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MALTA  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
REVIEW

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## THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The Archaeological Society is formed of members with a genuine interest in archaeology in general and that of the Maltese Islands in particular. Anyone with such an interest, whether a professional archaeologist or not, is welcome to join.



The Society is concerned with all matters pertaining to archaeology. One of its principal objectives is to promote and enhance the study of archaeology at all levels. It is not a pressure group. It believes that it is only when there is a sufficient interest in, and understanding of, our archaeological heritage among the public at large, that this priceless heritage can be protected and preserved.

The Society organises meetings and seminars, some of which are open to the public, as well as site visits both in the Maltese Islands and abroad. It publishes the Malta Archaeological Review. It endeavours to maintain close relations with the Museums Department and the Department of Classics and Archaeology of the University of Malta and to support the activities of both. It also maintains a network of relations with archaeological societies and organisations abroad.

The Malta Archaeological Review welcomes the submission of papers on the subjects mentioned above. Contributors are requested to keep papers to a maximum of 2000 words but may also submit two or three illustrations. The editors reserve the right to limit the reproduction of illustrations, which are not an integral part of the text, according to availability of space.

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## THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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# MALTA ARCHAEOLOGICAL REVIEW

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# From the President

Antony de Bono

*The final year before the next Millennium might indeed be dedicated to Janus, to look back on the past as well as forward to the future.*

The refurbishment of the National Museum of Archaeology has been completed and is a tribute to the imagination, skill and determination of all concerned. The restoration of the magnificent building in which it is housed, formerly the Auberge of the Knights of Provence, is in itself a major achievement. It is always extremely difficult to accomplish the many faceted objectives of displaying any archaeological collection that does full justice to individual items as well as the whole. The important considerations of conservation and preservation of irreplaceable artefacts must surely be paramount as this entails responsibilities not only to present generations but also to those yet unborn. This of course applies with even greater cogency to the priceless monuments exposed not only to the relentless erosion of the elements, but to the even harsher depredations of man. *Tempus edax, Homo edacior.*

However, the display must also entertain and educate. The educative mode is an important but complex one. It involves exciting and holding the interest of the observer as well as explaining the relevance and context of the exhibit. Most people have a natural curiosity for the past and an early introduction to archaeology and history, if well presented, not only contributes to knowledge and insight into a person's identity, but helps to lay the foundations for an abiding interest and this in turn ensures that the community does not wantonly vandalise or neglect its cultural heritage.

The Museum cannot remain inanimate, however ancient its treasures. It is vitally important that new life should be imbued into these relics of the past by the lively interest of the present and that the Museum should be the focus of this process. The new Director and Curators have made a start, and the Society will cooperate fully with them to hold events that give life to the Museum. In addition to talks and visits to sites,

it is planned to hold a series of "Conversazioni" where the emphasis will be on discussion of short presentations.

As one of the few major tourist attractions in the Maltese Islands, quite apart from its inherent priceless nature in archaeological and cultural terms, the integrity and genuine nature of the Maltese archaeological inheritance must be preserved without vulgarisation and commercialisation. Such exploitation would indeed be short-sighted folly.

The most important issue in Maltese archaeology must surely be how to preserve the remaining neolithic temples. These unique and wonderful structures, having been exposed to the elements are deteriorating. Already in the space of a few years one has seen the dramatic collapse of two ortholiths in Mnajdra and latterly at Hagar Qim. However, this is by no means the only deterioration, and widespread if less obvious damage is slowly but surely eroding these magnificent monuments. There can be no doubt that the Tarxien, Mnajdra and Hagar Qim temples, if they are to be preserved for future generations, must be covered. Any less radical measures are clearly inadequate. As relics of world importance they merit the technical and financial help of the whole of the civilised world. Arguments about landscape impact must surely be secondary.

This number contains a paper on the medieval archaeology of the Maltese Islands. This is most welcome. It begins to fill a wide gap in our archaeological knowledge of the millennium after the end of Roman imperium. Much evidence must still lie buried in Mdina, which must have been inhabited from the earliest times and the stones of which certainly witnessed the central events of this "lost millennium".

Interest in archaeology in Malta has certainly been revived in recent years and the close cooperation between the Museums Department and the Society has no doubt contributed to this. So too has the interest and enthusiasm shown by local archaeological bodies and local authorities.

The Society organised a seminar on the theme of Archaeology in Education. The objective was to encourage the use of archaeology, its topics and techniques, as stimulating educative tools. As has no doubt happened elsewhere this was widely misinterpreted as “education in archaeology” which worthy an aim as it is, was *not*, the object of the exercise. However we shall try again.

In the last number of the Review I wrote of the silted up and filled ancient haven of Qormi (?Ormos), that today lies mainly beneath the Marsa Sports Club. Only a geophysical survey using modern equipment would give an idea of what lies beneath the surface, such as possible remains of seacraft up to four thousand years old preserved, one hopes, in the wet alluvial silt.

The amazing discovery of the largely intact remains of ten Roman era ships preserved in the alluvial mud in what was once a harbour lagoon not 500 metres from the leaning tower of Pisa, illustrates exactly what I mean. The parallel is quite remarkable. This fantastic discovery in Pisa will generate massive revenue for generations. Surely a geo-physical survey of the putative Qormi lagoon using modern technology would be well worthwhile.

What type of craft were they? As I sailor I have always been convinced that terrestrial archaeologists have always under-estimated seafaring in pre-historic times. Diana Woolner’s (1) observations on the graffiti on two ortholiths in the temple complex of Tarxien deserve re-visiting. True, they are so eroded to day – a mere forty years later – that one has to rely on her drawings. (This is in itself a condemnation of the neglect that has allowed this to happen.) However it does not require much imagination to think of seafarers whose craft were beached in the lagoon below, climbing to the temple on the hill, and making this votive gesture, no doubt with appropriate libations and sacrifices, either in thanksgiving for their safe arrival or for a safe passage.

The intrinsic evidence of the boat types portrayed conveys a sense of the genuine nature of the incised graffiti, with older types of craft in the background. How widespread the Siros type craft was is impossible to say, but there are many representations of this craft with its high prow and a possible ramp at the stern. The lead Naxos boats at the Ashmolean Museum are good

examples. However, one feature which is quite fascinating is the representation of similar craft incised by an entirely different technique – that of tapping rather than scratching! This technique has been used for graffiti in the Aegean, Naxos (2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC) as well as elsewhere. The technique was apparently developed for portrayals in hard stone such as marble. Why it should have been used on the soft Malta stone, on top of so many scratched graffiti, is a mystery. Unless seafarers used to the techniques of the Aegean naturally continued to use their familiar way of “drawing” their craft.

In a paper in this Review, David Trump poses a number of unanswered questions in Maltese archaeology. These and more will no doubt be the subject of much thought and endeavour as we move into the next millennium. Among the techniques which have already revolutionised ancient anthropology is molecular genetics, particularly the study of mitochondrial and nuclear DNA. Could this shed light on the community of pre-historic Malta? The unique collection of bones recovered from the “Xaghra necropolis” dating from the Zebbug Period (4000-3700BC) to later neolithic times could well contribute to knowledge of the extent of in-breeding or even the provenance of the population buried there.

In the past much vital knowledge has been lost, and indeed much priceless archaeological material, due to the looseness of arrangements with archaeologists from overseas. It is, of course, necessary to work with reputable archaeological teams from abroad, but clearly their obligations with respect to reports and the record of the excavation must be clearly defined. Without these any excavation is vandalism.

As we move towards the new millennium we must clearly renew our collective efforts both towards preserving the monuments and artefacts that have been found, and, as importantly, avoiding the destruction of those that have yet to be discovered. The only way to make these things happen is to ensure the interest and indeed understanding of the public at large. In this, not only the Museums Department and University, but the education authorities, local councils and the media, have key roles to play.

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# Waking up to the Sleeping Lady

Reuben Grima

*A reconsideration of some of the modes of representation used by the Maltese "Temple" culture.*

The purpose of this paper is twofold. Firstly, to question the tendency to read "Temple Period" representations as direct, straightforward scale models which represent their subject according to our modern preconceptions. And secondly, to suggest that these may instead be expressions of a highly sophisticated cognitive system of representation, which embody a different spectrum of knowledge and information, and which are sometimes more concerned with conveying perceptual sensations than correct proportions.

## *Current approaches to the "Sleeping Lady"*

The image of the "Sleeping Lady" from Hal-Saflieni must be a familiar one with whole generations of Maltese schoolchildren, to say nothing of any archaeologist with an interest in Mediterranean prehistory. Discovered in 1905 in an underground complex that was hewn out of the rock during the fourth and early third millennium BC, this figurine soon attracted international attention (Mayr 1909). It has since been reproduced in countless publications, and has become one of the focal points of any visit to the national archaeological collection in Valletta.

If we were to stand by the showcase housing the "Sleeping Lady" in its handsome new setting, and ask random visitors what they knew about this figurine, chances are we would rapidly build up a representative portrait of the ideas and preoccupations which have dominated the thoughts and efforts of archaeologists who have worked on the subject. "Mother-goddess", "Venus" and "fertility cult" are bound to be among the terms we would hear most often. Before too long, it should become clear that the questions which have been posed and argued most vigorously by archaeologists, as well as popularised with the public, are those of ritual meaning and function.

Recent reviews of the current state of the debate on anthropomorphic figurines from the prehistoric Mediterranean have shown how dominant these themes have been (Meskell 1995; Hamilton 1996; Ucko 1996). Among the issues enumerated, there is the social status and role of the people producing and using these figurines; whether these figurines represent a divinity; whether figurines found in different regions had a single conceptual origin; whether they represent a female, male or androgynous figure; patterns of production, decoration and breakage; and possible relationships with other social domains such as sexuality and agricultural production (Meskell 1995, 76-82; Hamilton 1996, 284-5; Ucko 1996, 302). All these writers express their concern that contemporary agendas such as feminism have too often resulted in misrepresentations of the evidence, and appeal for approaches which do not treat these figurines in isolation from their material and cognitive context.

Looking at this debate as an outsider, in the sense that I am not a prehistorian, there appear to me to be some issues which may have been somewhat neglected in the efforts to grasp the meaning and function of the Maltese figurines, and more specifically, of the "Sleeping Lady". To begin with, there is the problem of generalisation. As Ucko has emphasised while pointing the way for a future agenda for such figurines, we must "avoid the constricting nature of assumed monolithic classificatory categories..." (1996, 304), which have tended to swamp the idiosyncrasies of individual figurines under the discourse on collective categories and their meaning. The "Sleeping Lady" is a case in point. Although it is singled out from other Maltese prehistoric figurines by its form and provenance, it has been the subject of very little separate discourse beyond the purely descriptive. In spite of an early awareness that this figurine called for individual treatment (Zammit & Singer 1924, 78; Pace 1995, 10) we find that its interpretation is almost invariably treated collectively with that of the rest of the corpus of "Temple Period" figurines, with an emphasis on

unifying themes such as their perceived obesity. The question of the obesity of these figurines brings me to another, more central point which I feel has been somewhat neglected. The proportions of these figurines, which by modern standards appear somewhat obese, have attracted much debate and attention. The discussion on the obesity of many prehistoric figurines has for long been dominated by the "...assumption that there would have been an ubiquitous... association between obesity and fertility" (Ucko 1996, 301). This closely echoes the dominant interpretation of the obesity of the Maltese figurines: "The basic association of ideas in this mode of portrayal of the deities we may regard as the leisure and fatness which comes from power and wealth and are associated with the idea of fertility" (Zammit & Singer 1924, 77). Meskell's alternative interpretation is representative of current approaches to this issue: "From a purely representational point of view we could be witnessing *obesity* rather than *divinity*" (1995, 77). What appears to continue to be at issue is the *meaning* of this perceived fatness, that is, which of the alternative interpretations of this characteristic is the more correct one. It is taken as a fact that the figurines are indeed representing very generously proportioned figures.

### *Languages of representation*

To my thinking, a serious assumption is being made here. When we read these images as "obese", we are perhaps unconsciously bringing to bear a complex heritage of ideas, conventions and expectations on how an image should represent its subject. The development of our systems of representation today may be traced back through millennia of experiments and discoveries, which have deeply altered the way an object or figure is represented. To read a prehistoric representation with our current mind-set is to risk seeing it without removing our ethnocentric blinkers. This possibility may be worth considering because the relationship between a representation and what it represents is more susceptible to objective testing than most other cognitive processes, because by definition it is engaged in the creation of a material record of a mental process. In other words, a

consideration of the systems of representation which are being made use of in these figurines promises to be less precariously high on Hawkes' (1954) ladder of inference than many of the other questions which have often been asked regarding their meaning and purpose.

The assertion that different cultures in different periods have developed and employed different representational styles and conventions is not, of course, an original one. The issue of how different styles characterise different periods was a matter of paramount concern to a line of pioneers in the field of art history, particularly Wickhoff & Hartel (1895), Wolfflin (1899), Loewy (1900), Riegl (1901) and Panofsky (1927). Some of their most important contributions have been succinctly summarised (Witkin 1995: 1-25) and critiqued elsewhere (Gombrich 1977: 12-21). One of the ideas which emerged from this movement was Riegl's *Kunstwollen* or 'will-to-form', which essentially argued for a direct relationship between the "spirit" of an age and the representational styles current at the time. Like many original ideas which attempt to grasp with a new realisation for the first time, weaknesses in the argument left this approach vulnerable to vigorous criticism (Popper 1950, 1957 quoted in Gombrich 1977: 17, 23). The ideas and preoccupations of these thinkers went through a period of neglect during the decades following the second world war, to enjoy a revival of interest in recent years (Witkin 1995: 4).

Very little of this fundamental debate appears to have penetrated the realm of prehistoric figurine studies. While most researchers in this area have been drawn into discussion on the meaning and interpretation of these figurines, they have rarely stopped to consider the rather less ambitious question of what representational codes are in operation in their creation. Douglass Bailey's (1996) isolated effort to treat this dimension of the problem is a notable exception. Noting that "it remains the assumption of much figurine research that figurines are straightforward illustrations of the people of past worlds and their beliefs," (1996, 291), he goes on to critique and dismantle this assumption by bringing the issues of perception and illusion into the equation:



The connection between the represented object (figurine) and its representational subject (person)... is neither direct nor straightforward... To have made a figurine was to have transformed something or someone into something else. Transformation moves the subject across media (i.e. from flesh, living or dead, to fired clay) as well as altering the subject's form (Bailey 1996, 292).

Returning to the Maltese context, we find an early awareness that representational conventions may be playing an important role. Specifically on the issue of the obesity of Maltese figurines, it was long ago observed that "the fatness is represented in a highly conventionalized manner" (Zammit & Singer 1924, 77-8). In spite of this early pointer, subsequent research on the Maltese figures has only exceptionally dealt with the question of convention and style (Pace 1995).

In the specific case of the "Sleeping Lady", Zammit and Singer "...see here an extraordinary exaggeration of the secondary sexual characters" (1924, 78). This observation is closely paralleled by Bailey's comment that prehistoric figurines may "comprise only a selection of human attributes" (1996, 292). In their strategic selection of which features to represent or emphasise, figurines become "institutions and instruments for knowing (and for displaying) knowledge about the real and the artificial" (Bailey 1996, 293). In the same vein, Haaland and Haaland write:

We assume that the imaginative moulding of material objects to imitate, emphasize or elaborate the form and attributes of the human body, serve to express and foster ways of seeing and experiencing the world, understanding oneself and forming attachment to others (Haaland & Haaland 1996, 296).

What, then, is the knowledge, which "way of seeing and experiencing the world", is embodied and expressed in the Saflieni "Sleeping Lady"? Here it is suggested that the very experience, the very perception of a woman's body is at the heart of the matter. The "exaggeration" which

Zammit and Singer (and most others!) observe, particularly in the hips of this figurine, may betray the ethnocentric biases with which we have approached this figurine.

At this point it should be helpful to reconsider some of these biases. Our modes of representation today are dominated by a concern with correct perspective, a concern which is held by some to be a decisive influence on the western experience of reality since the Renaissance:

When we speak of the changes in perception that began after the twelfth century in the West, the year 1425 should be regarded as one of the most decisive in human history, for in that year (or thereabouts) linear perspective first (at least since classical antiquity) came into painter's practice... No other idea before or since has done more to shape the psychological outlook of the West... from that time until the early twentieth century, western peoples and their dominions believed that visual "reality" and geometric linear perspective were one and the same thing. (Edgerton 1991, 88).

The point is that our conception of "true" representation is dictated by the idea of a perspectively correct image, that is, one which reproduces lines and shapes in such a way that when read by the eye they produce an illusion of the optical experience of looking at the object represented (This subject has been treated extensively elsewhere; see for instance Panofsky 1927; Gibson 1950; Gombrich 1977; Edgerton 1976; Gombrich 1982; Harvey 1990; Edgerton 1991.) This mode of representation is inseparable from a history of cultural choices and constructs. It is by no means universal, as even the most cursory consideration of medieval representations should remind us; size of image reflects values such as importance and status, not optical impressions. When considering the history of human efforts at representation across different periods and cultures, perspectively correct images fall into place as a short and recent chapter. They form part of a tradition developed in the west during the present millennium, inseparable from a particular way of experiencing and organizing space, or constructing it into architectural form (Harvey 1990, 245).

## *Architectural parallels... and curves!*

Architecture may provide some clues here. The most enduring evidence of the “Temple Period” culture is the structures that they built or excavated, and it is to these that we must turn. These structures differ from ours today in several fundamental ways, which may be indicative of different ways of treating and perceiving space and form. Curvilinearity is a dominant characteristic throughout these structures. Sub-circular apses are added to other sub-circular apses when larger spaces are required. Buildings are never laid out on an angular plan. Even megalithic orthostats have been described as appearing “...to swell slightly, like the sag of a soft cheese, giving an impression of comfortable solidity” (Trump 1972, 29).

In the Hal-Saflieni Hypogeum, this curvilinearity is even more inescapable in all three dimensions. Walls and ground are often inseparable, not meeting in a joint but forming part of a single curve. The skeuomorphic imitations of a temple interior that characterise the Hypogeum are particularly noteworthy here. These representations of a megalithic interior, carved out of the living rock, are a novel and remarkable sculptural and conceptual achievement in themselves. They are most often quoted as a fossil-index of temple structures and their roofing systems (Ceschi 1939). However, what concerns us here beyond their importance as a passive record of contemporary megalithic architecture is *how* this representation is undertaken, and what representational codes may be detected here. Having the possibility of comparing the remains of the original structures themselves to this contemporary reproduction tantalisingly suggests that we may be able to catch glimpses of how a subject is transformed into a representation, and with what degree and nature of artistic license to depart from or follow the original.

There is, in fact, a distinct difference between these sculptures and the buildings they imitate, which may be observed clearly and repeatedly. This is the bending of vertical lines representing orthostats and pillars, which repeatedly bulge outward away from the centre of the architectural composition, to create a fish-eye effect. The

optical impression that this creates is one of spaces which appear rather wider and higher than they are in reality. One of the most remarkable things about this formula is its resemblance to Panofsky’s description of how the retinal image reads straight lines as curves (1927, 32-36). These sculptured representations may in fact be as concerned with reproducing sensory impressions of contemporary megalithic architecture as with being accurate in perspective and scale. The “distortion” of the vertical lines, while departing from a modern conception of “precise” reproduction of temple architecture, may give us access to another way of “knowing”, of conceiving and perceiving, these buildings.

Hints of the same phenomenon may also be observed in other, miniature representations of megalithic architecture. The door-jamb in the fragmentary model of a temple facade found at Tarxien appears to have a similar outward curve, which may also be detected on both the doorjambs of the tiny model of a megalithic structure in the round from Ta’ Hagra. The facade model from Tarxien also has a pronounced, overhanging curve on the surviving outer corner. It is worth noting that Ceschi’s (1939, 40-4) hypothetical reconstruction of the facade of the Tarxien temples, while resting heavily on the information provided by this particular model, edits out this pronounced outward curve. In the reconstruction, Ceschi proposes a structurally more plausible vertical edge right up to the cornice, which only juts out in the top two courses.

The evidence that has been quoted is admittedly fragmentary. Collectively, however, it allows us some glimpses into the stylistic conventions which dictate the model representations of the later “Temple Period”. As representations of architecture allow us to make some comparison between subject and image, one can actually observe how the stylistic treatment alters the subject. What emerges is a tendency to curve lines to wrap them around the viewer. Door-jambs curve outwards at their mid-point, and curve inwards above and below. External walls are represented as curving outwards to hang over the viewer. The overall effect is the accentuation of sensory experiences through the bending of lines. The sensation of a building towering over

the viewer is conveyed by the outward curve of the façade model from Tarxien. The curved orthostats in the Hypogeum replications of temple interiors and in the entrances of the models also accentuate such sense-impressions. This treatment is in fact remarkably close to Panofsky's description of what he terms the "retinal image":

The orthogonals of a building, which in normal perspective construction appear straight, would, if they were to correspond to the factual retinal image, have to be drawn as curves. Strictly speaking, even the verticals would have to submit to some bending (Panofsky 1927, 33).

Here then we have a treatment which appears to be more concerned with conveying and accentuating perceptual *sensations and impressions* than with being precise in *scale or proportions*. As noted earlier with Bailey, such representations may give us some understanding of other, past ways of knowing and experiencing reality. The images we are considering here allow us glimpses into some of the modes in which the people of the Maltese temple culture conceived, experienced and represented space and form. It is against this background that I shall now return to the "Sleeping Lady" once more.

### **Conclusion: The "Sleeping Lady" as tactile representation**

One of the most striking features of this figurine is the realistic representation of certain anatomical details, such as the hollow of the back between the shoulder-blades, or the carefully observed yield of the flesh in areas which appear to be taking the weight of the reclining figure (Caesar Attard and Dennis Vella, personal communications). At the same time, however, the "extraordinary exaggeration of the secondary sexual characters" (Zammit & Singer 1924, 78) may be less naturalistic in execution. The curious combination of "small waist, exaggerated bust and hips..." has prompted the alternative possibilities that it may represent a pathological deformity, or "a specialized and local form of art" (Zammit & Singer 1924, 78). It is this second alternative which has been pursued here.

The representational codes and devices that have been observed in architectural representations of the same culture may also be relevant to figurative representation. It is suggested that the "Sleeping Lady" may in fact also be giving more importance to embodying perceptual sensations than precise scale or proportions. The problematic "extraordinary exaggeration" of her hip, which has been almost invariably read as obese at best, pathological at worst, is a mesmerically sensuous representation of the *tactile* sensation of feeling a woman's hip. It is not "correct" in its scale or proportions because it is not trying to be; the very concept of precise scale or proportions may have been quite meaningless in this culture. Instead, it is another expression of another way of knowing, another way of experiencing, which we have already caught glimpses of while considering architectural representations. It is not trying to produce a photographic or perspectively precise impression, but may be operating instead on another plane, where it embodies tactile knowledge and sensation. The gorgeous swelling of the hip as it soars in its splendid impossibility from its narrow waistline, is in its own way a faithful rendering of the physical sense-experience of the female anatomy.

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*For colour plates illustrating this article see centre pages.*

# Of Greeks and Arabs and of Feudal Knights

Alessandra Molinari & Nathaniel Cutajar

*A preliminary archaeological exposure of Malta's perplexing Middle Ages*

In 1999 the National Museum of Archaeology started developing plans to open a new wing dedicated to the medieval archaeology of the Maltese Islands. A few basic problems became immediately apparent to the curators of the new display.

The core problem lay in the paucity of available data on Malta's medieval archaeology for the millennium spanning the 6th to the 16th Centuries AD and in the resulting absence of a scientific consensus as to the actual import of Malta's medieval past.

Should Malta's Middle Ages, with its unusual mixture of Eastern and Western influences, be presented as an insular affair, a matter only of parochial/national interest? Or can it be represented as a significant phenomenon within the broader context of the medieval Mediterranean?

It is probably fair to say that most historical studies tend to picture Malta's medieval past in terms of an idiosyncratic local development. For example, the survival of Maltese as a spoken idiom is explained largely in passive terms - the language just happened to survive because of the Island's marginality. No active social or cultural reasons have been identified for the inexplicable survival of an Arab dialect through 900 years of Western Christian rule<sup>1</sup>.

Such a passive and introverted vision of Malta's medieval past is largely due to the quality of the surviving historical evidence. Most of the documentary evidence is very late in date and almost none of it can be truly said to represent an "autochthonous Maltese" point of view. The available documentary evidence describes Malta's medieval reality through the eyes of foreign chroniclers, rulers and administrators. The Maltese themselves are voiceless in this type of archival documentation<sup>2</sup>. Hence the historiographic impression that the medieval

Maltese man and woman were passive protagonists in a marginal historical drama - clearly a historical misrepresentation.

The Museum should try to present a holistic narrative of these difficult centuries, integrating the perspectives of all the relevant social, ethnic and cultural groups. This is possible because the archaeological record is objective and substantive, throwing light indiscriminately on the literate elites as well as on the non-literate masses.

Medieval Archaeology has over the last 20 years made great strides forward in the Western Mediterranean. Spain and Sicily in particular have become a focus of research into the overlapping cultures of Byzantium, Islam and the Latin West. The Maltese Middle Ages fall squarely within this pattern of overlapping cultures, with one particularity - while Spain and Sicily have over the centuries undergone a thorough process of Latinisation, Malta is unique in retaining to this day a basically mixed cultural reality. Speaking an Arab dialect but professing a Latinised ethos, Malta preserves a situation of mixed social and cultural traits that was once widespread throughout the medieval Mediterranean.

Explaining this process in the Museum display may however prove difficult on account of the lack of secure archaeological data for the local Middle Ages. Systematic excavation of medieval sites in Malta has been sporadic - the most noteworthy being the investigation of an Islamic cemetery at Rabat (1922), the excavations at Tas-Silg (1963/70) and those at Hal Millieri (1977). Beyond such episodic events, no holistic study of the local medieval heritage has been attempted.

This situation prompted the Museum of Archaeology to start a re-evaluation of the medieval ceramic assemblages kept in the reserve collection of this institution. A first stage of this initiative was conducted by the present authors on behalf of the Museum in June 1998

and involved a rapid review of the imported medieval wares that could be identified within the Museum collection. Twenty-six such assemblages were inspected in all from Mdina, Cittadella and from various rural sites and inland harbour waters<sup>3</sup>. All relevant ceramic pieces were then inventoried and analytically described.

Some of the conclusions drawn from this survey are described below by way of a preliminary report. These results should be treated with caution since the available archaeological data remains severely inadequate. Many important medieval sites in Malta have never been archaeologically excavated. Particularly poor is the archaeological record for the rural settlement. No data is available for the medieval township of Birgu in Malta, or for the urban suburb of Rabat in Gozo. Furthermore, some of the medieval material currently held by the Museum is drawn from poorly understood archaeological contexts.

In spite of these limitations the present study did identify a number of key characteristics regarding the importation and consumption of ceramics in medieval Malta. As more research is completed and as new medieval strata are excavated, it will become increasingly possible to confirm or review these preliminary results.

### *Preliminary Results*

The medieval ceramics of the Maltese Islands may be conveniently grouped into four chronological periods which may in turn be broadly associated with political and historical labels. These groupings may be roughly described as follows :

- ◆ the 6th to 9th Century AD (Byzantine)
- ◆ the 10th to 11th Century AD (Islamic)
- ◆ 12th to 13th Century AD (Norman/Swabian)
- ◆ the 14th to 15th Century AD (Angevin/ Aragonese).

Radical changes in the distribution and supply patterns of fine ceramics have been noted to occur at every transition from one chronological group to the next (see Table). The following account will highlight the general trends observed in the changing local ceramic record and set them within a Mediterranean context.

• **Late Roman/Byzantine** - In the 6th and 7th Centuries there is a remarkably high incidence of imported wares in Malta and Gozo involving both fine tableware - Late Roman Red Slipped Wares - Hayes 104, 105, 109 - various oil lamp typologies as well as amphorae from North Africa, South Italy and from the Eastern Mediterranean. The presence in Malta of amphorae from Byzantine-held areas continued well into the 8th and possibly 9th Centuries<sup>4</sup>.

Byzantine ceramics have been detected at Mdina, Cittadella, Tas-Silg, and Marsa as well as in marine contexts at Marsascalea and Xlendi. The evidence so far suggests that Byzantine activity is detectable mainly around harbours and in urban settlements.

Evidence for Byzantine settlement in the rural areas is so far restricted. Only a small ceramic scatter has been recorded at San Pawl Milqi. This negative datum is probably due to insufficient archaeological fieldwork<sup>5</sup>.

Nonetheless, the hitherto unsuspected presence in significant numbers of ceramics from the Byzantine period in Malta is a feature of regional significance, providing important new data on the little understood transformation of Mediterranean commerce in the era going from the fall of the Roman Empire to the rise of Islam (6th/9th Centuries). The evidence from Malta for the 7th/8th Centuries appears to be exceptionally rich, particularly when compared to the scanty recovery of Byzantine wares throughout the Western Mediterranean.

In mainland Italy the importation of Byzantine wares in the Late 6th and 7th Century is restricted to a few urban and military centres - such as Rome, Naples, Otranto and St. Antonino di Pertini (Liguria). By the 8th Century even this trickle of Byzantine supplies to mainland Italy seems to have run dry.

The record for the Maltese Islands (as for Sicily) is substantially different. The Islands seem to gain strategic importance for the Byzantine Empire and consequently continue receiving a steady flow of supplies (in amphorae and tableware) from other areas of the Empire right into the 8th Century. The attested presence of a *drungarius* (governor of a naval base) in 7th/

8th Century Malta further strengthens the idea that the Islands occupied an important position within the Byzantine strategy for the Central Mediterranean<sup>6</sup>.

Very few ceramics have been recovered for the 9th and early 10th Centuries, with the possible exception of some amphorae shapes belonging to a late Byzantine tradition, discovered at Tas-Silg and Mdina. It should however be acknowledged that the ceramic production of this period is little understood even in Sicily.

• **Islamic** - Ceramics pertaining to the Late 10th and to the 11th Centuries have been identified at Mdina, Cittadella, Tas-Silg and at San Cir. The imported ceramics of this period include glazed wares (typologically attributable either to North Africa or to Sicily) and amphorae (probably Sicilian productions). The commerce in edible goods within amphorae, as attested in Malta, is a sparsely documented occurrence in the Central Mediterranean at this period.

The imported wares - both amphorae and fine ceramics - appear to be reaching both the urban and the rural settlements of the period. However the presence of Islamic wares at Mdina is so far more plentiful.

The evidence seems to indicate that in the 10th/11th centuries, Malta was fully integrated within the cultural and economic systems of the Islamic Mediterranean. Contrary to what some Arab chroniclers maintain, Mdina is clearly occupied throughout the 11th Century, and possibly in the Late 10th Century as well. It is, however, still not possible to say whether the Islamic urban and rural settlements followed closely on those of the preceding Byzantine one.

• **Norman and Swabian** - Ceramics from the 12th to the first-half of the 13th Century appear to be rather numerous and widely distributed, being documented at Mdina, Cittadella, Tas-Silg, San Gwann Tal-Ghargar and at Marsa. In this period the Islands are supplied with fine table wares from a variety of locations throughout the Mediterranean. In the 12th Century the main bulk of glazed wares appears to be reaching Malta from Sicily together with minor contributions from the Campania region and from an unknown site in the Eastern

Mediterranean. No North African wares appear to be reaching the Islands during this period.

As from the end of the 12th Century the provenance of fine table wares becomes even more varied, partly as a result of the decline in production of the Sicilian kilns. This period is characterised by the presence of Tunisian majolica (**Cobalto e Manganese**), one shard of early Spanish lusterware, **Protomaiolica Brindisina**, **Ramina Manganese e Rosso (RMS)** from South Italy, **Spiral Ware** from Campania, **Gela Ware** from SE Sicily, together with a possible continuation of Eastern Mediterranean **Slipped and Glazed Wares**.

Glazed cooking wares appear to be imported throughout this period from the Messina area, as well as Sicilian amphorae.

As with the preceding period, the entire range of imported ceramics was still reaching both the urban and the rural sites.

The spread of ceramics identified so far in Malta is highly compatible with the situation existing in this period in Sicily - at such sites as Segesta, Entella, Marsala and Mazara - indicating that the Maltese Islands were heavily integrated in the economic patterns established throughout the Tyrranean region.

• **Angevin and Aragonese Malta** - Fine table wares from this period have been documented at Mdina, Rabat, Cittadella, and Tas-Silg.

This period is characterised by a drastic restriction in the range of fine table wares available for local consumption, while the trade in amphorae stops altogether. The main body of imported fine wares originate from Sicily (**Maiolica Decorata in Bruno**), while rarer pieces of lusterware testify to the importation of ceramics from Spain (**Late Valencian Lusterware** and **Tipo Pula**). The only exception to this pattern are so far a few shards of possibly Calabrian slipped ware, and a single shard of **Graffita Archaica Tirrenica** from Savona (probably found at Rabat, Malta).

In spite of this restriction in the range of suppliers, the presence of fine ceramics is plentifully attested for the 14th Century.

In contrast, there is a marked lack of imported fine wares from the second half of the 15th Century to the 16th Century.

The evidence so far suggests that this period witnessed an increase in the production of handmade decorated ceramics, often covered with red or white slips and paints, or with appliqués and painted geometric motifs. The presence of such decorated wares appears to be higher in Gozo than in Malta - at such sites as Cittadella and at Mixta. Local decorated wares are also attested in 14th and 15th Century strata at Hal Millieri.

The lack of imported fine table wares together with the possible increase in hand-made productions seems to indicate that the late Aragonese era was a period of radical economic change. The archival documentation of the 15th and early 16th Century attest to the existence of a growing economic strain on late Maltese feudal society due to the insufficiency of existing agricultural resources to meet the demands of the local population<sup>7</sup>.

This situation of economic duress is clearly illustrated in Table 1, where the presence of imported wares is noticeably much more scarce in the lower end of the matrix - particularly in Gozo and in the countryside. Mdina still retains a fair scatter of largely Spanish fine wares indicating its leading economic position within Late Feudal Malta.

### *Synthesis of the Data*

This review of Malta's medieval archaeological record has highlighted some of the ways in which the Islands' relationship with the rest of the Mediterranean region changed, often drastically, during the millennium going from the 6th to the 16th Centuries AD.

Up to the 8th and 9th Century the Maltese Islands' role appears to have been strongly dictated by the Byzantine Empire's political, economic and military interests. A substantial amount of resources from Byzantine-held lands - represented by a heavy presence of commercial amphorae - transited through the Maltese harbours between the 6th and the 8th Centuries, and possibly even later. Some of these transiting

amphorae were utilised to supply the local inland strongholds (as suggested by the Mdina and Cittadella scatters). However it is yet to be understood what exactly these large numbers of Byzantine amphorae in Malta signify in political and economic terms.

In the Islamic period the military / strategic role of the Islands appears to be less predominant than in the Byzantine period. During the late 10th/11th Century the Islands appear to have become fully integrated in the prosperous economic situation enjoyed by the Maghreb and by Sicily under the Kalbid Dynasty's rule. The considerable presence of both Sicilian and Tunisian fine wares in 10th/11th Century Malta could indicate that the Islands were involved in the heavy trade that was then transiting through the Central Mediterranean area.

Under Norman/Swabian rule the Maltese Islands still received considerable amounts of imported wares that reached both the urban and the rural settlements. The major difference lies in the cutting off of commercial links with the Maghreb area in favour of a Tyrranean connection. The documented political ascendancy of the Maltese Islands by Genoese mercantile and military interests during this period may explain in part this switch in trading strategies.

The lively commercial activity detected for the Islamic and Norman periods is overtaken during the 14th/15th Centuries by an apparently rigid autarchic economy and by the virtual truncation of importation of Sicilian, Italian and Maghrebi ceramics. The mass of the ceramics consumed in this period consist of local, hand-made productions.

Furthermore, a distinction appears to have grown between the material lifestyle enjoyed by the largely Spanish feudal families residing at Mdina and the remainder of the Maltese population. This situation could indicate that Aragonese Malta had over a relatively short period transformed itself into an inward-looking, economically impoverished community. The ravages of war resulting from the Sicilian Vespers and the possible visitations of the plague may account in part for this economic inversion. However a social explanation for this decline may be equally valid, particularly when one



considers the considerable drop in consumption levels noticed between Mdina and the rest of the Islands.

The above reading of the Maltese Middle Ages is in some respects close to what we already know from archival sources. In many other ways, however, the archaeological and the archival sources are at variance. For example, the prosperity noted in the archaeological record for the 10th to 13th Centuries is nowhere indicated in the surviving documentation. On the other hand the prosperity that must have been generated in the 14th and 15th Century by the trade in cotton and cumin is simply not reflected in the archaeological data so far available.

Clearly much remains to be done. The above observations can only hint at the complexity of Malta's Medieval archaeology and what sort of issues need to be most urgently addressed. Continued study of the available assemblages, the development of topographical surveys and the excavation of new sites will allow us to better define the dynamic economic, demographic and cultural changes that characterised this period. This confident approach towards the study of Malta's unwritten history will, it is hoped, be reflected in the new Medieval display being planned for the National Museum of Archaeology.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Notable exceptions may however be found, as in Brincat 1991 and Wettinger 1993 which describe the development of the Maltese language within a specifically historical and cultural context.
- <sup>2</sup> This point is brought out clearly in Dalli 1994.
- <sup>3</sup> The authors gratefully acknowledge the extensive assistance provided by Prof.ssa A.Ciasca, Dott.ssa B.Bruno and Dott. C.Capelli of the Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta. Besides facilitating the review of the relevant ceramics from the 1960's excavation, they have also kindly supplied many as yet unpublished excavation results and assisted in the study and identification of the amphora remains from Tas Silg, Mdina and Cittadella.
- <sup>4</sup> The information on Byzantine ceramic imports draws heavily on the as yet unpublished research of Dott.ssa B.Bruno of the Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta.
- <sup>5</sup> In fact recent fieldwork on Late Roman funerary hypogea - as at the Tal-Barrani - suggests that a number of rural funerary sites were still active right into the 6th and 7th Centuries.
- <sup>6</sup> See Pertusi 1977.
- <sup>7</sup> See Wettinger 1982 for the resort to usury practices due to the drastic rise of land prices in the 15th Century.

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Table illustrating the incidence of different classes of imported medieval ceramics in various Maltese sites from the Late 10 to the 15th Centuries

URBAN SITES												RURAL SITES				
MDINA / RABAT									CITTADELLA / RABAT							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
ISLAMIC MALTA 10th/11th Cents.																
1			□		□				□			●		●		
2														●		
3														□		
4			□				□							●		
5														●		
6			□			●		□	●			●		●		●
NORMAN / SWABIAN 11th/13th Cents.																
7			●			●		□	●							
8							□		●			●	□			□
9			□					□	●			●	□			
10									●							□
11	□								●		□					
12							□	●	●			●				□
13								●	●		□	□				
14									●			□				●
15			□					□								
16									●							●
17									□							
18									●							
19								●	●			●				□
20									●							
ANGEVIN / ARAGONESE 13th/15th Cents.																
21												●				
22	□	●		□	●	□		●	●			●				
23								□								
24											□					
25								●			●					
26		●														
27								□			□					
28		●		□	□			□			□	●				
29								□								

Key:  
 □ =single sherds recovered  
 ● =multiplesherds recovered

The numbers in the vertical axis (Table I) refer to the main classes of imported medieval ceramics identified so far in the Maltese Islands, in chronological order as listed opposite.

The numbers in the horizontal axis (Table I) refer to the principal archaeological sites in which imported medieval ceramics have been securely identified. They are arranged according to settlement type as listed in Table II.

Table I

Settlement Classes	Archaeological Investigated
URBAN SITES	MDINA / RABAT
	1. Inguanez Str., Mdina 2. Magazine's Str., Mdina 3. Palazzo Gatto Murina, Mdina 4. Cathedral Museum, Mdina 5. Saqqajja, Rabat 6. Unprovenanced Lot # 1 7. Unprovenanced Lot # 4 8. Unprovenanced Lot # 5 9. Unprovenanced Lot # 6
	CITTADELLA / RABAT
	10. Forman Str., Victoria 11. Cittadella Excavations 12. Ta' Lambert
RURAL SITES	13. Tas-Silg 14. San Pawl Milqi 15. San Cir 16. San Gwann Tal-Gharghar 17. Marsa Waterfront

The four unprovenanced assemblages included in Table II are fairly securely attributable to the Rabat area - Lot # 4 from F. Mallia's 1960's excavations at Saqqajja, and Lots # 1, 5 and 6 from Temi Zammit's investigations at the Roman Villa.

Table II

The main classes of imported medieval ceramics so far identified in the Maltese islands, in chronological order:

1. Dipinta Sotto Vetrina  
- 10th / 11th Cent.
2. Invetriata Monocroma  
- 10th / 11th Cent.
3. Smaltata Bianca  
- 10th / 11th Cent.
4. Vasi con Filtro Acromi o Dipinti  
- 10th / 11th Cent
5. Ceramica Acroma  
- 10th / 11th Cent.
6. Anforae di Tipo Siciliano  
- 10th Cent. / 13th Cent.
7. Vasi con Filtro Acromi  
- 11th / 13th Cent.
8. Dipinta Sotto Vetrina  
- late 11th / first-half 12th Cent.
9. Invetriata Monocroma  
- 11th / 12th Cent.
10. Invetriata Campana  
- 12th Cent.
11. Solcata Sotto Vetrina Verde  
- 12th / early 13th Cent.
12. Cobalto e Manganese (C&M)  
- last-quarter 12th / third-quarter 13th Cent.
13. Dipinta sotto vetrina (Officine C& M)  
- last-quarter 12th / third-quarter 13th Cent.
14. Ingobbiata Sotto Vetrina  
(Eastern Mediterranean ?)  
- 12th / first-half 13th Cent.
15. Spiral Ware  
- late 12th / first-half 13th Cent.
16. Marsala Ware  
- 12th / 13th Cent.
17. Early Spanish Luster Ware  
- 12th / 13th Cent. (?)
18. Ramina, Manganese e Rosso (RMR)  
Southern Italian - 13th Cent.
19. Gela Ware and co-related productions  
- 13th Cent.
20. Protomaiolica Brindisina  
- first-half 13th Cent.
21. Protomaiolica or Dipinta sotto Vetrina,  
Southern Puglia - 13th / 14th Cent.
22. Maiolica Siciliana Decorata in Bruno  
- end 13th/ 14th Cent.
23. Dipinta Sotto Vetrina  
(Officine Maiolica Dipinta in Bruno)  
- end 13th / 14th Cent.
24. Graffita Arcaica, Savona  
- 13th / 14th Cent.
25. Ingobbiata e Dipinta in Verde, Bruno  
e Rosso sotto Vetrina, Calabria (??)  
- 14th Cent.
26. Maiolica Monocroma Bianca, Sicilian (?)  
- 14th / 15th Cent.
27. Spanish Luster Ware 'Tipo Pula'  
- 14th Cent.
28. Late Spanish Luster Ware, Valenzia  
- first-half 15 Cent.
29. Loza Azul, Spain - First-half 15th Cent.

*For colour plates illustrating this article see centre pages.*

# Sulla Rotta dei Fenici

*Auberge de Provence, Valletta*

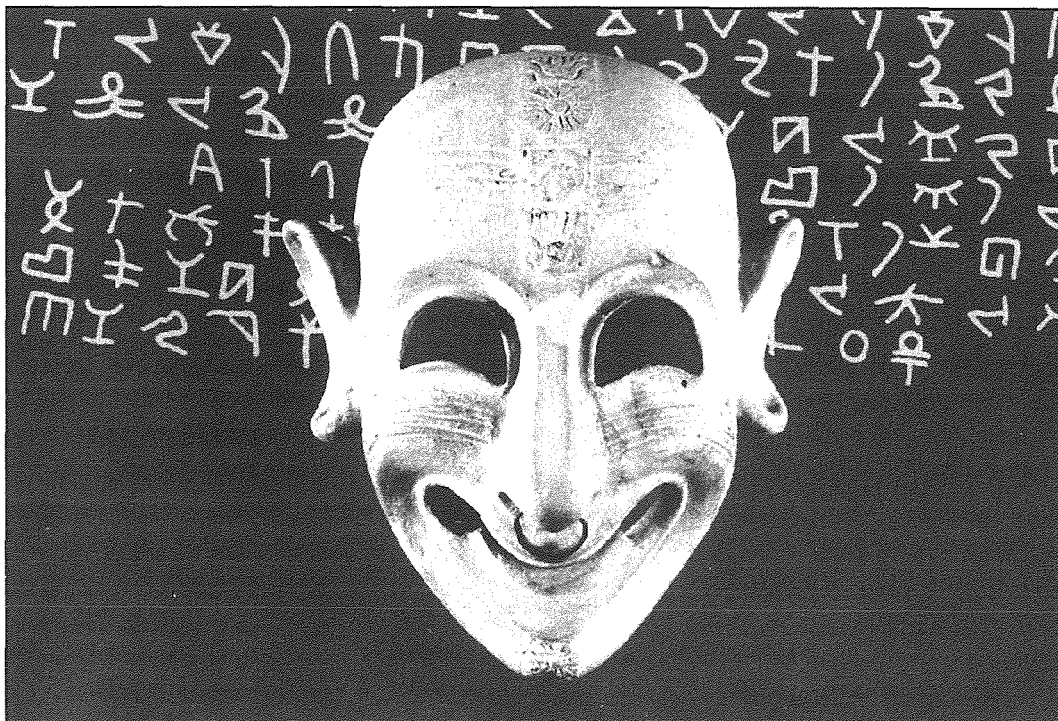
*3rd November - 20th December 1998*

An impressive international exhibition aimed at illustrating the wide-ranging Mediterranean nature of Phoenician mercantile and colonial activity and included a range of fine examples of Phoenician jewellery, ceramics and sculpture from sites in the Central and Western Mediterranean basins: Sardinia, Sicily and from the Maltese Islands.

The exhibition was jointly organised by the National Museum of Archaeology, and the Ministry for Education and National Culture; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the *Istituto Italiano di Cultura a Malta*; the *Ministero degli Affari Esteri*; and *Associazione Civita*. A full-colour

catalogue was also published with the help and sponsorship of The Malta Experience.

The event drew much attention, particularly from the Maltese public. The didactic impact of the event was further heightened by means of a public seminar held at the Auberge de Provence on the 2nd of October on the theme of Phoenician Archaeology. Three talks were given by Prof. Enrico Acquaro, Professoressa Antonia Ciasca and by Dr. Tancred Gouder. The texts of the latter two are published by the MAR in commemoration of this interesting evening dedicated to the furthering of Phoenician archaeology.



# Accenni su Malta Fenicia

Tancred Gouder

È giusto dire che il fascino esercitato dai Fenici fu derivato soprattutto dalla tradizione biblica e da quella romana, da Tito Livio e da Virgilio in poi.

Ma nel secolo scorso l'entusiasmo per le grandi scoperte archeologiche - soprattutto la scoperta di Troia e delle più affascinanti testimonianze della civiltà Cretese-Micenea - l'avvenuta decifrazione dei geroglifici egiziani, le stesse conseguenze della spedizione napoleonica in Egitto (si ricorda che la notissima 'Stele di Rosetta' che consentì allo Champollion di decifrare i geroglifici faceva parte del bottino di guerra importato in Francia) tutti questi fatti accesero gli interessi per le più antiche culture soprattutto del Mediterraneo, ma anche degli altri bacini culturali. Fu appunto nel secolo scorso che si cominciarono a studiare le civiltà precolombiane d'America; fu nel secolo scorso che l'Erman introdusse il metodo storico nel campo dell'Egittologia moderna; e fu nel secolo scorso che emerse un'interesse nuovo per i Fenici, per questo popolo di commercianti e di navigatori, così stranamente sparpagliato in diverse culture: quelle di Cartagine, quelle di Biblo, Sidone, Tiro e via dicendo. Questo rinnovato entusiasmo - che portò addirittura alla scoperta di una civiltà completamente scomparsa (la civiltà degli Ittiti che gettò nuova luce su tutta una serie di problemi storici sino ad allora quasi insolubili) così riaccese e rianimò le ricerche relative alla civiltà dei Fenici. Si fecero scoperte più importanti, si riportarono alla luce documenti archeologici di straordinaria importanza, si cominciò a guardare ai Fenici sotto nuove e più valide prospettive.

La stupenda mostra dedicata ai Fenici nel 1988 e allestita a Venezia a Palazzo Grassi, ha ulteriormente eccitato questo interesse per la civiltà di quel popolo e lo ha rieccitato non solo a livello di pubblico. In quell'occasione non solo si sono posti in evidenza straordinaria alcuni degli aspetti che la tradizione già attribuiva a quella civiltà e a quella cultura, ma si è anche fornito ricco e valido materiale per stabilire sui Fenici una importantissima serie di verità oltre che per inquadrare in modo nuovo alcuni fondamentali problemi.

I Fenici non costituirono mai una vera nazione, né uno stato unificato, ma investirono ugualmente un ruolo storico e culturale notevolissimo nelle vicende del Mediterraneo antico. In confronto ai grandi imperi del Vicino Oriente Antico - autentiche potenze quali Babilonia, Assiria, o la Persia - la Fenicia, culla storica di questo popolo, appare come un raggruppamento di singole città-stato portuali nel Mediterraneo, piccoli e deboli regni spesso in concorrenza tra loro anche se continuamente minacciati da vicini aggressivi e potenti. Praticamente prive di entroterra e di materie prime, città come Biblo, Tiro, Sidone ed altri centri urbani furono spinti dalla loro posizione geografica e dagli eventi storici a fondare in gran parte la propria sopravvivenza sulla navigazione e sul commercio. In tale ambito, infatti si espresse al massimo delle sue capacità il 'genio' fenicio, fatto di spirito di iniziativa e di inventività, ma anche secondo gli autori greci e latini di furbizia, perfidia e di inganno. Cartagine e le numerose colonie fenicie nel bacino mediterraneo receperono questa eredità fenicia, prolungando ed estendendo fino all'Africa nera, al di là delle colonne d'Ercole (cioè lo stretto di Gibilterra) l'impero commerciale punico che dovette ultimamente scontrarsi con le ambizioni di Roma.

Nella mostra "Sulle Rotte dei Fenici" - organizzata dall'Associazione Civita, dall'Istituto Culturale Italiano a Malta e dal Museo Nazionale di Archeologia a Malta - che sarà aperta domani, si è cercato come in quella allestita a Palazzo Grassi nel 1988 di far rivivere i Fenici ed i Punici (cioè i Fenici delle colonie occidentali, così definiti in base al termine latino Poeni) la loro vita quotidiana, la loro cultura, le loro attività, all'incirca dal 1200 fino al 146 a.C., data della distruzione di Cartagine ad opera dei Romani alla fine della terza Guerra Punica. Ma è indispensabile considerare questi due termini cronologici come punti di riferimento in parte convenzionali. La città di Biblo con i suoi tesori rinvenuti nelle tombe reali e nei santuari (notevolmente le tombe di Abi-Shemu e suo figlio Ypshemu-Abi c.1840-1785 a.C.) conosce

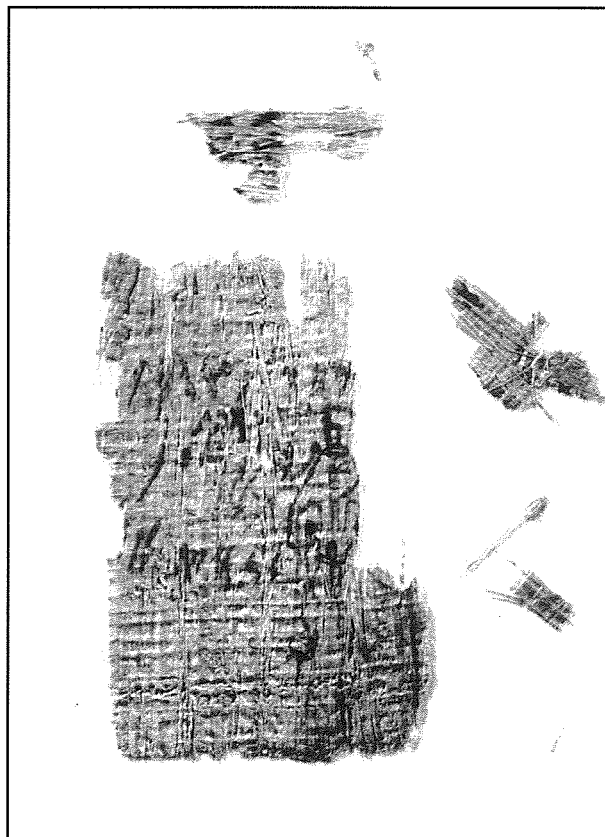
il suo apogeo ben prima del 1200 a.C. Per comprendere appieno la civiltà fenicia è poi indispensabile aver presenti le sue radici storiche nel terzo e secondo millennio, nelle culture della Siria-Palestina dell'età del Bronzo, anteriori all'invasione dei "Popoli del Mare" che sconvolse il Mediterraneo orientale attorno al 1200 a.C., creando le condizioni per l'emergere di una nuova realtà politica e culturale. Se poi la Fenicia deve molto alle tradizioni di Canaan, un termine che nell'Antico Testamento designa la realtà etnico-geografica anteriore all'arrivo degli Ebrei in Palestina, non si devono ignorare i prolungamenti delle sue manifestazioni culturali in età ellenistica e romana. Sant' Agostino afferma, ad esempio, che alla sua epoca i contadini del Nord-Africa parlavano ancora un dialetto punico e si definivano addirittura 'Cananei': segno inequivocabile questo di una eredità plurisecolare, che la conquista romana non fu in grado di distruggere completamente.

All' interno di questo ampio quadro cronologico la civiltà dei Fenici ci appare come una realtà dalle dimensioni veramente eccezionali: dal Libano alla Spagna, passando per Cipro, l'Anatolia, l'Egitto, le Isole Maltesi, da Sicilia, la Sardegna, Ibiza, l'Africa settentrionale. Non c'è una zona del Mediterraneo infatti che non li vide passare, con le loro navi cariche di metalli, di anfore, di oggetti svariati da trasportare, vendere o barattare. Interessati soprattutto agli scambi, essi non furono, come furono i Greci, dei veri e propri colonizzatori. A loro premeva soprattutto di disporre di punti d'appoggio per i loro viaggi: approdi specificamente scelti su isolotti o su promontori, riparati dai venti, suscettibili di fornire acqua potabile e viveri ai marinai, sempre alla ricerca di nuove mete mercantili. Tali insediamenti commerciali furono disseminati su tutte le coste mediterranee: all' inizio modesti scali, che hanno lasciato delle tracce, divenuti poi in qualche caso, spicca particolarmente l'esempio di Cartagine, metropoli ricchissime e popolose.

Non mi sembra inopportuno a questo punto di fare qualche breve accenno a proposito della presenza fenicia a Malta.

L'arcipelago maltese, con le isole principali di Malta (forse 'nn in fenicio) e Gozo (in fenicio *gwl*) appare di interesse specifico per i navigatori fenici grazie alla sua posizione centrale nel

Mediterraneo e per i suoi buoni approdi. La sua importanza fu quindi soprattutto di caposaldo commerciale e strategico. Non molto purtroppo sappiamo di Malta fenicia e punica dalle fonti antiche. Un passo di Diodoro Siculo dà notizia della colonizzazione fenicia; il geografo Tolomeo nomina gli insediamenti di Melite e Chersoneso ed i santuari di Era (Astarte) e di Eracle (Mellqart). Da un passo del geografo Pseudo Scilace (IV sec. a.C.) sappiamo della occupazione cartaginese; da un passo di Nevio apprendiamo di una razzia ad opera di Attilio Regolo (verso la metà del III sec. a.C. durante la Prima Guerra Punica); Tito Livio si riferisce all'occupazione romana nel 218 a.C.; Cicerone infine c'informa sulle ricchezze e la fama del santuario di Giunone (assimilata con Era/Astarte). A questa scarsità di riferimenti suppliscono in parte le informazioni di carattere archeologico, con dati abbondanti sulle necropoli, sul santuario di Giunone, identificato nella località di Tas-Silg presso Marsascirocco e anche sull' insediamento agricolo di San Pawl Milqi. Purtroppo, l'estensione del popolamento attuale impedisce di acquisire informazioni di qualche ampiezza sui centri abitati antichi.



*Frammento di papiro con iscrizione fenicia trovato arrotolato entro un astuccio porta-amuleti. Da una tomba Tal-Virtù, presso Rabat, Malta - Sesto Secolo a.C.*

*The National Museum of Archaeology*

In base ai dati disponibili si ricostruisce che Malta è stata occupata dai Fenici a partire dal tardo VIII sec. a.C. Si può identificare un modello di insediamento in parte diverso rispetto a quello considerato tipicamente fenicio: l'occupazione delle coste, in siti di particolare interesse portuale. Basandosi sulla posizione delle necropoli, si è potuto constatare che, come nella vicina isola di Gozo, i primi coloni dovettero insediarsi in zone interne ed elevate. A Malta l'abitato più importante doveva corrispondere all'attuale centro di Medina/Rabat (da identificare con Melita); il centro antico di Chersoneso doveva invece, a mio avviso, essere situato nel area del Porto Grande (forse l'attuale Vittoriosa). A Gozo il principale insediamento doveva corrispondere a quello dell'odierna Victoria.

È stato notato - dalla Prof.ssa Antonia Ciasca - che gli abitati fenici coincidono in buona parte con quelli indigeni. Ciò si spiega in base alla situazione delle isole maltesi al momento dell'arrivo dei Fenici, densamente abitate e sede di una fiorente cultura del Tardo Bronzo (detta di Borg-in-Nadur). I coloni sembrano essere venuti in diretto e stretto contatto con gli abitanti indigeni ed essersi stabiliti nelle zone già sedi di genti locali. Non mancano, tuttavia anche insediamenti costieri, specie nella zona sud-est, nell'attuale baia di Marsaxlokk, anche questa già occupata da popolazioni locali. In questa zona, nel sito di Tas-Silg, è stato scavato un santuario dedicato dai Fenici ad Astarte, in seguito identificata con Era e Giunone corrispondente a quello menzionato da Cicerone nelle orazioni contro Verre. Il santuario di Melqart, ricordato in due iscrizioni ritrovati nel secolo diciassettesimo e menzionato anche da Tolomeo, non è stato ancora localizzato.

Lo scavo a Tas-Silg, condotto da una Missione Archeologica Italiana dall'Università di Roma e magistralmente eseguito dalla Prof.ssa Ciasca, ha dimostrato anche qui la continuità tra la cultura preistorica locale e quella dei coloni. Il santuario fenicio si è infatti insediato, riadattandolo, sul tempio di una divinità femminile indigena. Dopo la fase fenicia e punica, il santuario fu occupato senza interruzione fino ad epoca bizantina con l'impianto di una chiesa. Tra i ritrovamenti effettuati a Tas-Silg, oltre alla ceramica con

sequenze ininterrotte dalla fine del VIII secolo, sono da segnalare sia elementi architettonici decorati, frammenti di statuaria votiva, e soprattutto elementi di avori lavorati. Alcune iscrizioni votive dimostrano la dedica del santuario ad Astarte, e moltissimi frammenti di recipienti in ceramica hanno graffiti con l'indicazione dell'appartenenza del luogo sacro alla dea.

Sono anche attestati stanziamenti in fattorie di carattere rurale al di fuori dei centri abitati per il periodo punico-ellenistico. Sul sito di San Paolo Milqi sono stati individuati resti di muri disposti a terrazza, impianti di carattere industriale (bacini, canali e pozzi). All'impianto punico succedette poi una villa Romana.

Varie iscrizioni fenicie e puniche sono state rinvenute a Malta, in siti non sempre registrati. Oltre alle iscrizioni di Tas-Silg e alle dediche a Melqart già evocate, si devono menzionare due stele iscritte che risalgono al VII sec. a.C.; ambedue, a giudicare dal testo, dovevano provenire da un *tofet*, il cui sito non è però localizzato. Questo termine (*tofet*) deriva dall'Antico Testamento dove è impiegato in vari passi per designare un luogo nella valle di Ben-Hinnon, presso Gerusalemme, in cui venivano effettuati sacrifici di bambini a Baal. Tale uso, condannato come infame nella Bibbia, viene connesso con le usanze delle circostanti popolazioni cananee, che includono i Fenici. Oltre a Cartagine stessa, *tofet* sono stati individuati in tutto l'Occidente fenicio-punico. Si ricordano quelli di Salambo (Cartagine), El Hofra (Costantina), Mozia (Sicilia), Sulcis, Monte Sirai e Tharros (Sardegna). Per quanto riguarda Malta, è vero che ancora mancano indizi archeologici, ma le due iscrizioni alle quali ho accennato lasciano giustamente supporre la presenza di un *tofet*.

A Gozo resti riferibili alla cultura punica consistono soprattutto in un santuario a Ras-il-Wardija, ma è da ricordare anche un'importante iscrizione risalente al II sec. a.C. che commemora i restauri di un certo numero di santuari ad opera del popolo di Gozo.

La cultura fenicia e punica delle isole maltesi si caratterizza in maniera specifica rispetto a quella delle restanti regioni toccate dalla

colonizzazione; ne rendono in parte conto sia il già citato incontro con l'ambiente locale, sia uno sviluppo parzialmente appartato dal restante ambiente occidentale, cui si contrappone invece un più diretto contatto con l'Oriente.

I Fenici fanno parte del nostro passato e del nostro patrimonio culturale. Al di là dei vari aspetti 'aneddotici', che hanno monopolizzato l'attenzione moderna, influenzandone le valutazioni storiche ed etiche date di queste genti levantine, quali i sacrifici umani o la prostituzione sacra, si devono anche ai Fenici realizzazioni e scoperte culturali di assoluto rilievo: una per tutte l'invenzione dell'alfabeto, che portò una vera radicale rivoluzione nella società dell'epoca, ponendo le premesse al sorgere della nostra cultura. Furono loro, infatti, ad usare per la prima volta un alfabeto lineare che trasmisero ai Greci. Attraverso questi ultimi, l'alfabeto raggiunse gli Etruschi ed i Romani e così ne possiamo disporre oggi. Si tratta indubbiamente di un apporto essenziale alla nostra civiltà moderna, che vale la pena ricordare giacché si ha spesso dei Fenici una immagine distorta dai pregiudizi ereditati dagli autori classici, oppure ridotta alla loro abilità commerciale.

Infine, in un mondo chiuso sempre più in se stesso, i Fenici furono al contrario un popolo aperto a tutte le influenze. Per capire la loro civiltà bisogna guardare anche all'Egitto, alla Grecia, a tutte le culture che essi incontrarono nei loro viaggi e di cui si impregnarono largamente. Essi si integrarono spesso negli ambienti che li accolsero adottando usi e costumi del posto, praticando i culti stranieri accanto alle proprie divinità ancestrali mai dimenticate. Questa costante apertura all'altro, al diverso, al nuovo, rende la civiltà fenicio-punica particolarmente ricca e ancora più attraente.

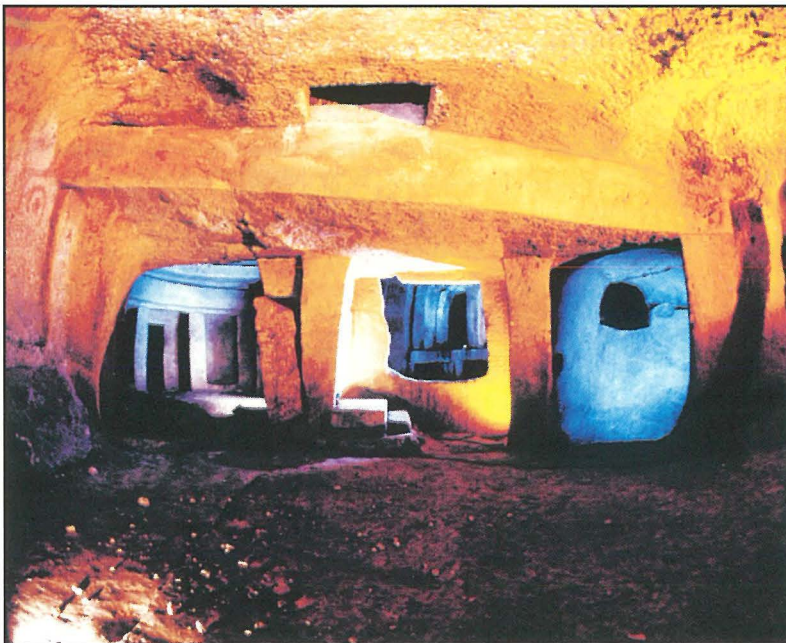


# Waking up to the Sleeping Lady

*"A gorgeous swelling of the hip, as it soars in its splended impossibility from her narrow waistline ...."*



*Photo: Jon Wrigley*



*A view of the skeuomorphic sculpture  
in the Hypogeum*

## Of Greeks and Arabs and Feudal Knights



*Photo 1. Islamic period, Late 10th / 11th Century. Dipinta Sotto Vetrina Policroma Rim of a carinated bowl, with floral motif rendered in green and brown. From the 1998 excavations at Mesquita Square, Mdina.*



*Photo 2. Same as Photo 1, decoration on the exterior.*



*Photo 3. Islamic period, Late 10th / 11th Century. Dipinta Sotto Vetrina Policroma Base of a large carinated bowl, with a rope motif rendered in green and brown. From the 1998 excavations at Mesquita Square, Mdina.*



*Photo 4. Islamic period, Late 10th / 11th Century. Dipinta Sotto Vetrina Policroma Base of a carinated bowl, with an intricate 'floral' motif rendered in green and brown. From the 1998 excavations at Mesquita Square, Mdina.*



*Photo 5. Islamic period, Late 10th / 11th Century. Dipinta Sotto Vetrina Policroma* Fragment of a straight-walled cup, decorated with green bands and touched in brown. From the 1998 excavations at Mesquita Square, Mdina.



*Photo 6. Islamic period, 11th / 13th Century. Vase with Filter, Unglazed* Reputedly discovered on the sea bed at Salina Bay.



*Photo 7. Same as Photo 6.*



*Photo 8. Norman/Swabian period, Late 12th / First-half 13th Century. Dipinta Sotto Vetrina Policroma* Footed bowl with intricate decoration on interior, rendered in brown and traces of green. Recovered from Marsaxlokk Bay in 1997.

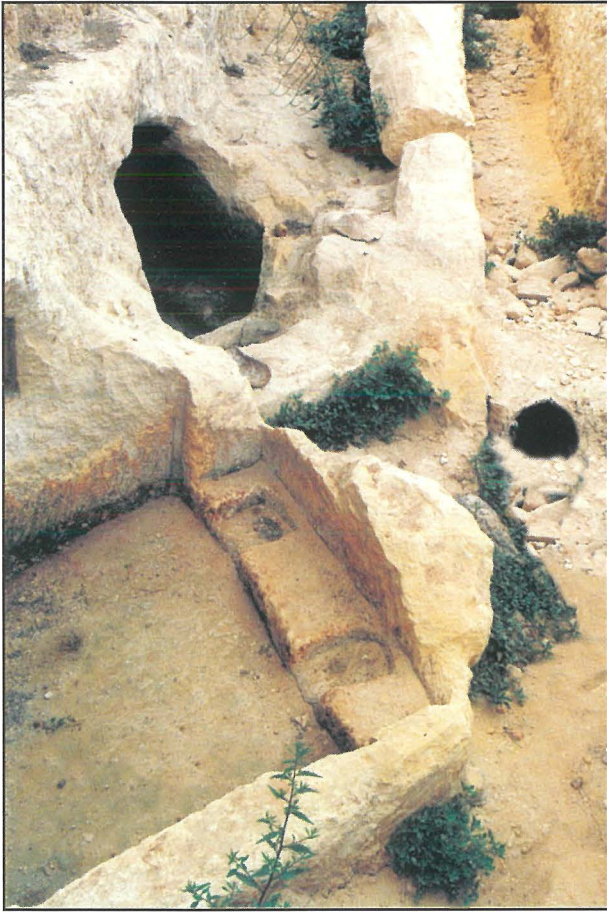


*Photo 9. Angevine/Aragonese period, End of 13th / 14th Century. Maiolica Siciliana Dipinta in Bruno* Rim of bowl decorated with spirals and complex 'floral' motifs, rendered in brown. Unprovenanced material, probably from Sir Temi Zammit's excavation at the 'Roman Villa' in Rabat

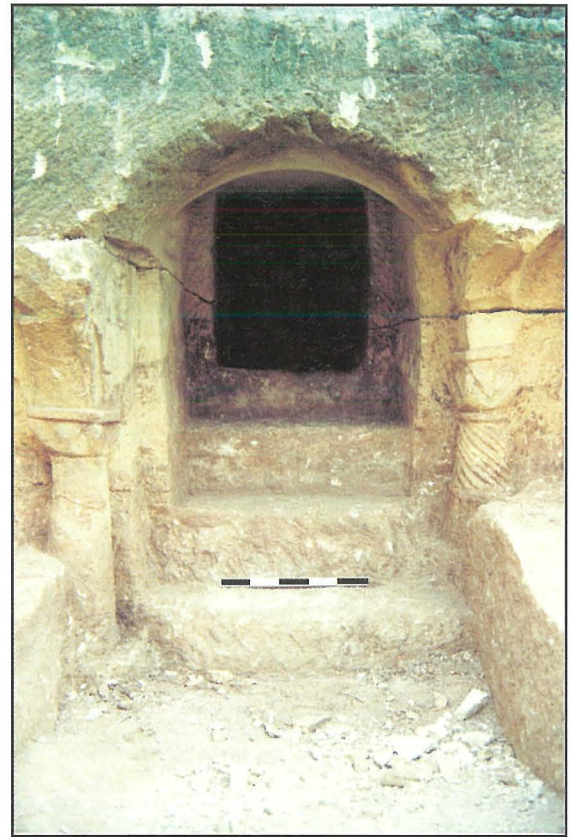


*Photo 10. Aragonese period, 15th Century. Lustro Valenzano Maturo* Large bowl with extrovert rim, decorated with floral motif. From the 1992 excavations at Magazines Street, Mdina

# Xarolla



*Plate I.* A tomb with two, uneven headrests: one cut in a square shape, the other rounded. The roof of the tomb has completely disappeared. A drainage pipe and channel can be seen to the right of the photograph



*Plates III & IV.* A number of smartly cut, short columns are clearly visible at the entrances to the exposed tombs, some of which have steps leading up into the cubicles. These columns are decorated with carving on the capital and patterning on the stem and base.

*Plate II.* Several catacombs lie underneath the Xarolla windmill



# Le Isole Maltesi e il Mediterraneo Fenicio

Antonia Ciasca

Dopo le chiare e stimolanti comunicazioni dei proff. Gouder e Acquaro, rimane a me ora il compito di provare a fornire un' indicazione sulla cultura di Malta fenicia e punica, cercando di individuare il posto che l'arcipelago maltese occupa nell'ambito di almeno alcuni dei vasti fenomeni che segnano l'area geografica legata alla presenza dei Fenici.

Vorrei subito avvertire che le considerazioni che seguiranno non intendono proporsi come complete, né tanto meno conclusive, su argomenti dei quali il processo della ricerca continua a mettere in luce le numerose sfaccettature e non di rado anche i molteplici contrasti. È proprio nel corso dell'ultimo ventennio, ad esempio, che il concetto di antagonismo fra Fenici e Greci nel Mediterraneo Centrale e occidentale - già ritenuto punto fermo iniziale di ogni ricostruzione storica - ha subito un radicale ridimensionamento. Ed è proprio l'archeologia che ha innescato questo processo di revisione cui gli storici - gli storici degli avvenimenti - si sono ampiamente associati nella sostanza.

Per quanto concerne Malta, occorre dire che la ricerca diretta sul territorio dell'arcipelago ha potuto negli ultimi anni avvantaggiarsi grandemente della forte accelerazione registrata non solo nelle parallele ricerche archeologiche esterne, ma anche nello studio delle dinamiche storiche delle aree circostanti. Risulta, per confronto, estremamente più agevole e convincente la caratterizzazione degli aspetti maltesi.

Come è noto, nelle fonti storiche scritte Malta è fatta oggetto di pochissime citazioni dirette.

Il testo di Diodoro Siculo riveste importanza notevole, poiché si ricollega alle prime fasi di frequentazione fenicia del Mediterraneo occidentale. Ai viaggi commerciali viene collegata dallo storico la rete degli insediamenti stabili fenici in terre straniere: ciò che, convenzionalmente, viene spesso indicato negli studi moderni con il termine complessivo di "*colonizzazione fenicia*". Occorre a questo punto qualche precisazione riprendendo le parole di un

recente contributo di H.G. Niemeyer (1995), che esprimono con chiarezza le tendenze attuali nella ricostruzione di tali complessi fenomeni :

"Con le parole *colonizzazione fenicia* non si indica un processo nettamente definito, che inizia simultaneamente nell'insieme del Mediterraneo e che ha valore di avvenimento storico : si tratta piuttosto di un cambiamento strutturale dalle sfaccettature molteplici che si sviluppa durante un certo lasso di tempo".

L'interesse fenicio per Malta è dunque legato inizialmente alle frequentazioni commerciali e in particolare ai viaggi finalizzati alla ricerca di materie prime di pregio quali i metalli, di cui il bacino mediterraneo è ricco e che rappresentano una delle risorse di primaria importanza per l'economia fenicia antica soprattutto della prima Età del Ferro.

La carta geografica che qui si presenta è tratta da un volume pubblicato nel 1989 da Michel Gras, Pierre Rouillard e Xavier Teixidor e schematizza la localizzazione delle zone minerarie, certamente già sfruttate in epoca ben più antica di quella dei primi insediamenti fenici occidentali, che su base archeologica si collocano oggi nel corso dell'VIII secolo a.C. Lo schizzo mette in evidenza tre aree di maggior concentrazione di tali risorse, attorno alle quali gravitano aree di attività economica a queste più direttamente legate, indicate geometricamente con tre cerchi dello stesso diametro. Quella orientale comprende Fenicia e Cipro, quella occidentale il Sud della Penisola Iberica e la parte dell'Africa costiera al di là dello stretto di Gibilterra, settore unitario oggi molto opportunamente denominato nella letteratura archeologica "circolo dello stretto". L'area centrale con la zona mineraria della Sardegna riterrà principalmente la nostra attenzione. Al suo interno sono state incluse Cartagine e la Sicilia occidentale con Pantelleria : regioni queste del tutto prive di risorse minerarie, ma che sono parte del sistema di sfruttamento di esse, con funzioni diverse - dalla raccolta dei minerali, ai diversi gradi di lavorazione, allo smistamento su medie e lunghe distanze, senza escludere di principio

possibili produzioni di manufatti “di lusso”. Nella grafica proposta, l’arcipelago maltese resterebbe all’esterno di questo circuito, per motivi innanzi tutto geografici, essendo notevolmente spostato verso Est.

Altra carta geografica dello stesso contenuto - cioè relativa ancora allo sfruttamento delle risorse minerarie - è presentata da Neimeyer nel 1995, con l’aggiunta delle vie commerciali frequentate dai Fenici. Viene proposto, principalmente sulla base delle testimonianze archeologiche disponibili, un unico percorso Est-Ovest da cui si distaccano circuiti secondari collegati, in funzione sempre della ricerca di minerali. È la cosiddetta rotta settentrionale “delle isole”, che lambisce terre emerse, già sedi di insediamenti di grande rilievo storico dell’ Età del Bronzo - da Cipro a Rodi, Creta, Malta, Baleari - fino ad attraversare lo stretto di Gibilterra, le mitiche “colonne d’Ercole”, per terminare alle foci del Guadalquivir, via fluviale verso I bacini minerari.

Nella carta geografica - presentata da M.E.Aubert nel 1987 - la stessa rotta settentrionale “delle isole” in direzione E-O è accompagnata dall’indicazione di un percorso di ritorno - in direzione Ovest-Est - proposto in base ai venti dominanti e alle correnti marine, che si svolge nel settore Sud del Mediterraneo, principalmente lungo le coste dell’Africa.

Sono queste alcune delle possibili ricostruzioni di percorsi storici pubblicate in anni recenti: hanno il pregio di proporre concretamente l’elaborazione di dati archeologici e testuali di grande complessità e anche - è bene non dimenticarlo - a tutt’oggi ancora estremamente incompleti. Esse dunque non possono che valere quali suggerimenti, in definitiva teorici, per la ricostruzione di parte almeno di grandi complessi fenomeni storici. Dichiaratamente non vi vengono considerate che le grandi correnti di commercio, quelle delle più antiche frequentazioni, in cui la Fenicia asiatica riveste ancora un ruolo attivo diretto.

Ad ogni modo, per quanto concerne Malta - priva di risorse metallifere - i suggerimenti degli studiosi citati mettono bene in evidenza la sua posizione che appare, innanzitutto dal punto di vista geografico, al margine delle aree direttamente attive nelle operazioni commerciali

ricordate. Secondo tali ricostruzioni Malta si sarebbe affacciata alle grandi correnti dei traffici con le sue terre più settentrionali e dunque con l’isola di Gozo. In posizione geografica analoga suggerirebbe Pantelleria e le isole Pelagie, figurano nelle ricostruzioni praticamente isolate, ancorché profondamente incuneate nel non largo “canale di Sicilia”. (Ritourneremo più tardi su Pantelleria).

La presentazione rapida di questi pochi dati rende, credo, già abbastanza evidenti le modalità con le quali l’arcipelago maltese è stato integrato nella storia dell’espansione coloniale dei Fenici. Se prendiamo ora il testo di Diodoro, notiamo quanto felicemente puntuali possano essere le osservazioni dello storico a proposito di Malta :

“... i Fenici la presero come rifugio a motivo dei suoi buoni porti e della sua collocazione in mare aperto ...”.

Se quella riportata da Diodoro può dunque ritenersi con buona verosomiglianza la funzione precipua esercitata dall’arcipelago maltese - soprattutto nelle fasi più antiche delle frequentazioni e degli impianti fissi - risulta parallelamente evidente che la “forma strutturale” dell’insediamento fenicio a Malta difficilmente potrà essere valutata per analogia con quella degli insediamenti costieri legati più o meno direttamente alle regioni minerarie. Così, ad esempio, se la Sardegna pre-fenicia del periodo del Bronzo Recente può essere considerata “una importante provincia periferica della koiné micenea” - sono parole di Niemeyer - non altrettanto sembra possibile ipotizzare per Malta nonostante che essa si collochi lungo la rotta principale Est-Ovest e nonostante che anche essa abbia restituito ceramica micenea.

Per altro verso si noterà che a Malta non è oggettivamente documentabile alcuna evoluzione dinamica programmata degli insediamenti; tuttavia essa non deve di necessità avervi avuto luogo, proprio per la situazione insulare e per la funzione fondamentale di difesa verso l’esterno degli insediamenti, irrinunciabile anche in epoche più recenti. Condizioni storiche molto diverse da quelle, ad esempio, della Penisola Iberica: lì le variazioni nelle mappe degli abitati si manifestano con particolare evidenza, ad esempio, con l’abbandono di alcuni insediamenti a vantaggio di altri di maggiore

ampiezza e in posizione strategicamente migliore come rivelato dalla storia dei numerosissimi piccoli centri dell'Andalusia orientale e dall'assurgere a dimensione urbana di Malaga. Per l'arcipelago maltese, gli abitati di Rabat a Malta e Victoria a Gozo si presentano nello stesso tempo - in base alle testimonianze archeologiche disponibili - come centri topograficamente dominanti, di antico impianto e di regolare progressivo sviluppo per estensione e popolamento.

Concludendo questi brevissimi cenni sugli abitati, peraltro assai imperfettamente noti su base archeologica, se ne possono forse derivare punti per valutazioni storiche. Se - come pare - i caratteri fondamentali degli abitati principali di Malta si conservano di fatto nel corso dei secoli, si potrebbe considerare che anche il ruolo di queste isole abbia subito poche variazioni all'interno di quello che potrebbe indicarsi - se pure con qualche schematizzazione - come un "sistema" di controllo su di un'area politica molto ampia. A questo proposito si ricorderanno le rapide azioni di guerra condotte su Malta nel corso delle guerre puniche.

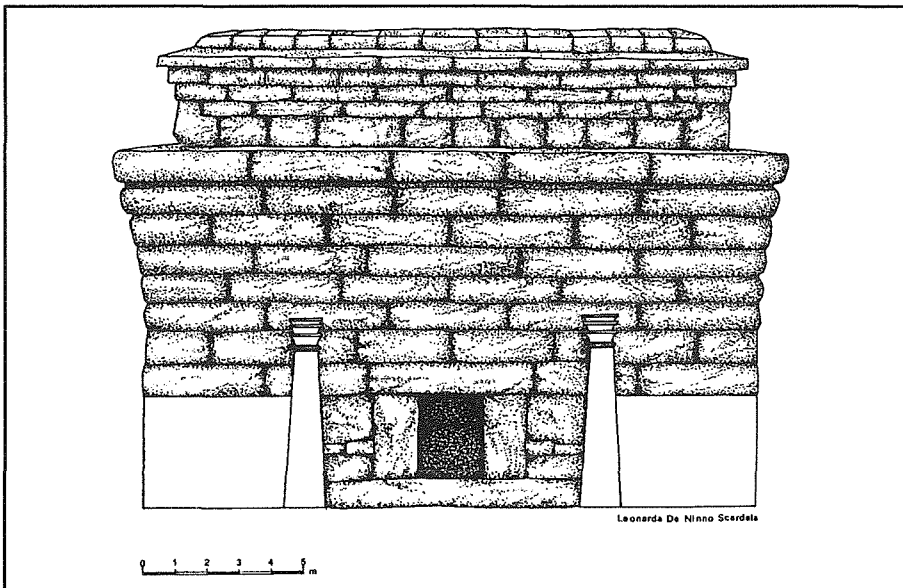
Al ruolo strategico e "di difesa" assunto da Malta è comunque da attribuirsi una connotazione tutt'altro che passiva, ma anzi di forte iniziativa e di organizzazione diretta, con la possibilità anche di vivace spinta verso l'esterno. In termini di vantaggio economico e di acquisizione di risorse - perché anche di questo deve trattarsi - la prosperità di queste isole, nel corso del tempo e in situazioni politiche anche notevolmente diverse, può verosimilmente giustificarsi in parte con i grandi guadagni che possono derivare dall'attenta gestione del contatto col traffico marittimo su lunghe distanze, con approvvigionamenti di navi e flottiglie, pedaggi, assistenza a stranieri ecc. È anche possibile immaginare attività di cantieri per il restauro di navi in avaria a motivo di tempeste o altro, occasioni che dovevano presentarsi non di rado se si sentiva la necessità di considerarle nelle norme dei trattati internazionali. Non vi sono dati che si riferiscano a lavorazione su ampia scala di oggetti di prestigio per la diffusione verso l'esterno, in metallo o altre materie preziose, come è stato ipotizzato per la Cartagine del VII secolo a.C. (per l'avorio) o per centri ancora non reperi della Penisola Italiana (per vasellame d'argento): tutti oggetti convogliati dai Fenici

nelle regioni minerarie principalmente quali merci di scambio.

Alla luce dei fatti, il ruolo storico assunto da Malta si deve ritenere tuttavia assai più ampio di quello tramandato dalla storiografia antica. L'informazione risulta dalla ricerca archeologica, che si presenta per molti versi particolarmente chiara. L'arcipelago si colloca in questo caso in modo centrale all'interno del complesso processo dell'espansione fenicia verso Occidente, non tanto direttamente nell'ambito delle varie attività commerciali dei Fenici, quanto piuttosto con il tramite di particolari e rilevantissimi aspetti della cultura asiatica della quale sono portatori.

L'isola di Malta è infatti sede di un grande santuario extraurbano localizzato nella sua parte meridionale su di un piccolo rilievo in vista dell'ampia baia di Marsaxlokk, aperta verso il Sud. Il santuario è denominato dal toponimo moderno di Tas-Silg. Il santuario, che non è legato al territorio di un abitato, assume dallo inizio rilevanza 'nazionale', ma la sua posizione a dominio di uno dei porti più adatti alla navigazione antica ne rivela il legame più ampio con la storia dell'espansione fenicia.

"Un fatto che colpisce nei racconti della tradizione classica relativi alle fondazioni fenicie del Mediterraneo è che in molti casi l'impianto di stanziamenti è accompagnato dalla fondazione di un tempio. In alcuni casi unicamente il tempio è citato": è un passo di G.Bunnens (1979). La lettura che di tale particolarità fornisce la storiografia moderna concerne non solo il campo delle credenze religiose, ma anche - e forse nello stadio attuale delle ricerche in misura maggiore - le funzioni più specificamente economiche e organizzative che si sono riconosciute nei grandi "santuari coloniali": quali luoghi "di asilo", di transazioni commerciali, ecc. sotto protezione ma anche con la garanzia della divinità. Il santuario può inoltre costituire il luogo di accumulo di ricchezze pubbliche cui attingere in momenti di emergenza (secondo le documentate ricerche di C.Grottanelli). Le molteplici attività del tempio possono essere registrate in archivi anche di notevole importanza: è sorprendente, ad esempio, la quantità di bulle con impressioni sigillari che chiudevano documenti scritti su papiro venute alla luce di recente nell'area del primo grande tempio della città di Cartagine ora in corso di scavo.



*Ricostruzione evocativa della facciata del Tempio di Ashtarte a Marsaxlokk, Malta, come poteva apparire in epoca fenicia. In questo periodo furono inserite due grandi ante sovrapposte da capitelli con doppia gola egizia davanti all'entrata originale del tempio Neolitico (qui ricostruito sulla base di un modellino recuperato dal Tempio di Tarxien)*

*Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta*

Il grande tempio di Tiro è ignoto, anche se di esso rimane un suggestivo testo di Erodoto, che dice di averlo visto e che lo descrive con l'ingresso fiancheggiato da due preziose colonne. Molti sono i santuari in cui la tradizione storica classica riconosce fondazioni fenicie, lungo le principali vie commerciali: i più direttamente legati alle aree dell'estremo Occidente sono quelli notissimi di Cadice, di Nora in Sardegna e di Lixus sulla costa marocchina dell'Africa. Ma di tutti l'archeologia non ha potuto fino ad oggi rintracciare i resti.

Per quanto concerne Malta, due città e due santuari principali sono citati in un noto passo del geografo Tolomeo.

Il santuario nel sito di Tas-Silg è stato identificato con sicurezza con quello dedicato alla dea Astarte grazie al ritrovamento di eccezionale valore per tutto il Mediterraneo. Ma il fatto che esso sia realmente un unicum - non confrontabile con nessun altro monumento antico - è il risultato della sua lunghissima e singolare storia, che si dipana per più di tre millenni dalla preistoria all'età bizantina. La sua storia architettonica sembra avere inizio nella fase maltese denominata dal centro di Tarxien, caratterizzata anche a Tas-Silg dalla presenza delle tipiche costruzioni templari. La successione delle fasi e di riadattamento vede il giustapporsi di aggiunte e sovrapposizioni che si dispongono proprio intorno a una struttura megalitica, la sola superstite di un complesso forse ben più vasto. L'aspetto che il luogo sacro raggiunse in epoca bizantina può valutarsi dalla pianta schematica, dove sono indicati con colori diversi le aggiunte

successive, ciascuna delle quali a volte annulla ma più spesso convive con quelle precedenti anche di vari secoli.

Al di là della pertinenza materiale di singoli settori del monumento a periodi e tradizioni culturali diversi, la tipologia di luogo sacro fenicio è riconoscibile a livello planimetrico essenzialmente nella presenza di un vano chiuso coperto in funzione di cella (nel nostro caso, il resto di una struttura megalitica) e di uno spazio scoperto antistante precisamente delimitato, cortile o temenos.

L'uso dell'area con funzione santuariale da parte dei Fenici può considerarsi iniziata nell'ultima parte dell'VIII secolo a.C. per confronto con materiali ceramici ritrovati a Cartagine (e abbastanza precisamente datati in quella città da ceramiche greche in contesto). Nello studio che è in corso sulla storia costruttiva del luogo sacro si è propensi oggi a considerare le prime murature storiche come riferibili a una fase non antichissima. Tutto ciò è in corso di accertamento con sondaggi sul terreno. Ma qualora confermato, se ne dovrebbe dedurre che nel corso di non pochi anni - e anzi di qualche secolo - i nuovi arrivati Fenici abbiano usato il vetusto impianto senza adattamenti strutturali.

Per citare solo alcuni degli argomenti in corso di studio, diremo che le prime aggiunte storiche sono i resti di imposta sulla roccia di due elementi rettilinei simmetrici, in asse con l'ingresso del santuario, che ancora sussistono in parte. Nello schizzo schematico della pianta che si presenta si è proceduto a collegare i due tratti rettilinei - vere e proprie ante - con il resto della struttura



preistorica e in particolare con il prolungamento della sua facciata concava (le parti integrate sono a tratteggio).

Una veduta frontale dell'alzato del tempio - ancorché appena evocativa - si è voluta elaborare a scopo di studio utilizzando il noto modellino in calcare proveniente da Tarxien, dell'altezza originale di circa 33cm. Ai pilastri rastremati che terminano le ante sono stati associati capitelli a pianta quadrata, con doppia gola egizia: un esemplare è stato rinvenuto al margine meridionale del santuario, reimpiegato come pietra da costruzione in un muro tardo.

La distanza notevole fra i due pilastri - di poco inferiore ai 15 metri - rende poco probabile che essi sostenessero una qualche copertura o tettoia. Verrebbe dunque richiamata piuttosto la tradizione legata al simbolismo religioso vicino-orientale dei pilastri isolati non portanti; essa ricorre in costruzioni templari di Palestina, Fenicia e Cipro (documentata anche in modellini votivi architettonici delle stesse aree). Il collegamento possibile con le testimonianze scritte sul tempio di Tiro, di Cadice e su quello di Salomone a Gerusalemme è molto suggestivo, così come è significativo il ricorrere della stessa particolarità nel tempio fenicio di Kition a Cipro, indagato archeologicamente da V. Karageorghis.

Nel santuario maltese, a margine di questa nuova area - delimitata ma scoperta - trova posto il primo altare 'fenicio' a livello della roccia, della lunghezza di m. 2,90 adatto ad offerte carnee, anche di animali di medie dimensioni. Di esso è stata intenzionalmente conservata la grande lastra di base, al disotto di una pavimentazione lastricata di epoca ellenistica, dopo lo smantellamento, certo avvenuto in forma rituale, del vetusto altare.

Le ricostruzioni possibili, diverse per dettagli pur significativi, prevedono comunque una spalletta anteriore e due "guance" laterali.

Prima di concludere sull'argomento vorrei solo ricordare qualcosa del santuario in pieno periodo ellenistico.

È ancora in uso con funzione templare l'antica struttura della fase di Tarxien (il cui interno è però ora pavimentato a mosaico di tessere marmoree) e il temenos antistante, della stessa

superficie che aveva in epoca arcaica, viene circondato su tre lati da portici colonnati. Si viene così ad isolare ed evidenziare nello stesso tempo la parte più antica e più sacra attorno alla quale si dispongono a Nord le aree di servizio e di culto in maggioranza scoperte (altari, pozzi, vasche ecc.) e a Sud ambienti verosimilmente coperti a funzioni diverse.

Va notato che in questo periodo il santuario appare circondato da un possente muro di cinta, che richiama la tipologia cui sopra si è accennato dei santuari fortificati che conservano il patrimonio della comunità. Le numerose cisterne per la raccolta dell'acqua piovana - una delle quali molto grande, con camera centrale e cunicoli che se ne dipartono - sono senz'altro appropriate ad approvvigionare per lunghi periodi gruppi anche numerosi di individui. Lo schizzo ricostruttivo di un tempio approssimativamente coevo dell'area costiera a Sud di Tiro (Oumm el 'Amed, in Libano) può rappresentare un pertinente confronto per la parte centrale del santuario di Tas-Silg.

L'alzato del santuario di Astarte doveva offrirsi, come già accennato, con un aspetto fortemente composito dovuto agli spesso imponenti aggiunte che raggiungono i primi secoli dell'impero; queste fasi sono in corso di studio sulla base di documentazione purtroppo fortemente carente a seguito delle spoliazioni moderne del sito (prof. M.P. Rossignani, Univ. Cattolica, Milano).

Per il periodo punico ellenistico è documentata - anche qui da frammenti radi e mal conservati - una fase che si colloca nel filone della grande architettura fenicia asiatica che unisce elementi degli ordini classici (capitelli dorici e ionici), gole a cavetto egizie ed elementi decorativi tradizionali della Fenicia della prima età del Ferro (capitelli di pilastro e fregi a doppia voluta e triangolo centrale). Monumenti caratterizzati da questo stile sono noti dalla Fenicia (Oumm el 'Amed) fino al Nord-Africa: Libia (Sabratha, Mausoleo), Tunisia (Cartagine, Dougga mausoleo), Algeria (tomba a tumulo architettonico denominati "Medircen") ecc. Anche il cosiddetto tempio di Tharros in Sardegna rientra in questo gruppo di monumenti.

# Malta in Phoenician and Punic times

Pablo Vidal González

Malta's role in the period previous to the first Phoenician presence was of limited prominence, with the existence of two cultures of the Late Bronze age, Borg in-Nadur and Bahrija.

These cultures were not outstanding for their economic development nor for the number of trade relations outside the island. The only contacts documented are with the nearby Sicilian eastern coast (Bernabò Brea, 1976-77). It is through these contacts that the very limited Mycenaean materials found would have got to Malta (a fragment in Borg in-Nadur and another in Tas-Silg) (Missione, 1965: 50)

This shortage of Mycenaean materials contrasts with the abundant presence of contacts of the Mycenaean world with Sicily, especially with the eastern coast, in the same way as with Sardinia. This shows us that the Mycenaean trade on its journey from the East to the Sicilian coasts and, crossing the Sicilian strait to Sardinia, had no need whatsoever to reach port in the island of Malta, which was relegated to secondary status at this time.

There is no element which allows us to talk about a Phoenician presence in Malta when the first great Phoenician expansion occurred from the East to the Spanish coasts, in the eighth century BC.

We can see, therefore, that the island of Malta did not have, at the time, a strategical position of privilege in navigation from East to West, but rather that of a far away and isolated place, so to speak. The most favourable navigational route was from the island of Cyprus, to the Sicilian coast, reaching port in Syracuse, which was taken by the Mycenaean and later by the Greeks, so as to head from there to the West - skirting along the Sicilian southern coast (Derrotero, 1849: 158)

This was done to avoid the presence of prevailing winds - the north western mistral as well as the West winds, also the existence of a marine current which, in west east direction would go through the Sicilian channel by the centre, from Pantelleria to Malta.

This marginal situation of the great sea route changes from the eighth to the seventh century. It is at this time that we can confirm the first presence of the Phoenicians on the island. But how can one explain this change in the strategical situation of the island? To find an answer we have to look again at the eastern Sicilian coast, where contacts had already started between Greeks and natives in Siracuse in the mid eighth century. That concluded with the presence of the first Greek constructions with the settlement of Lindios, preceding the foundation of Gela towards the year 690, and later Camarina and Agrigento. This strategy of colonization and control of the territory on the part of the new Greek cities is not inconsistent with the aim, among others, of preventing the Phoenicians contact with the interior of the island, rich in resources. We cannot talk about a confrontation between Greeks and Phoenicians at this time, but about a "friendly" rivalry that would make the real control of the territory south of the island impossible.

It is in this context of strategical and trade pressure that we can explain the occupation of the island of Malta, making it a port of call which was secured in Phoenician territory after the long journey from Crete. It is in searching for a secure place, removed from the threat of the Greeks, in which the words of Diodorus (V. 12. 1-4) must be interpreted: "the Phoenicians, as they extended their trade to the western ocean, found in it a place of safe retreat, since it was well supplied with harbours and lay out in the open sea". It is at this moment that we can confirm a second flow of settlers in the western foundations, and the creation of new settlements, of new support places which strengthen and improve the initial route (Aubert, 1994: 301).

This first occupation of the island on the part of the Phoenicians is made in two ways: on the one hand, by dedicating the temple to Astarte, thus legitimising, according to the eastern traditions, the property of the territory. On the other hand, settling in the island's most strategical place, the Mdina-Rabat hill, not only due to its central

position and height, but also for its closeness to the small springs of drinking water, which made them acquire an extraordinary strategical importance (Vidal González and Groenewoud, 1995).

A controversial discussion point is the possible relation of these semite settlers with the native population of the Late Bronze age (Vidal González, 1998).

As is well known, the data that Ward Perkins (1938-39: 12) provided in his time about the already famous silo of Mtarfa, as well as the first results of the excavation of Tas Silg carried out by an Italian group, lead the researchers to confirm that the relations between both worlds, the native and colonial, were intense and smooth. Nevertheless, a more detailed analysis of the archaeological sources is reconsidering this relationship (Brusasco, 1993 and Frenedo, 1995: 117).

The rapid occupation of the most strategical points, the absence of sure data about the relationship between a theoretical great native population (which has not left any trace), as well as the obvious eastern Phoenician character of the tombs, of their ritual and of their pottery leads us to state that the island would have been abandoned by the previous settlers. This could have been at a previous time, and the Phoenicians might have found the island uninhabited, or with such a small population that no trace was left in the archaeological records.

This occupation phenomenon, on the part of the Phoenicians, on an island as a navigational support point repeats itself on the island of Ibiza. There the withdrawal in a previous phase of the native population led the Phoenicians to occupy a strategical uninhabited place, allowing them to secure the control of routes which, from Sardinia, headed as much to the south of the Iberian peninsula as to the Catalanian coasts and southern France (Gómez Bellard, 1990: 18).

Thus, the first Phoenicians who started the cult of Astarte in the temple of Tas-Silg reused the previous Megalithic temple, located in a control position over the bay, which had been in use in the phase of the temples (until 2500) and remained abandoned throughout all the Tarxien

cemetery phase (from 2500 to 1500) (Stoddart et alii, 1993: 9). This was reused in the Borg in-Nadur phase for completely different purposes to those for which it was created initially.

No continuity exists in the use of the temple, nor assimilation between the adoration of the Mother Goddess, peculiar to the native world, and the cult to the goddess Astarte.

The Phoenicians again took advantage of the megalithic elements of this privileged position for a different purpose from the one of the previous phase, that of walled bastion. So they restored the function of worship which, it is important to emphasize, had ceased in this place at least during a thousand years before.

The re-introduction, in this initial phase of the Phoenician use of the sanctuary, of a female figure of the Tarxien period, shows the precariousness of the semite construction in the first moments, as is also shown by the lack of reforms in the architectural structure. The Phoenicians seem, in this first stage of the seventh century, to be more interested in securing a place of worship than in carrying out a great work to honour the goddess. That concern would try to justify, as we have already mentioned, the control of the island on the part of the newly arrived. This objective was realized by dedicating to the goddess a place of worship so that the new lands would become an extension of their native land.

A variation was made of the routes that they took from the East to the Spanish coasts, once they left the island of Crete, and after a voyage of fifteen days on the high seas, they reached port in Malta so that from there, and once inside the 'mare phoenicum' headed for Mozia, on the western extreme of Sicily, avoiding the Greek trade routes and reaching port on Eastern Sicilian coasts.

This new strategical function would explain at the same time the location of the inhabited settlement in a high place, easily defended, securing the limited water resources of the island. The privileged position of the headland actually occupied by Mdina-Rabat made the Phoenicians choose this place in which to live from the first moment. A different pattern is created with the

existence of an inhabited settlement, separated from the port area, controlled and protected by the influence of the Astarte sanctuary on the outskirts.

The foundation of a sanctuary involved setting-up a series of links between the mother country and the new settlement, among which the guardianship of the Temple of Tiro was one of the most important (Aubet, 1994: 141). This link of Malta with the East became one of the principal characteristics of the island (Bonanno, 1988: 420). This is indicated as much by the architectural and decorative elements of Tas-Silg, as by Phoenician pottery, or the Egyptian amulets (Hölbl, 1989), to name some of the most outstanding.

Some of the pottery shapes we find in the Phoenician tombs of the eighth century show us this direct relationship with the East. Among them the oil-bottles, of ancient eastern tradition, stand out. This pottery type is characteristic of the Phoenician factories in the south of the Iberian Peninsula. They are not prominent in Carthage or Sardinia, pointing to a link between East and West but without North African influence.

Another example is a decorated jar of Cyprus origin, which also shows parallels in other examples of the western factories of the Mediterranean, bearing witness to the route followed by the navigators from the East, Cyprus in this case, to the colonies in the Spanish south.

Other elements would be the cinerary urns, the dippers, the mushroom jars or the tripods, showing the presence in Malta of materials typical of the initial phase - all of them dating from the seventh century.

A new phase opens for Malta with the sudden interruption of the commercial currents from the East and the replacement by Carthage of Tyre, which had played a prominent role in the mid sixth century.

Malta, which had occupied a central strategical position throughout the seventh century and the first half of the sixth, suffered an important setback. Its function ceased to make any sense, and it became a territory lacking in any value

for the growing colonial interest of Carthage. This substantial change turns the island into a 'cul de sac', into a place outside trade routes. Malta withdrew within itself, removed from the influence of Carthage which does not need it as it is far removed from its interests, and is disconnected from the great sea route from the East. This sudden isolation was why it retained its specific eastern character: Phoenician, at its full Punic height.

Logically, the economy of the island started a changing process to adapt to the new circumstances. By the second half of the sixth century the occupation of the rural areas began, setting in motion the first agricultural farms which allowed the sustenance of an island which found itself withdrawn, starting a period of economic self-sufficiency, which led Malta into one of its worst crisis periods. This lasted until the end of the fifth century, coinciding with the greatest clashes between the Punic and Greek world for control of Sicily - a dispute to which Malta would not be alien as it was a naval operations base.

It was not until the end of the fifth century BC that an awakening in the activity of the island was shown - more obvious in the Tas-Silg sanctuary. New adjustments and reforms started at that time, which gave way to the peak period of the sanctuary, and, in addition, to that of the whole island, between the fourth and first centuries BC (Ciasca, 1970: 102).

It was now that the role of the temple as a neutral meeting and exchange place acquired all its prominence. If for the first phase of the use of the Phoenician temple, this served as a stopping place and protecting sanctuary of navigators, it was now that it acquired the rank of international sanctuary, of a crossroads. The abundance of non-Punic pottery, especially Greek, from Sicily and Magna Graecia, must be put in relation to the establishment on the island of a meeting place, of an exhaust valve between two areas which at this time ignored one another. Malta, located at the end of two worlds, the Punic and the Greek, acquired new prominence as a back water, as a necessary stream for the upkeep of trade activity which did not understand periods of conflict.

The island presented at that time Greek cultural influence (Ciasca, 1999: 77), as can be seen from the pottery shapes, which present a white slip treatment and a decoration of red lines, of which we find plenty in the numerous tombs of this period, in shapes such as the late oinokoe, the double-handed jars, the imitation kylikes or the Punic-Maltese amphoras.

It is in this fourth century BC that we can confirm the presence of new pottery shapes of local origin, which show us the vitality of the economic life of the island at this period, as well as the high levels of creativity and independence, outside the possible cultural influence of Carthage. The appearance of native work, like the Punic-Maltese egg-shaped amphora, the late cinerary urns, perhaps copied from Egyptian models, the late oinokoes, the profusion of imitation kylikes, as well as the double handle jars, together with the presence of their own decorative motifs, are the sign of the prosperity reached by the island around that time (Vidal González, 1996: 105 and Sagona, 1996-97: 35 and 36).

Parallel to this development of commercial activity throughout the Tas-Silg sanctuary, we see a period of great rural development, especially in the fourth and third centuries, as is confirmed by the finding of a great number of tombs on the whole island (Vidal González, 1996: 34). These tombs must be placed in the unmistakable relation to the establishment of small agricultural and stock farms, which allowed for taking advantage of the island's resources, as well as for investing the undoubted benefits that the commercial activity would have left in the inhabitants of the island.

Nevertheless, the third century involved the island in the first Punic war. A text by Nevio (*Bellum Poenicum*, Iv, 37) tells us of a raid carried out by Roman troops on the island, as an example of the prevailing insecurity and instability of which we have received some evidence, like the existence of a defensive wall in the S. Pawl Milqi farm (Missione, 1968), the protective wall of the Tas-Silg sanctuary, the creation of towers for defensive purposes and as points of communication and warning. All this created a network which presumably linked not only Marsaxlokk Bay, but all the rural area of

Malta with the defensive position of Mdina-Rabat fortress, which would have been walled in accordance with the written evidence.

The island of Malta remained in Carthage's power sphere after the first Punic war, pointing to the upkeep of at least some political and strategic links of Malta to Carthage, and not towards nearby Sicily - annexed in the first war.

Malta joined the Roman world in the second Punic war, after which Rome started to control all the Mediterranean. In this context Malta performed a second rate role, as a small island lacking in strategical value, where only ships in distress reached port.

Nevertheless, the political annexation to the Roman sphere did not suppose the immediate elimination of the Punic identity of its inhabitants. Thus, the funeral practices were in the Punic ritual, as is shown in the continuity of some of their most characteristic elements, such as the bilicnic oil-lamp, together with Roman pottery (Vidal González, 1995). Carrying out burials in rock-cut tombs - a practice, with variations, which remains in the Paleo-Christian era - was a custom held by the majority.

This continuity of religious elements was also seen in the Tas-Silg sanctuary, which remained a place of worship in the Roman era. That this lasted at least until the change of era was confirmed by inscriptions of a Punic character. Inside the enclosure of the temple we found pottery shapes of Punic tradition until the first century AD, revealing the vitality in the late Roman era, of this temple to Astarte (Ciasca, 1970: 104 and 106). Then -very holy and ancient- it was dedicated to Juno. According to Cicero only the treacherous Verres was capable of sacking it.

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# A Century Ago

Guido Lanfranco

*Some centenaries and anniversaries that fell during 1998*

*300 years ago (1698)*

In the afternoon of 12th April a hoard of Arab gold and copper coins was discovered at Mdina at a depth of 6-7 palmi while clearing rubble to enlarge the cathedral square. The copper vessel in which the thousands of coins were found is still preserved at the Mdina Cathedral Museum. Although the exact number was not given, the weight was stated as 35 libre arid 6 onze. Studies indicate that the spot was in front of what now is No.1 St. Paul Square, on cathedral property. The discovery was considered a miracle at the time, because the bishop and cathedral chapter were at a loss wherefrom they were to obtain funds for the rebuilding of the cathedral, destroyed in the 1693 earthquake. Since the Grand Master thought he should have a share, the pope was requested to give his ruling. He decided that the coins should be shared between the chapter and the inquisitor, the former to rebuild the cathedral and the latter to perform works of mercy. The coins were of Fatimid times. The inauguration of the Numismatics Section on 28th March 1998 at the Cathedral Museum, Mdina, proved to be an appropriate occasion 300 years later! (Ref. A)

*100 years ago (1898)*

John Henry Cooke continued his excavations in Ghar Dalam by digging his ninth trench, in which he found remains of a bear. He had been excavating the site since 1892.

Albert Mayr of Germany continued his excavations and studies of megalithic remains. Among other things he studied the so called "tower" (It-Torri) or *Il-Borg ta' L-Imramma* of *Ix-Xaghra l-Kbira* at Gebel Ta' Cenc, Gozo. It appears to have been first brought to his attention by the Jesuit Manwel Magri.

The first proper survey of the Abbatija tad-Dejr hypogeum was undertaken by Filippo Vassallo on 30th May 1898. Vassallo figures again in this centenary, since he made the drawings for the

lithographic plates appearing in the book published by Annetto Caruana also in 1898, *Ancient Pagan Tombs and Christian Cemeteries...* This important government publication contains 33 plates and 129 pages, (and sold for 8 shillings!). Apart from the general sections on tombs, it includes also a monograph on St. Paul's Catacombs and another on the Abbatija Tad-Dejr. The following year Caruana published a similar work on the pottery, this time painted by Giuseppe Call, because Filippo Vassallo had meanwhile died (Ref. B) Malta Archaeological Review. Issue 3 1999

*75 years ago (1923)*

Excavations started at both Ta' Hagraat Temples at Mgarr, and the Roman Villa at Rabat, and continued until 1926. Important finds from Mgarr which included some interesting stone blocks, and earthenware and red lamps from Rabat with interesting decorations and designs were placed in the Valletta Museum. (Ref.C)

*60 years ago (1938)*

On 24th February quaternary deposits were found in "Tal Gizzu" quarry at Mqabba. In June some silo shaped tombs were found at H' Attard) and several others found later. (Ref.D)

*50 years ago (1948)*

Six tombs dated as 4th century BC were excavated in Triq il-Liedna, Fgura, from 28th October to 21st December. (Ref.D)

*25 years ago (1973)*

Media reported discovery of silos at Marfa in October.

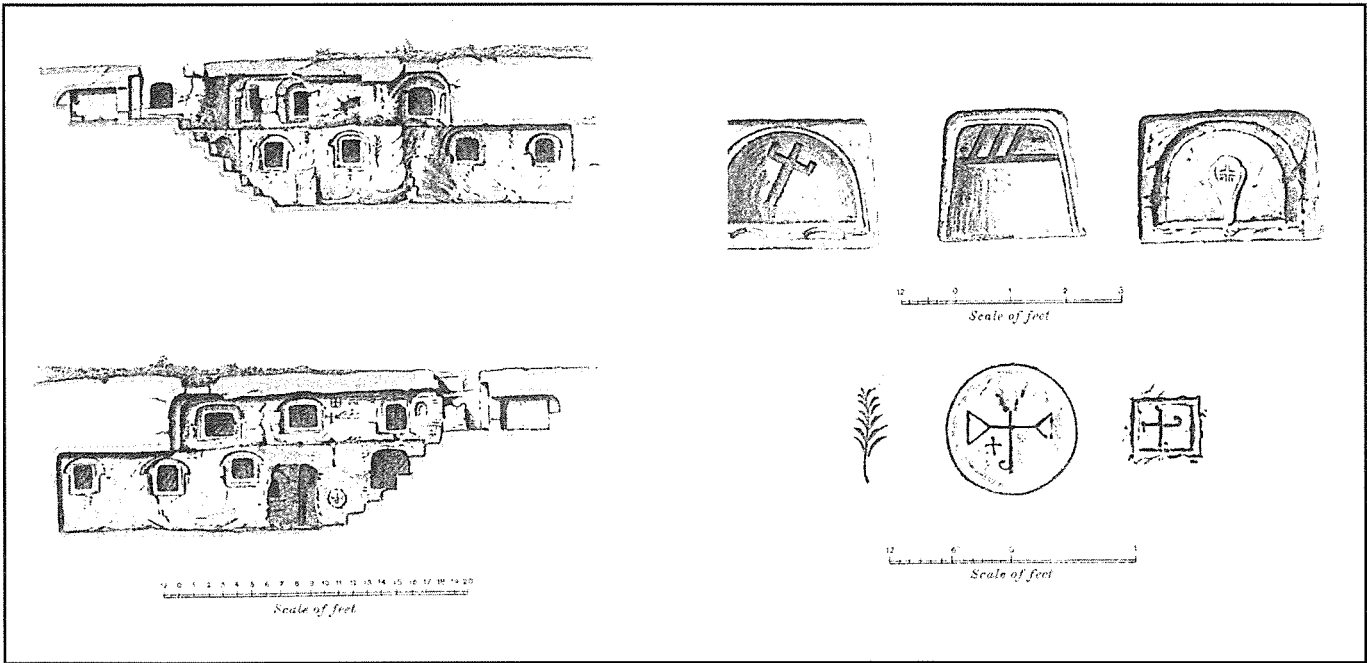
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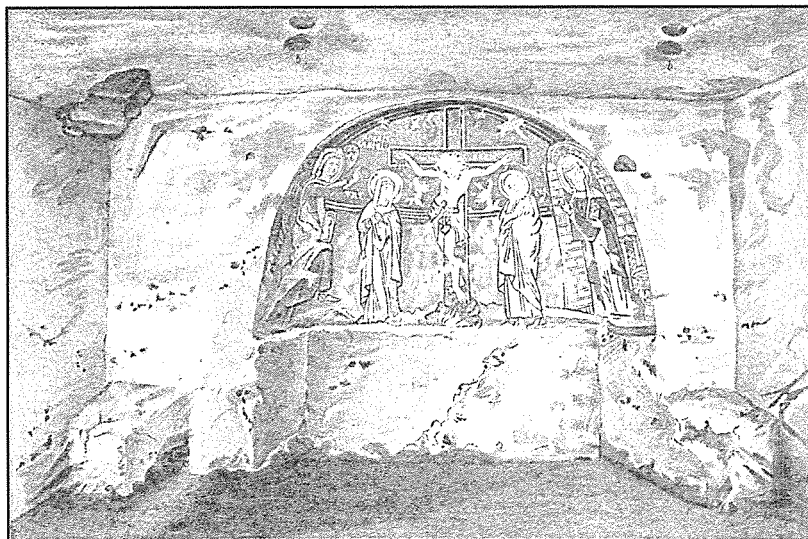
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“Tal-Liebru” Catacombs



Fresco at Abbatija tad-Dejr



# Some problems in Maltese archaeology

David Trump

With local interest in the islands' archaeology booming, the Malta Archaeological Society playing a commendable role in both stimulating and meeting that demand, and the Museum Department and the University of Malta both engaging more actively in research, it seems a good moment to reconsider the many outstanding problems which still beset the subject, yet give it so much of its appeal.

Speculation has long ranged over whether Malta was colonised before man had acquired the skills of farming. One cannot deny that it could have been. By 8000BC seafarers were importing obsidian from the Cycladic island of Melos to the cave of Franchthi on the Greek mainland. Malta and Sicily are rather further apart than that, but not by much. The means, then, were available. So far, however, there is no evidence that the crossing was made so early. One difficulty is that at this period the coasts were the preferred zone of settlement, and there is clear evidence that the sea has risen relative to the land on Malta, particularly along its more favoured northern coast. The crucial evidence is thus likely to be submerged. This problem will remain unresolved until such time as we discover conclusive evidence, more likely by chance than deliberate search since there is nowhere obvious to look for it.

For the best part of a century, archaeologists have bewailed the absence of settlements to go with the famous temples. Here is a glaring example of the shortcomings of negative evidence. The fact that we had not found them could not possibly mean that they were never there: the temple builders must have lived somewhere, and more or less credible explanations for the lack of settlements have been suggested. Far the most likely is that we simply hadn't looked hard enough, or in the right places. Slowly, examples are beginning to come to light, at Skorba, then Ghajnsielem, now Tac-Cawla. What is more, once the legal problems are sorted out and this site at Victoria can be properly investigated, a much clearer picture of how the people at the time lived will emerge, just as current study of

the skeletal remains from the Xaghra Circle is telling us much about their deaths, thus making up for the opportunity so signally missed when Hal Saflieni was first cleared.

The reason for the cataclysmic collapse of the temple culture around 2500BC remains as uncertain as it ever did. Theories abound, including soil erosion, crop failure, famine, disease, war or even religious hysteria, and the likeliest answer lies in a combination of factors, possibly with others we haven't yet thought of. Certainly, wherever deposits are found at the interface between the temples and the Bronze Age, the question of how the one gave way to the other should be in the forefront of any investigator's mind.

The same applies to the vexed question of where the Tarxien Cemetery folk came from. There are two schools of thought here: that, despite the marked differences in both material and non-material culture, the latter could have evolved from the former on these islands, or that they arrived here from some undiscovered foreign source. Again the problem remains unresolved, though new lines of evidence are opening up. In particular, if DNA samples could be recovered from temple period bones and compared with others from later periods, the rival theories of population continuity or replacement might be categorically answered. More radiocarbon dates from latest temple and earliest Tarxien Cemetery contexts could be very helpful too, to show whether or not there was sufficient time for local development to provide the answer.

Cartruts offer an even more fruitful field for controversy, indeed, a bewildering variety of interrelated controversies: date, construction, function (both mechanical and topographical), vehicle type, traction, social organisation. The only aspect on which there is general, though still not universal, agreement is that they represent some form of transport. I do not propose to rehearse the arguments here, having covered them recently elsewhere (see references at the end), without, it is only fair to add, coming

to any firm conclusions. At least, there is now renewed interest in them, and the more serious research that is devoted to them, the better the chances of at least limiting some of the wilder speculations, perhaps, though by no means certainly, eventually arriving at some generally acceptable consensus.

The replacement of the local Bronze to Iron Age culture, in the Borg in-Nadur and Bahrija phases, by Phoenician civilization faces similar disagreements to those of the change from Temple to Bronze Age. At least here no one doubts that the Phoenicians' roots lay back on the eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean, but the nature of its impact on Malta and Gozo - complete replacement of people, or at least culture, or some degree of blending of the two - and the date of impact, are hotly debated. As with our other problems, we remain desperately short of archaeological deposits bridging the changeover, which shortage may, or may not, in itself be evidence for a major break at this point.

Progress is at last being made on a typological subdivision of the Phoenician, Punic and early Roman pottery forms, based on a careful study of well recorded tomb groups. Perhaps, as a prehistorian myself, it is more my own ignorance than a general lack of knowledge which has hitherto blurred the picture here.

Another area where useful progress is at last beginning to be made is in the millennium following the Roman occupation. I have in the past bewailed the fact that this seemed an impenetrable "Dark Age". I read with satisfaction the note in the last Malta Archaeological Review that "in a property sited off Triq L-Imghallem (Victoria) a particularly important assemblage of Mediterranean ceramic remains datable to the 10th/12th centuries was recovered". It is just this sort of evidence we have hitherto lacked to bridge that embarrassing thousand year gap. And where one assemblage has come to light, we can hope for more.

I would not for a moment like to suggest that I am setting a fixed agenda for my successors of the younger generation to follow. On the one hand, so much will depend on chance discoveries, which of course will still need to be recognised and exploited to have any value at

all. On the other, one of their main tasks will be to think up, and then try to solve, new problems, rather than just chew away at old ones. I wish them every success, and the same sort of pleasure in the attempt that I have myself enjoyed since first digging in Malta with John Evans. Was it really 44 years ago?

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# Xarolla

Patricia Camilleri and Nathaniel Cutajar

## *A catacomb site under investigation*

On a high point to the south of Zurrieq, built in the eighteenth century, stands Xarolla Windmill. Below it lies what remains of a late Roman catacomb cluster. The site, at Triq Sant'Andrija, measures c.30mts in length and lies along Triq Sant'Andrija which leads to Bakkari on the south. Until a year ago, it was an asphalted road. The site was briefly mentioned by Caruana<sup>1</sup> in the late nineteenth century but remained unexplored. The road was opened up several times in the last fifty years to pass through various services: drainage, telephones, water, electricity. This necessitated cutting channels into the rock. The catacombs must have been immediately visible but no report was made to the Museums Department. Recently, however, interest in the site was revived through the Zurrieq Local Council which planned to create a garden area around the newly renovated windmill.

As soon as the Museums Department was made aware of the find and ascertained its importance, the Works Department was asked to create a deviation to the existing road and the asphalt surfacing was removed. What was revealed was a large cluster of catacombs similar in size to those found at Salini and Bistra. It is difficult to calculate the extent of the site exactly because there are buildings around it including the windmill and the very interesting, late sixteenth century chapel dedicated to Sant'Andrija. The catacombs extend underneath the windmill and the chapel and continue right up to the newly deviated road. It is probable that there are more tombs beyond this area. In 1998 another catacomb was discovered in the middle of Triq il-Bronja and the excavators think that the site may run alongside a road which existed in Roman times. If this proves to be true, it would give important insight into settlement and road systems of that time.

The tombs seem to fall into two zones, one running due east and the other running due west of Triq Sant'Andrija. The tombs to the west run

under the windmill and the chapel while those to the east have been encroached upon by what is probably a nineteenth century quarry. Although the first investigations were made at the catacombs to the east in 1996, the ones to the west were first excavated in 1998 and the work is now ongoing. While we do not know the exact extent of the site, enough of it has been exposed to allow a good description of it.

## *The west side*

More than ten tombs have been excavated so far and the team is aware of several more still awaiting attention. Of course, to describe as 'excavation' a site that has been cut through by service channels can only have a relative significance. However, having said that, there are deposits that appear not to have been touched since antiquity from which it has been possible to recover information. At some point in time, probably during the time of Knights, all the tombs were opened and rifled and what robbers did not do, has been done by the mechanical diggers. Most of the tombs have lost their roofs but many still have their sides and their bases intact or partly missing (see Plate 1). At first sight, the area is not easily understood. Tombs seem to cross each other and are not immediately identifiable. What is clear is the variety of the tombs. Access was most probably from the original surface area through a shaft. There is evidence of steps or footholes leading down to vestibules which then lead either to a single tomb or to a group of tombs.

One particular tomb, which has not yet been cleared, reveals a pair of unusual, triangular lamp holes, the only ones of that shape uncovered in the area so far. This particular tomb is of elegant construction with an oval, well-cut vestibule leading to a fine double window tomb with cut-out headrests. It now awaits the removal of modern rubble which was dumped in it during the cutting of the drainage channel that runs just in front of the window leading to the vestibule. The stone plug door still lies, face downwards, broken but probably untouched since robbers originally entered the tomb.

The Xarolla windmill was built above the catacombs (Plate II) and, interestingly, the builders utilized one of the tombs and its vestibule as a well. The tomb is almost intact at the sides but its base was cut away to catch water from the roof. A channel was cut, probably through the window entrance to the tomb, leading into the front area which was cut into a round shape and deepened considerably. It was filled up with debris years ago so, at present, it is impossible to determine its depth.

A most interesting set of tombs, accessed from a window entrance, is one of the most recent 'finds'. The window itself seems to be cut at the back of an already existing double tomb which is quite a common phenomenon in the Rabat area. Much work still has to be done to clarify the situation. However, it is already evident that there are two separate cubicles with what might prove to be quite extensive tombs behind them. In this set of tombs, the elegance of the architecture is quite striking and contrasts with some rather second rate cutting elsewhere in the area. One window tomb, for example, is anything but

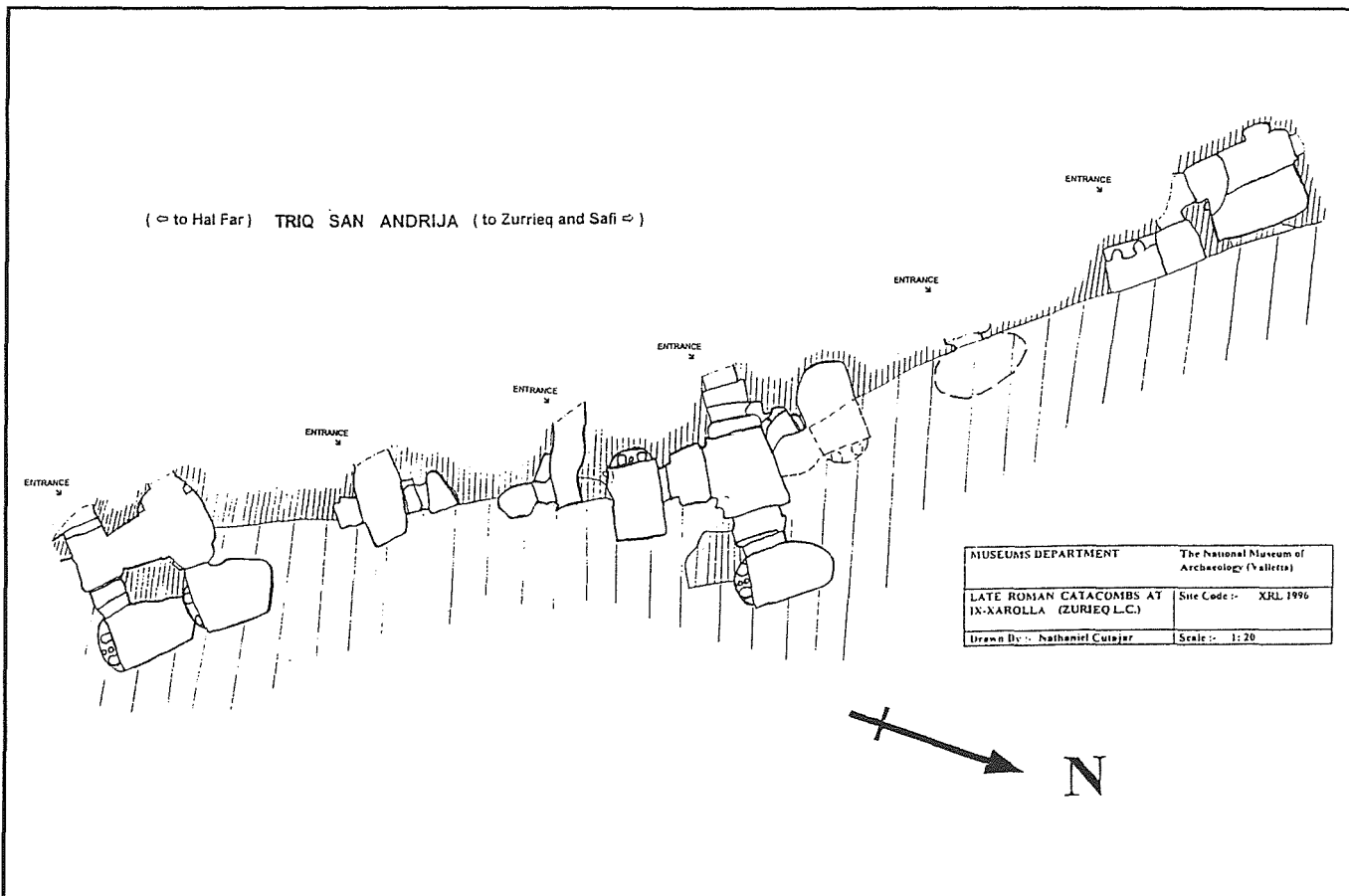
symmetrical. It slopes away at the feet (providentially for the excavators, as this is where the glass and bone washed down into a corner and was thus conserved) while the head area widens inexplicably on one side only. The headrests, as can be clearly seen in the photograph, have been cut haphazardly.

Every tomb, of which the sides remain extant, (except the one mentioned above) seems to have an arched shelf and rounded lamp holes and most are double tombs. There is an exceptionally wide tomb, however, which has a headrest cut in one side and not the other. One can only speculate that perhaps it was unused. It is also evident that the tombs lay at different levels. One or two, most of which severely damaged, lie almost at the surface while others were clearly cut at a depth of a metre or more.

*The east side*

The nineteenth century quarry has exposed the cubicles of several tombs. A number of smartly cut, short columns are clearly visible at the entrances to the exposed tombs, some of which

*Six catacombs aligned along the East side of Triq San Andrija at Xarolla, Zurrieq as they appeared following the 1996 excavation*



have steps leading up into the cubicles. These columns are decorated with carving on the capital and patterning on the stem and base in a fashion similar to some at the Salina catacombs. An interesting parallel can be drawn between these columned entrances and certain Roman sarcophagi of the 3rd/4th century. Most notable are the different capital designs evident in both the sarcophagi columns and those of the Xarolla site (Plates III & IV). Various fragments of *terra sigillata* vessels discovered across the site, also confirm that the cemetery reached its apex during the III and IV Century AD<sup>3</sup>.

Tantalizingly, the tombs themselves are, as yet, filled with debris. Lack of human resources and logistical problems have meant that only a small part of the site could be worked on at any one time. It is hoped that when the Volunteer Programme, co-ordinated by the Museum with the collaboration of the Malta Archaeological Society, gets off the ground the human resource problem at least will be alleviated. Although it is almost impossible to date these tombs, certainly the west side has a very different feel when compared with the east side. As the excavation progresses, it will be interesting to assess whether in fact there are differences between the two areas. The architecture is diverse and it certainly seems more sophisticated in design. However, this may not mean that the more elaborate superseded the simpler versions.

*For colour plates illustrating this article see centre pages.*

Perhaps, more investigation into these tombs will provide us with information such as pottery with which to date them. The differences in style and the variety of the tomb types beg the question as to why there was not a set model. Were there functional factors in play or, perhaps, social factors? Or was it a question of finance. This variety is evident all over the island. Some funerary *mensae*, for example, have superb carving while others, very near by, are badly executed.

It is probably safe to say that the site would not have come to light had it not been for the Local Council whose members have taken a personal interest in the works. It is heartening to note that several young people of Zurrieq have taken time off to help with the excavation while various youth groups have also lent a hand. This is an important example of collaboration that is an essential part of the development and maintenance of Malta's cultural heritage.

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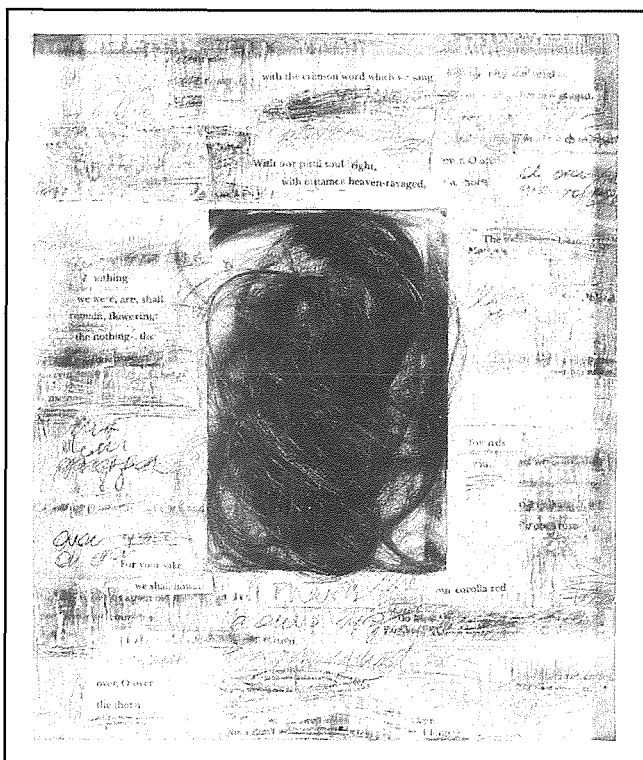
- 1 Caruana A.A., Report on the Phoenician & Roman antiquities in the group of the Island of Malta, Malta 1882
- 2 The excavation is co-ordinated by the National Museum of Archaeology
- 3 Information on the sarcophagus and ceramics is based on discussions held with the Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta

# Art as Archaeology

Theresa M. Vella

Human remains are one subject studied by archaeologists in order to learn about past societies. However small the available sample of such remains may be, the information that can be extracted from the physical characteristics often permits an imaginary reconstruction of individual types.

In recent years, the subject of human remains has also occupied the attention of an artist, Vince Briffa, who has since produced an exploratory series of works entitled 'Relics'.<sup>1</sup> Briffa reworked those bodily elements that are discarded with time - bones, skin, hair - into powerfully visual form; he imbued his findings with meaning by exposing the stratigraphy of bodily identity and by discovering structure in anonymity. In the artist's words, these artworks are "attempts to preserve what is left behind, to create poignant reminders of what once lived, to constitute the foundation of these relics of everybody - poising the subject, and therefore the work, between presence and absence, life and death, its only value symbolic."



*No-one's Reliquary (1997)*  
mixed media reliefs, human hair mounted in wooden cases

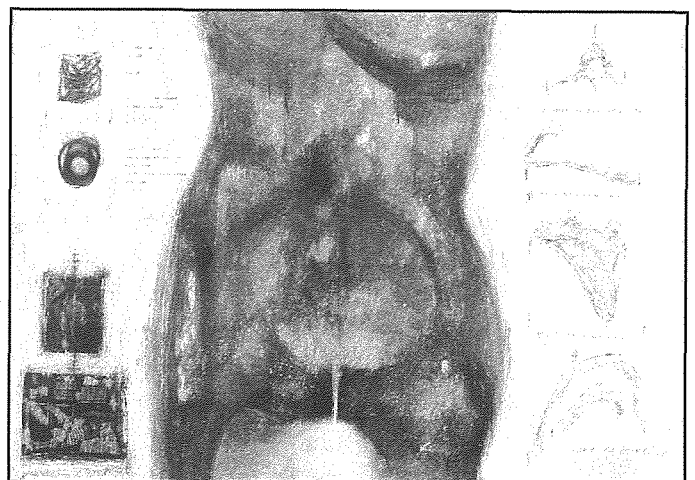
In addition to Briffa's purpose, these works would appear to propose an archaeological metaphor by presenting the viewer with those elements that, under a different brush - the archaeologist's - regain another purpose many years after the process of disfiguration has set in. The artist's creative practice may seem highly divergent from the archaeologist's scientific method. However, there is ultimately a common purpose, that of perpetuating our memory of past lives, by unearthing and exposing their remains to the gaze of the curious viewer, the museum visitor.

Vince Briffa's thought-provoking series breaks through conventional disciplinary barriers, thereby challenging the viewer to arrive at a new point of view on art itself. By analogy, can the archaeologist benefit thus by borrowing methods from other fields, namely that of art practice?

<sup>1</sup> The title 'Relics' refers to those early objects of veneration, fragment of the bodies of saints displayed in reliquaries, that uniquely combined artefact and authenticity. The exhibition was on display at the National Museum of Fine arts in November 1998.

*Vince Briffa*, with two other local artists, represented Malta at this year's Biennale di Venezia.

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*I have no boundaries (1998)*  
mixed media, pine needles, human hair, cellophane on canvas

# MUSEUMS NEWS

C. Michelle Buhagiar

The following is a brief account of the principal projects undertaken by the Archaeology Section within the Museums Department during 1997. This is intended to provide a more accessible report than that published in the Government Departments Annual Report for 1997.

## *New Units within the Archaeology Section*

Significant developments were registered in the re-organisation of the staff structure of the National Museum of Archaeology. There are now three principal areas of operation, with staff organised into three units, each of which is accountable for one of these areas of activity. These are: the Collections Management Unit; the Heritage Information Management Unit; and the Site Management Unit. During 1997, the total curatorial complement within the National Museum of Archaeology was increased from one Curator and two Assistant Curators to one Chief Curator, two Curators, and four Assistant Curators.

## *Collections Management Unit*

Permanent Exhibition Project (PEP) - During 1997, the Permanent Exhibition Project - which is aimed at totally refurbishing the National Museum of Archaeology - was mainly concerned with finalising the rehabilitation of the Auberge de Provence. The focus was set upon the ground floor where refurbishment works were completed, including carpeting and lighting, as well as the installation of new joinery works. This, together with the conclusion of the design and layout of the exhibition halls within the ground floor, enabled the Museum to initiate the installation of the information panels and accompanying graphics, as well as the showcases and the artifacts within these galleries. The exhibition display also includes a series of models and reconstructions which were refurbished or newly constructed.

During the year the artifacts which would form part of the exhibition display were selected and conserved. Conservation of the prehistoric artifacts was not solely limited to the smaller objects but it also included the Tarxien megaliths located within the Museum.

A fundamental part of the permanent exhibition project includes the development of exhibition content and display, which has been undertaken thanks to the Getty Grant programme which ran into its second year.

The Getty grant programme also enabled the Museum to acquire the services of Prof. Albert Borg, Department of Maltese and Linguistics, University of Malta and of Dr. David Trump, former Curator of the National Museum of Archaeology. Prof. Borg undertook the task of translating all the information texts into Maltese and also of producing the children's information text. Dr. Trump kindly offered his services to establish a study collection for Maltese prehistory.

Temporary Archaeological Exhibitions - Two temporary displays were set up by the Museum of Archaeology. One was held at the Foundation for International Studies on the occasion of an international seminar on 'Heritage in Small Island States', whilst the other was held at the Mediterranean Conference Centre.

## *Heritage Information Management Unit*

The following are the major operations undertaken by this Unit in the course of 1997:

**Bugibba** - A dense scatter of Punic ceramic sherds was discovered at an undeveloped site along the coastline between Bugibba and Qawra. A small trial trench was dug at this site, whereupon two distinct layers of soils were noted, the upper yielding a substantial amount of sherds, while the lower was found to be sterile.

The considerable amount of sherds present at this site, together with the types represented, suggest that the area could contain archaeological remains dating to the 3rd/4th centuries AD. No architectural features were, however, detected during this preliminary investigation.

**Marsaxlokk** - The Unit was involved in supervising and co-ordinating two separate archaeological investigations at the Punic sanctuary of Tas-Silg. A first investigation was carried out in the northern half of this site by an Italian archaeological mission, which was composed of members from the Universities of La Sapienza (Rome), La Cattolica (Milan) and of Lecce. The southern half of the monument was investigated by a team of archaeologists from the University of Malta.

**Mdina** - A sub-rectangular, rock-cut cistern was discovered within the Mdina ditch in the course of trenching works. The cistern had two major distinct fills, namely a fill of brown soil underlying a stony fill. An investigation of the cistern established that it had been obliterated by the excavation of the Mdina ditch in the 17th century, and must therefore pertain to a structure sited immediately outside the earlier line of fortifications. It is not yet clear whether these earlier fortifications were classical or medieval.

**Mellieha** - A cluster of three Roman rock-cut tombs were discovered at Il-Hewwiexa, along the Selmun ridge, by members of Nixxiegha Kulturali - a local cultural organisation. An investigation established that all three tombs had been disturbed by a small coralline limestone quarry early this century, although much of the original features are still well preserved. All three tombs appear to have had the usual shaft and chamber morphology. The interiors of the tomb-chambers, however, show features more usually associated with Late Roman catacomb chamber types, such as headrests, vaulted ceilings, and the absence of any water-drainage system. However, these tombs definitely do not belong to a catacomb complex, but were entirely isolated burial places. Owing to the disturbances which the site has undergone, no archaeological materials were recovered from within these tombs.

**Paceville** - A number of features belonging to a late 19th century fortification - known as Spinola

Battery - were identified and documented in the course of ongoing development at the site of the former Hilton Hotel. The original fortification, built in the 1890s, was demolished during the 1960s when the first Hilton Hotel was constructed. However, parts of the Battery had been buried beneath the foundations of the hotel, and were uncovered during the recent developments in the area. These remains consisted primarily of a short section of a vertical rock-hewn scarp and sloping counter scarp, situated along what was once the southern corner of the rectangular-shaped plan of the fort.

**Rabat** - A small catacomb complex was discovered within the St. Paul's Grotto complex in Rabat. Preliminary investigation and documentation of the site established that it consists of a small catacomb, equipped with a mensa and stibadium arrangement, window tombs and infant burials. Another small catacomb was investigated at the Grotto in the 1980s. There are also indications that other small catacombs had originally existed across the present street, under the Wignacourt Collegium. Preliminary examination of these remains suggests that the area was intensely used for burial in Roman times at least since the 1st and 2nd centuries BC, and continued to be extended until the 5th century AD.

**Rabat** - A large cluster of classical funerary monuments was discovered in the district of Tac-Caghqi. This site was found to include three rock-cut tombs and two catacombs, which have been only partially investigated. A further rock-cut feature was investigated, which was found to be roofed over by means of an intact barrel vault constructed out of Roman concrete. Although disturbed in recent times, these features were found to be in a good state of preservation and still hold substantial archaeological potential, thus requiring further, extensive investigation.

**Tarxien** - Two stretches of undeveloped land to the west and north of the Tarxien temple complex were investigated to determine whether they contained any archaeological remains. The need for these investigations was to identify areas free of archaeological deposits close to the prehistoric monument which could host a visitors' centre intended for the Tarxien Temples. In both instances, prehistoric structural remains and earth deposits were located, such as an apse-



like structure apparently made of a double wall built with medium sized, irregularly shaped stone blocks, and a large group of megaliths, possibly still in situ. These remains indicate that the Neolithic temple complex originally occupied a far larger area than that excavated by Sir Temi Zammit, that is, the area of the currently exposed monument.

**Valletta** - A large deposit of 18th and 19th century materials were recovered from within an abandoned water culvert in the basements of the Auberge de Castille. The material includes ceramics, glass, metal and animal bone. The ceramic assemblage from this site is particularly interesting because it consists of very distinct types. One finds English Blue on White stoneware and fine porcelain which was used as tableware for the English garrison. In sharp contrast, much coarser wares, including rough maolica and glazes from Sicily, together with glazed cooking pots probably from the Thyrranian area, were used in the kitchens. Thus one gets a marked distinction between the material culture employed by the British and by the Maltese as it existed in the colonial period.

**Victoria** - Two classical rock-cut tombs were discovered under the Bishop's Seminary in the course of development. The tombs were badly damaged and much of the internal archaeological remains were consequently lost. The archaeological investigation of these tombs still managed to recover archaeological material - ceramics, metal and glass - datable to the Punic and Roman periods, as well as some human and animal skeletal remains.

**Victoria** - A site on the east flank of the Cittadella height was investigated to evaluate the area's archaeological potential in connection to the planned development of the area. Preliminary results obtained so far indicate that the area was occupied in early modern times by humble domestic structures. Further investigation of the site should provide us with information as to whether there are archaeological remains from earlier periods.

### *Site Management Unit*

The Hypogeum Conservation Project - A number of key elements of this project were executed

during 1997. In February, the details of an improved visitor route which includes cloakroom arrangements and easier access for people with special needs were defined. During March, visitor walkways were installed in the middle level. These have been designed to eliminate treading over prehistoric surfaces, to create a smooth and safe walking surface, and to be 100% reversible. The climatic monitoring of the site was resumed in April 1997. In May, an Internet Website providing general visitor and background information world-wide was launched. This is the first Internet site providing detailed information about a museum or site managed by the Museums Department. The audio-visual experience which will precede the visit to the site itself was also completed during 1997.

**Mnajdra Temples** - The Mnajdra temples were re-opened to the public in September 1997, following the completion of extensive restoration works. The apse which had collapsed in the Spring of 1994 has been completely reconstructed.

**Tarxien Temples** - A brief for the development of the Tarxien Temple site was completed in October 1997, and issued to interested architectural firms by the Bank of Valletta International (BOVI) Heritage Trust, which is committed to funding the project.

# Society Report

## *Meeting with Cathedral Museum*

A joint meeting with the Cathedral Museum, held at Mdina, was a successful innovation. The talk, given by the Society's President, was on **The Mdina Roman Corn Mill and Corn grinding in Antiquity**. The star exhibit was the "Roman" *catillus* which featured in the last issue of the review. This came to light in the cellars of the Museum. The curious persistence of milling techniques which evolved and were used in parallel for millennia was described; these ranged from the primitive hard stone querns used for at least eight thousand years and still used today in many parts of the world, to the water driven mill described by Vitruvius in the first century BC, later modified to be wind-driven. The pattern of the evolution of mills was largely influenced by the type of grain, and thus by environmental and cultural factors.

The Mdina *catillus* was shown, by examples from most of the Roman and Carthaginian world, to represent an early prototype, showing features that have echoes of the Morgatium type of asymmetrical form. It has several features which, if not unique, are certainly uncommon.

## *Lecture by Professor J.D.Evans*

It is always a great pleasure to listen to Professor Evans who has, for over half a century, been part of the Malta archaeological scene. Indeed his monumental book "The Prehistoric Antiquities of the Maltese Islands" remains a comprehensive compendium of Maltese antiquities. It is now almost impossible to lay hands on; what a pity a new edition could not have been brought out to mark the millennium.

The title of Professor Evans talk was : **"Some Reflections on the last 50 years of Research on Mediterranean Prehistory"**. This was the first of the Society's activities to be held at the refurbished Museum and the Meeting was crowded. The speaker gave a masterly account

of a very prolific half century of archaeological discovery and his erudite *tour d'horizon* of the ancient Mediterranean was very well received.

## *Short Papers*

The Society asked senior archaeology students to give ten minute papers on a subject in which they were particularly interested. Although at first there had been the usual reluctance to talk for only ten minutes, this proved to be one of the most refreshing events of the year. The object of the exercise was not only to give the opportunity to give a paper in public, but to submit to the arduous discipline of confining the talk to ten minutes. A president of the United States was reputed to have said that if they wanted him to speak for several hours, he could do so right away; a one hour talk would, however, require at least a week's preparation; if he were to confine his address to ten minutes that would require at least a month's work.

The following topics were presented; Early use of metal, (Ms Rebecca Farrugia); Cave dwelling in Medieval Malta (Keith Buhagiar); the contribution of Palynography (Ms. Katherin Fenech); Archaeological sites at Iklin (Josef Briffa); Calcolithic Period in Syro-Palestinian Archaeology (Kevin Borda); Funerary sites at Mellieha (Ernest Vella); Ceramic transition between Late Bronze Age and Phoenician (Ms. Marlene Galea).

The talks were all fresh and stimulating and the standard of presentation was, on the whole, excellent. It is hoped that this will become an annual event.