Distribution patterns of imported lithic tools in Early Neolithic Skorba

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Introduction

The importance of lithic tools for archaeological studies lies in the recognition of these small objects as artefacts, that is, objects manufactured by humans as opposed to objects shaped by nature (Schofield 1995: 3). The basics of lithic tool production imply a high-level grasp of planning and preparation which is influenced by several factors, including complex ones such as the stratification of society. Therefore it is not surprising that lithic tools are thought to have been a key element in the evolution of human intelligence. Nowadays, these implements help archaeologists to understand human behavior through the systematic investigation of their attributes and location within an archaeological site.

Lithic tools have been studied by archaeologists for several decades and recent analyses have included studies which range from the micro to the macro scale. As is typical in archaeological studies, these follow a long tradition of technological/typological studies but do not attempt to answer a fundamental question: Why? Yet, in lithic tool analysis, methodologies which address this do exist, and include models such as the *châine opératoire* (Schofield 1995: 3). In this model, lithic tools are not analysed in view of their ultimate function, but as assemblages that are a product of human decisions and actions (Phillips 2003: 8). According to Phillips (2003: 8) the *châine opératoire* is used to understand and explain the life histories of artefacts, and consequently, of living floors.

This article is an attempt to understand the significance of imported lithic tools in Early Neolithic contexts at Skorba, through the identification of the relationship between visible architectural spaces and the lithic tools found within.

The Maltese Archipelago

The Maltese Archipelago is made up of three main islands, Malta, Gozo and Comino. Sedimentary in nature, this island group is made up of 315.6 km^2 of dry land with five main rock horizons, which are found in differing heights and depths. The topmost rock type is the Upper Coralline limestone, followed by Greensand (*Rina*), then Blue Clay, Globigerina limestone (*Franka*) and lastly the Lower Coralline Limestone. The majority of these sediments are marine carbonates of shallow water deposits.

Linked to the Ragusa Peninsula of southern Sicily by a submarine ridge, Malta is about 95 km away from the southern tip of Sicily and approximately 320 km from the North African coast. For part of the year, the local bio-ecology is supported by perennial springs from rainwater and perched aquifers. These springs tend to form and locate themselves in the *wied* (valley) basins and frequently acted as points of access for transportation and movement.

Starting from around 5000 BC, this insular environment saw the development of a unique culture whose material remains, which include masterpieces of megalithic architecture, are still the subject of research and debate. Among these remains is Skorba, a site which yielded evidence of use throughout Maltese prehistory and which is the focus of this study.

Skorba and its Early Neolithic Contexts

The site was discovered in 1914, when Themistocles Zammit, then Director of Museums, along with Carmelo Rizzo carried out an inspection of the fields known as Skorba in Żebbiegħ, limits of Mġarr. From then on, the fields in Skorba were subject to several investigations, including a stratigraphic excavation by David Trump in the 1960s with significant results which changed the chronology of Maltese Prehistory (Trump, this volume).

Among the many significant remains in Skorba, the excavators uncovered Early Neolithic structures dating to the Għar Dalam, Grey Skorba and Red Skorba phases (Figure 1 and Timeline). These Early Neolithic structures are so far unparalleled in the Maltese Islands, and are therefore considered to be a suitable case study for the understanding of lithic tool production.

Għar Dalam phase (5,000 – 4,300 BC)

Remains dating to the Għar Dalam phase were uncovered in two areas. To the southwest of the site, running east to west, was an 11-metre wall partly buried underneath the megalithic Temple. To the north was a hint of a cross wall, indicating that the wall was not necessarily a straight wall (Trump 1966: 10). Trump notes that "the comparative richness of finds on its north side suggests that this was its inner face [...]" (Trump 1966: 10). Amongst the finds recovered next to its northern face were charcoal, carbonized grain and several fragments of daub. Trump interpreted these as "parts of the wall's own superstructure, or more likely of huts enclosed by it which have left no other trace [...]" (Trump 1966: 10).

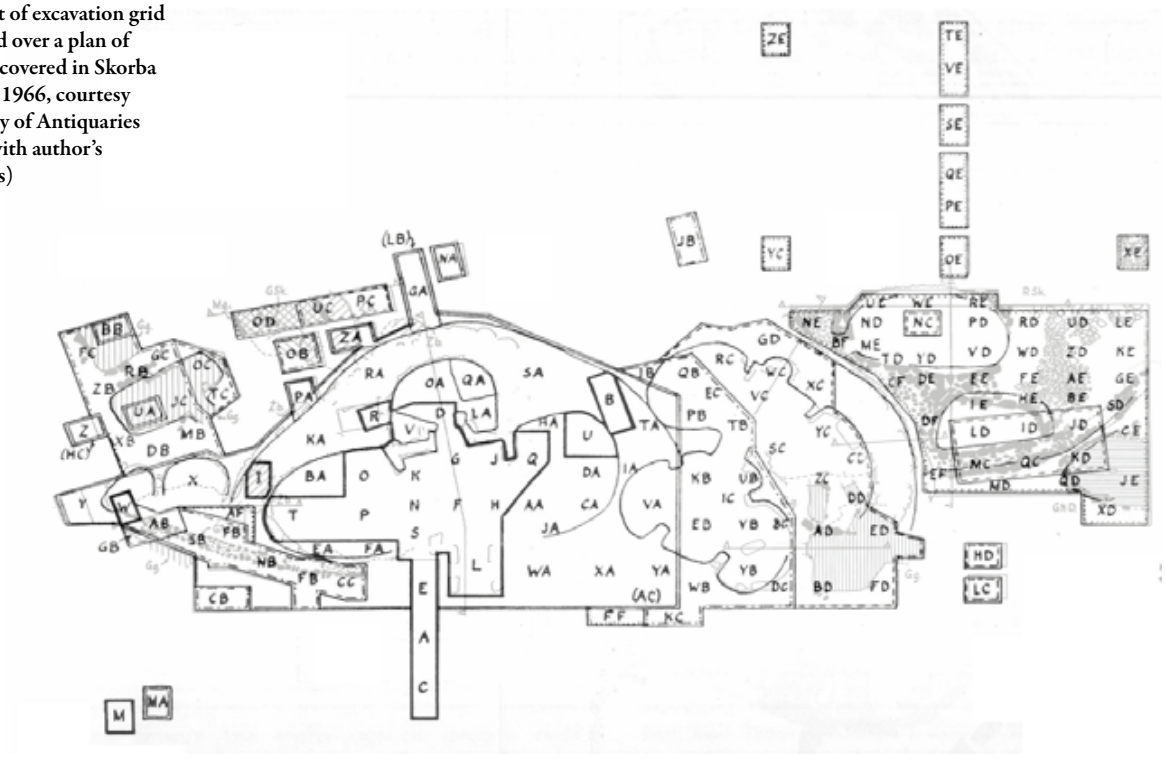


Fig. 1. Layout of excavation grid superimposed over a plan of structures uncovered in Skorba (after Trump 1966, courtesy of The Society of Antiquaries of London, with author's modifications)

To the southeast, at the edge of the excavated area, remains of the western wall of an oval hut, also of the Għar Dalam phase, were discovered only a few centimetres under top soil (Trump 1966: 10). According to Trump's observations, the 0.70m thick walls could not have supported any substantial superstructure. An upturned quern was found in the centre of the floor and this was possibly meant to act as the base of a central column (Trump 1966: 10).

Grey Skorba Phase (4,500 – 4,400 BC)

Grey Skorba was interpreted as a transitional phase of approximately 200-300 years (Trump 1966: 24-30) and only a few traces of it were found at this site. David Trump identified a hut in grid OD, which was built on sterile clay. In the north eastern pits, especially QE, OE, and PE, the excavators uncovered a large amount of knapped lithic debris. Trump recounts that '[...] although much more material, particularly refuse from the settlement, could be recovered from further trenches to the north, the reward in terms of information would be unlikely to repay the effort at this juncture [...]' (Trump 1966: 2). Although no architectural elements emerged from the area, the lithic finds were substantial, as shall be explained below.

Red Skorba Phase (4,400 – 4,100 BC)

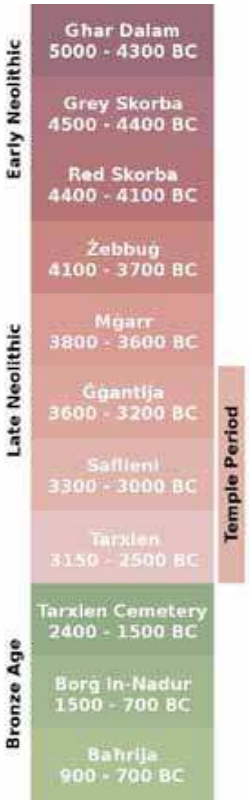
Two structures dating to the Red Skorba phase were uncovered in the eastern part of the site. The northernmost structure is approximately 8.40 m by 5.40 m and its entrance faced west. On the other hand, no doorway was found in the smaller structure which measures about 5.60 m by 3.20 m. Between these two structures, a paved open area was uncovered. This paving is level with the bedrock, which is also the floor, of the north room, (Trump 1966: 11-12), indicating that the two are contemporary.

According to Trump, the north and south room both contained, '[...] a great quantity of broken pottery of pure Red Skorba type including a number of restorable vessels [...] above bedrock in both rooms [...]' (Trump 1966: 14). This appears to indicate that refuse was allowed to accumulate in both spaces possibly within a short time span with no attempt at clearing out debris in the surrounding paved area.

Context and the *Châine Opératoire*

Lithics can simply be examined as tools which served a purpose and were eventually discarded. However, archaeological principles emphasize that artefacts have little meaning without a thorough grasp of their context of discovery. Contextual understanding requires comprehension of space and the material culture deposited within (Hodder and Hutson 2003: 166-168). The logic behind this understanding is that different human activities were carried out in different areas of occupation, even within a single hut. This 'sub-zoning' within structures has remained unexplained in Maltese archaeology, particularly due to the lack of adequate stratigraphic documentation.

Lithic tools, as material culture, have a use life which influences and is influenced by their context, making tool and context inter-dependent. Cognitive Archaeology, a branch of the New Archaeology movement, fine-tuned the concept of intrasite spatial analysis, and heralded the use of the *Châine Operatoire* model. Translated literally as the Operational Chain, this model attempts to study the prehistoric mind on the basis of material culture's use life (Schlanger 1994). The model traces the trajectory which leads from raw material to material culture until its eventual discarding, assuming that each step of this process was consciously planned by the human actor (Schlanger 1994: 144). Therefore, in trying to identify the processes which led to the development of the archaeological record, an attempt is made to relate to the whole process or chain.



As a result, there is an obvious connection between the contextualization of artifacts and the application of the *châine operatoire*.

The next section, will outline and discuss the major trends and patterns of the imported lithic tools in each structure of Skorba.

A Contextual Analysis of Imported Lithic Tools in Early Neolithic Spaces

Għar Dalam Wall

There are several issues which render the understanding of this structure difficult and which may lead to very different interpretations. Firstly, the functionality of this wall is not well understood, and consequently, there can be no consensus on the location of the inside or the outside of this structure. Secondly, there is no mention of where the majority of the lithic tools were recovered from. Figure 2, which illustrates the distribution of obsidian and flint in the stratigraphic layers of the trenches in Skorba, shows an evident majority of obsidian, which at first glance might be misleading.

Arguing from a quantitative point of view, there is a significant obsidian scatter in grid SB, located at the northern extent of the excavated Għar Dalam wall. Trump describes how, despite the lack of clear evidence of a floor on any side, the '[...] comparative richness of finds on its north side suggest that it was its inner face [...]' (Trump 1966: 10). This wall contained deposits of charcoal, carbonized grain, lithic tools and animal bones. Of all these layers, only SK SB 6 was identified by Trump as contemporary to the wall's prime utilization stage, the Għar Dalam phase (Trump 1960-1963: 15-23). The difference between the layers SK SB5, identified as containing Grey Skorba material, and SK SB6 might be caused by the abandonment of the structure. For the scope of this paper, the analysis of imported lithic tool material from this structure is based entirely on the deposit SK SB6.

The lithic material recovered from this area is predominantly obsidian the majority of which is of the Lipari type. All lithics are under 1.6 cm in length and 1.7 cm in width, indicating that they are actually debitage. The debitage from SK SB6 is a good indicator of the utilization strategies which prevailed in Maltese prehistoric communities. In width all the fragments are about half the length, implying that a large percentage of this group was broken through extensive use. None of the recovered artifacts have a visible distal termination[1] and only one instance retained a striking platform at the proximal end. During the study it was evident that this end might have been subjected to pressure strain, possibly through hand use. The latter point is of interest since nearby Sicily has fine examples of composite tools, where several pieces of lithics were mounted on a handle of different material. However, the author

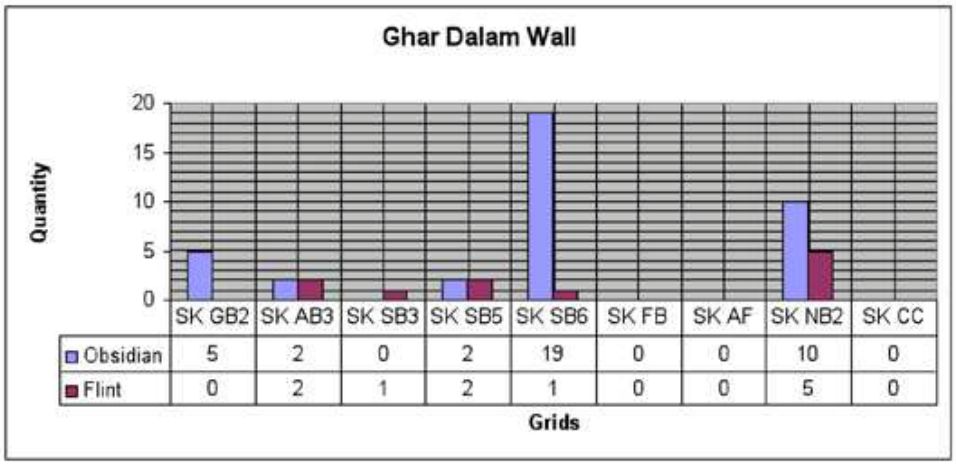


Fig. 2. Chart showing the occurrence of obsidian and flint within excavated deposits.

has yet to encounter a local discussion of the presence/lack of composite tools. In SK SB6 only one piece of flint lithic was identified and this was interpreted in the same way as the obsidian pieces described above.

Despite the fact that other deposits in this general area are of a later Grey Skorba phase, the finds are equally important for this study, especially since the latter lacks any substantial structural remains. In these deposits, the prevailing lithic raw material is once again obsidian. One of these deposits, SK NB2, yielded an interesting set of 9 broken obsidian blades of the Lipari type, along with a single Pantelleria type fragment. Once more, the size of the obsidian pieces is identical to the Għar Dalam phase tools recovered and described above. However, in this case, the broken blades had a single side edge, meaning that only one side was used for cutting/slicing.

The imported lithic tools found in this space indicate that, rather than a living quarter, this area can be more closely identified as a refuse zone. The latter interpretation is upheld by the excavators' note that no flooring was observed and an array of carbonized material was uncovered (Trump 1966: 10).

Għar Dalam Hut

The Għar Dalam Hut on the eastern part of the site is the only domestic structure from this phase uncovered during the excavations although unfortunately its eastern side was damaged by agricultural activity. Within SK JE (see Figure 3), a centrally located trench in the vicinity of the upturned quern described earlier, five lithics were found. These were all flake shatters. Multidirectional flake scars were observed on these lithic tools and these can be interpreted as an informal method of knapping. In principle, larger flakes detach in a uniform manner from the core sides. Therefore, this indicates that the initial size of these five lithics from SK JE would not have been larger.

Two other lithic tools were recovered from layer SK KD2 (Figure 3), which is situated in the western corner of the hut. These lithics are, on average, the same size as those found close to the Għar Dalam Wall.

If one compares the lithic tools discovered in both Għar Dalam phase structures, it is clear that flint tools make up a minor percentage of both assemblages. However, considering that the evidence indicates that one was a domestic hut, whereas the other is considered to be a building of special significance, the difference in quantity, but not quality, of imported lithic tools found in the Għar Dalam Hut and the Għar Dalam Wall requires a closer look. The termination types of obsidian and flint tools discovered in these structures are, in all instances, broken. Broken terminations can occur either because, during knapping, the lithic snapped unexpectedly, or because the tool

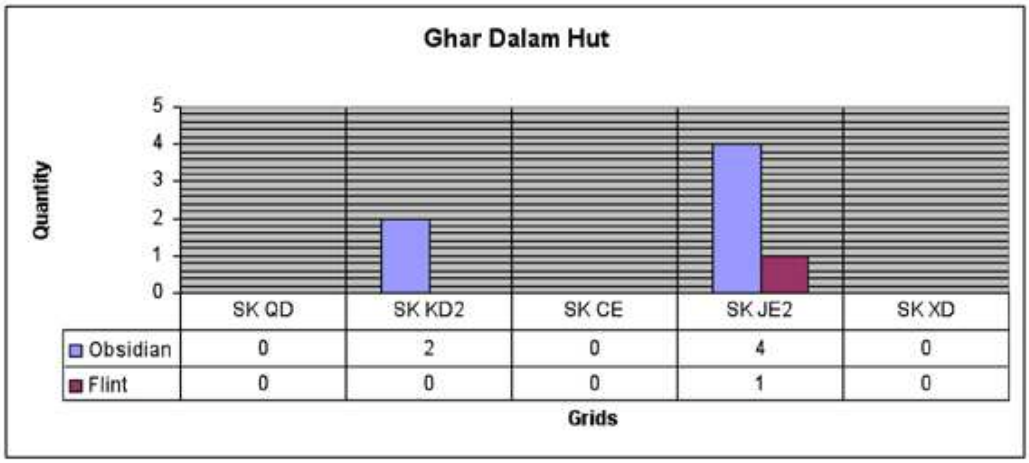


Figure 3: Chart showing the occurrence of obsidian and flint within excavated deposits

was broken through excessive use/pressure. In the case of the obsidian and flint tools from these structures, the latter appears to be the case. These imported tools also have a very low occurrence of cortical skin on their surfaces indicating that the material might have been imported from overseas after it had been prepared for working. Considering that these tools were made from a raw material that required substantial effort to acquire in limited amounts, it is possible these lithics were used for specific tasks for which local materials were not appropriate even though local chert was being used for a multitude of tasks. The spatial location of these scatters indicates that no actual knapping of imported lithic tools was carried out in the Għar Dalam structures and their discarding is related to chert waste within corners of the same structures.

Grey Skorba Deposits in North Eastern fields

Deposits situated in the north eastern fields of Skorba were chosen for study based on the fact that this area contained by far the most substantial Grey Skorba phase deposits.

From the several trenches in these north eastern fields about 700-800 lithic tools were recovered in Grey Skorba contexts. None of these contexts were identified as being close to the edge of the archaeological site, but almost immediately it becomes apparent that this zone must have been utilized as a dumping area of knapped waste.

Approximately 75-80% of the chert lithic tools are bulky shatter pieces (more than 1 cm in thickness), and therefore larger than the average flake. Thus, the area was a discarding point for waste pieces and probably a secondary dump from a nearby location. This interpretation is based on the relative lack of smaller sized lithic tools which are represented particularly within structures. Although imported lithic tools are in an even smaller quantity than in the other deposits and structures at Skorba, there is a larger ratio of flint than previously described.

Artefact number SK TE4 (13) is an unretouched flake tool, a type of lithic tool which has been observed in limited quantities (Figure 4). This tool indicates that no edge retouching was added as it was required for varied tasks. This fact is of particular relevance because it has yet to be determined whether, in this phase, imported tools, as opposed to local tools, were task specific or not. The same deposit, SK TE4, also contained good examples of unretouched flint blades which are broken on both the distal and proximal end, implying breaking caused by applied pressure, probably through hand use. These characteristics may be observed in the other flint tools, however, this part of the site lacked the over-exhausted lithic tools which are observed in other areas.

There is once again a consistent lack of obsidian functional tools in this area, except for some fragments which are recognized as

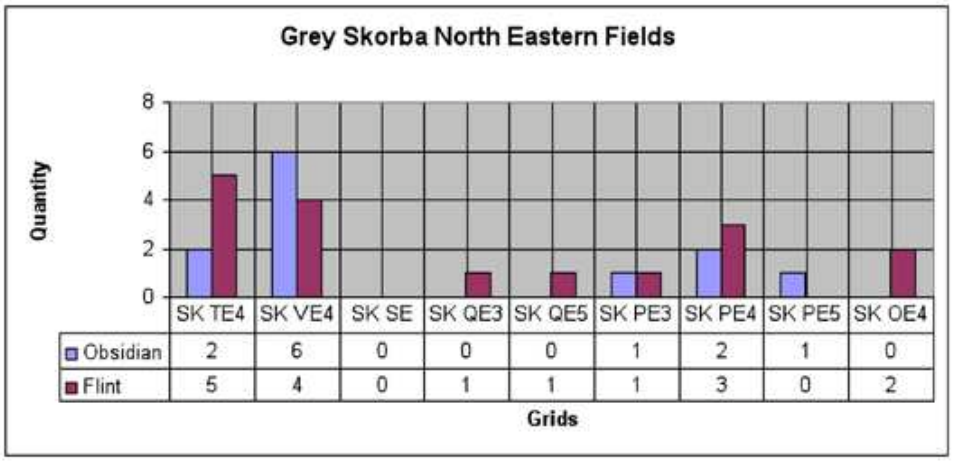


Fig. 4. Chart showing the occurrence of obsidian and flint within excavated deposits

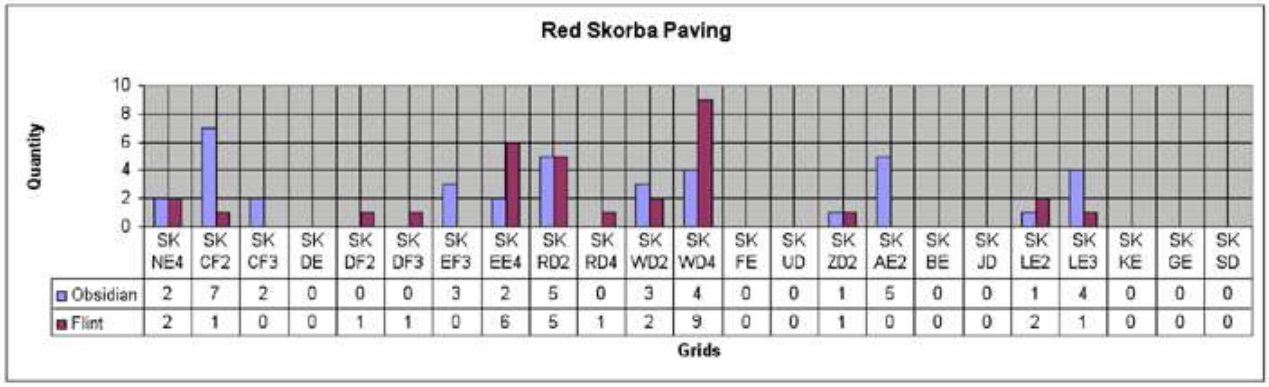


Fig. 5. Chart showing the occurrence of obsidian and flint within excavated deposits

broken blades. Therefore, the discovery in deposit SK VE4 of two obsidian cores, one from Pantelleria and the other from Lipari, is surprising. The Lipari core, the smaller of the two, appears to have had too many flakes detached from a single platform area. Consequently, the edges of the core became too steep and several blows from the distal side were carried out to reduce the steepness. Except for size, the Pantelleria core is similar in its technological traits. The former, however, has a clear example of a single striking platform which indicates the modification of the core's edges for supposed knapping continuation.

Red Skorba Paved Space

The small number of imported lithic tools over a relatively large space appears to indicate that this area was not utilized for any working tasks.

SK CF2 (5) and SK CF3 (1), both Lipari bladelets, are two of the few obsidian lithic tools which are still in a functional state. In these tools there seems to be no indication of the hafting necessary to create a larger composite tool. A possible interpretation of this fact is that despite the small size of the imported lithic tools, they were for the most part hand-held.

Red Skorba North 'Shrine' and South Hut

The northern 'shrine' structure contained more than twice the quantity of the lithic tools of the southern area. There is an evident chert scatter located at the eastern corner of this hut, directly opposite the doorway discovered in grid BF. Apart from the single flint tool coming from the doorway, the excavators also recovered a broken sickle, with unimarginal retouching, which is approximately twice the size of normal recovered flint tools. On the other hand, the eastern corner grids of VD and YD held the largest concentration of imported lithic tools within this architectural

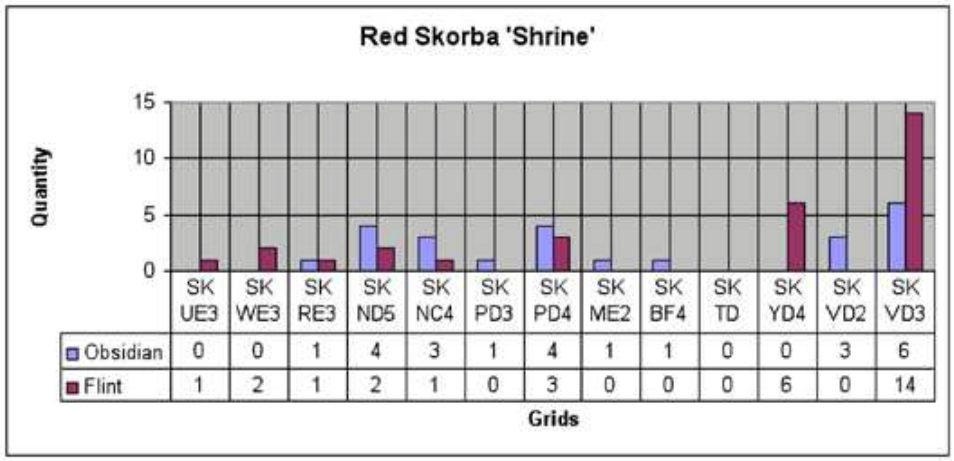


Fig. 6. Chart showing the occurrence of obsidian and flint within excavated deposits

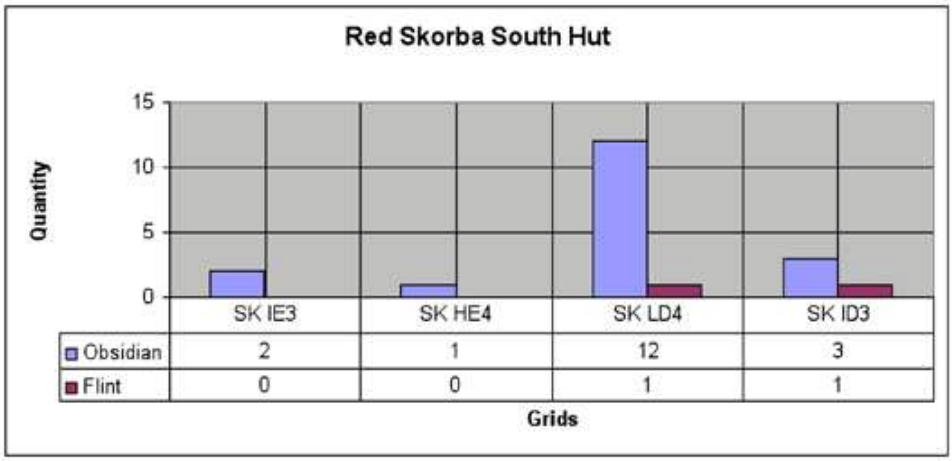


Fig. 7. Chart showing the occurrence of obsidian and flint within excavated deposits

space (Figure 6). However, none of these lithics appear to have been used.

The only other functional lithic tool observed, SK UE3 (197), was classified as a broken unimarginal blade. This type of blade was observed frequently in flint tools and appears to have been a popular solution for various cutting requirements. These blades had no edge retouching indicating that the knapped pieces were sharp enough for the required tasks

The highest concentration of imported lithic tools was uncovered in the southern hut's south-west corner (Figure 7). Whereas the average size of obsidian flakes in other areas of Skorba appeared to be in the 1.7 by 0.9 cm range, within this hut the average size appears to be around 1.4 by 0.6 cm. Combining this aspect with the interesting lack of functional lithic tools, architectural space differentiation appears evident. This hut has a clear concentration of debitage pieces, which are smaller than the other pieces observed. This fact presents two possibilities: these are debitage waste pieces; this structure did not have an influx of good lithic tools. Since there does not seem to be a substantial amount of knapped pieces uncovered in this hut to indicate that these were debitage waste pieces, the second proposal is slightly more compelling than the first.

Comparison between the northern and the southern structures does indicate significant diversity in size and functions. The various artefacts collected in the northern hut, such as the smoothened cow tarsals, isolated goat skulls and anthropomorphic figurines have consistently been interpreted as being purely ritualistic, thereby strongly implying a non-domestic use of this space. The majority of lithics, including local chert, were recovered from the northern structure where it seems that knapping might have been carried out, an interpretation which is not plausible in the case of the southern hut. Imported lithic tools are also represented more within the northern structure, hinting at the different uses between the two. In fact, the southern hut's artefact deposit is mundane and related to domestic activities. Additionally, from the waste scatter within the two structures, it appears as if material was pushed to the sides of the huts where less activity would take place. This is extremely interesting since it highlights the importance of detailed recording of artefact scatters.

Establishing a **châine operatoire** *for the Early Neolithic phases of Skorba*

After considering the main imported lithic tool scatters within the Early Neolithic phases of Skorba, it is time to attempt to trace the mechanisms which created this archaeological record. As discussed previously, an ideal method to describe cultural changes and formation processes

is through the use of the *châine opératoire* model. In this case, this model will be applied to the various phases and adapted to the local situation (Figure 8).

For the Procurement Stage, the steps of Organization, Travel and Acquisition, illustrated in Figure 8, have been identified. There is evidence that travel between Malta and Sicily was undertaken. The lack of knapped waste remains from production could indicate that either ready-made pieces were imported or else that the quantity of raw material was limited. Indeed, *prima facie,* this appears to agree with the interpretation of other scholars. However, a different interpretation, based on the core concept of the Procurement Stage, is possible. Even during the Early Neolithic, relations with the outside world must not have been geared solely towards procurement of raw material. Surely the demand for such products was high, and yet the supply was irregular and/or controlled. Another significant aspect is that only two imported obsidian cores were recovered on site from layer SK VE4 attributed to the Grey Skorba period. This begs the question of whether the inhabitants of Malta extracted the raw materials themselves or used their Sicilian contacts, a vital clue to understanding Skorba and inter-cultural relations at the time.

At this juncture, two conclusions may be drawn:

- Trips between Malta and Sicily were not intended solely for the procurement of lithic raw material,
- A different value was attributed to flint and obsidian, and for the latter, a distinction was made even between Lipari and Pantelleria obsidian.

These have wide repercussions on our understanding of contacts between Maltese and Sicilian prehistoric communities. Although it has often been assumed that exchange between the two was fueled by the impoverished needs of the Maltese communities, imported lithic tools show a restricted function aimed at specific tasks which would not have been the case had the simple lack of raw material been the cause of importation.

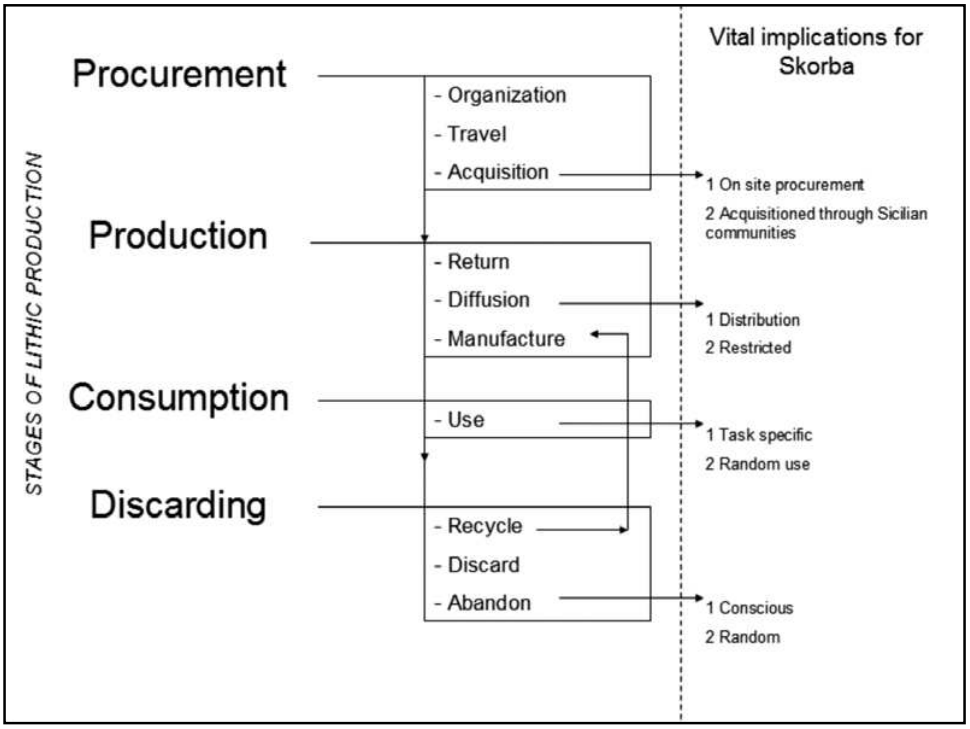


Fig. 8. The *châine opératoire* model applied to Skorba

Additionally, the sea vessel's capacity should also be considered as this must also have had a bearing on materials imported. A key consideration on this point is the amount of cortex on the dorsal side of flint lithic tools. In the Early Neolithic phases of Skorba there is only 5% of all the flint lithic tools with more than two thirds of cortex on the dorsal surface, whereas 19% are secondary flakes and about 76% are tertiary flakes. This implies that the flint raw materials were being shaped in efficient pieces and only then taken on the sea crossing. This shows that efficient use was made of the limited space available on board and throws a light on how movement in the landscape was planned.

The next stage, Production, starts with Return, that is, the arrival of the raw material to its destination followed by Diffusion, its distribution among the community. The biggest problem with tackling Diffusion locally is the lack of evidence for domestic settlements, and as a result, the absence of data makes it impossible to develop arguments in this regard. Interpretations of diffusion methods are somewhat dependent on the understanding of the socio-economic situation of the communities in Early Neolithic Skorba. The idea of a flat based society in early Neolithic Malta appears to hail back to Renfrew's interpretation of the first communities as "farmers [of] a simple agricultural economy [...]" (Renfrew 1973: 166) whereas the megalithic temple builders were believed to have evolved into " [...] more complex than simple farming villages [...] identified [as] chiefdom societies [...]" (Renfrew 1973: 170). In recent literature, Trump describes the Early Neolithic community as a simple society with some sort of stratification (Trump 2002: 32-34). This interpretation was based on the discovery of the Għar Dalam Wall and the northern Red Skorba Structure. Both these structures appear to have been anomalies, indicating a more intricate social system than that of a mere group of farmers. If the interpretation of these structures is correct, considering the amounts of lithics recovered from the Għar Dalam Wall and the northern Red Skorba structure in comparison to their contemporaries, it seems that imported lithic tools were more strongly represented in key structures. This might be interpreted as an indication of different functions, if not even of different access to valuable materials. In fact, whilst local chert was recovered in large amounts, flint and obsidian finds were limited and it is their context which throws a light on their value.

At the Manufacturing Step, there appears to have been a specific function linked to specific material/s. Obsidian seems to have been manufactured into thin cutting tools. These pieces were rarely retouched, indicating that the manufacturer was after a straight cut and not a serrated type of edge. This type of thin blade production is also core efficient since such thin pieces prolong the core's use life. Flint, on the other hand, was suited to a wider variety of tasks, as deduced from edge types represented in the Skorba assemblage. These types can be summarized as scraping, cutting, serrating and slicing lithic tools, of which the first two were most commonly observed. In comparison to obsidian, flint is relatively difficult to manufacture in thin flakes. Consequently, flint tools had a larger percentage of edge retouching than obsidian and local chert tools. Although no retouching type prevailed in any particular trend, all retouching was carried out according to the morphological shape of the lithic tools. For instance lithic tools with steep edges were retouched for scraping motions and it seems as if the knapper was retouching according to what his work had yielded.

With regards to the Consumption stage, from the brief overviews on local lithic tools in the literature, one would be tempted to assume that the general lack of functional lithic tools implies a scant lithic assemblage. Yet, it is the author's opinion that the analysis of edge types of the few functional lithic

tools which were found, may aid in the understanding of utilization strategies.

The consumption of an artefact would eventually have led to the Discarding Stage, wherein imported lithic tools were recycled intensively and extensively, a process frequently referred to as tool curation. Popularised by Lewis Binford in the 1970s, this term has been recently utilized in reference to greenstone axe fragments recovered from the Xagħra Stone Circle excavations (Malone and Stoddart 2004: 98-99). According to Malone and Stoddart (2004: 99) the curation of greenstone axes in the Late Neolithic is identified as a "[...] sacralization to maximize the resource [...]". Yet, already in the Early Neolithic, even the more common obsidian and flint were recycled to large extents.

With regard to this, although an analogy between a sedentary Neolithic group in Skorba and the semi-sedentary Nunamiut Eskimos in Alaska studied by Binford is risky, it is worth noting the following extract: "[...] very rarely does one go out into the environment for the express and exclusive purpose of obtaining raw materials for tools [...]" (Binford 1977: 259). Furthermore, the Nunamiut are "anticipatory in character" (Binford 1977: 261) and their lithic toolkit always had backups. Malta's case strongly suggests a non-wasteful character which ascribed high value to objects during their use life. Still, there is as yet no evidence of caching in Early Neolithic Skorba which suggests that the imported materials, particularly obsidian, had active purposes, possibly related to their locations. Domestic hut assemblages reflect a lack of influx of such tools, whereas the northern Red Skorba Structure and the Ghar Dalam Wall have produced some of the only functional lithic tools. From these points one can interpret that Maltese lithic tool production, particularly with regard to lithic tools, was anticipatory in nature with an in-depth understanding of the origin, raw material, morphology and current needs.

Conclusion

The lithic tool technology of Skorba during the Early Neolithic appears to have been a variant and localised expression of the imported raw materials' value. The finds suggest that the demand for such raw materials was higher than that for the local chert. Yet, factors such as taste and material comprehension might have been behind the driving forces of such an intensive curation. Evidently, these raw materials were utilized for tasks in which chert could not be used to produce efficient tools. The tool types observed in the Skorba collection are therefore largely a local product and reflect the conditions in which the community was functioning and how they were handling their needs.

Local technology was primarily limited by availability. However, intra-site variations indicate that different spaces were utilized by different persons for diverse functions. The biographies of these artefacts also hint at the possibility that the social system within Skorba was not flat or egalitarian. The varied exploitation of obsidian and flint should be considered in the light of the socio-economic structure of Early Neolithic Skorba as this enriches the corpus of knowledge on Maltese prehistoric communities. This underlines the importance of the biographies of these artifacts in Early Neolithic, and even more so in Late Neolithic, Malta.

Early Neolithic Malta is very often overshadowed by the unique megalithic culture which followed it. Obviously, in comparison to Late Neolithic or 'Temple' culture, the Early Neolithic inhabitants appear simple. Yet comparisons between Maltese and Sicilian Early Neolithic archaeology indicate an element of variability within the culture, reflected in the material evidence by the Għar Dalam Wall and the northern Red Skorba structure. Similarly, imported lithic tool production is different from that of their Sicilian counterparts.

It is evident that Skorba is contributing to our knowledge of the manner in which Early Neolithic local communities led their lives and, more importantly, how they identified with their surrounding world.

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Notes

1 Distal termination refers to the bottom point of the fracture of any given lithic. There are various types of terminations which are dependent on their morphological characteristics.

2 This tool type is, however, common among chert lithic tools.

3 This methodology is being applied by the Missione Archaeologica Italiana a Malta in their studies on Tas-Silġ.