

TAS-SILG EXCAVATIONS

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by
DIN L-ART HELWA

During its January meeting the Council of *Din L-Art Helwa* agreed to sponsor the first campaign of archaeological excavations to be conducted this summer by the Department of Classics and Archaeology of the University of Malta. This is the first of a series of yearly excavation campaigns we plan to undertake at Tas-Silg, in the area south of the Zejtun-Delimara road. Permission for the excavations was granted by the Minister of Justice, Youth and Culture last year, after consultation with the Museums Department, the Government agency responsible for Malta's antiquities. As stipulated by the Antiquities (Protection) Act of 1925 (as amended), the excavations shall be undertaken under the superintendence of Government.

As Head of the Department of Classics and Archaeology of the University and member of the Council of *Din L-Art Helwa*, I am very pleased of this decision by the Council to involve the Society, not only in the preservation of the already existent cultural heritage of this "Fair Land", as it has been doing since its foundation 30 years ago, but also in the active development and enrichment of Malta's archaeological resource. Most departments of archaeology of universities in other countries have their own "dig", an archaeological site of some size where exploration is entrusted to them. Many universities of northern Europe and north America seek, and are assigned, such "concessions" in the archaeologically rich countries of the Mediterranean. In Italy departments of archaeology have their own excavation sites which are considered to be a service provided by the university for the state. Consequently, the state actually finances the excavations. One hopes that some day the same will be done in Malta.

The main purpose of the Tas-Silg excavation is to provide students following a degree course in archaeology

at the university with an opportunity of training in field techniques to complement their theoretical formation in the discipline. The second purpose is to provide further material evidence for a more truthful reconstruction of our nation's history, thus enriching Malta's archaeological patrimony.

Tas-Silg is one of the very few sites which has already proved to be of a multi-period nature. The excavations conducted by the university of Rome in the 1960s have revealed that the site was repeatedly - I purposely refrain from using the word *continuously* - utilised as a place of worship for thousands of years. So far the Department's excavation experience has been limited to a funerary site, the prehistoric underground cemetery at the Xaghra Circle in Gozo, although both the director and co-director of this project have had excavation experience on settlement sites of ancient Himera in Sicily and Berenice (Benghazi) in Libya and Tell Nebi Mend, ancient Qadesh, in Syria. It is high time, therefore, for our students to be exposed to an investigation of a complex site, such as Tas-Silg promises to be. Besides, with

5000 years of human activity and occupation literally sandwiched in a few centimetres of earth, the 1960s excavation was bound to present serious problems of interpretation, raising many more questions than it could answer. It is also hoped that these new excavations, even if on a completely new area of the same site, will shed new light on those questions and on other questions that riddle our history.

Finally, we are intent on conducting this excavation to the highest level possible. We want to extract from the ground every scrap of information that we can possibly manage. We have no pressures to rush us on, no pressures of time, money or career ambitions. The pace will be slow but sure. Naturally, although we are not after treasure troves or spectacular artistic finds, we shall appreciate the odd satisfaction of contributing to the already rich cultural patrimony of our country.

ANTHONY BONANNO

Professor of Archaeology
and

Head of Department of
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~~DIN L-ART HELWA HOSTS M.E.P.~~

~~Michael Elliott, Member of the European Parliament (MEP) for West London was one of the eight MEPs meeting their Malta MP counterparts at the sixth joint parliamentary group meeting held at the beginning of last November at the Holiday Inn, Sliema.~~

~~Mr Elliott was with his wife, Julie, who is his London-based secretary, and they were both guests of the editor of Vigilo on their final day free of meetings. They toured the Din L-Art Helwa headquarters~~

~~and met the Association's President and Secretary General.~~

~~Earlier they had shown great interest in the restoration works at Torri Mamu and admired the country views across St Thomas' Bay towards the Munxar peninsula. Their sight-seeing tour also included the Three Cities, Marsascala, Marsaxokk and Birzebbuga as well as Valletta of course. Michael Elliott is a member of the EU Culture and Heritage Committee.~~



~~Michael Elliott MEP and his wife on the roof of Torri Mamu~~