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INTRODUCTION

Archaeology has not yet provided us with the proper tools and the right means for reading the minds of our prehistoric ancestors from the material evidence they left us. When and if such means are ever made available, we may rest assured they will be the product of science and technology rather than of archaeology itself. Till then such a scenario is bound to remain in the realm of wishful thinking and science fiction. With our feet planted firmly in the ground the most we can hope to do, in the meantime, in the field of religious thought, is to try to reconstruct, by using that same material evidence, the rituals through which our ancestors might have expressed their beliefs in the supernatural.

Trying to promote the use of contextual evidence in the interpretation of archaeological data is like carrying coal to Newcastle - for those who are less familiar with the Anglosaxon world or idiom, this is more like exporting sand to Saudi Arabia, an improbable venture which, I am told, has actually taken place. In this case, it amounts to stating the obvious, or speaking to the converted, though from the precirculated abstracts of some papers to be presented in this meeting, this might not be the case at all (Skeates 1993, though he is taking the "contextual approach" in the meaning given it by Hodder 1987). Nevertheless, I consider the physical context in which an archaeological object is discovered as a most powerful tool, perhaps the most powerful one, in the attempted interpretation of that object and of what it stands for. A powerful tool which, I find, tends to be underutilised, sometimes not utilised at all. The most glaring example of such a sin of omission is the case of the traditional approach in the interpretation of figurative objects. These tend to be clustered together in a mass of similar, or remotely resembling, objects originating from the most disparate and distant contexts (both in space and time) and given fanciful meanings without any reference to each item's archaeological context. On

the other hand, one of the most effective uses of contextual analysis in the interpretation of the prehistoric figurative repertoire that I know of, was made by Peter Ucko, as early as 1968 (Ucko 1968). Contextual analysis, both in this narrow sense and in the broader sense (i.e. social and spatial), has been most effectively promoted on the theoretical level by Ian Hodder (1986; 1987).

In the following pages I shall endeavour to assess the potential contribution of the archaeological (or physical) context towards a more realistic and less fanciful interpretation of certain ritualistic objects, in particular the figurative ones, in the Maltese prehistoric context. In so doing, I shall limit myself to the first two periods of Maltese prehistory - the Neolithic and the Temple Period - as these do not seem to be substantially separated from each other, culturally and possibly ethnically, while there is more than ample evidence for such a separation between the Temple Period and the following Bronze Age (Bonanno 1993).

The earliest documented period of Maltese prehistory, the Neolithic (c. 5000-4000 B.C.), has so far revealed only ritual evidence connected with the theme of life, possibly that of fertility. The evidence comes from the Neolithic open settlement of Skorba, excavated by David Trump in the early sixties (Trump 1966). What are generally considered to be ritual objects were found together in one hut (the so-called North Room of the Skorba Shrine) that had significantly larger dimensions than the other huts surrounding it, denoting thereby an unusual, at least a different purpose. These objects consisted of several fragments of small, stone (1) and terracotta (4) statuettes representing a human figure with pronounced female sexual attributes, a few goat skulls complete with horns but with their facial bones knocked away, and several cow tarsal bones with the lower face smoothed away to allow them to stand on end (Fig. 1). Although one needs to refrain from producing circular arguments by trying to confirm the ritualistic meaning of

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these objects from the architectural context after having concluded that the latter was a 'shrine' on the basis of the non-secular symbolism of the contents, in this particular case the circumstantial evidence within this particular hut, which is not repeated in any of the other 'domestic' huts, is sufficiently strong to suggest a non-secular, if not necessarily religious, significance. Rightly enough, the excavator prudently suggested that the structure was "some sort of shrine for votive offerings rather than a temple for public worship" (Trump 1966: 14).

vagaries of archaeology, and one is confident that such evidence does survive and awaits discovery.

TEMPLE PERIOD (OR LATE NEOLITHIC)

The Temple Period is that period in Maltese prehistory which follows in immediate succession the Neolithic Period and which is characterized by the world famous megalithic buildings known as temples. It corresponds to the Late Neolithic and Copper Age in Sicily and other central Mediterranean countries, spanning from c.

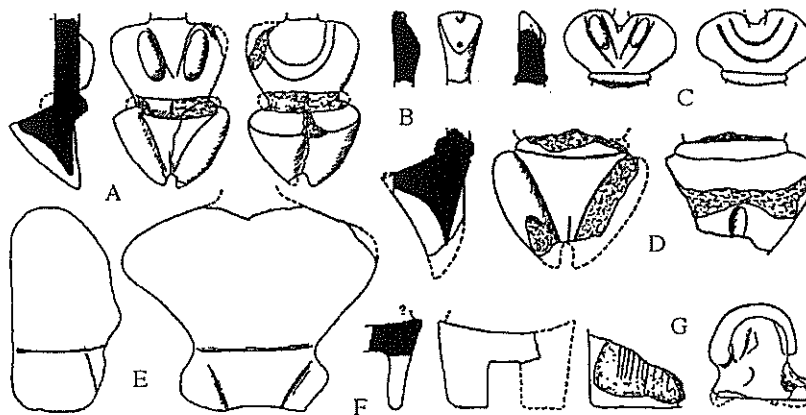


FIGURE 1. Fragments of statuettes. All except (B) and (C), from the North Room of the Red Skorba Shrine. (after Trump 1966).

The human figure, although rather strongly stylized, has very pronounced female sexual attributes. The repetition of the iconography and its association with the other seemingly ritualistic objects, as well as the absence of domestic or funerary features or goods within the circumscribed space in which it was found at the time of discovery, leave very little doubt that the figurines had a ritualistic meaning. In this case I would not mind going so far as suggest, as has already been done, that these human representations were connected with some fertility ritual, especially in view of their association with the standing tarsal bones, and that they may be referring to a belief in some form of Mother Goddess, connected with the fertility of the land and/or of the human species.

The rites of death for the whole of the Neolithic period (5000 - 4000 B.C.) are unfortunately not documented; so there is nothing much one can say about it except that, since Neolithic man did die and did dispose of his dead somehow, this situation is only the result of the

4000 to c. 2500 B.C. in calibrated terms. For this period we possess an extremely rich documentation of both the rite of life and the rite of death.

A sharp dichotomy between the two themes, that of life and that of death, is suggested by the buildings in which the related rituals took place: impressive architectural constructions above ground for the rites of life; underground, sometimes equally impressive, structures (natural, man-made or a combination of both) for mortuary rituals. These are very distinct from each other both in space and typology, although we know of at least two cases where access to the underground cemetery was via a monumental megalithic structure above ground (the Hal Safflieni Hypogeum and the Brochtorff Circle) and two situations for which one could speak of some spatial relationship between temple and underground cemetery (the Tarxien temples with the Hal Safflieni Hypogeum and the Ggantija temples with the Brochtorff Circle) (Fig. 2). Besides, some structural features characteristic of the temple architecture, such as

trilithic doorways and niches, are also found underground, while the curvilinear, lobed spaces with inward projecting, oversailing walls of the temples are thought to be ultimately inspired by similar properties of under-

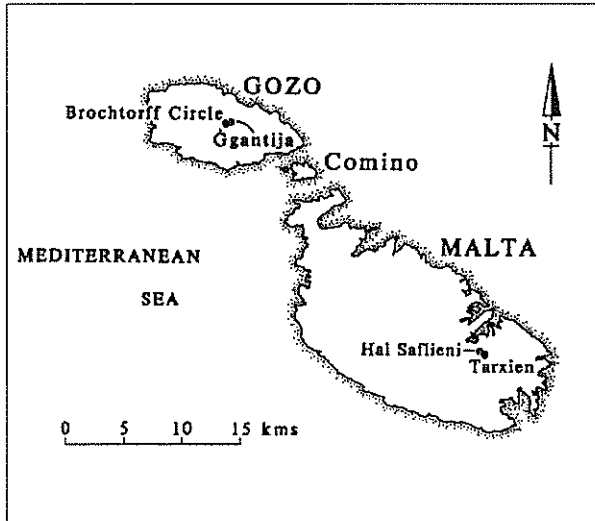


FIGURE 2. The Maltese Islands, showing the spatial relationship between Brochtorff Circle and between Hal Saflieni and Tarxien. (after Stoddart et al. 1993).

and Ggantija

ground tombs. Much less pronounced is the separation between the two kinds of monuments in terms of material culture and ritual artifacts, in particular human representations since similar specimens are found in both contexts. So much so that for the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum two purposes have been proposed, that of a burial as well as that of worship; a view that might have to be revised in the light of findings currently being made at its analogous counterpart in Xaghra, Gozo. That objects of material culture, in particular prestige items, are found in burial context as well as domestic and religious ones is no surprise: such objects were meant to accompany the possessor both in this life and beyond. But that human representations with overt symbolism of life, prosperity and abundance, such as figures of the familiar obese type and phallic symbols, should occur in funerary contexts almost to the same extent as in those of worship, is more than one expects and the phenomenon needs a deeper study than hitherto (Bonanno 1992).

RITUALS OF LIFE

The rituals of life practised by the Temple people seem to have been conducted in buildings constructed specially for that purpose. For that reason they are universally designated as temples. This does not exclude oth-

er, albeit secondary purposes, such as that of redistribution of agricultural produce suggested by the presence of certain artifacts like stone grinders and large stone bowls (Bonanno 1986). Such a function would complement that of the central worship and both would be very conducive to social cohesion (Bonanno 1991). Nor would this exclude the possible practice of similar rituals within the domestic environment; but, again, archaeological discoveries of Maltese contemporary settlements are limited to the extreme, consisting only of a couple of partially surviving huts belonging to the Ggantija phase excavated in 1987 (Malone et al. 1988). No ritual artifacts were found there except for a cone-shaped object buried under part of the hut construction and, therefore, possibly connected with the foundation rites of the hut itself (Fig. 3).

These rituals of life are abundantly documented particularly for the last phase of the Temple age, the Tarxien phase. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, practically all temples even those that were constructed in earlier phases remained in use in the last phase before abandonment, with their original furniture being gradually replaced by that in current use. - One notable exception is the small, 5-apsed temple at Tarxien, which produced very little archaeological material and seems to have been subjected to some structural changes before it was partially destroyed. - Secondly, almost all the major temple sites that were constructed in earlier phases were cleared of their deposits in the first half of the 19th century, leaving very little, or no record of the findspots of ritual artifacts from them. This situation permits a reconstruction of the evolution of the spatial context (the temple) but not, unfortunately, of the ritual contents themselves. The range of surviving temples suggests a gradual, but on the whole linear evolution from the simple to the elaborate and sophisticated, from the modest to the monumental, both in terms of size of plan and building material. From a simple trefoil unit, consisting of symmetrically disposed lobed chambers enclosed by a semicircular outer wall and built of relatively small stone blocks, the temple plan developed in stages into the six-apsed unit with a shallow niche at the inner end, maintaining the initial symmetry, and being built of increasingly larger blocks (Evans 1959; Trump 1990).

As a practical illustration of the contextual approach I am promoting for the interpretation of the ritual evidence I am reproducing a plan drawing of the Tarxien temples that appeared in an article of very recent publication under the name of all the joint directors of the current excavation project on Gozo (Stoddart et al. 1993: fig. 2). The drawing is by the project's draught-

sman, Stephen Ashley, based on information compiled by David Trump. This illustration provides an excellent tool for a quick visualisation of the immediate archaeological context of different classes of ritual objects. In it the more or less precise findspots of ritual artifacts are indicated (Fig. 4). Not even when the Tarxien complex was excavated, very early in this century, were proper, detailed records kept of findspots of important archaeological material. As the list of artifacts is long, I limit myself to the figurative ones. I start with the larger pieces of statuary and work my way down to the smallest specimens.

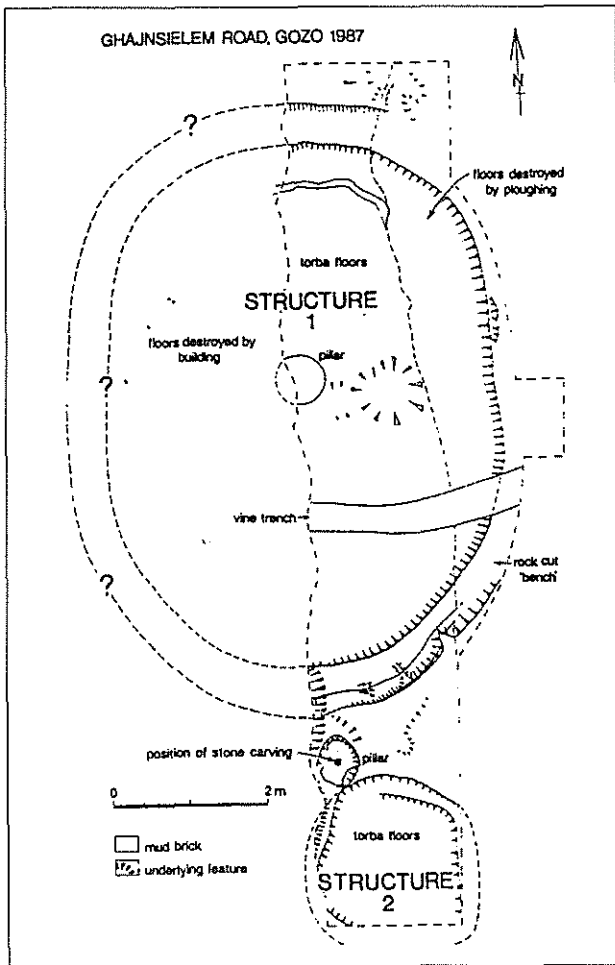


FIGURE 3. Plan of hut remains at Ghajnsielem, Gozo, excavated in 1987.

The largest statue ever to be discovered in any pre-historic context - and this record does not apply only to Malta - is the colossal statue of the typical Tarxien type found in situ, though in a fragmented state, inside the first apse (Room 2) on the right beyond the monumental doorway of the Tarxien complex. Originally it stood

almost three metres high and was the focal point of this extremely elaborated sector of the temple. Even if the ordinary worshippers were allowed only a fleeting glimpse of this system of two apses separated by the wide central passage, they would certainly have been impressed by its elaborate sculptural decoration, consisting mostly of a series of reliefs depicting variations on the spiral motif, dominated by the colossal seated obese statue. Two long and narrow friezes showing animal processions in low relief and lying on the floor in the inner part of the left apse (Room 3) are taken to represent sacrificial victims. The real victims might have been temporarily kept in this enclosure, as suggested by some rope holes on the floor and on some standing blocks. The actual sacrifices are thought to have taken

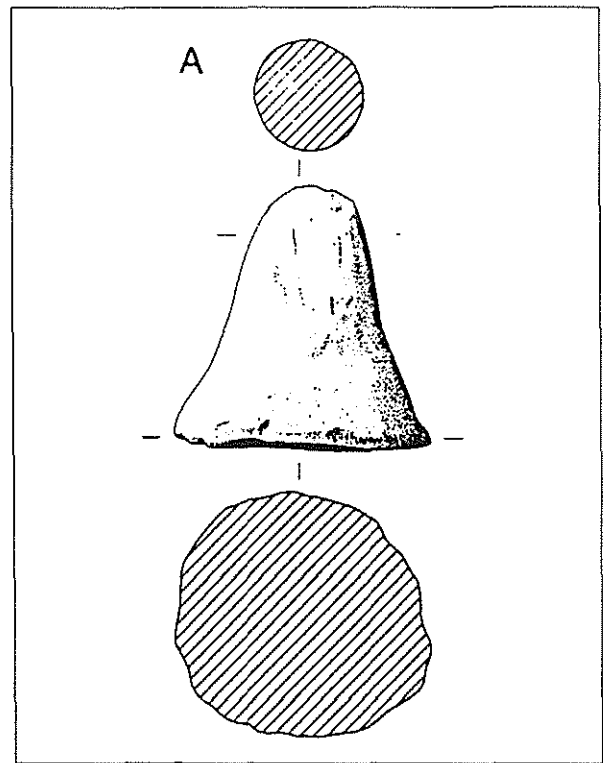


FIGURE 3A. Cone-shaped stone object found under pillar. (after Malone et al. 1988)

place on the decorated altar in the opposite apse. Inside a plugged hole on the sculptured face of this altar several goats horns were found accompanied by a long flint knife. Large quantities of their bones were also encountered in various recesses of the temples.

If there is an anthropomorphic representation, that has all the prerequisites to qualify as an image of a divinity it is this one. Its colossal size, its material, and

the tremendous amount of art and care expended in the elaboration of its immediate context leave little doubt as to the importance of the entity it portrayed. It is also likely that the sacrifices performed on the altar close to it were in worship of the divinity it represented. If, then, we accepted that its prosperous body was meant to convey a message of abundance and prosperity it would be hard to deny the suggested connection with the theme of life and fertility.

Two smaller stone statues of the same fat personage were discovered at Tarxien, which are important for their unusual iconography since they bear a series of

ments in the second left apse of the Middle temple (Room 15). They are quite different in their iconography and style from either the stylized obese type or the realistic nude female figures. Their hieratic pose and portrait-like facial features have earned them the designation of priests. One of them has been restored from various pieces and is exhibited in this way in the National Archaeological Museum. It is true that the chest section might not belong to it and a reconstruction of it as a priestess with the breast of the "Venus" from Hagar Qim has been proposed (Biaggi 1990). Whether priests or priestesses, the identification of these statuettes

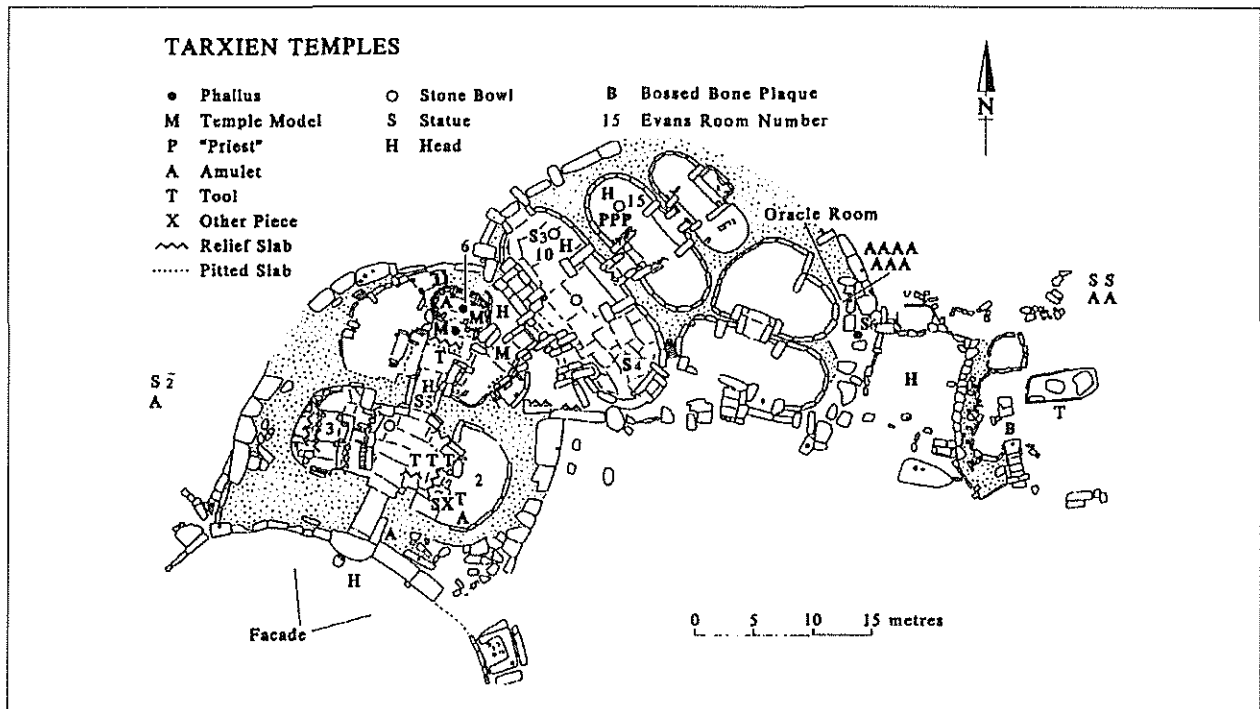


FIGURE 4. Plan of Tarxien Temples, showing the findsspots of various classes of objects. (after Stoddart et al. 1993 with additions)

miniature figures of the same obese type carved on their skirt or on the stool below them. Unfortunately, one of the two appears to have been out of context as it was retrieved to the west of western temple unit in 1929 (Evans 1971: 143, pl. 48, 4-5). The finds spot of the other is not given by Evans (1971: 143, pl. 48, 1-3). Zammit (1920, 197-8, pl. xv) simply states that it "was found among the debris" during his 1917-8 excavation campaigns which covered not only the east temple and the area to the southeast of it, but also a number of other areas outside the temples and some features inside the temples.

A class on their own are at least three hollow terracotta statuettes (some 60 cms high) retrieved in frag-

ments in the second left apse of the Middle temple (Room 15). They are quite different in their iconography and style from either the stylized obese type or the realistic nude female figures. Their hieratic pose and portrait-like facial features have earned them the designation of priests. One of them has been restored from various pieces and is exhibited in this way in the National Archaeological Museum. It is true that the chest section might not belong to it and a reconstruction of it as a priestess with the breast of the "Venus" from Hagar Qim has been proposed (Biaggi 1990). Whether priests or priestesses, the identification of these statuettes should be supported by the context in which they were found. Indeed, whereas the first set of apses of the Middle temple was accessible directly from the outside from a doorway on the east apse, the rest of the temple was secluded by the insertion, probably as an afterthought, of a stone block decorated with two spirals in relief which barred access to the inner temple. Besides, each of the two apses was screened off by a high limestone block decorated with spirals in relief. The restricted access to this area adds support to the identification of these figures as priests, and until a better explanation is proposed, we are fairly justified to continue calling them so.

A fragment of a statue of the seated type with calves

tucked up to one side comes from the first left apse of the middle temple (Room 10) where it was found in the vicinity of the large stone bowl not far from a strange artifact with a human head carved on a small stalactitic lump of stone. The size of the statuette (29 cms wide) again suggests a cultic purpose. So does the material, i.e. stone. Its apparent nudity may be taken to refer to

which has been identified as such on the strength of the non-secular nature of the contents. Similarly, I suggest that the space often referred to as "Oracle Room" at the Tarxien complex, between the inner right apse of the eastern temple and the outer wall, can be better interpreted from its contents. As many as seven amulets were found inside this area along with a phallic symbol

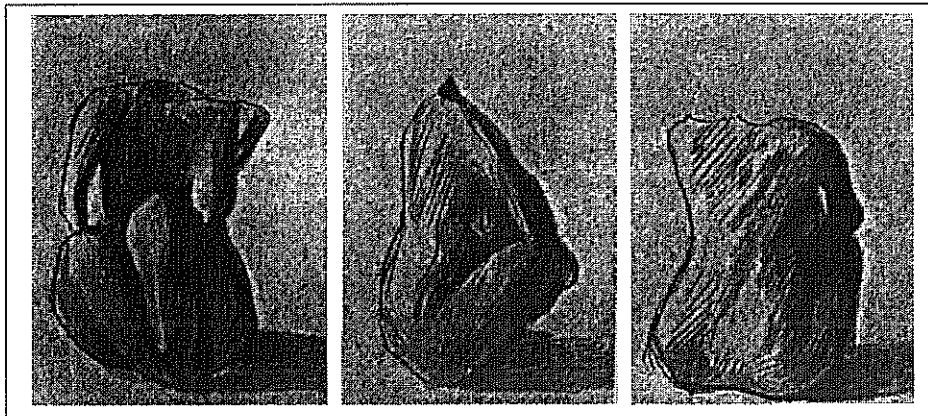


FIGURE 5. Naked clay figurine from Tarxien, height 30mm (after Zammit and Singer 1924)

some sex-related rite (Biaggi 1986). As many as seven statuettes of this type were found, apparently in a similarly positioned room, in Hagar Qim. But I'll come back to Hagar Qim later.

The smaller, miniature figurines, on the other hand, could very well have been votive offerings, especially those in clay. One such figure was found in the first right apse of the middle temple, while another one of stone was found in "court 4, near corridor to I, on west side", not far from the head of a largish terracotta figurine which was, however, encountered "at a fairly high level?" (Evans 1971: 143, pl. 49,1-2). Yet another figurine, depicting a naked woman (fig. 5) comes from the inner fill between the external wall and the so-called oracular room. Close to it a phallus was found. Two phallic representations (Fig. 6) found in the innermost chamber of the western temple seem to be connected with esoteric rites of initiation, given the seclusion of the architectural space in which they were found (Bonanno, forthcoming). Indeed, this space is not only separated from the rest by a richly decorated stone block but the floor level is also raised to that of the upper surface of the block.

The contextual approach works also the opposite way. Objects found in context could lead to the proper interpretation of that spatial context. Mention has already been made of the Red Skorba Shrine at Skorba

and a miniature figurine representing a seated naked women with knees raised against the chest (S6)(Zam-

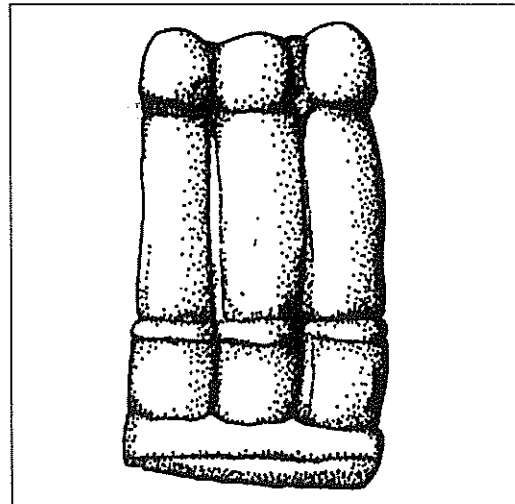


FIGURE 6. A group of three limestone phalli on a base from Tarxien, height 78mm.

mit 1920: 196). Such finds are more indicative, in my view, of a deposit of votive offerings. This seems to find confirmation from the type of formal doorway leading to it, a port-hole entrance with rope holes for door-posts on the outside, rather than on the inside - as one would expect if the space were for a secretive activity, like that of oracle delivery.

Although the temple complex of Hagar Qim has pro-

duced an abundance of anthropomorphic representations, we cannot reconstruct properly the original findspot of most of them because when the site was excavated in 1839 very poor records were kept (Fig. 7). Seven fat stone statuettes, four of which of the naked type with feet tucked up to one side, are reported to have been found in "apse 2 or near the spiral slab of room 1" (Evans 1971: 91-2). Two others of the group are seated, one apparently draped in an unusual flounced skirt and the second one wearing a long pig-

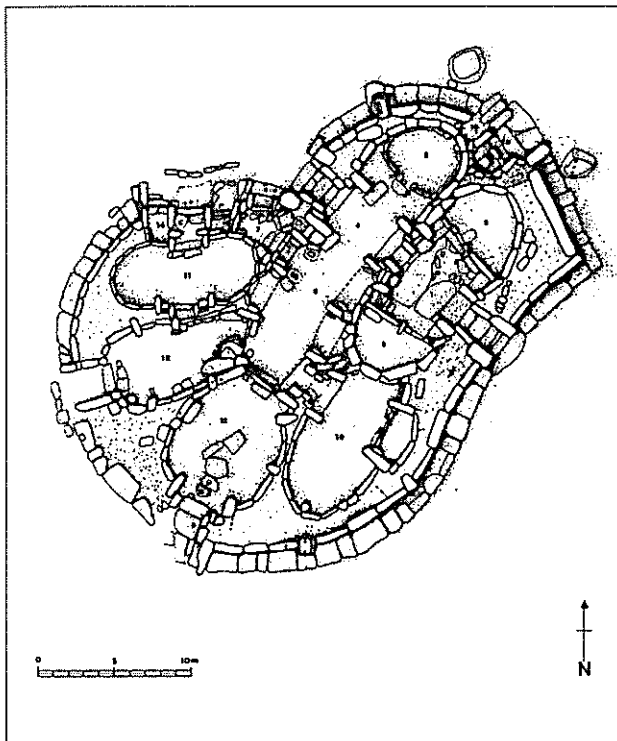


FIGURE 7. Plan of Hagar Qim Temples (after Anati and Anati 1988).

tail. There are no architectural niches in this area that could have housed any of these sizable statuettes in apse 2 while those found at the foot of the altar in room 1 could have originally stood on it. It is difficult to surmise anything from this context except that it is close to the main entrance, almost in the same position as the colossal statue at Tarxien. They could, therefore, be representations of the divinity. The nakedness of some of them, on the other hand, could have sexual overtones.

The small clay "Venus" figure belongs to the same group of nine figures that are reported to have been discovered either "at the foot of" the altar in room 1 or in apse 2. Its much more realistic nakedness is even more

erotic, at least to our eyes, and could, possibly, be associated with some fertility deity. But its small size and material suggest rather a votive purpose and would tend to exclude a cult statue.

We know the exact findspot of 3 stone headless statuettes of the typical fat figure (Fig. 8). These, together with a fragment of a fourth one, were found in 1949 under a raised capstone serving as a threshold to the higher level of the floor of room 10. It has been noted that the Hagar Qim complex must have undergone a series of reconstructions and adaptations, and it is likely that these statuettes found themselves in this buried condition during one of these operations. Nevertheless, the fact that they were removed from sight meant that they could be disposed of - possibly to make room for others that replaced them - and were never recovered. The same fate seems to have been that of two figures of the same type, this time carved in relief on a block which now forms part of the wall of room 13. Only the lower part of the legs of the figures survives. The carved surface of the block faces the outer wall of the complex and would have once been covered by the earth infill that usually occupies most of these spaces between the inner and outer walls. This twin figure again raises questions about the identity of the personage represented by these obese figures; but this is not the place to discuss such questions. Again, it is a question of context, one that in this case suggests that these representations could be disposed of, ceremoniously or otherwise, even within the same building.

RITUALS OF DEATH

The value of data derived from mortuary contexts in reconstructing the social organisation of ancient societies has been much discussed by both archaeologists and anthropologists. Of direct interest to the theme of this meeting are the works by Trinkaus (1984) and D'Agostino (1985).

Although the number of burial contexts for the Maltese Temple Period (4000 - 2500 B.C.) are not diachronically numerous, enough isolated examples survive to allow a reconstruction of the burial ritual from the first phase (*Zebbug*) to the last one (*Tarxien*) of this age (Bonanno *et al.* 1990; Stoddart *et al.* 1993). The figurative ritual evidence, in fact, tends to be more concentrated for the first phase, and greatly more so for the last phase. That of the first phase comes from a group of separate underground tombs discovered in 1947 at Ta' Trapna near Zebbug (Evans 1971: 166-169), and two rock-cut chambers sharing a single access shaft from the recent excavations at the Xaghra Circle in

Gozo (Bonanno *et al.* 1990). The data for the *Tarxien* phase comes from the well-known underground labyrinthine cemetery at Hal Safflieni in Malta, estimated to have received about 7000 burials, and another one, consisting of a system of natural caves, currently under excavation in Xaghra, Gozo (Stoddart *et al.* 1993). The cluster of small lobe-shaped tombs at Xemxija belong

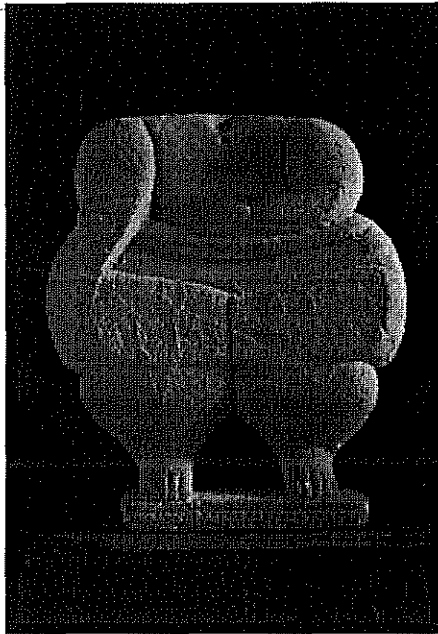


FIGURE 8. Standing limestone statue on base from under the threshold to Room 10 at Hagar Qim, height 486mm

to the intervening phases (Evans 1971: 112-116).

All examples mentioned are, indeed, of the collective burial type with the insertion of new depositions requiring the pushing aside of the remains of previous ones together with their accompanying mortuary goods. This process inevitably resulted in an archaeological situation which crystallised itself only on the occasion of the last use of the tomb, to be revealed *tale quale* to the archaeologist at the time of discovery. Such a situation obviously prevents practically any distinction between one burial and another. Human remains are thus hardly ever found in articulation and it is quite impossible to connect mortuary objects with any one burial. An attempt has been made to identify all the individuals buried in the Xemxija tombs as belonging to a privileged class from a study of the bones themselves, but no social stratification could be made out within each tomb (Pace 1972).

The only anthropomorphic representation retrieved from the Ta' Trapna tombs consisted of a stylised head

which was broken at the bottom, thus suggesting that it was part of a fuller statue (Fig. 9). The schematisation of the human form showed some similarity to the statue-menhirs of the contemporary prehistoric cultures of southern France and Sardinia and Corsica, and it has been known as the "Zebbug statue-menhir" ever since its discovery. The precise find-spot is not recorded; all we know is that it came from tomb 5 (Evans 1971: 168, pl. 61,7-8). The context obviously implies a mortuary ritual for the artifact but, since the head "was already broken when it entered the deposit" (Evans 1971: 168), one could not tell whether it was originally intended for some other purpose before being deposited in the grave. The discovery of a second head with identical features in one of the *Zebbug* tombs recently explored at Xaghra, Gozo has, however, confirmed the intimate connection of the artifact with death and mortuary ritual (Trump 1994). Thus, if a divinity is represented, it should be one connected with death. Furthermore, the excavators this time have noted its exact find-spot, that is, immediately behind the sealing slab of the tomb chamber, as if intended to stand guard on the interred human remains, or on their spirits.

Oddly enough the group of tombs explored at Xemxija in 1955, which belong to the next two phases, did not contain any figurative material (Evans 1971: 112-6); and since this paper is concerned mainly with the latter, they are not of much interest to us at this stage except for their negative evidence, namely, that burials were in fact conducted without figurative artefacts.

The most impressive burial place to be discovered so far for the whole of the Temple period is undoubtedly the Hal Safflieni Hypogeum, a complex system of mostly man-made chambers and halls hewn out of the living rock on three levels. Unfortunately, it was cleared of the abundant skeletal remains and other artifacts in the most unscientific way at the beginning of this century, and practically no records of the exact findspots of the figurative objects have been traced. We do have, however, an indication as to which rooms some of the anthropomorphic items were found in.

We have already suggested at the beginning that the separation between temples and tombs is bridged by representations of the obese figure. One example, in limestone and of roughly the same size as the Hagar Qim ones (c. 40 cms high) shows a standing headless figure that is almost identical to the slightly larger, standing, and similarly headless statuette from underneath the threshold of room 10 at Hagar Qim (Fig. 8).. It was found in pit (a) in room 1 along with some sherds of what Zammit called "typical Neolithic pottery" (Zammit 1925: 40). From the same pit two limestone

heads were retrieved, one of which (S/S.39) fits exactly into the neck cavity of the statuette. This pit is very close to the original entrance on the surface level and could, therefore, be more appropriately associated with

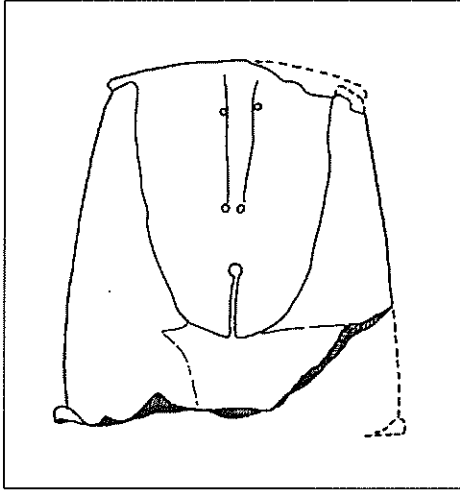
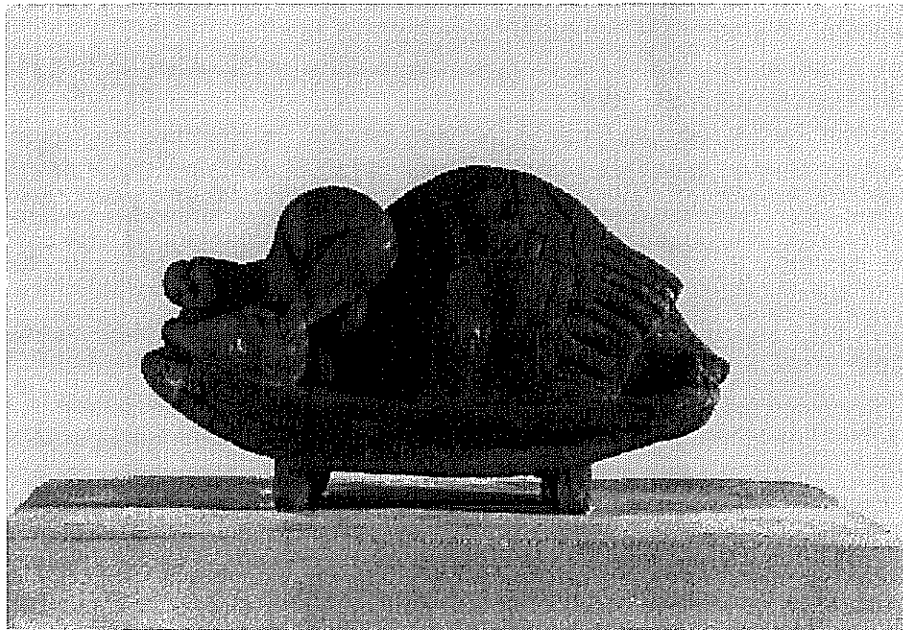


FIGURE 9. Head of an anthropomorphic stone stele from the Ta' Trapna tombs, near Zebbug, height 195mm (After Evans 1971)

that structure than with the underground cemetery itself. This could lead one to suggest that the built structure on the surface connected the mortuary ritual underground with that of the temples above ground. Furthermore,

FIGURE 10. Clay figurine lying on a bed from Hal Saflieni Hypogeum, length 122mm.



their findspot, buried in a pit, suggests once more that they were discarded and disposed of, after having served their purpose.

The two small terracotta figurines portraying sleeping women are traditionally thought to have been found in one of the small cubicles adjacent to the "Oracle Room", with the consequent inferences on incubation rites held in this area (Fig. 10). Zammit and Singer (1924: 90) thought that they had been discovered together in 1905 in a "deep pit of one of the painted rooms". Evans takes this to refer rather to the deep pit in the large painted hall (22) and tends to accept the suggestion that they "may represent priestesses in the act of incubation" (1971: 59). As Evans rightly observes, they have no parallels in the temples, but I would prefer to see in them merely personal grave goods, at most personifications of companions in the life beyond. The same applies to the other small-sized figurines and fragments thereof whose precise provenance is not known and which are finding parallels in artefacts being discovered in similar contexts in Xaghra, Gozo.

CONCLUSION

Since 1987 another underground cemetery is being systematically excavated by a joint research team from the Universities of Bristol, Cambridge and Malta, and the Museums Department of Malta. This consists mostly of natural underground caves originally encircled by a monumental wall of standing megaliths. My colleague

David Trump, another member of that joint research team, dwells in detail on the ritual objects and their contexts from this site. I therefore refer the reader to his contribution (Trump 1994).

A type of figure that has occurred only in underground collective tombs is that of the plank figures consisting of a blank, elongated trapezoidal body surmounted by a human head. A set of six of these in different state of completion have been found in a bundle together with a human head on a cylindrical pillar, another on two stumps, and a pig's head on a pillar. These are thought to have constituted the kit of a shaman for use in the mortuary ritual taking place in the lower cemetery levels at the Brochtorff Circle (Stoddart *et al.* 1993). No similar artistic expressions have occurred in the temples, and until they do so they may be considered to be specific to mortuary practice.

The reverse is the case of several terracotta figures, of substantial size, discovered in various degrees of

preservation in one of the inner apses of the Tarxien temples. A number of inherent characteristics suggest that they might represent priests (or priestesses, even). Again, so far this type of human representation have been found only in one temple context, at Tarxien.

In a paper read at the 1985 conference held in Malta on the theme "Archaeology and Fertility Cult in the Ancient Mediterranean", Brian Hayden propounded his view of prehistoric religious thought as based on complementary opposition between the two sexes (Hayden 1986). This seems to be the case in prehistoric Malta, certainly before the onset of the Bronze Age. From the presence of both clearly female representations and male sexual symbolism in both temples above ground and in underground cemeteries, one may conclude that for the Maltese Temple culture the theme of life (whether centred on female fertility or on complementary opposition between the male and female principles) is projected to the life beyond the grave.

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