

# The Mysterious Pans of Gozo

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The Gozo countryside continues to interest and surprise us. We keep falling over remains which must have been very meaningful centuries ago, but which now have fallen into disuse, disrepair, or have even faced complete destruction. Among the latter we find the insensate devastation currently going on at Ghar Ilma, near San Lawrenz, where troglodytic caves are being wantonly destroyed.

Among the unexplained man-made phenomena in Gozo, we find a number of rock-cut pans which have hitherto been disregarded. A cluster of these pans, hewn into the rock surface along the sides of Mgarr ix-Xini, Xewkija, were first reported in 1946 by Chev. F. Zammit Haber in his capacity as member of the Ancient Monuments Committee<sup>1</sup>. To our knowledge, these pans are the only ones that have been identified to date. A more detailed description of these pans is currently in press<sup>2</sup>.

The purpose of this communication is to announce the finding of a rock-pan on the opposite side of the island, at Dwejra, in the limits of San Lawrenz, and to give a brief description. It is common knowledge that the area around Dwejra has been the site of considerable activity in the past, as evinced by the presence of cart ruts in the area, as well as the famous Phoenician settlement at Ras-il-Wardija overlooking Fungus Rock.

## Description

This rock-pan is found on the southern side of the valley that leads to Dwejra Bay. It has the general features of those found at Mgarr-ix-Xini, as follows:

- The main component is a pan

measuring about 1.5 metres square, and about 40 cm deep at one end, and 20 cm at the other (labelled "A" in figure).

- Next to it, and at a lower level, there is a smaller roundish pan ("B" in figure), measuring about 83-95 cm in diameter and 50 cm in depth. In all likelihood this was meant to connect with pan "A", as is shown by the presence of a short but pronounced, imperforate, spout-like projection.
- Besides these, there are a number of communicating smaller pans, the first of which (pan "C" in figure) measures 80 cm long by 46 cm wide and joins the main pan ("A") near the lower corner on one side.
- Another shallow pan ("D"), about 90 cm in diameter communicates with pan "B".
- On the opposite side, and also communicated with pan "B", there is a much smaller pan ("E"), 25 cm in diameter and a couple of centimetres in depth.
- The whole complex is situated on gently sloping rock, with the larger pan "A" lying at a higher level than pan "B".
- Surrounding pan "A" on three sides is a shallow gutter, presumably meant to divert rain-water away from the whole system of pans.

## Comment

The significance of these pans is unknown. It is possible that they were

used to press fruit such as grapes or olive, the juice from which would collect in the round collecting pan. Alternatively, they could have been employed in the process of dyeing of textiles, or retting of flax from which linen was produced. These hypotheses are further discussed in the forthcoming publication mentioned above.

There are a number of similarities between the Dwejra pan and those at Mgarr-ix-Xini. These include:

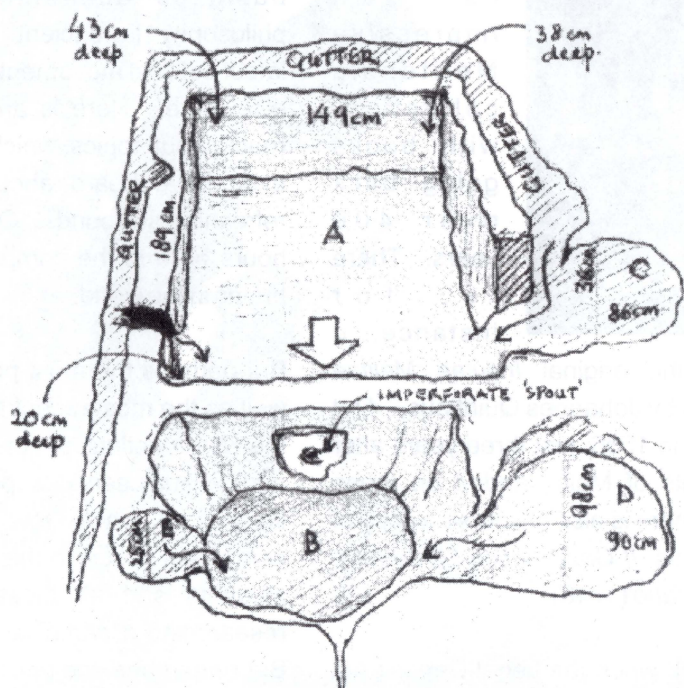
- *Siting.* They are all found on the side of a valley with nearby arable land and within a short distance from a safe harbour, (Mgarr-ix-Xini and il-Port tad-Dwejra respectively).

- *The incline.* They are situated on gently sloping rock, presumably to allow gravitational flow of liquid from the larger pan to the smaller one.
- *The layout.* Each system consists of a large square or rectangular pan which leads to a rounded smaller (collecting?) pan.
- They all have smaller and shallower side-pans, the significance of which is speculative.

The obvious point of difference between the two sites is the presence of a gutter around the pan complex at Dwejra pan system but not in those at Mgarr ix-Xini. This gutter is not unlike conduits found around the salt-pans at Marsalforn and elsewhere, and which serve the purpose of leading rain-water away from the pans and towards the sea. Moreover, post holes which are present at two of the sites at Mgarr ix-Xini, are not seen at the Dwejra site.



While our ideas about the function of these pans are mostly speculation, it is nevertheless important that these lesser known artefacts are preserved for posterity<sup>3</sup>. We must ensure that they are not destroyed or covered over with rubble which is slowly but surely burying larger and larger tracts of the Gozitan countryside.



<sup>1</sup> F. Zammit Haber, personal communication

<sup>2</sup> Jaccarini C. & Cauchi M.N. "The Enigmatic Rock-Cut Pans of Mgarr ix-Xini, Xewkija, Gozo." In press.

<sup>3</sup> We note with satisfaction that following our recommendation, the Planning Authority has recently added the Dwejra rock-cut pan to the list of Scheduled Sites. Personal communication, Prof. Anthony Bonanno.