
Forewords

The discovery of the cemetery site at Xagħra in Gozo was indeed a stellar moment in the island's archaeological history. This and other great moments make up that narrative and all of them have left us an important legacy. Each has provided its own set of information blocks that help us to understand our past.

A glance at the contents of this publication tells us of the complexity of this site which reflects its significance not only for the Maltese Islands but for the Mediterranean and for the study of prehistory worldwide. Those who come to Malta and Gozo, be they interested tourists or professional archaeologists, can now enjoy some of the magnificent examples of the site's material culture including the extraordinary figurative sculpture. However, the academic significance and research potential of the excavation clearly goes beyond the physical remains.

This book is the tangible proof that academic collaboration coupled with a deep love of the subject

and of these islands can produce a work of great substance. The detailed examination of each area of this excavation makes this book a comprehensive study and a genuine *tour de force*. The authors should have every reason to be proud of their work and Malta should be pleased to see this amazing site recorded and published for the benefit of all.

I note that all the participants in the excavations are listed in an egalitarian way, undergraduates side by side with well-known professors, reflecting their truly concerted effort. Many of those undergraduates, including the Maltese amongst them, are now themselves professional archaeologists. For several of our students the Xagħra Stone Circle was the training ground where they first learned their craft and I feel sure that it will always have a special place in their hearts.

*The Hon. Dolores Cristina
Minister of Education, Culture, Youth & Sport*

Decoding the past is by no means an easy task. Having to do it under the scorching August sun in the central Mediterranean is a daunting task indeed.

For several months during the summer periods between 1987 and 1994, an Anglo-Maltese team made up of professionals, students and volunteers have toiled to uncover, record and preserve one of the most intriguing and interesting prehistoric sites of the Maltese Islands. The past fourteen years have been devoted to specialized analysis and study, focusing on human and animal bone, pottery, pollen, molluscs, stone implements and artefacts. The result is the present monograph report which, I am sure, will become a significant milestone in the study of Maltese archaeology.

This monograph report sheds light on the life and customs of a people who have shaped the face of Malta for thousands of years, and who have left an indelible mark on the landscape of our islands.

Once more, the small island of Gozo is at the forefront in providing invaluable information for better understanding the world famous Temple Culture of the Maltese Islands. It will help to deepen the understanding of world heritage sites such as Ġgantija, Ғaġar Qim, Mnajdra and the Ғal Saflieni Hypogeum by providing a hitherto missing link — that connecting life and death, and possibly, in the minds of these ancient people, rebirth.

It is therefore with a considerable measure of pride that, as Minister responsible for Gozo affairs, I write this message for such a unique publication.

I feel it is my duty to thank all those who worked and contributed towards the realization of this project: Dr Caroline Malone, Dr Simon Stoddart, Dr David Trump, Prof. Anthony Bonanno together with Mr Anthony Pace and the late Mr Tancred Gouder, as well as with numerous professionals and volunteers. The pivotal role of the Universities of Cambridge, Bristol and Malta is indeed praiseworthy.

A special word of thanks goes to compatriot Mr Joseph Attard Tabone whose love for Gozo, his interest in archaeology, and intensive studies have led to the conclusive re-location of this site of world importance.

The most significant finds from the Xagħra Circle are now on permanent display at the Gozo Museum of Archaeology, whose small but very interesting collection has been enhanced with the addition of truly singular artefacts from this site.

I augur that this publication will encourage a healthy debate among scholars which will help us understand better the world renowned Maltese Temple Culture.

The people of Gozo are grateful to all those who made this project possible.

*Giovanna Debono
Minister for Gozo*

It is a privilege to write a few words of introduction to this major monograph which I believe to be one of the most significant contributions in recent years to the prehistory of the west Mediterranean, and indeed to European prehistory more widely. I well remember the enormous impact which the temples of Malta and their rich finds, as well as the Hypogeum of Hal Saflieni, already had upon the interested visitor half a century ago. My own first visit was as an undergraduate in the winter of 1960, when John Evans had already published his cultural sequence for the Maltese Islands, and David Trump was undertaking his excavations at Skorba which both documented and refined that sequence stratigraphically.

Some years later, in 1966, Trump published his radiocarbon dates from Skorba, but it took the first calibration of the radiocarbon time scale by Hans Suess in 1967 to open the possibility that these great monuments of Maltese prehistory, and the Ġgantija and Tarxien cultures which sustained them, might be set many centuries earlier. By the early 1970s it had become clear that the Maltese Temple Cultures were indeed of hitherto unimagined antiquity and originality. What had already seemed prodigious achievements of the prehistoric past became yet more astonishing. They are among the earliest surviving examples of free-standing stone architecture in the world — with, until recently, only the megalithic chamber tombs of northwestern Europe able to claim a temporal priority. The problem was, however, that, with the exception of the relatively small-scale work at Skorba, no excavations had been undertaken to modern standards at any of the major sites. That great pioneer, Sir Themistocles Zammit, had done important excavation work much earlier in the century, but that was in an earlier era of archaeological research. No excavations had been undertaken which were up to modern standards, and which by careful observation and publication could help answer questions about the function of these sites or about the belief systems and ritual practices which sustained their use.

It was in 1985, during the conference on 'Archaeology and Fertility Cult in the Mediterranean', organized in Valletta by Anthony Bonnano and his colleagues, that the late Tancred Gouder raised with me the possibility of an Anglo-Maltese project that might remedy this situation. Out of those discussions and out of that aspiration the Cambridge Gozo Project emerged, with David Trump, Caroline Malone and Simon Stoddart representing the Cambridge end, and Tancred Gouder himself, supported by Anthony Bonnano and later by Anthony Pace forming the core of the Maltese element of the project. The Gozo survey and the excavations at the Ghajnsielem Road site were its first fruits. But from

the outset the remains at the so-called Xagħra Circle, near the Ġgantija temples on Gozo, had been a focus for discussion. For the drawings undertaken in the late 1820s by the German painter Charles de Brocktorff had indicated features near the Ġgantija temples on Gozo which gave tantalizing suggestions of an important site. The discovery and excavation in the early twentieth century of the great Hal Saflieni underground cemetery (hypogeum) near the major temples at Tarxien on the main island of Malta had given rise to speculation that a similar temple/cemetery relationship might have existed on Gozo. But the indications on the ground at that time of this possible counterpart on Gozo for the great hypogeum near Tarxien no longer seemed clear.

The successful confirmation by the project that the circle at Xagħra was indeed the 'Brochtorff Circle', and that it was the location of a major underground cemetery complex, in some ways parallel to the one at Hal Saflieni, must rank as one of the great moments in the archaeology of the Maltese Islands. At last it was possible to recover in their context and to study systematically considerable quantities of human remains from the period of the Maltese temples. And gratifyingly, along with the material remains, came much evidence relating to the rituals that were practised, with symbolic finds — not least the delightful and now celebrated sculpture of two small seated figures — that make serious additions to the iconographic repertoire of Maltese prehistory.

It has taken fifteen years since the completion of the fieldwork to prepare for publication all the data recovered, with a full range of specialist reports. But these days the task of gathering and compiling such data is a formidable one. Among these reports come new radiocarbon dates which confirm and document the claims earlier made for the high antiquity of the Maltese Temple Cultures. And now there is detailed information on the human bones (as well as the animal bones) which permit informed discussion of the funerary rituals involved. At last it becomes possible to analyse this remarkably original and innovative period in its wider context. The monuments of Malta have always been among the most remarkable in world archaeology. The full publication, in satisfying detail, of the new discoveries on Gozo further enhances that situation. The publication invites further discussion and opens the way to future research. Maltese and British colleagues are to be congratulated upon this culmination of a very rewarding scientific collaboration.

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