", *MM*, 71-86; Bonanno, *Third century*, 505-513; *id.*, "Contiguità e continuità culturale e linguistica fra Sicilia e Malta in età prearaba", *Hyphen* v, 5 (1988), 250-252.

between the two sons of Septimius Severus in one inscription,⁵³ and that between the two tetrarchs, Constantius and Galerius, in two others.⁵⁴

On this and on other questions relating to ancient Maltese history we await impatiently the data the Maltese archaeological soil still preserves and that which the prevalent economic and administrative powers will allow it to reveal.

53 *CIL*, x, 7503; J. Busuttill, "The Geta inscription", *Journal of the Faculty of Arts* vi, 3 (1976), 273-277; Bonanno, *Third century*, 506.

54 *CIL*, x, 7507-7508.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACA	Arxiu de la Corona de Aragò
AIM	Archives of the Inquisition, Cathedral Museum, Malta
AOM	Archives of the Order of St John in Malta, National Library, Malta
ARSJ	Archivum Romanum Societatis Jesu
ASD	Archivio Storico Diplomatico, Farnesina, Rome
ASM	<i>Archivio Storico di Malta</i>
ASN	Archivio di Stato, Naples
ASP	Archivio di Stato, Palermo
ASPisa	Archivio di Stato, Pisa
AST	Archivio di Stato, Trapani
ASV	Archivio Segreto Vaticano
BCH	<i>Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique</i>
BEFAR	<i>Bibliothèque des écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome</i>
Bib. Fard.	Biblioteca Fardelliana
BL	Bodleian Library, Oxford
CA	Cathedral Archives, Cathedral Museum (Mdina), Malta
Canc.	Cancelleria
Cat.	Catalogue
Cat. Brev.	Catalogus Brevis
Cat. Trien.	Catalogus Triennalis
CIG	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum</i>
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
CMM	Cathedral Museum (Mdina), Malta
CR	Cancelleria Regia
Epist. Gen.	Epistolae Generalis
f./ff.	folio/folios
Filangieri	<i>I registri della cancelleria angioina ricostruiti con la collaborazione degli archivisti napoletani</i> , ed. R. Filangieri. Vols. 1- (Naples, 1950-)
FO	Foreign Office
IG	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i>
Lib.	Library Manuscripts Collection

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LVR	Lettere Viceregie
M	Mandati
MH	<i>Melita Historica</i>
MHSJ	<i>Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu</i>
Misc.	Miscellanea
MM	<i>Medieval Malta: Studies on Malta before the Knights</i> , ed. A. T. Luttrell (London, 1975)
NAV	Notarial Archives, Valletta, Malta
ND	Notai defunti
n.f./n.p.	no foliation/no pagination
NLM	National Library, Malta
PRO	Public Record Office, London
Prot.	Protonotaro del Regno
Sic.	Provincia Sicula [Societatis Jesu]
TRP	Tribunale del Real Patrimonio
Univ.	Università Manuscripts Collection