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**Religious Landscapes and Identities of the Maltese Islands
in a Mediterranean Context: 700 B.C. – A.D. 500**

- George Azzopardi -

Abstract

Maltese religious practices in Classical antiquity are an area of research that has been neglected by scholars, particularly in recent years, in contrast to religious practices of the prehistoric periods. This has created a *lacuna* in Maltese archaeology that this thesis seeks to address. In doing so, the approach adopted in this thesis diverges from earlier accounts based largely on artefacts and sites divorced from their associated landscape. Instead, the approach pursued here focuses on the landscape context of religious practices of the Maltese islands.

An important contribution of this thesis is the deliberately broad definition of religious phenomena in the Maltese islands to include aspects of private religion and rural religious contexts. This aim is achieved through a multidisciplinary, comparative, and interpretative approach that is widely adopted throughout the core of the thesis comprising five integrated case studies. To facilitate a better understanding and interpretation of the religious phenomenon in the Maltese islands, the thesis evaluates the case studies within the religious context of the wider Mediterranean region.

Aided by syntheses and analyses of the data, this study examines ‘sacralised’ landscapes often re-worked to accommodate hybrid cults. It also identifies the religious identity(ies) of the Maltese communities as they are shaped by their different concerns or motives and as they manifest themselves in urban and in rural contexts, defines the nature of their religious practices, and establishes their character vis-à-vis other Mediterranean religious cultures.

Relying on a wider set of data sources and adopting a more holistic approach, the thesis builds up a comprehensive picture of ancient Maltese religious culture and identity that, while reflecting the religious scenario of the wider Mediterranean region, was characteristically Maltese in a hybridised form. The thesis, therefore, provides a case study that may contribute towards knowledge on religious cultures and identities in the Mediterranean in general and amongst island communities in particular.

Religious Landscapes and Identities
of the Maltese Islands
in a Mediterranean Context:
700 B.C. – A.D. 500

George Azzopardi

Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Archaeology
Durham University 2014

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During the course of my PhD programme, I was able to present aspects of my study through poster and paper presentations in some of the international conferences I attended, including the combined Roman Archaeology Conference and Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference (2012) in Frankfurt, Germany and the 18th International Congress of Classical Archaeology (2013) in Merida, Spain. These participations in international conferences were generously supported by grants awarded by the management committee of the Rosemary Cramp Fund and by travel scholarships funded by Durham University College Senior Common Room and the Skene Bursary. To them I should also register my gratitude.

Finally, but not least, I would like to thank all those copyright holders whom I managed to contact for being so kind to grant me their permission to reproduce illustrations or quotations from their respective works. Every effort has been made to trace and contact all copyright holders but, as this was not always possible, any omissions or errors will be rectified at the earliest opportunity, if notified.

To my late father Carmelo

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

1.1 - Aims

In re-assessing current understandings of religious behaviour, experience, and expression in the Maltese islands between *c.*700 B.C. and *c.*A.D. 500, this thesis seeks to articulate a new synthesis of developments and to re-interpret the subject within the framework of the wider Mediterranean context. In so doing, it will also contribute to on-going debates about the archaeology of religion and ritual in the Mediterranean region.

Anthropogenic impacts on landscapes are frequently difficult to identify and, as a result, it would be likewise difficult to distinguish the sacred from the profane. This is, perhaps, more so in contexts like rural places where elements of monumentalisation (that are often taken as a qualifying factor of sacred spaces) are frequently lacking. Thus, this thesis sets out to broadly determine what landscape elements, places, human activities, and objects (or representations) can qualify as ‘sacred’ or as religious (in Chapter 3) and, then, assesses the character of Maltese sacred spaces (including landscapes), rituals, religious representations, and religious beliefs or ideologies. This is achieved, in particular, through detailed case studies – in Chapter 4 – of six sites (two of which are presented together as one case study) in Malta and Gozo in the light of the available data and through the presentation of fresh interpretations of the latter. The sites are located at Tas-Silġ and Ras ir-Raġeb in Malta and at Ras il-Wardija, Għar ix-Xiħ, Tal-Knisja, and Tal-Loġġa in Gozo (Figure 1 below).

The thesis also seeks to identify relationships between Maltese sacred spaces (including landscapes and seascapes), rituals, religious representations, and religious beliefs or ideologies on the one hand and the significance or relevance, values, and meanings attached to them on the other. Through these mediating points, it seeks to identify how humans and supernatural beings interacted. Possible manifestations of commemoration, memory, preoccupations, concerns, emotions, or continuities in Maltese ritual practices are given due consideration.

On a wider scale, the thesis contextualises the religious behaviour, experience, and expression of the Maltese people within the broader background of the Mediterranean. Here, it also seeks to identify where and to what extent these either differed from their contemporary Mediterranean counterparts or assimilated them (or even contributed to them).

Against such a background, an attempt is made to look for elements of regionality, identity, ethnicity, and also hybridity in material expressions of religion and to identify the role played by religion in the formation, development, and definition of the Maltese communities and their local and Mediterranean identities.

Within this framework, another aim is to look for any social or political statements underlying Maltese religious iconography, monumentalisation, or practices and to assess any exploitation or manipulation of religion in the legitimisation or justification of social and political (or even religious) power, privileges, and structures.



Figure 1
Map of principal sites and locations mentioned in the thesis. Sites include those treated in the five case studies (above and Chapter 4 below) and major towns and harbours. (Source: www.geocities.ws/maltashells/NatHist.html).

1.2 - Background to the Maltese islands: a brief geographical and historical profile

In various respects, the Maltese islands – comprising Malta (the largest of the group), Gozo, and Comino (the smallest and least inhabited island) – are akin to other Mediterranean islands particularly those that, like them, are to be found in the central part of the sea like Pantelleria, Sicily, and the Lipari islands, though not

without their distinct characteristics. Shaped by geomorphological processes over thousands of years, the Maltese islands created the landscape one can witness today: a coast marked by cliffs, promontories, open beaches and sheltered coves and a hinterland with hills, fertile plains, winding valleys, and settled areas.

The coast has been a hub of activity in no less measure than the inner parts of the islands. It has provided livelihood to many coastal settlers through fishing activity. With their mooring facilities, harbours were the hub of trading activity bringing the Maltese and Gozitan communities in contact with the rest of the Mediterranean world. In times of distress at sea, not only harbours but even sheltered yet sufficiently deep coves could provide temporary refuge. At times, they could also offer facilities for small-scale trading activities. But apart from the latter, they were also notorious for illicit activities, namely piracy. Sea pirates who, for centuries, infested the Mediterranean could find sheltered coves or small landing beaches very suitable to launch their piratic activities from. Small islands, in particular, could also provide an ideal setting for their base (Rauh 2003). Nonetheless, the coast was (and still is) in continuous change as a result of both natural agents like sea or wind erosion as well as anthropogenic agents when, to accommodate demands linked to maritime and trading activities, changes to the coast are effected especially by way of building new artificial harbours.

Further inland, one would come across fertile plains, most likely, at the foot of hills. Natural water springs bursting out from beneath the Upper Coralline hilltops (where water cannot filter further down through clay) feed the fields and, sometimes, even similarly fertile valleys which, for this reason, have long hosted agricultural activities (Pedley *et al.* 2002; Pedley & Hughes Clarke 2002). Irrigation and water storage systems skilfully developed by the peasants help maintain the land's fertility in drier seasons. The relatively dry garigue areas which have fewer water resources are usually reserved for pasture. While run-off water collected in cisterns is sufficient to sustain herds grazing on the garigue, it cannot support a thriving agriculture particularly if based on vegetables and fruit trees. Thus, different kinds

of agricultural products are not only grown in different seasons but also on different types of land depending on the latter's suitability. This strategy ensures a varied supply of agricultural products throughout the year – the Mediterranean *coltura promiscua* (Barker 2005: 57, 65) typical of the Mediterranean region. At the same time, any surplus the Maltese and Gozitan agricultural communities might have produced could be exchanged with other products they might not have had.

As even the land itself often helps shape human nature and its destiny, all of these topographical and geological elements as well as climatic factors have, in various ways, contributed to shape the life of the Maltese inhabitants by way of the latter's responses to these same elements or factors throughout the seven millennia of their presence on the islands. Their responses are reflected in the type of dwelling places they resorted to (like caves) or built (like houses), the costumes they donned, the agriculture they practised, and their pastimes. The elements or factors just referred to are not altogether hostile but not entirely friendly either. In adverse conditions – particularly those affecting agriculture and most especially the climatic ones which proved to be beyond their control – the islanders often had to respond by resorting to alternative or supplementing subsistence means like herding, textile production, fishing, and trade. The sea-boundedness of their inhabited land facilitated the last two activities even better.

Situated at the very heart of the Mediterranean, the Maltese group of islands lay at the centre of a network of movements and activities which shaped the Mediterranean region – and not least the Maltese islands themselves – for many centuries. As a result, during the 7000 years or so of their occupation, the Maltese islands came in contact with various cultures: waves of different prehistoric peoples (Neolithic, Temple Period, and Bronze Age), Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Byzantines, Sicilian-Arabs, Normans, Angevins, Aragonese, Knights Hospitallers of St John, and British (TABLE 1 below). All of these were constantly competing for geographically strategic positions, for military exploitation, for influences, for

political control, and for commercial markets in the Mediterranean (Fiorini and Mallia-Milanes 1991).

The Maltese islands appear to have been first settled around 5000 B.C. (Trump & Cilia 2004: 10, 23, 26, 54-5) and remained occupied ever since, though not uninterruptedly. But this study will focus on the early historical period of the islands starting around 700 B.C. By this time, mainly through their commercial networks in the Mediterranean, the Phoenicians came in contact with the islanders. Initially, there may have been sporadic contacts that, gradually, consolidated themselves into a form of permanent presence. While the Phoenicians integrated themselves with the rest of the population, they introduced and adapted new ideas too as evidenced by their surviving material legacy (examples in Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 20-71). This period appears to have also ushered in a new settlement pattern with emphasis laid more on centrally-located urbanisation like Melite (today's Rabat and Mdina) in Malta and Gaulos (today's Victoria) in Gozo. In the religious sphere, new cults were introduced (as can be shown, for instance, at Tas-Silġ sanctuary) although, initially, these may have been syncretised cults developed from earlier ones.

By the time the Phoenicians were well established in the western Mediterranean, the city of Carthage (itself under Phoenician domination) assumed a leading role in the western Mediterranean, comprising also the Maltese islands as from the late sixth or early fifth century B.C. From now on, the Maltese islands found themselves also immersed in the political and military intricacies that, by then, were characterising the central Mediterranean as Carthage and the newly-emerging power – Rome – were competing for power and supremacy.

This situation gradually ended with the balance tipping in favour of Rome and the Maltese islands shifted to Roman control around 218 B.C. (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 35, 131). This ushered in a long period of around seven centuries during which the Maltese islands were to participate – to greater or lesser degrees – in the unfolding

TABLE 1
Maltese chronology

Period	Phase	Duration
Early Neolithic	Għar Dalam	<i>c.</i> 5000 – 4300 B.C.
"	Grey Skorba	<i>c.</i> 4500 – 4400 B.C.
"	Red Skorba	<i>c.</i> 4400 – 4100 B.C.
Late Neolithic / Temple	Żebbuġ	<i>c.</i> 4100 – 3700 B.C.
"	Mgarr	<i>c.</i> 3800 – 3600 B.C.
"	Ġgantija	<i>c.</i> 3600 – 3200 B.C.
"	Saflieni	<i>c.</i> 3300 – 3000 B.C.
"	Tarxien	<i>c.</i> 3150 – 2500 B.C.
Bronze Age	Tarxien Cemetery	<i>c.</i> 2500 – 1500 B.C.
"	Borġ in-Nadur	<i>c.</i> 1500 – 700 B.C.
"	Baħrija	<i>c.</i> 900 – 700 B.C.
Phoenician		<i>c.</i> 700 – 550 B.C.
Punic		<i>c.</i> 550 – 218 B.C.
Roman	Republican	<i>c.</i> 218 – 27 B.C.
"	Imperial	27 B.C. – <i>c.</i> A.D. 530
Medieval	Byzantine	<i>c.</i> A.D. 530 – 870
"	Muslim	A.D. 870 – 1091
"	Norman	A.D. 1091 – 1194
"	Hohenstaufen	A.D. 1194 – 1266
"	Angevin	A.D. 1266 – 1283
"	Aragonese	A.D. 1283 – 1530
Early Modern	Knights	A.D. 1530 – 1798
"	French	A.D. 1798 – 1800
Modern	British	A.D. 1800 – 1964

developments that shaped the Roman world. In the initial stages of Roman occupation, 'Maltese' culture and religion were a blend of reworked Phoenician / Punic, Greek, and Roman elements (as evidenced, for instance, by contemporary coinage) but in peripheral areas of the islands, these hybrid culture and religion are likely to have survived longer.

The Roman control of the islands lasted until around A.D. 445 when the islands may have been taken over by the Vandals and, then, possibly by the Ostrogoths around A.D. 477 until, finally, they were incorporated within the Byzantine empire in A.D. 535. But from the first century A.D. onwards and in circumstances which, to date, remain largely obscure, Christianity had already started to develop alongside other cults until, gradually, it took over in a rather syncretised form. The material record for early Christianity or for any other cults (alongside Christianity) in late antiquity is negligible; possibly, having been destroyed.

As shown above, in the sphere of colonial domination, the Maltese and Gozitans changed masters more than once when their occupation shifted amongst different competing powers. These shifts brought about changes in colonial relationships and also in alliances not only in the internal realm of politics but also in that of religion, further confirming the close relationship and mutual influence between these two realms (for example, Livy, XXI, 51).

Furthermore, during all periods of domination by external powers, the Maltese at large were imbued with a feeling of subordination and dependence very typical of colonised communities. Yet, somehow sidelined from the mainstream of the dominating (and urban) culture, the rural communities managed to maintain, to a greater extent and for quite long periods of time, a re-worked but autonomous culture. On the other hand and largely with respect to the remaining categories of Maltese society, external domination enabled contacts bringing in influences and ideas from outside not least in the religious sphere. Along with the somewhat conservative character typical of rural cultures, this contact with changing and

diverse external cultures over such a long span of time has helped fashion the Maltese cultural identity into a multi-cultural one (Fiorini and Mallia-Milanes 1991).

1.3 - Why this study?

Scholarly attention in recent times has focused on the richly evidenced prehistoric period of the Maltese islands with its characteristic megalithic structures and material finds (e.g. Evans 1971; Malone *et al.* 1988, 2009). As a consequence, comparatively little attention has been paid to the subsequent periods in the history of the islands. It was this unwelcome situation that stimulated the present study devoted to the earliest period of Maltese history, spanning from *c.* 700 B.C. to *c.* A.D. 500 and, in particular, to the phenomenon of religion in the Maltese islands throughout this period.

Traditional approaches in the study of Maltese Classical archaeology tended to focus on sacred sites in Classical antiquity paying little or no attention to the surrounding and associated landscape. This approach, adopted by both local scholars (Bonanno & Cilia 2005) and foreign scholars like the Italians working on Tas-Silġ (*Missione* 1964-73) aimed primarily at interpreting the sites on the basis of their architecture and the material finds they yielded without giving sufficient consideration to what the landscape setting could contribute. Consequently, this approach has often fallen short of providing a whole and integrated picture.

Without ignoring the material finds and architectural elements, this thesis deviates from the above approach. It gives due importance to the surrounding and associated landscape in order to bring out any relationships there might have been between the sites and their landscape setting and, thus, gain more light on the function, choice of location, and any underlying ideologies that such relationships may transmit.

Two particular facets of Maltese religion in Classical antiquity that has been overlooked and which this thesis, therefore, seeks to address are the rural and popular religious practices and beliefs, including superstitions. In doing so, this thesis also deals with those religious elements that, so far, have never attracted scholarly attention. Addressing these two particular elements has been facilitated by recent archaeological investigations in which the writer has been heavily involved and which have brought to light new data (currently awaiting publication) concerning religious practices associated with rural and agricultural life. This is given due treatment in one (4.5.1-9) of the five case studies where interpretations are also presented.

The period covered by this study (*c.*700 B.C. – *c.*A.D. 500) broadly embodies the whole Classical period for the Maltese islands as well as for most of the areas bordering the Mediterranean. It encompasses the Phoenician, Punic, Roman Republican, and Roman Imperial periods. This long span of time facilitates the study of multi-period cult sites like Tas-Silġ and Għar ix-Xiħ. At the same time, this long time span provides a good number of well-documented comparable examples from the Mediterranean which help towards a better understanding and interpretation of Maltese religion and related places and practices through time and in their wider context.

1.4 - Research context

Before setting out the data sources employed and the method and approach adopted for the purposes of this thesis, it is pertinent to provide a brief overview of the research undertaken so far in the area and period of study that forms the subject matter of this thesis.

Several references to casual discoveries of structural remains and finds – sometimes including statues or statuettes of deities – dating back to Classical antiquity were

made during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by Maltese historians and antiquarians like Gio-Francesco Abela and Gio-Pietro Francesco Agius de Soldanis or by foreign visitors like Jean Hoüel (Abela 1647, Agius de Soldanis 1746, and Hoüel 1787). The Maltese antiquarian A.A. Caruana, active towards the late nineteenth century, and Sir Temi Zammit, first director and curator of Malta's Museum of Archaeology during the early twentieth century, both contributed considerably to the Classical archaeology of the Maltese islands through their investigations, excavations, and publications of several Classical period remains (e.g. Caruana 1882, 1884, 1898, 1899a, 1899b; Zammit 1917). Since then, excavations and studies of Classical period sites in both Malta and Gozo have been only sporadic and usually followed from the casual discoveries of burials (*MAR* 1905-2002).

A considerable research project embarked upon by the *Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta* in the 1960s provided what can perhaps be considered as the largest contribution to date towards knowledge of the Maltese islands in the Phoenician, Punic / Hellenistic, and Roman periods. This Italian-led research project comprised extensive archaeological excavations, focusing on three important sites: San Pawl Milqi and Tas-Silġ in Malta and Ras il-Wardija in Gozo (*Missione* 1964-73). Preliminary survey by the Italian team had identified a greater number of sites for potential archaeological research, but the above-mentioned three were eventually short-listed. The last two – namely, Tas-Silġ and Ras il-Wardija – are sanctuary sites and form two of the case studies in Chapter 4. Of the two, Tas-Silġ provides richer cult evidence over a longer period of time. As a multi-period site, the Tas-Silġ sanctuary provides ritual evidence even for the earlier prehistoric period and its occupation for ritual purposes continued successively throughout the Phoenician, Punic, Roman, and early Christian / Byzantine periods.

However, with the exception of a recent resumption of excavations at Tas-Silġ (Bonanno *et al.* 2000), other excavations on a villa site at nearby Żejtun, and the recently-concluded project at Għar ix-Xiħ (another small cult site in Gozo) and the

nearby Tal-Knisja and Tal-Loġġa in Mġarr ix-Xini valley, no other major initiatives on such sites / periods have been undertaken since then. It is, therefore, an area which leaves much research to be done in order to attain a more comprehensive picture of the nature, function, and significance of sacred sites – both urban and, particularly, rural – in Malta and Gozo during the period under review. In view of this, the addition of the recently excavated site at Għar ix-Xiħ and the ones in the nearby Mġarr ix-Xini valley in Gozo will significantly enrich the relatively small corpus of Classical sacred sites and religious activities in Malta and Gozo and the evidence we have to date for this area of Maltese archaeology. Although still awaiting publication, the excavated sites at Għar ix-Xiħ and in Mġarr ix-Xini valley will also feature as case studies in Chapter 4, the writer having been himself heavily involved in the identification of the sites' archaeological potential and in their eventual excavation which he also co-directed.

Though the main objective of this research is to develop deeper knowledge and understanding of the religion and cult spaces on the Maltese islands during the period under review, the islands did not – and do not – exist in isolation. Set within the wider Mediterranean context, studies of religion and sacred spaces on the Maltese islands are expected to contribute reciprocally towards a better understanding of religion, religious activity, and associated spaces in the Mediterranean region too.

Moreover, as religion formed a key element of any community's social and political identity, this study will have implications for the understanding of other aspects of Maltese (and Mediterranean) communities too. This will further complete the picture we have in respect of the Maltese social and political history in the Classical period as a whole. The spectrum of knowledge gained in respect of the Classical period in the Maltese islands in particular will be thus ultimately of broader relevance. This additional knowledge will also make good the imbalance in archaeological research which, until now, focused more on the islands' prehistory.

1.5 - Data set

The data sources employed include: the cult sites themselves along with their architectural elements, artefactual evidence together with their context, any other features, sites, or landscapes related to cult sites, epigraphic information, coinage, and Classical literary sources. Occasionally, where available, botanical samples and faunal collections also provide useful additional data. These same sources would also help confirm those sites, activities, or expressions that qualify as religious or distinguish them from those that are not. Other related sources include published and non-published material largely in the form of reports concerning material evidence retrieved from sites both through systematic excavations and accidental discoveries.

Epigraphy and, to a lesser extent, Classical literary sources provide evidence for cults (including imperial cults), deities, and a number of temples / sanctuaries. The locations of most of the latter have never been discovered or are still debated. From both Malta and Gozo, we have seven inscriptions – one Punic, one Greek, and five Roman – mentioning divinities like Sadam Baal and Astarte and their respective temples (*CIS* 132), Apollo and his temple (*CIL* 7495, and possibly also 8318), and Proserpina with her temple (*CIL* 7494); not to mention the *ostraca* and other inscribed objects found mostly at Tas-Silġ and bearing the names of Astarte or her equivalents Tanit and Hera. Other inscriptions refer to imperial cults like those of Augustus (*IG* 601), Hadrian (*CIL* 7507), and Iulia Augusta identified with the goddess Ceres (*CIL* 7501). Inscriptions often give us great details about deities and their cults and temples but excavation of the temple sites themselves provides greater insight into the use of these sites and their changes over time.

Another category of evidence that will be considered is coinage. Although coins are usually associated with financial transactions and other economic aspects, they often feature deities on their obverse sides that indicate the divinities worshipped by the communities respectively responsible for their minting. A typical case is that of

the coinage (of Malta and Gozo) on which the Punic goddess Astarte continues to feature consistently even in early Roman times (Figure 2 below).



Figure 2

A ‘Romano-Maltese’ coin minted towards the beginning of the first century B.C. During the early Roman political (and military) occupation of the Maltese islands, the Maltese maintained their Punic deities and cults. The above coin bears what might be the profile head of the Phoenician / Punic Astarte / Tanit on the obverse side and a ram’s head with a Punic legend on the reverse side. It was only later, in imperial times, that Roman cults – albeit reworked and reorganised – became increasingly evident. (Source: Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 159).

The Maltese data are supplemented by select data from analogous sites or material from the wider Mediterranean context which helps us to understand better the Maltese cult sites and their material finds and the extent to which there were close and immediate contacts with the Maltese islands. Here, connections, associations, isolations, similarities, dissimilarities, continuities, and interruptions in the field of religious spaces and practices are highlighted. For example, there are certain instances where the religious practices (in the Maltese islands) seem to follow those of Carthage while the architecture of the sacred places appears to follow the Greek / Hellenistic style. At Tas-Silġ in particular, one finds Hellenistic pottery types carrying Punic inscriptions. But parallels and similarities seem to exist too. For instance, the association of sacred groves with temples sites like those in Latium (in Italy) during the Roman Republican period seems to be also evidenced at the Tas-Silġ sanctuary during the same period. Interesting similarities are also provided by data from North Africa where, for example, pagan temples at Sufetula and Thuburbo Maius in Tunisia were transformed into Christian churches on a plan very similar to that at Tas-Silġ in Malta (Chapter 4).

Funerary contexts also throw light on rituals and beliefs associated with the dead (and the world beyond) which, thus, also form a significant component of a society's religion. Nonetheless, this thesis rather focuses on those contexts that are more exclusively and unequivocally religious (e.g. sanctuary sites) or relate more directly to deities and their cults. For this reason, no chapter or section is specifically devoted to burial sites; nor are they discussed at length. But the significance of funerary evidence is not ignored either as references to data from funerary contexts are also made wherever they help to throw light on certain deities (and their cults) or illustrate popular religious habits or concerns.

1.6 - Research methodology and approach

One of the key steps in the course of the analysis is to define, by way of a multidisciplinary approach, empirical criteria to establish which places and practices can be considered as religious or sacred. Then, focusing on surviving cult sites in Malta and Gozo, these are presented as case studies selecting, along the way, Mediterranean examples that, by way of comparison, may shed light on and assist interpretations of the Maltese and Gozitan examples. The approach is, therefore, also comparative and interpretative.

Analysis of the selected data focuses on the sites' locations and on any determining factors behind the locations' choices. In particular, it focuses on coastal sites and any light they may shed on associations with maritime activities. It also focuses on the relationship between the material finds and their respective contexts, on the relationship between these and their landscape, and on the use of the sites and of their material finds. Wherever possible, the architectural and functional development of the sites is also discussed, particularly with reference to the activities undertaken there.

Consideration is also given to other factors including the continuity or discontinuity of religious places and practices, the imprint left by religion on the communities' identities, and the nature and extent of co-existence and mutual impact of diverse religious traditions within a same community. An attempt is also made to understand how sites and associated landscapes might have been perceived and experienced and, as a consequence, what significance and meanings might have been attached to them.

1.7 - Thesis outline

Following the literature reviews on religious (and physical) landscapes and on religious behaviour, expression, and experience respectively in Chapters 2 and 3, five case studies centred on six sites are presented in Chapter 4. The remaining forms of evidence – inscriptions, coins, and other chance finds – are given due treatment in Chapter 5. In both Chapters 4 and 5, the evidence provided is followed by interpretations and analysis in separate sections towards the end of the respective case studies or chapter (in the case of Chapter 5).

Chapter 6 brings out the hybrid nature of Maltese religion as a continuous process wherein ideas and beliefs are accepted and rejected, negotiated and reworked. A classic example is provided by two specific coin issues minted in Malta towards the middle of the second century B.C. They maintain the same albeit interchangeable image of a deity who shifts identity or representation (upon assimilation) depending on the accompanying symbol that changes from one coin issue to the next. While possibly reflecting a shift in political (and, hence, also religious) allegiances or a reworking of identity to reflect changing political situations, this coin might perhaps be classified as a 'hybrid' coin comprising both old and new elements (3.4 and 6.3). While representing a hybridisation process 'in miniature', this coin might be taken to reflect also what was going on – on a larger scale – in terms of hybridisation processes in the Maltese religious landscape.

The key point drawn out in the conclusion of the thesis is that the Maltese islands were not immune to the religious and political currents moving around them in the entire Mediterranean. Indeed, it is shown that their already hybridised religious and political identities were 'countermarked' with those of any other cultures or groups of people whom they came in contact with, thus maintaining their hybridised nature albeit under new forms.

As both Maltese and other communities (particularly, island communities) in the Mediterranean shared the same phenomena of reception and rejection, reworking and interaction, creating hybrid identities that were distinct for each community or group of communities, the Maltese islands are presented in this thesis as a typical case study showing how religion works in a Mediterranean island setting.

CHAPTER 2:

THE MAKING OF A SACRED LANDSCAPE

2.1 - Aims of chapter

This chapter provides a wide overview of the types of landscapes – particularly, those in the Mediterranean – and their facets relevant to this research. This is done by reference to recent literature on general landscape theory and, occasionally, to Maltese examples too. Relevant topics that are likewise dealt with include settlements and colonisation. Sacred landscapes, particularly those with elements like religious monuments and sacred spaces with maritime connections, are treated towards the end so as to introduce the subject matter of Chapter 3.

2.2 - Defining landscape

Animate bodies do not simply occupy places but they also engage with them, move around them and alter them in a process through which they make them all the more their own. Bodies, movement, and places link together to form what is termed as ‘landscape’. Thus, landscapes are not just something looked at, thought about, contemplated upon, depicted, or represented, but they are lived through, mediated, worked upon, altered, and are full of meaning and symbolism. From this perspective, landscapes can be defined as perceived and embodied sets of relationships between places, dwellings, emotions, movements and activities within a geographical region which may or may not have precise topographic boundaries. Knowing a landscape amounts to knowing who you are, knowing how to go on, and knowing where you belong. In this respect, therefore, landscapes have the potential

of being effective media for socialisation and knowledge (Edmonds 1999: 4; Tilley 2004: 24-5 and 1996: 162; Witcher 1999: 16).

Landscapes, therefore, are created by people via their experience of and engagement – through both thought and action – with the world they live in and, usually, constitute worked-upon or lived-in places. Generally speaking, landscapes are understood to involve only the surface of the land but, in certain societies, what is above or below the land surface (e.g. mountain tops or subterranean caves) may be equally or even more important (Bender 1993: 1). Thus, landscapes may operate on different spatial scales: either horizontally, across the surface of the land, or vertically, up to heavens or down to the underworld. Likewise, they may also operate on different temporal scales: engaging with the past or with the future in different ways (Bender 1993: 2).

But landscapes are not only worked upon or lived in; they are also perceived. Perception can be said to be one of the many forms in which landscape is engaged with. Perception, in fact, constitutes the contact between one's consciousness and his / her world from which meanings arise (Tilley 2004: 2). In prehistoric art, for instance, places are sometimes perceived in terms of feel, significance, or meaning rather than their external appearance. In this manner, places are experienced from inside. This contrasts markedly with depictions of places and landscapes, for example, in post-Renaissance western art. The latter freezes both time and place / landscape and establishes a fixed relationship between object (place or landscape depicted) and subject (viewer), locating the latter outside the picture and beyond the relationships depicted (Thomas 1993: 21-2; also Figure 3 below).

In so far as it is perceived by someone, landscape is ego-centred as much as it is a landscape of views and vistas (Bender 1993: 1). However, the way in which people, anytime and anywhere, comprehend and engage with the world they live in is not universal or standard (Thomas 1993: 20). It depends upon various factors: the specific time and place, the prevalent historical conditions, the people's gender, age,

class, and their social and economic conditions. In other words, landscapes are to be viewed within their particular context (Bender 1992: 735; 1993: 2). To this effect, landscapes are not only themselves created, but they are also creative in that they too create social, cultural, political, and economic conditions. As a result, they may also end up an object of tension between competing or contradictory claims and counterclaims upon them (Bender 1992: 735).

The term 'landscape' can be used with reference to both an environment – generally, one shaped by human intervention – and a representation of an environment signifying the meanings attributed to it. But the former (or physical landscape) can also be viewed in different ways by different people, often at the same time (Layton and Ucko 1999: 1).

Darvill (1999: 105) proposes two ways of understanding the landscape: as an object and as subject. Understanding landscape as an object would involve looking at humanity-land relationships in locational, functional, or economic terms, focusing on the way in which people (individually or collectively) mould and shape the physical appearance of the landscape and, conversely, the ways in which the landscape affects them and their activities. On the other hand, understanding landscape as subject would involve a reconstruction of earlier states of existence, whereby an image of the landscape as it might have appeared at some stage in the past is created, building up a quasi-historical map showing the disposition of sites and monuments as they might have been arranged at that stage.

As shown below, cultic spaces and practices can find themselves integrated in a landscape as much as they can find themselves at the margin of a landscape. Sometimes, they can find themselves in a peripheral rural or coastal environment. Such a situation is not restricted to islands, but in the Maltese scenario this is not least typical.

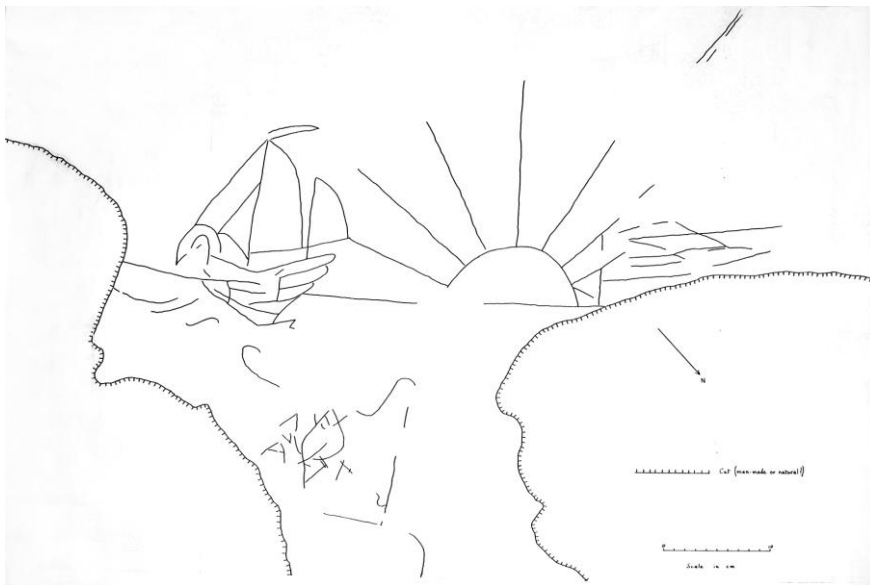


Figure 3 (top and bottom)

Sunset seascape graffiti at Il-Bajjada, Gozo (Malta): photo (top) and drawing (bottom). Unlike perception, a realistic depiction freezes place as seen from a particular point of view (Thomas 1993: 21). This horizontal plane graffiti of a sunset seascape is engraved in the rock surface by the very edge of a sheer coastal cliff at Il-Bajjada, limits of Munxar, Gozo. Its prominent location faces west (where the sun sets in the evening) and overlooks the mouth of Xlendi Bay (a harbour already frequented in Classical antiquity) in the not-far-off distance and to the right of the viewer. This graffiti immortalises as if in a photograph, yet freezes, a sunset seascape with an outbound sea-vessel (probably, leaving Xlendi harbour) as seen by its unknown author from that particular vantage point on an evening at an unknown, but likewise frozen, point in time. (Photo / drawing: the author).

The type of landscape we shall be dealing with in this thesis is that of an island – an island – which itself may be said to comprise a number of smaller-scale landscapes of various kinds ranging from settlement landscapes (both urban and rural / coastal) to agricultural or agro-industrial ones. As shown in the following chapters, this island shares a number of characteristics with other islandscapes that dot a broader seascape: that of the Mediterranean.



Figure 4

Salina Bay in Malta. Originally extending further to the left into what is now the Burmarrad plain (marked by agricultural fields), this ancient harbour got shrunk to its present extent following sea-level changes. As a consequence, what had previously been a coastal settlement found itself inland and away from the coast. (Source: Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 240).

2.3 - Islandscapes and seascapes

Like terrestrial landscapes, maritime landscapes – particularly, in terms of coastal topography (Figure 4) – also have their role in determining the nature and extent of communication and interaction amongst maritime communities and between these

and hinterland communities. Coastal routes do not only connect ports but also maintain both maritime and terrestrial communications systems while linking these to overseas communities too. Good coastal connection routes laid the foundation for effective maritime interaction which, in turn, also facilitated trade (Doonan 2004: 41-3).

Providing easier and quicker travel than most overland routes did, the sea facilitated movement of people, objects, ideas, and technologies. But the physical boundedness of the islands and the geographical separation brought about by the sea always led to regional differences both between mainland and islands and between islands themselves. Such regional differences are manifested largely by the way islanders fashioned and developed their world and, thus, an identity of their own: an identity which, nevertheless, always incorporated both land and sea (Knapp and Blake 2005: 1, 9-10). Begging a reversal of the accepted notion of what are the best conditions favouring a productive and creative society, some would argue that remoteness and marginality may form precisely those conditions which motivate island societies towards identity, novelty, and creativity: in the Maltese island context, demonstrated in the prehistoric megalithic temple building. Some would even go further to argue that island societies themselves chose to be different and distinctive as it best suited them (Malone 2008: 83).

On large islands, where inland populations might never relate with the sea and, thus, the sea almost never features in their lives, one could hardly speak of an island culture or identity in respect of these populations. On the other hand, one could equally speak of 'cultural islands' in mainland contexts in respect of those mainland communities who, due to marginality, maintain an insular identity (Rainbird 2007: 22, 29). This would show that island identity is not even restricted to islanders while, equally, it could not be applicable at all to certain islanders.

But islanders' identities might be affected by interaction with other islanders or with mainlanders. Taking place largely via sea trade, this maritime interaction

might serve many functions ranging from economic to social and ideological: modifying social structures, stimulating political or economic development, and transforming human needs and actions. Therefore, together with insularity and identity, interaction impacted on both level and intensity of contact and mobility between various island communities and between these and their mainland counterparts (Knapp and Blake 2005: 9-10). This gives strength to Paul Rainbird's comment, cited by Barker (2005: 49), that islands were components of a shared broader seascape rather than bounded landscapes.

Thus, while islands might be viewed as isolated places, the sea surrounding them could connect them to as much as it could separate them from the rest of the world. Viewed as the edge of any settled land, the shoreline or coastline provided the point of contact as much as it provided the point of separation. But the dual nature of the sea was not restricted to contact or separation. To fishermen and sailors, it secured their livelihood. Yet it could equally pose a threat to their life, whenever sea conditions turned unfavourable (Bradley 2000: 27). However, perceptions of islandscapes might also change over time. In early Mediaeval times, for instance, islands ranked (especially for ascetics) among what Paul Rainbird calls 'metaphorical deserts'. They could substitute deserts or other isolated places as ideal locations for a 'perfect society', personified in a monastic community, insulated from the rest of the world with its political regimes. But this perception of islands was to change by the time of Columbus, Magellan, and others who were discovering the 'new world'. Islands, now, came to be viewed as strange and dangerous and places to be feared (Rainbird 2007: 4-11).

2.4 - Settlements' landscapes and settlements in landscapes

In one form or another, settlement is the result of human presence in the landscape. It is a place where, for some reason or another (or for a combination of reasons),

people have chosen to live. Yet each settlement is shaped by diverse social processes and factors reflecting the time and place it occupies (Sollars 2005: 252-4).

Settlement necessitates a structure or group of structures in association with daily activities and practices. For this reason, permanence is considered as a basic – though not a sole – criterion to define settlement. In contrast, temporary establishments set up by itinerant communities like pastoralists or nomads who are engaged in short-term occupations (e.g. herding) do not qualify as settlements. So, what perhaps can best define settlement is a collection of basic living and working structures making up a village or a town / city whose members take part in shared activities and make use of communal facilities like fields, workshops, and shrines (Sollars 2005: 254).

Although not necessarily a primary factor, the dominant activity carried out by the settlement's community (whether it is agriculture or another) determines to a large extent the choice of the settlement's location. But whatever the dominant activity, this would determine not only the settlement's location but also the latter's relationship to other nearby sites as well as its (i.e. the settlement's) layout. Other factors determining the choice of a settlement's location could be topography, communication links, defence, the disposition of and access to local resources, socio-political considerations, and considerations of control: control of production centres, resources, or of access. Emotional or historical links to a particular location may too encourage a community of people to choose that location for their settlement and keeps them attached to it (Aston 1985: 91, 94; Kleibrink 2002: 216; Sollars 2005: 258-9).

In their distribution across a landscape, settlements can be either nucleated or dispersed. Rural settlements are usually defined as small units dispersed in the fields around a town (larger urban unit or settlement). For their sustenance, rural settlements usually rely on agriculture, sometimes supplemented with secondary tasks like pottery production (Sollars 2005: 254-5, 259). On the other hand, a local

or regional centre may fulfill a number of functions in the service of neighbouring settlements. Its basic components – the environment, population, technology, and social organisation – are functionally interrelated while its people are largely interdependent. Such a centre often occupies a geographically central position with respect to the other settlements and, usually, manifests itself in the form of a town or city. It, therefore, enjoys a high status in the hierarchy of places within the settlement system (Aston 1985: 44, 94; Attema 2002: 24). But mainly through their agriculture, rural settlements may support the urban centres (i.e. towns or cities) too even if the latter usually rely heavily on technological industry which, again, frequently involves the processing of rural products.

However, geographic and population size along with their productivity are not, on their own, sufficient to distinguish between rural and urban settlements. There are regional, political, social, functional, architectural, and even legal considerations which come into play when defining a settlement. Settlement definitions are, thus, difficult to universally apply. It is, therefore, of utmost importance to view a settlement's existence not in absolute isolation but in relation to its context made up of the surrounding landscape with the other nearby settlements within the same landscape, the population, and the related time periods (Aston 1985: 91; Sollars 2005: 255, 259).

A settlement occupies space and, in turn, this occupied space influences the settlement's size and shape. But the way that space is occupied by a settlement is also itself defined by both external and internal boundaries. External boundaries – sometimes defined by walls (although the function of these could have varied from the marking of boundaries to defence) – can mark both the full extent of the main habitation unit as well as its wider territory, effectively marking the transition from one settlement to another. Though less confrontational, on the other hand, internal boundaries also mark (even if in different ways) divisions or differentiation between living, working, and storage areas within the settlement. These external and internal

boundaries in settlements may also change over time (Sahlqvist 2001: 79; Sollars 2005: 256-7).

Both boundaries and morphology of a settlement are ultimately significantly dependent on the location of the settlement itself. The lifestyle of a settlement's community is intimately linked to environmental considerations. Thus, the choice of a settlement's location usually reflects a compromise reached between various influences affecting the settlement's population: whether they are the population's daily activities, physical factors brought about by the surrounding landscape, or wider social factors from beyond the settlement's population itself (Sollars 2005: 257-8). These would often leave their mark on the settlement's boundaries and morphology.

But settlement patterns may alter too. These changes take place upon the desertion of individual settlements within the pattern in favour of others (within the same area). These changing preferences would demonstrate that settlement patterns are as fluid and dynamic as the settlements themselves (Aston 1985: 98). It is clear, therefore, that settlement is that particular element in landscape which constitutes the vital part of landscape and, as such, it contributes heavily to the dynamism of landscape.

2.5 - Colonisers and colonised

Diverse settlement histories are accounted for not only by environmental modifications (be they anthropogenically-induced or not) but also by demographic ones brought about by colonisation. Indeed, contacts and relations between potential colonisers and colonised often start before the actual colonisation takes place. In fact, colonisation is a gradual process sometimes starting with familiarisation visits (or visits of other nature) and forging, along the way, varied, complex, and flexible relationships and experiences extending over decades – if not

even centuries – amongst the groups of people involved. The reciprocal dynamism and interaction between these groups would be demonstrated in terms of transformations reflected not only in the movement of settlers (both newly and long established ones) but also in their character and identity as evidenced in Sicily during its colonisation by both Phoenicians and Greeks. A society of colonisers and colonised is, therefore, a complex one which, due to its porous boundaries, comprises different groups borrowing but also rejecting cultural elements from each other while maintaining others of their own too (Leighton 1999: 219-36).

One aspect of identity – or, rather, identity formation – is the colonisation and contestation (sometimes repeatedly) of a territory by distinct groups of people and their impact on the same territory in terms of both ideas as well as products. Thus, different identities may remain inscribed in the territory's landscape of temples, road networks, engineering works, and cemeteries as it (i.e. the territory's landscape) gets appropriated and contested. Furthermore, in the coloniser – colonised dynamics, repeated colonisation would also bring about processes of rupture or integration between the colonisers and the local community (Bender 1993: 3; Doonan 2004: 46). It was this aspect of repeated colonisation that has contributed towards the formation of the multi-cultural identity of the Maltese. Furthermore, as a single place (or its landscape) is often differently perceived by the colonisers and by the local inhabitants, the former's renaming, rereading, and re-interpretation of a place (or its landscape) in contrast with the names, readings, and interpretations of the same by the latter would amount to an imposition of identity and, in this respect, an act of 'oppression' on the part of the colonisers (Layton and Ucko 1999: 5, 7). But in spite of the disaggregation and displacement which such 'oppression' might bring about, a sense of place and attachment to it among the local inhabitants is hardly ever diminished. And this sense of place includes experiential and expressive ways in which the place is known, imagined, contested, struggled over, remembered, yearned for, and lived, and other multiple ways in which the place is tied to identity (Feld and Basso 1996: 10-1; Tilley 1994: 15, 17-8).

Shared cultural values might imply another dimension of colonisation: what Chris Gosden (2004: 41) terms as ‘colonialism without colonies’. A generalised culture which bypasses any physical territorial limits might take over a whole region or regions by way of influence and not necessarily with military conquest or physical occupation. As a result, the group of people attached to this generalised culture could be at home everywhere – though still maintaining a symbolic centre of reference – and could trade and exploit local resources to their benefit without any need of forced intervention. Generalised cultures existed in the ancient Mediterranean as a result of widespread movements, encounters, connections, relationships, and exchange systems and, as a prime example of this, one could find hybridised ‘Phoenician’ and ‘Greek’ colonies not only in the sense of physical settlements but also in the sense explained above (Gosden 2004: 41, 63-5, 69-71).

In contrast to the Phoenicians (and Carthaginians), the Greeks seem to have never physically (and politically) established themselves on the Maltese islands but, nonetheless, their encounters and contacts with the islands facilitated their cultural exchange and interaction on the islands no less than that of the Phoenicians (and Carthaginians). In fact, the Hellenistic ‘colonisation’ of the Maltese islands did not take place in the form of physical settlements, military conquest, or physical occupation but by way of cultural exchanges and interactions through demographic movements, encounters, connections, and relationships. This is evident in various aspects of Maltese culture, not least in the religious aspect. At Tas-Silġ, for instance, religious cultural exchange and interaction manifest themselves in the way the first major structural reorganisation of the sanctuary complex evolved and took a monumental form, typical of what was going on in the Hellenistic world between the third and first centuries B.C. (4.1.15). Similarly, the terrace arrangement of the sanctuary at Ras il-Wardija may somehow recall the magnificent terrace complexes of Hellenistic sanctuaries known from the Mediterranean world around the third century B.C. when the Ras il-Wardija sanctuary itself may have been initially built (4.2.8). The Greek Hera cult in continuation of the earlier Astarte cult at the Tas-

Silġ sanctuary (4.1.15, 20, 23) might be also seen in view of the prevailing cultural developments in the religious sphere of the Maltese islands.

2.6 - Geographical and human landscapes of the Mediterranean

While it is smaller than other great seas of the world and in spite of the movements, engagements and intermingling of populations, trading networks, and cultural exchanges (which are expected to bring about a certain degree of cultural and religious ‘uniformity’), the Mediterranean hosts a greater range of geographical differences, people, cultures, and religions than any other comparable area (Bradford 1989: 28; Braudel 1972: 23-4, 135, 276-7). This may be also due to the fact that, when dealing with its peoples, this sea might be viewed as extending also beyond its shores in more than one direction. The movement of its peoples, along with their goods and ideas, might be compared to concentric waves that, while originating in this region, extend not only within but also beyond it (Braudel 1972: 168-70, 223-6; Woolf 2005: 134-7). True enough, the peoples intermingled and, as a consequence, ideas, customs, and tastes circulated but these same peoples also managed to maintain a certain degree of their respective identities and autonomy in the geographical, cultural, and religious spheres, resulting in a hybridisation so typical of the Mediterranean region (Braudel 1972: 135).

This means that influences circulated between the Mediterranean and its confines too, i.e. those zones or regions surrounding the Mediterranean and which, thus, might be termed as a Mediterranean on a larger scale (Purcell 2005: 23). Without excluding other determining factors, zones like wastelands in arid deserts and inhospitable lands in mountainous regions beyond the Mediterranean had often forced societies (and economies) into continuous movement into and, hence, in contact with the Mediterranean world and its trade (Braudel 1972: 171-3; Woolf 2005: 136). An almost inevitable consequence of these demographic movements was the mutual penetration of cultural – not least religious – influences respectively

across the Mediterranean and into its bordering regions and the similarly mutual responses they sometimes generated. Nevertheless, any penetrating cultural influences – whichever side they came from – did not always take over but were sometimes themselves subordinated and adapted accordingly. In other words, assimilation might have worked in either direction and, when compared to its buffer regions, any overlaps or differentiation would have always qualified the Mediterranean as a distinctively unique and singular zone in its own right, notwithstanding the influences it exerted or absorbed and any ensuing exchanges (Braudel 1972: 171, 178-9; Purcell 2005: 23-5; Woolf 2005: 133-7).

An important constituent of the Mediterranean Sea is composed of the numerous islands – large and small – with which this sea is dotted. The smaller ones may also combine with neighbouring ones (as they do, for instance, in the Aegean region) to form families of islands. But, be they large or small, one of their main significant contributions remains that of providing possible landfalls – so indispensable for shipping – on the sea routes, particularly the longer ones (Figure 5 below). Most of them situated along the paths of the main sea routes, they often came to play an important role in external relations (Braudel 1972: 148-9, 154; Rainbird 2007: 82). This would demonstrate that the isolation often attributed to islands is, in fact, a relative phenomenon. Mediterranean islands in particular provide a case in point. Although their insular nature and their being surrounded by the sea separates them physically from the rest of the world, when they are integrated into shipping routes and, thus, come to form part of a chain, they are actively involved in the dealings of the rest of the world and become less isolated than certain inaccessible mountainous regions on the mainlands. In this respect, the sea extends the islands' horizons and projects their territories. The same might be said with regard to their participation in mainland networks (apart from the maritime networks) in the case of offshore islands which, in this respect, might be viewed also as extensions of the adjacent mainland if not as peninsulas. This would have enabled such islands to be involved in both maritime and overland trade which, depending on either economical or political circumstances (or both), may have sometimes necessitated shifts in the

direction of mainland contacts (Braudel 1972: 150; Frachetti 2009: 55-8, 69-70; Horden and Purcell 2000: 133-43, 225-7; Knapp and Van Dommelen 2010: 10; Rainbird 2007: 41, 64-6, 86, 88, 141, 170; Spanò Giammellaro *et al.* 2008: 129).

Indeed, being strikingly exposed to interaction, islands owe much of their distinctive character and identity to their responses to and their relationships with the patterns of communication in which they are immersed (Horden and Purcell 2000: 76; Rainbird 2007: 87-9, 154, 173). The Maltese islands in the Neolithic period seem to provide a case in point. The resultant picture, therefore, is that of a sea characterised by ‘a web of seaways fusing maritime communities on islands and continents in fluid and complex social interactions’ (Rainbird 2007: 88).



Figure 5

Islands and mainlands in the Mediterranean. Two major groups of islands can be detected in the Mediterranean: those lying adjacent to mainlands (or larger islands) to which they could act as extensions and clusters of islands – particularly visible in the eastern part of the Mediterranean (encircled) – which could serve as ‘stepping stones’ for shipping routes. (Source: www.utexas.edu/courses/greekhistory1/mapsblank.html).

The Mediterranean itself may also be viewed as a series of lands – be they islands or not – which, though sometimes physically isolated from each other, are constantly in contact with each other, not least through emigration or ‘export’ of

their respective peoples as Braudel (1972: 158) puts it. This emigration would extend itself also to elements (like customs, language, or even subsistence items) which the migrating people would 'export' with them, thus extending connectivity in more diverse ways (Rainbird 2007: 94). Emigration, in fact, provided another common way (apart from integration into shipping routes) for the islands in particular to enter the life of the world. But, in spite of these contacts, the different Mediterranean lands were also able to preserve many elements of their respective characters and identities in the midst of such a blend of peoples, cultures, and religions (Braudel 1972: 135, 158, 161).

In fact, the Mediterranean sea has been a medium of religious differentiation and change. On the one hand, it delineated the extent and limits of religious influence amongst its various microregions but, on the other hand, it also helped disseminate various religious forms and systems. Thus, the Mediterranean was as much a barrier promoting divisions between the varied religious systems as it was a carrier facilitating the transmission of religious ideas and practices (Horden and Purcell 2000: 407-8, 460; Woolf 2005: 135-6).

But the Mediterranean was also itself (and still is) in a process of change: changes detectable on both land and sea; caused by man and natural forces; and resulting in cultivable or barren landscapes, seas poor or rich in fishes, reliable or unpredictable weather, safe or perilous sea voyages, abundance or famine, life safety or threats. As, in antiquity, the operation of all these was understood to a much less extent than it is today, they were often attributed to superhuman forces, often giving rise to myths and legends. Thus, it may have been inevitable that mountains (and the sky), headlands, streams (and springs), caves, tree groves, and the sea would themselves be perceived as manifestations of divine powers, dwelling places of superhuman beings, borderlands between the human and the divine spheres, and sacred spaces which provide the presence and the desired cooperation of the gods and where humans pay their tributes to the gods by prayers and offerings (3.8). Deities or cults may have changed and been replaced by others, but the religious character and

significance of such places was, in most instances, maintained in one form or another. Thus, for instance, certain tomb sites associated with tomb cults in Dark Age Greece may have become associated with heroes' and founders' cults in the Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman periods and, then, with saints' cults in Christian and Islamic times (Bradford 1989: 30-60; Horden and Purcell 2000: 235; Malkin 1987: 139, 141-2; Woolf 2005: 133-4).

Coastal areas, in particular, were often not lacking in sacred character. Sacred places along the coastlines or linked to harbours not only protected these and their associated communities, but also underlined the coastlines' status as the border where land, sea, and sky met (Scarre 2002: 9). In addition, coastal or harbour shrines (or sanctuaries) also allowed contact between the local community and external traders and sailors frequenting them (i.e. the shrines or sanctuaries) on their safe arrival. This cultural mix is frequently manifested by way of the richness and complexity of non-local cultural features evident in coastal shrines or sanctuaries (Zifferero 2002: 262).

2.7 - Sacred landscapes and places

Landscapes can be permeated with ritual and religion which means that they may consist, in part (at least), of ritually or spiritually significant places, themselves making up a 'sacred map'. A landscape, on its part, may encompass both anthropogenic and natural features (like streams and hills) which are held as sacred due to the role they play in human experience or the culturally distinct symbols they carry. Permanent natural features (in the landscape) which are held as inherently sacred could be regarded as places of spiritual power, while artificial ones could be built in association with the founding spirits or mythical figures believed to have first occupied the place and infused it with spiritual forces. Landscape features would become, in this way, an embodiment of spiritual forces. These spiritual forces are released through ritual ceremonies aimed at maintaining continuity

between the ancestral beings, deities, the social group, and the place (Bradley 1991: 135-7; 2000: 28-9, 41-3, 100-4; Crumley 1999: 274; Edmonds 1999: 6; Jost 1994: 217; Kearns 2010: 328; Lahiri 1996: 245-7; Marangou 2001: 153; Mather 2003: 25-6, 32-40; Sahlqvist 2001: 79; Sinopoli 2003: 21; Steinsapir 1999: 182; Valk 2007: 201-10; Zifferero 2002: 255-6).

The construction of artificial features in the landscape might be a form of ordering, management, control, and domestication of the landscape through its conversion brought about also by the incorporation in it of architectural orders, thus bringing external spiritual forces into the domain of human society. Monumentalisation of spiritually significant natural landscapes via the construction or insertion of artificial or architectural features (Figure 6) may enrich them with additional symbolism, imbue them with more significance and new meanings, and formalise their use. Such artificially-built features might also signify claims to land inherited from the founding ancestors or mythical beings. Then, through its reservation for ritual and its consequent and conscious separation from human settlements, the land is defined while, through the ritual mechanism itself, it continues to be domesticated (Bradley 1991: 139; 2000: 107-13, 158; Guettel Cole 1994: 216; Harding 1991: 146-7; Mather 2003: 27, 29, 36, 40-1; Parcero Oubina *et al.* 1998: 173; Prent 2003: 87, 89; Steinsapir 1999: 189, 192; Valk 2007: 209).

While their ritual significance may depend a lot on their geographical locations, ritually significant places may also act as spatial or territorial markers, especially when monumentalised. This might have been one of the special roles played by the sanctuary sites at Tas-Silġ (4.1.15, 19-20, 24), Ras ir-Raĥeb (4.3.10), Ras il-Wardija (4.2.11, 13), and the shrine site at Għar ix-Xiĥ (4.4.13, 15-6). In this manner, ritually significant places do not only divide the territory (thus forming a territorial hierarchy), define and fix territorial limits, or act as tokens for land ownership, but also provide orientation to people's movements and activities in the landscape.



Figure 6
The Mnajdra prehistoric temple complex in Malta. An example of a monumentalised landscape. (Photo: Daniel Cilia).

Nonetheless, they may be also used as places of mediation where the normative and practical aspects of social life meet. Very often, this mediation is not only on social and political levels, but may also involve the natural and the supernatural, the visible and the invisible, the concealed and the revealed, making accessible those forces and meanings which are inaccessible and concealed beneath the visible world (Bradley 1998a: 180; 2000: 147-55; Izzet 2007: 123; Jost 1994: 217; Marangou 2001: 155; Mather 2003: 34, 42; Parcero Oubina *et al.* 1998: 170; Sahlqvist 2001: 90-3; Zifferero 2002: 246-63).

Ritually or spiritually significant places might also be used to link rural and urban landscapes. This link is normally achieved through a complementarity between rural and urban sacred places in the respective landscapes. Such complementarity is concretised by the mobilisation of both rural and urban populations in movements and activities (like processions) across the landscape (Edmonds 1999: 7; Jost 1994: 228-9; Morgan 1994: 105).

Another important link might be that of inter-visibility intended between the sacred places themselves, like that between Ras ir-Raheb and Ras il-Wardiġa and that between Ras ir-Raheb and Għar ix-Xiġ (4.3.11) and between the sacred places and

their associated settlements as possibly at Tas-Silġ (4.1.19, 24). Establishing viewing points for a sacred place would lead to its ‘objectification’ which implies redefinition and control. On the other hand, directing the viewers, the sacred place would exert control over the viewers; besides assuming a powerful role in their daily lives on account of its domination over the surrounding landscape. The sacred would, thus, be fitted in its place within the general order. In this case, sightlines and view-sheds would be a crucial factor in determining the location of the sacred places and their networks in the landscape. This environmental affordance, therefore, establishes context and structures the ritual activities taking place there. In this way, topographic features – like, for example, hills which provide sacred places built on top of them with lasting visual prominence within the landscape – would contribute towards the proliferation of the sacred places as a type of ritual space (Bradley 1991: 136-8; 2000: 101, 106; Briault 2007: 122-4, 131; Edmonds 1999: 3; Izzet 2007: 126-7, 141; Prent 2003: 83, 87; Valk 2007: 203; Zifferero 2002: 246).

It has already been shown above that sacred or ritually significant places may also act as spatial or territorial markers. Inter-visibility is often a key factor in the construction and maintenance of religious and political landscapes or territories. While these can be correlated with sightlines and visual alignments from the sacred places (4.3.11 and 4.6), inter-visibility might also be crucial in expressing ritual unity transcending political boundaries (Bradley 1998a: 180; Briault 2007: 135; Zifferero 2002: 246-7, 250, 252-7, 260-3).

Nevertheless, the experience of the sacred place’s own landscape might be more significant than the visibility of or from the sacred place itself. To this effect, architectural elements of the sacred place (and, possibly, even material objects used or deposited there) might also embody or replicate aspects of the surrounding landscape evoking events, people, and places or features. This is what might have been sought through the way the shrine at Għar ix-Xiħ was laid out (4.4.13). The experience might be further enhanced by the focusing of attention on these elements

(like altars) or objects (like a cult statue), involving the widest possible range of senses. The architecture itself of the place might be exploited to structure the experience of the people and to determine the degree of their participation in rituals by controlling their movements or restricting their access. Thus, the sacred place might be the medium and outcome of the experience people have of their world, of themselves, and of their relations – whether personal, familial, communal, or political – with others. This it does also through its liminal character which enables the temporal world to interact with the other world beyond as it partakes of the qualities of both (Bradley 1991: 136; 2000: 41-2, 104, 109, 158; Briault 2007: 134, 137; Edmonds 1999: 3-4; Renfrew 1985: 16-8).

Finally, the re-use of previous spiritually-charged places might involve a change in their role and meaning. Nonetheless, their sacred character might be acknowledged and maintained throughout time. Such a phenomenon is best evidenced at Tas-Silġ (4.1.11-7, 19-21) and, perhaps on a shorter scale, at Ras ir-Raġeb (4.3.6, 9) and at Ghar ix-Xiħ (4.4.9-11) as can be seen in the respective case studies. As in these cases, the process would imply the incorporation of previous beliefs and traditions within a new socio-ideological order. Thus, as it entails the construction of a new social and ideological order based on the appropriation of the past, the re-use of the previous spiritually-charged places would involve both permanence and discontinuity (Bradley 2000: 158; Edmonds 1999: 3, 7; Harding 1991: 145, 149; Morgan 1994: 140, 142; Parceró Oubina *et al.* 1998: 174; Prent 2003: 90-100; Sahlqvist 2001: 91-2; Sundstrom 1996: 186-8; Valk 2007: 201, 208).

2.8 - Choosing holy places

The choice of places for worship or ritual activities is not arbitrary. Like all material culture – and not least like the architectural details and form of the religious structure which eventually occupies the chosen place – the choice is culturally and socially informed. The chosen places are those which have special meanings

attributed to them and which are confirmed and re-created through the ritual practices passed down from one generation to the next. As an example of this, certain places might be perceived as points of intersection between the material and spiritual worlds and, hence, as places of transformation from where the journey to the spiritual world begins. Likewise, the same places might be perceived as points of communication where the said material / natural and spiritual / supernatural worlds meet (Bradley 2000: 26-8; Harding 1991: 141; Izzet 2007: 122, 124; Valk 2007: 201, 203-10).

Moreover, the preference for a place's topographical location seems to be concerned with marking difference from other places. The Tas-Silġ sanctuary and Għar ix-Xiħ shrine could not have been better sited to bring out the desired difference (4.1.19 and 4.4.8, 13). Therefore, the chosen places are also instrumental in the creation, structuring, and expression of difference and it is in the difference they create, structure, and express that their efficacy emerges so strongly. The chosen places themselves are also defined as different from their surroundings, particularly with regard to what they contain, like certain invisible or inner qualities. As happened at Tas-Silġ (4.1.15, 19) and at Ras ir-Raħeb (4.3.6), the area they occupy is usually codified through the building of a boundary wall marking separation – and, thus, creating a difference – between the sacred and the profane. As a result, these delineated sacred places would stand out in sharp contrast to their surroundings to the extent that anyone approaching them would remain impressed. At the same time, the creation of a distinctly bounded ritual place would locate the religious within the wider profane landscape while ordering the relationship between the two (Bradley 2000: 101-3; Izzet 2007: 124, 129-30, 141-2; Valk 2007: 203).

Some criteria in the choice of such places have already been listed further above. Most notably, these include natural places which, for some reason or another, are already imbued with spiritual power or carry culturally distinct symbolism on account of the way their topography is perceived. Other criteria include

intervisibility and visual alignments between, for example, the sites themselves and associated settlements and, not least, the experience afforded by the site itself and by its surrounding landscape (above).

Mostly on account of the last criterion, occupying a new place for ritual activity often implies the creation of a new relationship between the occupants and the place they come to occupy. This would mean turning the place from a passive object into an active subject involved in relations with its occupants. Such relationships might refer back to myths of distant origins which, in turn, might be translated in the form of monumental structures. This might also ensure the transmission of social memories to later generations in a permanent form (Bradley 2000: 157; 2002b: 47, 81; Valk 2007: 201, 209).

Therefore, the chosen location of a place for cultic purposes can often be comprehended in relation to ideas referring to the distant past or to an origin myth. In some way, therefore, these places document the history of the people who use them while their spatial organisation might bring to light or express these people's concerns. These concerns might also themselves be woven into the people's ideas about their distant past or their origins (Bradley 2002b: 19, 34, 48).

In other instances, a newly-created cultic place might be simply reusing, replacing or, perhaps, even commemorating an older one whose size, layout, and orientation it often follows. Examples are perhaps best provided by Tas-Silġ (4.1.13-6, 20-1) and Ras ir-Raheb (4.3.6, 9). This might be a result of the fact that the earlier place's religious significance is acknowledged by the new occupants for whom it might also serve as a source of inspiration, possibly being referred back to as a prototype. Often, it is also a matter of adopting the attributes or characteristics of the earlier place and rendering them in a more durable form. Nevertheless, this does not exclude attachment of new significance or meaning to the place, redefinition, reinvention, reinterpretation, or even legitimatisation of the place. At the same time, the past is connected with the present as the material culture of a newly-created

place becomes implicated in that of the older one. Thus, past and present places would live parallel lives, each providing a medium for human memory as well. In fact, rather than a random choice, the re-use of an older place might imply preservation of the memory of the special character of that place. The frequent lack of habitation in the immediate surroundings of such a place might also point in favour of this possibility (Bradley 2000: 153-8; 2002b: 30-2, 59, 69-71, 81, 122-3; Harding 1991: 149; Hingley 1996: 240-2; Prent 2003: 87-100; Thomas 1993: 29; Valk 2007: 201, 208).

2.9 - Religious monuments as symbolic representations

Apart from providing the local setting for the artificial cultic structures, natural landscape features are often themselves replicated in the architectural design of these structures which serve to link earth and sky, the material and the spiritual (Bradley 2002a: 137). The shrine's artificial lay-out at Għar ix-Xiħ might be viewed in this regard (4.4.13). Such a replication of natural features in artificial monumental structures is often seen as referring to and imitating something already visible on the ground surface and which is infused with spiritual powers or inhabited by the gods (Richards 1996: 203; Scarre 2002: 11).

The creation of artificial monumental structures is one aspect (linked to other aspects) in the life of the people in their understanding and appreciation of the landscape. Both visually and in terms of the individual experience they provide, the artificial monumental structures would remain different 'constructs' within the landscape but their role is constituted in terms of the transformation they bring about in the natural world. Forming an integral part of a landscape which is continually read and re-read by the people inhabiting it, the artificial monuments would become a visible aspect of a lived and worked landscape (Richards 1996: 200-2, 206).

The building material itself and the construction pattern of the artificial monuments might further seem to reflect the surrounding natural landscape, if not the earth itself. Stone and, sometimes, clay employed in the monuments' construction are themselves extracted from the earth and the way they are applied in the construction of the monuments often replicates the geological formation of the earth itself where the bed-rock (stone) is overlain with natural till (clay) (Richards 1996: 202). This might be a conscious attempt to create a world for the spiritual beings which is not dissimilar to that inhabited by the material beings. On the other hand, extracting the building material (like stone) for the monument from the monument's own location or surrounding landscape – as happened at Ras ir-Raḥeb and Ras il-Wardija – might help to integrate the monument more firmly within its surrounding natural setting (4.3.6, 10 and 4.2.8).

But the monuments might be also located at different places and assume different architectural forms reflecting different purposes, intentions (which might be also political, such as the promotion of specific cults), and functions. The monuments' purposes and intentions – as well as the structural principles of their ritual practices or functions – might also be reflected by the monuments' embellishment but, perhaps even more, by their spatial patterns revealed by both occupancy of and movement within the monuments. This might be shown, for example, in the architectural arrangement of the sanctuaries at Tas-Silġ (4.1.19, 23), Ras ir-Raḥeb (4.3.8), and Ras il-Wardija (4.2.10-11). As shown above (2.8), some of the monuments might even refer to older monuments as remembered places, thus creating a memory of landscape. Other monuments might alter the understanding of the landscape by occupying new places in the landscape (Barrett 1991: 8; Hingley 1996: 240-2; Horsnaes 2002: 230, 233; Richards 1996: 202-3).

The building (or enlargement) of a monument and the architectural form adopted in its building (or enlargement) might be also a purposive and calculated imposition on the landscape or on a particular place. Evidence of this might be borne by the sanctuary enlargements at both Tas-Silġ (4.1.14-6, 20, 23-4) and Ras ir-Raḥeb

(4.3.6, 8-10). It might be a measure to assert a claim to or control over the place (and whatever that place might stand for) or to insert new people into the history and associations of the place. This ‘imposition’ might also gain legitimacy by making reference to the past. Proximity to the past – as well as exclusion of others – might, then, express greater affinity with the powers of the place (Edmonds 1999: 140-1; Sinopoli 2003: 21, 25-6, 31).

Natural elements – like water – might also represent what one might call ‘natural architecture’ through their acting as symbolic agents of, for example, transition and division or separation. The symbolic agency of these natural elements might be further highlighted when in combination with artificial architectural elements. If we take water as an example, its combination with causeways and ditches (for example, surrounding a monument) would highlight its agency for transition and separation. Symbolic agency might be also played out by the stones themselves out of which the artificial monuments are built. The height of any standing external stones dwarfing the internal features inside the monument might be taken to reflect the surrounding topography overlooking the settlement and, possibly, the monument itself. However, these same stones might also be looked at as standing in contrast to the surrounding topography. The relationship between the artificial monument’s architecture and the surrounding topography, the built and the unbuilt, might be enhanced either by the possibly intended replication of the vertical rock formations of any surrounding hills provided by any standing external stones – themselves also quarried from the natural rock – in or related to the monument’s structure or by the possibly intended contrast between them. Thus, through the agency of natural elements, artificially-built monuments and their surrounding natural landscape or topography might also ‘fuse’ together in a symbolic representation or re-creation of the cultural and natural (or physical) world. Through the people’s daily activities and tasks overshadowed by the artificial monuments, the landscape is continually transformed and re-created. The social landscape of daily life becomes, thus, formalised into a ritual landscape (Richards 1996: 203-6; Tilley 2004: 97-9).

2.10 - Religious monuments as memorial representations

A place is itself a sensual experience and the human body, social identity, and the shifting perceptions of society intersect through the daily, lived experience of the place. This experience provides a starting point to retrieve social memory. Place and memory might become intertwined to create a sense of place and this sense of place might reconstruct a history of social engagement with the landscape. As people create, modify, and move through the place, their perception and experience of the place might create, legitimise, and reinforce social relationships and ideas. Nonetheless, experience of the place might be also a useful means to recognise, remember, and reconstruct the past. Emotional attachments to the place or to its past might also contribute towards the construction of memory to the extent that the place itself might become inscribed with meaning and might be subject to commemorative appropriation and transformation. It might have been in view of this that architectural elements were re-utilised and re-incorporated during any major restructuring undertaken at Tas-Silġ sanctuary (4.1.21). Lending itself to purposes of remembering, the place might thus provide access to the past through its commemorative functions which might also include re-enactments and movements around or across the place (Edmonds 1999: 7, 134; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003: 4-6).

For the reasons outlined above, places or monuments might be built on previously occupied sites which are, hence, repeatedly occupied. This re-occupation is not an arbitrary and meaningless re-use but a conscious and meaningful one where people observe and interpret the past to serve their present needs and interests, including legitimisation. The re-occupied sites or places might undergo a change in their form, character, meaning, and significance. Nonetheless, they might simultaneously retain a sense of permanence. This evocation of continuity might maintain an unbroken line between past and present (Edmonds 1999: 134-5; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003: 1). This is particularly true of those places with a tradition of ritual

connections and significance like Tas-Silġ (4.1.14-7, 20-1) and Ras ir-Raheb (4.3.6, 9).

For instance, ritually significant places or places with a long tradition of ritual activity might also sometimes come to accommodate human burials and related deposits, if not within, near them in later times. In this regard, the sanctuary at Tas-Silġ provides the only known example on Malta (4.1.17). The accommodation of human burials and related deposits within such places might be perceived as an appropriation of these places to the extent that new funerary monuments might tend to cluster around older ceremonial ones (Barrett 1999: 254; Bradley 1998a: 130).

Nevertheless, even when no longer a focus of ritual and funerary activity, these places might remain present in later periods as well through their remaining structures which might be considered as significant monuments in their own right. To some extent, therefore, theirs might be perceived as a ‘renewal’ or ‘development’: not by way of a physical intervention (as, physically, they remain unmodified) but through a change in their landscape context. Thus, these monuments might remain integrated in the landscape which keeps accommodating them in later times too (Barrett 1999: 258). They might be seen as having gained permanence (and importance) on account of their remembered and respected past (Edmonds 1999: 151).

2.11 - Sacred spaces with maritime connections

The importance for seafarers, in particular, of the pantheon of different gods and goddesses with maritime associations can be best shown by the presence of coastal or seaside worshipping spaces. Sanctuaries and shrines located in or next to harbours or on headlands and dedicated to such guardian deities acted as sacral focal points for seafarers to help them maintain their link to their divine guardians and protectors both in harbour and at sea (Brody 1998: 38, 61, 84-5, 99-100).

Harbours and certain seaside locations provided the ideal setting for the erection of sanctuaries and shrines that, perceived as the earthly residence of maritime gods, linked the seafarers to their sacred benefactors. Harbour sanctuaries and shrines like those at Tas-Silġ in Malta and Għar ix-Xiħ in Gozo, therefore, were places where seafarers could turn to their gods imploring them for safety at sea before they set sail and also where, after a safe return, they could express their thanks or fulfill vows made at sea. A common offering in thanksgiving or in fulfillment of vows in port sanctuaries and shrines consisted of sacred or votive anchors (or anchor parts) which, sometimes, could also be placed on board a ship and used in emergencies like a storm as these were the sailors' last hope for safety during a storm. It is likely that, after bringing a ship safely home following a storm, such sacred anchors were placed in temples or sanctuaries and the Tas-Silġ anchor (4.1.15) might be one such example. Instances of anchor offerings in temples and sanctuaries come from the temple of Baal at Ugarit and from the Cypro-Archaic sanctuary at Kition-Bamboula (Cyprus). Sometimes, a sanctuary or shrine could be itself set up (or undergoes structural enlargement) in fulfillment of a vow to guardian deities after deliverance from peril at sea. Seafarers, nonetheless, could even stop, while on a journey, to pay homage at these sanctuaries and shrines, unless they did so from on board their vessel at sea. Nearby freshwater sources could also provide this commodity to any visiting or passing ships. For this reason, seaside sanctuaries and shrines with nearby freshwater sources, like Temple B at Kommos (on southern Crete), could also function as watering points (Brody 1998: 6, 14, 39-61, 71-7, 95-100, Figs.34-6, 41-4, 48-50, 75-6, 84-5, 95-6, 99-101).

Coastal promontories (or headlands) share a number of characteristics with high places besides their relation to the sea which, acting as boundaries, they separate from the land. Viewed from the sea, they are impressive, prominent, and conspicuous landmarks which might create a feeling of proximity to the gods (Malkin 1987: 142, 146-8). Acting also as distinct coastal features, they could be used as 'seamarks' in locating land and identifying coastal positions from the sea.

Very often, they would better serve this role if they are defined by a structure. This is often of a religious nature. This structure defines a space, frequently separated from the hinterland by a built boundary but, for its remaining extent, surrounded by the sea. Headland structures, therefore, may have been purposely positioned and defined so as to create a symbolic link between the land and the sea (Figure 7 below). In this way, more than simply providing key landmarks in aid of mariners, promontories or headlands also provided a liminal zone where people of the sea and those of the littoral could come together (Rainbird 2007: 55-6, 159-60).

Thus, headlands or promontories might be connected with a deity who would be protector of those who sailed within sight of that headland or promontory. The visibility of the headland or promontory could have also facilitated the identification of that same headland or promontory as a landmark and navigational reference for mariners and fishermen. Erection of a temple (or an altar) on that headland or promontory like those at Ras ir-Raheb in Malta and at Ras il-Wardija in Gozo (and, likewise, in harbours) might have served to thank the deity and to ensure the safety of the seafarers. And if the seafarers could not stop to pay their homage at these temples or shrines, they could pray to the resident god from their vessel at sea and within sight of the promontory temple or shrine. This would have, thus, confirmed the importance of that deity as the seafarers' guardian and the importance of the headland or promontory (or harbour) itself for the seafarers (Brody 1998: 21-4, 33-41, 55, 61, 81, 85, 99, 101).

Usually isolated from settlements along the coast, shrines built on seaside promontories did not simply link the seafarers to their patron deities but, visible from the sea, they maintained the seafarers' link to their divine guardians and protectors even while away from their home port. Nautical expeditions could also lead to the discovery of previously unknown promontories and their eventual dedication to seafarers' patron deities. The foundation and dedication of a temple to the Semitic "Poseidon" on a wooded promontory by the Carthaginian captain Hanno during a colonising sea voyage along the Atlantic coast of Africa reflects



Figure 7

Ras ir-Raheb headland, Malta. To create a symbolic link between the land and the sea, a temple structure (arrowed) was purposely positioned on the prominent and conspicuous headland shown in the picture above. (Photo: Daniel Cilia).

this Phoenician practice of commemorating newly found headlands. Furthermore, shrines on seaside promontories could also mark particularly dangerous areas along the sea journey, provide a sighting or a landmark to aid navigation from the sea (above), mark freshwater sources where ships could stop to replenish their water

supplies, or commemorate an event like a battle or a shipwreck (Brody 1998: 37-41, 55-61, 81, 96-101).

2.12 - Summary

When marked with spiritually significant features – both natural and, often, even anthropogenic – landscapes are imbued with sacredness. The creation of artificial features brings order and control upon landscape which is, thus, domesticated and given further special significance and meaning. Its use is, therefore, formalised and reserved for ritual by which spiritual forces are brought into the domain of human society.

It follows, then, that certain characteristics, like monumentality and architectural layout or shape, decoration, durability, continuous use, conspicuousness, location environment and topography, relative isolation, building material, and associated features (whether natural or anthropogenic) might be more obvious than others leading one to assume that the site bearing such characteristics was not an ordinary but rather an important and possibly a religiously specialised one. Spaces or landscape settings, like pathways or boundaries / territorial markers, may also provide useful indicators inasmuch as they can be suggestive of specific movements, like processions, associated with ritual dynamics.

Elements of this sort seem to be exclusive of other places and actions and, thus, might be better suited to provide that unique sensory and emotional experience associated with the supernatural and the sacred. In fact, they were essentially considerations of geographical location, spatial organisation, sightlines and viewsheds, characteristics pertaining to the physical and cultural settings, related finds (including their treatment and disposal), overall experience or feeling, and communicating or mediating potential that informed the criteria for the qualification

of the sites examined in the case studies (in Chapter 4) as more religiously specialised.

It also follows that spaces where cult rituals are carried out form the mediating point between humans and supernatural beings. There, the physical encounters the metaphysical through rituals. Spaces designated for this purpose – mostly temples – are, thus, perceived as the residence of the gods within a settlement or region (whether urban or rural) to the extent that they come to form an important element in the landscape of that settlement or region. The presence of a temple would manifest the relationship between religious belief and physical space sometimes reflected in the pairing of cults and towns / settlements / regions (Revell 2013: 21).

This makes it almost imperative that religious buildings be seen not only in terms of their physical setting, such as their location in a town or region, but also in terms of their cultural setting. This means that, through their use of these religious buildings or spaces, the inhabitants of a town or region would constantly recreate and rework their religious knowledge (in terms of correct religious ritual) and bring into being the power of the gods as something which deserves worship in their daily life. Correct rituals of worship would, thus, be considered an important criterion of the correct running of an urban community. This would seem to explain public participation in cult rituals as part of a wider ideology of urban or regional cults. Moreover, relationship between the architectural layout of religious buildings and the rest of the settlement or region would reflect the nature of the relationship between humans and gods. Likewise, variations in architectural layout of religious buildings would respond to regional variations in cult rituals and in forms of religious knowledge. The incorporation of gods into towns or regions is also itself a localised response to variations in social and cultural structures (Revell 2013: 22-3, 25-9).

But ritual activity was not restricted to sites or places designated specifically for this purpose, like temples or sanctuaries. As will be shown by the last case study

centering on Tal-Knisja and Tal-Logġa, open-air spaces like agricultural fields might also occasionally host popular festivals of a religious nature which might not necessarily involve specialised priesthoods either. Ritual activity of this kind and in this sort of environment is usually associated with rural communities whose concerns (mainly agricultural) it usually tended to manifest and address.

CHAPTER 3:

RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOUR, EXPRESSION, AND EXPERIENCE

3.1 - Aims and method of chapter

This chapter provides a broad overview of the current state of general literature on religious behaviour, expression, and experience with reference to six Maltese sites that constitute the five case studies in the following chapter. Two of these sites – Ras il-Wardija in Gozo and Ras ir-Raheb in Malta – lie on a pronounced coastal promontory, two others – Tas-Silġ in Malta and Ghar ix-Xiħ in Gozo – are coastal sites associated with a harbour, while the last two – Tal-Knisja and Tal-Logġa in Gozo – are two fields set within a valley landscape marked by intensive agricultural activity.

The aim of the chapter is to reach – even with the aid of examples – a set of criteria determining which structures, objects, and practices (in general) can be considered to be more religious or more religiously specialised than others. On a contextual basis, many of these criteria will be applied in Chapter 4 to the mentioned sites and their respective rural landscapes, their finds, and the activities presumed to have taken place there to form the basis on which these are thus classified and, therefore, included in the case studies.

To achieve the above-mentioned aim, this chapter focuses on the theme of religion and its constituent elements, like ritual performance, symbolism, communication, and expression, from a largely anthropological perspective. Preference is given to those religious phenomena (like cults) that are deemed relevant to the Maltese religious scenario in Classical antiquity. When dealing with cults, for instance, due

treatment is focused on those cults which are either evidenced in the Maltese islands or, considering the wider Mediterranean context, are thought to have been practised locally too.

3.2 - Religion: towards a definition

Religion has never been easy to define and what it is and what it is composed of is the subject of much debate. In Classical antiquity, religion was much looked upon as the relationship between gods and humans, both in the way this relationship with the gods was organised and articulated by humans and the way in which human conception of the divine was structured (Kearns 2010: 26). Essentially, religion is a matter of meanings attached to ideas expressed in ritual and belief and has universal functions. If one, then, sets out to speak of natural religion in terms of belief in a supernatural being or power, practices or worship, and a code of ethics promising afterlife rewards and punishments, this is said to exist in all societies; at least, traditional ones (Asad 1983: 245). A definition which presents religion as a universal cultural phenomenon is that proposed by Geertz (1993: 90; bracketed numbers inserted by present writer). According to Geertz, religion is

“(1) a system of symbols which act to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic”.

In the broadest sense, then, the term ‘religion’ is often used to describe practices, beliefs, and material culture and, thus, implicitly sets apart and distinguishes which of these are ‘religious’ and which are not. Yet religion also touches upon the intangible and the indefinable. If one takes ‘symbol’ as meaning something – be it an object, a sign, or a gesture – which represents or refers to some other thing beyond itself, then this ‘symbol’ would enable one to grasp the invisible by means

of the visible, the intangible by means of the tangible, and the indefinable by means of the definable. It can be argued, in fact, that symbolic behaviour lay at the origins of religious behaviour (Insoll 2004: 6-7, 24-5).

According to Martin Southwold (1978: 371), religion is composed of a variety of forms of behaviour which are in response to diverse individual and social requirements. Though of diverse origins, these forms of behaviour have distinct affinities with each other, leading them to form a coherent cultural system. Such a cultural system, therefore, somehow corresponds to a notion of religion and is to be found in nearly every human society. Southwold (1978: 370-1) attributes the following characteristics (in their entirety or in part) to a cultural system which one could call a religion:

- a central concern with ‘godlike beings’ and men’s relations with these;
- a dualist categorisation of the elements of the world into sacred and profane, the main concern being with the sacred;
- a quest for salvation from the worldly conditions;
- ritual practices;
- beliefs which cannot be logically or empirically proven but are held on the basis of faith;
- an ethical code;
- supernatural sanctions on infringements of the ethical code;
- a mythology;
- a corpus of highly esteemed scriptures or oral traditions;
- a priesthood or a specialist religious elite class;
- association with a moral community or institution like a church;
- association with an ethnic group.

Southwold (1978: 371-2) adds that some of the above characteristics – like the central concern with ‘godlike beings’, the dualist categorisation of the elements of the world into sacred and profane, and ritual practices – are among the most nearly universal characteristics of religions. However, these characteristics are frequently

found in combination. For example, if ‘godlike beings’ are considered important, ritual practices must be employed to communicate with them. In turn, the ‘godlike beings’ would become the objects of these rituals.

Religion performs essentially two functions. These are respectively termed by David Riches (1994: 381) as ideological and cosmological. Through the first function, religion lends support to the social, particularly the institutional. This point will be elaborated further below when we shall deal with power and ritual (3.7 below). Through the second function, religion allows contemplation of eschatological and related questions which individuals often ask.

In this regard, behind religion stands a long tradition of thought about the essential human concerns such as life and death, good and evil. In this respect, religion can be viewed as a critical, overarching element of primary importance in structuring life into which many other ‘non-religious’ concerns or aspects of life are fitted. All of these can be influenced by religion which, thus, can be seen as the structuring principle for the lives of religious communities (Insoll 2004: 7, 22-3).

Religion is not composed solely of materially comprehensible elements, like religious buildings and artefacts. It also comprises individuals’ imaginary, yet equally mysterious, ‘worlds’. It is here that an important element in the domain of religion comes in: the ‘numinous’ or the ‘supernatural’; at least as it is perceived by the human mind. The numinous is likewise or perhaps even harder to define. Perhaps it can be best described as lying beyond nature. As such, it is acknowledgeable, yet incomprehensible (Insoll 2004: 19).

3.3 - Religion and its material forms

Religion manifests itself in a variety of material forms and expressions. Without these, religion would risk being void and lifeless. Through both ideology and

senses, material forms are used to construct sacred symbols and to render deeply held beliefs. This engages all fellow believers and brings them together in acts of communal celebration and worship. And through the distinct material expression of their religion, different religious communities not only build up a cultural identity embedded in religious beliefs but these same beliefs are also provided with a sensory atmosphere and given material shape. For without its ‘incarnation’ in material expression, religion itself would be largely unintelligible. Indeed, religion is grasped and translated by way of innumerable material expressions comprising a myriad of forms and sizes (Keenan and Arweck 2006: 1-3).

Material expressions of religion ‘transport’ the believers beyond this world and into the ‘other’ world and lead them to hope in things unseen. The material creation of ‘supernatural’ realities, the physical imaging of gods and spirits by way of effigies, masks, and shrines help, in fact, to impose a spirit world upon the real world in which we live and move around in everyday life (Keenan and Arweck 2006: 9-10). Perhaps it was also in reference to it as an exit and entrance or a barrier between and a bridge across these two worlds that the Roman god Janus personified the ‘door’ (Figure 8 below).

Artworks make up one distinct form through which religion is given material shape and expression. If looked upon also as works of art, the statuettes from Tas-Silġ (4.1.15, 22), Ras ir-Raħeb (4.3.6), and Għar ix-Xiħ (4.4.10-11, 14) sanctuaries might have also played out a similar role with respect to religion, whether they represented deities or substituted offerants. As a creative agency of the material expressions of religion, artworks are very apt for the diffusion of religious beliefs. Through the agency of artworks, religious beliefs are not only illustrated, but also illuminated and given depth and animacy. In this way, artworks strengthen the synergy between the proclaimed and the manifested belief. As expressive works of imagination, artworks materialise religious belief and experience and, thus, through art objects – as, indeed, through practices and all other material expressions – religion becomes a source of sensuous knowledge and experience. Through this



Figure 8

Libral Aes grave cast in Rome. It shows the bearded double-face of Janus on its obverse. *Circa 230 B.C.* (Source: Boussac and Delangre n.d.: 43(top illustration)).

material cultural resource – namely, art – of religion, what is unseen becomes seen, and what is incomprehensible becomes comprehensible (Keenan and Arweck 2006: 3, 5).

Representation often involves also substitute actions or objects (including deposited objects): actions or objects that will stand as a substitute for what is intended to be represented (Bradley 1998a: 139, 171-87; Kiernan 2007: 153-72; Lewis 1980: 29). Substitute objects, for instance, are found on sacred sites often in the form of statuettes representing offerants (Figure 9 below), zoomorphic representations, or representations of anatomical parts (Figure 10 below). Several of the examples found at Tas-Silġ (4.1.15, 22-3), at Ras ir-Raheb (4.3.6), and at Ghar ix-Xih (4.4.10-11, 14) may fall within this category. Substitution (particularly, through miniaturisation of objects) could afford an extra ritual potency and impetus to the



Figure 9

Statuette from Ghar ix-Xih (Gozo, Malta). It is a naive and crude representation of either an offerant or a deity. (Photo: Frank Chetcuti).

offering. Furthermore, the fact that substitutes (particularly, miniaturised objects) cannot be used for utilitarian purposes relegates them to the supernatural realm (Kiernan 2007: 171). In fact, through ritual, substitute actions or objects may be also mystified. The mystification of these actions or objects involves their ‘isolation’ by using any special features they may have to attract the attention of the spectators, stimulate their imagination, and invite them to recognise qualities or aspects (of those actions or objects) which would not otherwise be ordinarily seen but may have symbolic meanings. These qualities or aspects may, therefore, be used to grasp information about a mystery by investing it with perceptible form. This would show that ritual may be also concerned with the unravelling of mysteries and ambiguity (Lewis 1980: 30-2).

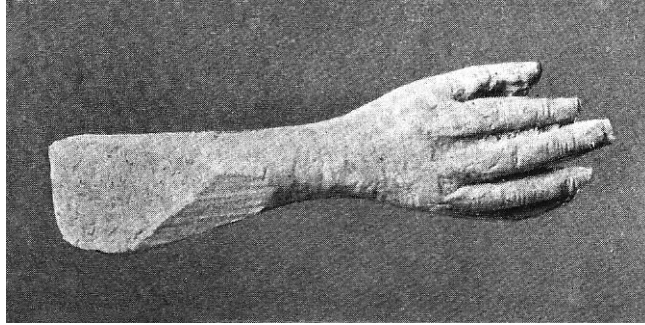


Figure 10

Hand representation from Tas-Silġ Sanctuary, Malta.

Made of ivory, it is 4cm long. Possibly, a votive anatomical offering. (Source: *MISSIONE* 1966: 37, Plate 24(5)).

3.4 - Religion, identity, and hybridity

Any elements newly-introduced amongst a community – often via a colonisation process (in whatever sense it might be understood) – usually bring about a reorganisation or a redefinition of the affected region and its population. The community is thus ‘redefined’ in a way whereby different cultures blend together through a thorough reworking of their various elements manifest in a mutual, interactive, and fluid hybridisation. Developing material and social relations between them would often assume the form of mutual cultural interactions – comprising both adaptations (or conformities) and resistances, acceptances and rejections, negotiations and contestations – and shared cultural values: a process in which all parties thus adopt an active role. Some of the mutual interactions and shared values that characterise the redefined community as a result of the reorganisation or restructuring that it involves often also have a fundamental religious dimension which might take a syncretistic form when they (i.e. the interactions) simultaneously incorporate acceptance of certain religious elements and rejection of others. Relations amongst the redefined community might also change through time while reciprocal influences might oscillate, as was evident in Sicily during the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. (Gosden 2004: 32-3, 65-72;

Knapp and Van Dommelen 2010: 3; Malkin 1987: 135-43, 183-6; Smith 2007: 268; Stek 2009: 171; Van Dommelen 1997: 309-20; Webster 1997: 327-35).

Religion – particularly through its ethical code – is especially suitable to act as a symbol and rallying-point for cultural and ethnic identities by uniting people into an effective co-operating unit and giving them a sense of moral coherence and solidarity. As cultural systems with their own respective doctrines or beliefs, religions are so effective in identifying and distinguishing, unifying and separating cultural communities. A doctrine which is important and undisputably true to a cultural community but which is otherwise adverse and unacceptable to outsiders or enemies would, almost inevitably, create a barrier around that particular cultural community. Simultaneously, it will confirm and strengthen, for the members of that cultural community, a sense of communal identity and solidarity (Southwold 1978: 373-4). This is, perhaps, best manifest in those cases where religious identities emerge or are strengthened as part of a process of self-definition in reaction to the ‘threat’ posed by the creation or appearance of a different religion or religions within the same environment (Edwards 2005: 123; Janes 2010: 135). To some extent, it might have been a similar kind of reaction that could have motivated the incorporation of previous beliefs and traditions within new socio-ideological orders through the repeated use of earlier architectural elements at sites such as Tas-Silg sanctuary (4.1.14-6, 20-1).

The material expressions of religion dealt with above may also contribute towards the identity of a cultural community through their being a source of unity on one hand and of separation on the other. Particularly on a sociological level, outward material manifestations or expressions of inward belief may serve to mark out both religious and cultural difference: uniting a group of believers and, at the same time, separating them from outsiders, creating a dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘them’. The material expressions of religion can, therefore, bring out a distinct identity of the cultural community or group: who are they and who they are not (Keenan and Arweck 2006: 12). Material expressions of religion may also create distinct ethnic

identities within large religious groups. This can take place when material expressions of a universal nature link a smaller group to the wider religious community while other expressions pertaining distinctly to the smaller group define it as different from the rest of the wider community. A good example is provided by early monotheistic Christianity in relation to monotheistic Judaism (Edwards 2005: 124; Wallwork 1984: 46, 49-50).

Though different in their own right from the wider religious community, these smaller groups often tend to have a hybrid religious identity. This identity may result from a destabilisation of religious (and cultural) boundaries and a negotiation of their differences as a result of their links with other contemporary groups within the wider community (or with groups forming part of the same religious phenomenon) or with other different groups over successive periods of time. As a result of their constant mobility, interchange, and interaction with each other, these smaller groups would develop a pan-religious identity or a religious *koine* comprising commonly appropriated ideas and practices but not without manifestations or versions specific to each individual group, the product of their individual choices, re-interpretations, and re-workings (Kindt 2012: 124-5; Knapp and van Dommelen 2010: 5; Rowlands 2010: 235-42; Vives-Ferrándiz 2010: 204; Woolf 2005: 133- 7).

With the encircling sea effectively providing them with a bridge to a wider cosmopolitan world which they may be neither completely dependent on nor closed to, islands (especially island clusters) may become an arena for interaction between different groups of people. On a local level, this interaction allows different elements – be they cultural or religious – to be selectively absorbed, reworked, and slotted into local frameworks (Broodbank 1993: 316) in a syncretistic manner ultimately leading to the creation of a hybrid identity that, for this reason, often characterises island societies.

Albeit likewise inspired by cultural contacts with other groups, another form of hybrid religious identity may stem from the need to adapt to newly-emerging religious (or even social or political) situations. In this case, the group's adaptation or re-working of its traditions is meant to address the new religious (or social or political) requirements (Janes 2010: 130, 135-6, 138-9).

In this respect, coins minted for circulation in the Maltese islands during the first centuries of the Roman political occupation of the same islands would, at times, demonstrate this phenomenon through their apparent adoption of what might be termed as a 'hybrid character'. They seem to do this when, perhaps in view of changing political allegiances, they develop a blend of local and external or 'old' and 'new' elements. They do this, for instance, when they depict a Punic deity on one side of a coin and a symbol of Roman political authority on the other side of the same coin (Azzopardi 1993: 42; also Figure 11 below). Or else, when they maintain the same image but change the accompanying deity's symbol (on the same side of the coin) and, hence, also the deity's representation (borne by the interchangeable image) from that of the 'Punic' Tanit to that of the 'Hellenistic' Demeter or rather her 'Roman' counterpart Ceres (Azzopardi 1993: 39-40; also Azzopardi(b) forthcoming and 6.3 below). Alternatively, a deity's image/s on a coin might carry different attributes (like the crescent moon and military attire) that equally belong to the 'Phoenician' Astarte and to the 'Roman' Juno (Azzopardi 1993: 43; also 5.2-3 and 6.5 below). Such a process of negotiations might also consign the relative deity – be it Astarte / Tanit or Juno – to the realm of hybridity wherein the deity is no longer purely or exclusively Punic or Roman but rather a hybrid one.

Continuing on the issue of identity and the material expressions of religion, one can also distinguish between popular religion and institutional religion (also 3.15 below). Popular or folk religion, which may be also labelled as 'grassroots religion', employs a lot of material forms and objects for the purposes of religious expression. In fact, most of the vital and interesting parts of religious life are to be found in

popular religion with its mix of cultural, traditional, and religious practices and beliefs often dismissed as superstition by institutional or organised religion.



Figure 11

A hybrid ‘Romano-Maltese’ coin of the first century B.C. It shows the profile head of what is likely to be the Phoenician Astarte / Punic Tanit on the obverse side (not shown here) and the curule chair – symbol of the authority of the provincial propraetor in Sicily – on the reverse side. The two representations might have highlighted a conciliation or an accommodation between a religious element (a representation of Astarte) and a symbol of Roman political authority. (Source: Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 195).

Amongst popular cultures, therefore, religion is distinctly a material process wherein religious forms and objects used for worship, commemoration, and even art are charged with culturally-specific sacred meanings. These material forms and objects, then, make their presence felt and are put to work through different practices, like ritual, meditation, and pilgrimage. In such a context, the physical substrate of popular piety manifest in everyday life is ‘religionised’ (Keenan and Arweck 2006: 13-6). However, due to its often limited engagement with formal public religion and its rather restricted contacts with urban religious currents, popular religion tends to be more conservative in preserving traditional religious

forms and practices, particularly in remote or rural areas (Edwards 2005: 124). But, as the 'religious' life of religious material forms and objects is itself variegated and dynamic, some of these forms and even objects also manage to 'move' beyond their original denominational locations and, like the attributes of certain deities in Classical antiquity, become part of a 'pantheon' of religious iconography shared by all humankind (Keenan and Arweck 2006: 15).

3.5 - Ritual and cult: meaning, expression, and performance

Ritual and cult seem to be such closely related terms that a clear-cut distinction between them seems hard to achieve. Very often, it is not even attempted but both terms are frequently taken to stand for each other. According to Wilfrid D. Hambly (1929: 655), the term 'cult' may be used to designate beliefs and acts. These beliefs and acts might imply loose affiliations and their nature is not so clearly defined. Colin Renfrew (1985: 15) is somewhat clearer when he considers cult as religious ritual (as opposed to secular ritual) or, putting it in simpler terms, a particular form of religious worship. In a later contribution (2007: 8-9), he comes forward with a much clearer distinction between cult and ritual: cult implies a religious context – it is 'the practice of worship within a religious context' – while ritual may have wider connotations. As a religious performance, cult involves ritual. But it does not follow that all ritual involves cult. Barrowclough (2007: 46) adds that cult is better thought of as small-scale (in comparison to religion) and rather localised. Thus, as a form of worship, cult may exist either independently or within a mainstream religion as a sub-set of small-scale localised beliefs.

Taking our cue from Renfrew, ritual may be said to comprise both physical and mental activities in combination and can be both sacred and secular. These combined activities generally consist of emotion, experience (or knowledge), communication (both verbal and non-verbal), and movement. However, ritual – with these physical and mental activities – is embedded within the other facets

which together comprise religion and is, in fact, inseparable from them. Therefore, ritual should not be equated with religion but it is one of its elements. Then, there are other elements which can form part of ritual itself. These include:

- Formality (or stylisation) of activities
- Consistency with tradition
- Repetition
- Rule-guidance (or regularity)

With these elements, ritual does not stand by itself in a dehumanised form but rather forms part of a wider inhabited and dynamic religious world (Barrowclough 2007: 45-6; Insoll 2004: 10-12; Renfrew 1985: 14-5).

Very often, ritual can be of either an ecstatic or a contemplative character. But whatever character it adopts, ritual always aims to bridge this world with the other world beyond and, thus, brings the participants into closer relationship with the deity or deities than they are in normal everyday life. On a broad level, it seems to have been commonplace for ritual to achieve this aim through its enactment on highly-placed sacred locations like Tas-Silġ (4.1.19) and Ras il-Wardija (4.2.8, 11, 13. Also Figure 12). On the other hand and on a more specific level, ecstatic ritual would normally achieve this aim through performances involving song / noise, dance, and even hallucinogenic drugs while contemplative ritual would achieve the same aim through solitude and silence (Renfrew 1985: 16).

In any case, ritual is essentially a performance which is responded to in various ways. As said above, it is not synonymous with religion but it is the latter's executive arm. And as ritual is a performance, action or behaviour is an essential part of it. Primarily symbolic in character, such an action is played out according to a certain pattern and is expressive of certain meanings. Therefore, this action has two aspects: a technical aspect (i.e. something is done) and a communicative aspect (i.e. something is said, or a meaning is conveyed). Both aspects are present in any action or behaviour forming part of ritual (Lewis 1980: 8, 10, 16-7; Renfrew 2007: 9).



Figure 12

View of the temple on the Acropolis hill at Athens. It dominates the city skyline. (Photo: Konstantinos Dafalias).

The meaning of a ritual performance cannot be understood if its intention is neglected. A frequent intention in ritual is communication: either with a spirit or deity to whom demands are made in expectation of a ‘ritual’ answer or with an audience on whom the performance works by means of an intricate system of signs (or symbols) and stimulations. For the ordinary spectator, signs would only have directly perceptible properties which, taken only at their face value, would express nothing to him / her as long as he / she does not understand what they stand for. But signs, involving ritual gestures, actions, or even objects, may have a special meaning. In other words, they have more than perceptible properties: they have also expressive or representational properties in that they may express or represent something beyond what they would seem to. However, any understanding of expression or representation is grounded in perceptions of visible signs (like gestures, actions, or objects) as the outer signs of an inner mental (or emotional)

state or experience. Generally speaking, a gesture, action, or object is expressive of this inner state or experience as long as it matches or corresponds to what is experienced inwardly. Thus, this match or correspondence endows the gesture, action, or object with expressive meaning (Lewis 1980: 23-7; Renfrew 2007: 9).

Expression and representation can be understood through the complex experience provided by ritual. One of the main objectives of ritual is precisely to produce an effect on the spectators and arouse their thinking. This is achieved through a complexity of stimuli of gesture, movement, costume, colour, and voice which are put to work (through ritual performance) in different ways on the spectators and instigate a complex response from them. Therefore, ritual does not only stimulate but also directs activities providing, at the same time, imaginative and creative understanding of the activities involved. As ritual is thus subject to understanding (and, hence, interpretation) on the part of the spectators, it follows that the spectators are not passive but active beholders. In this sense, they are also performers inasmuch as the performers (of ritual) are themselves also spectators of what they do (Lewis 1980: 33-8; Skeates 1991: 122).

But ritual does not have to do only with communication and expression. It is not performed solely and simply to be understood and interpreted. Ritual is something rather practical and, as such, it also guides action in important situations like those of transition or provides solutions or relief in adverse ones. For instance, situations of helplessness create tension and fear and, if the world is believed to be governed by supernatural forces, this tension might easily take the form of religious fear. In such circumstances, sensational and dramatic ritual might be used to provide relief. Value is thus correspondingly attached to ritual's practicality (Lewis 1980: 11, 34-5; Liebeschuetz 1979: 10; Skeates 1991: 122).

On the other hand, it is not only ritual itself which is subject to interpretation. As part of ritual performance, the participants may move around through spaces, sometimes linking ritual sites. These movements may assume formal patterns, like

processions. Spaces suggestive of processions are perhaps best evident at Tas-Silġ (4.1.23-4) and particularly at Ras il-Wardija (4.2.6, 8, 10-11. Also Figure 13). Two sets of rock-cut steps, one on each side of the small rural shrine at Għar ix-Xiħ, might be also suggestive of processions leaving and approaching the cultic site from different directions (4.4.10). Used and moved through, spaces are thus encountered, understood, experienced, and interpreted in a variety of different ways, gaining new meanings, recalling past connotations or traditions, and forming spatial narratives (Edmonds 1999: 7; Jordan 2008: 240; Pearson and Shanks 2001: 23-4, 54-5; Thomas 1993: 29). The bodily movement through which all of this is facilitated would, therefore, assume an interpretative role (Barrett 1991: 8). Perhaps one way of interpreting spaces through bodily movements would be the manipulation and appropriation of the former by means of the latter. For example, processions may be used to lay claim to territories precisely by making their way through them. Interpreting a specific territory as a space pertaining to a specific group and not to others, such bodily movements (like processions) would further unify and identify the group against other outsiders (Bourque 2000: 28-9; Fortes 1936: 590-1; Mylonopoulos 2006: 105; Pearson and Shanks 2001: 54).

Ritual also provides a sense of time and change (or lack of it). This it does through a pattern of repetition and through the roles played out by the performers according to an established set of formal rules or conventions governing the order and sequence of (ritual) performance. Knowledge of these rules or conventions is essential for the proper performance of ritual and the transmission of the right intentions (Bourque 2000: 23; Lewis 1980: 7, 12, 204). On the other hand, repetition of the prescribed forms of speech and acts may also constitute a symbolisation of major values which are, thus, repetitively expressed (Spicer 1954: 156).

But rituals do not only celebrate or perpetuate major values. They might also indicate social integration or differences or a desire for social change. Rituals are not only influenced but do also themselves influence social relations (social



Figure 13

Possible processional way at Ras il-Wardija Sanctuary (Gozo, Malta). It runs in front of the artificial cave on the fifth terrace. (Source: *MISSIONE* 1966: Plate 89).

integration or social differences), social change, and economic organisation. Through ritual (or, perhaps, through ritualised actions), social actions could distinguish themselves from other actions. Then, ritual could manipulate existing cultural schemes to redefine social situations and negotiate new understandings of self and society. Thus, even if not actually trusting the spiritual efficacy of the ritual, the participants could gain a new or distinct sense of self and society (Bourque 2000: 21-2; Fortes 1936: 598-9, 601-4).

3.6 - Material symbols and iconography

Ritual is often regarded as a configuration of symbols which make up the smaller units of religious behaviour overloaded with meaning. Very often, such meaningful symbols or symbolism can only be grasped through an interplay of stimuli and relations to the extent that ritual can be said to comprise symbolic relationships rather than symbolic objects (Lewis 1980: 32-3). A symbol, therefore, carries a set of relationships between objects (or events) brought together as concepts having both intellectual and emotional significances and, thus, meanings (Asad 1983: 240). And as these meanings can be equally appealing to people of diverse conditions and experiences, it follows that religion is most apt to represent the common interest of humankind (Southwold 1978: 376).

As implied above, symbols are best evident in ritual where they help to externalise metaphysical ideas and concepts such as those represented by words like 'god' or 'spirit'. This externalisation is attained by the grasp of a symbol's meaning and a common element in ritual which frequently helps to achieve this (i.e. grasping a symbol's meaning) is the frequency of repetition in the symbolic expression. In particular, repetitive symbolic expression by way of depiction or iconography of an image in association with similar contexts may yield indications of the meaning of the underlying belief system (Renfrew 1985: 13-4).

If the essence of private symbolism lies in its capability to arouse emotion and alter the psychological state of the individual, public symbolic behaviour such as that usually expressed in ritual is essentially concerned with communication wherein the ritual specialist or performer (if taking place in ritual) and the audience (or spectators) share a common symbolic language operating on both psychological and cultural levels. Operating on these levels, symbols are related to the individual's life experience and to the larger institutional context within which the symbols themselves are embedded (Obeyesekere 2002: 384-5, 395).

Ritual actions often employ symbols consisting of visual images that are encoded or impressed upon the brains of people who, though perhaps unable to read and write, are familiar with them (Mortensen 1991: 81, 85). These symbols are manipulated by the performers and, depending on the latter's intentions, there might be varied directions of address and response, transmission and reception, in the symbolic communication between the performers and the audience (Lewis 1980: 23-4, 33). This symbolic communication allows the performers to communicate their aspirations, ideas, emotions, and self-identity to each other and to their audience which might be composed even of supernatural beings. They might do this even in response to social or emotional conditions with which the aspirations, ideas, emotions, and identities communicated might have symbolic connotations. In this way, the performers unite in a common pursuit of shared basic values and create meanings shared by all of them (Bourque 2000: 21; Mortensen 1991: 84). And as ritual is itself a communicative process, the more successful this communication, the more successful is the ritual (Mylonopoulos 2006: 70, 85).

3.7 - Power and ritual

One of the ways in which attitudes towards the sacred can be identified is through an understanding of sacred space, particularly when social bodies adhere to the same religious territory. Thus, common participation in religious ritual in a given space might be crucial in constituting a 'civic space' that underlies the creation of a stable political institution as was the *polis* in ancient Greece (Edwards 2005: 127).

As religion often plays a major role in the development and definition of political communities and identities, an interrelationship often develops between religious and political power, taking the form of religious legitimisation of political power. Such legitimisation underlies the sacral power of kingship and the prominence of this power (i.e. the sacral power of kingship) forms the basis of the notion of 'Divine Kingship'. The interrelationship between religious and political power is

perhaps best manifested in burials with displays of material wealth that might be equally indicative of both political status and ritual roles to the extent that it is often difficult to distinguish between a tribal chief and a cult priest (Edwards 2005: 126-7).

If the creation of monuments may establish new forms of social and political power, religious ritual might be used by social and political interests not only to legitimise their power but also to justify or support a given social or political structure or, sometimes, even to challenge or change it. To this end, social and political authorities may construct religious ideologies, establish preconditions for distinctive kinds of religious personality, authorise specific religious practices, and produce and control religiously defined knowledge (Asad 1983: 237; Bourque 2000: 20; Edmonds 1999: 150; Malone 2007: 23-4; Nieves Zedeño 2008: 266-7; Riches 1994: 400).

Against such a background, participation in ritual might enable participants to gain a sense of empowerment. Participation in ritual becomes, thus, a joint and negotiated effort on the part of the various participants, irrespective of their differing interpretations and attitudes. In this manner and by the very act of participation, ritual provides the platform through which to negotiate understandings of power and authority as well as of self and society (Bourque 2000: 22).

Control of ritual knowledge and performance might be used to gain ritual power which, in turn, might provide access to political power (Edwards 2005: 125; Riches 1994: 398-9). Through ritual, therefore, religion is implicated in the development of political power. This is perhaps best shown in religious systems in which rulers, heroes, and ancestors are elevated to divine status, thus reflecting also political hierarchies. Both economic and political specialisations and roles can be valued status criteria in the attainment of political power and, thus, are often inextricably

linked to ritual power. In providing access to political power, ritual power may even surpass other, often weaker, political mechanisms (Edwards 2005: 124-5).

In view of the above, an important element in ancient religious life was the cult of the ruler. This cult's same existence was ensured by the widespread perception of the ruler as a god or, at least, as someone bearing affinity to a god. Although there could be economic, social, political, and ideological considerations underlying ruler worship, for his subjects, the ruler's supernatural and divine powers guaranteed their well-being (5.8). However, to secure the operation of his power, the ruler was to be appeased with rites of sacrifices, offerings, and prayers, much in the same way as other gods were in order to secure their favours. In the religious feelings and behaviour of his subjects, the ruler was just as present as the other gods. But as the ruler was also human and, thus, he was also subject to illnesses and death, he could guarantee the well-being of his subjects as long as his own well-being was secured. This implies that it was important to perform rites not only to honour him as a god but also to secure his well-being as a human (Alföldy 1996: 255-6).

In stratified societies, ancestral myths too were often exploited to develop and perpetuate social and political hierarchies. This was achieved through the ritual re-enactments of such myths by the elite whereby the latter would present the hierarchical system as rooted in the order of nature and in human history, identify themselves with mythical beings or with supernatural powers, and gain access to them. This access was established in the mythical past and reiterated in the present through rituals controlled by the elite. In so doing, the elite would legitimise their classification as separate and superior beings in relation to the other ordinary individuals. Both mythology and its ritual re-enactment would, thus, support the ruling elite's self-proclaimed divine nature (or sacred status), their privileges, and their claim to power and authority (Bauer 1996: 327, 333-4).

3.8 - Ritual deposition

At least formally, peoples from various cultures always felt the need to bring offerings or gifts to their gods as tangible expression of their belief. To attain favours from these supernatural beings, vows could be made whereby gifts or offerings are promised to the gods concerned as evidenced at Tas-Silġ (4.1.15, 22-3) and at Għar ix-Xiħ (4.4.10, 14) and, if the request is fulfilled, such promises are to be honoured much in the same manner as that of payment for services rendered in a 'deal' between the living and the gods (Becker 2009: 87-9; Bradley 1998a: 188, 201-2; Edlund-Berry 2009: 105; Renfrew 1985: 16, 18-20). In fact, offerings (that could be either simple and derived from daily life or elaborate and produced specifically to be offered) could also be made afterwards, in thanksgiving or in fulfilment of promises or vows following the attainment of the requested favours. The place where the offerings are dedicated and deposited could be either a natural landmark like a spring or a cave or could be an artificial construction like a sanctuary or shrine serving as a dwelling place for the deity concerned (Becker 2009: 87-9, 97; Gleba 2009: 69, 72). In addition, whereas they might also be deposited – and, thus, are hidden from public view – votive offerings or gifts might also be intended as a form of conspicuous consumption (Becker 2009: 87-9; Bourque 2000: 25; Bradley 1998a: 198-202; Kearns 2010: 215; Osborne 1987: 185-6).

Deposition of objects is, thus, often a key element in religious ritual as attested at Tas-Silġ sanctuary (4.1.15, 22) and Għar ix-Xiħ shrine (4.4.10-11, 14) as well as at Tal-Knisja and Tal-Logġa sites (4.5.2-5). Deposited objects may range from utensils and organic remains buried after a sacrifice to ritual objects like statuettes, miniature ceramic vessels and, sometimes, even architectural or decorative elements from the sanctuary building itself. Following their accumulation, objects offered in a sanctuary might be cleared to provide space for new offerings and then buried, forming a votive deposit in their own right as happened at Tas-Silġ (4.1.15, 22) and at Għar ix-Xiħ (4.4.11, 14). Any votive offering, property consecrated to a deity, or

even structural elements from the latter were a divine possession and maintained their sacred character even when obsolete, damaged, or destroyed. For this reason, they were to be retained within the precinct of the sacred site where they would be buried, both to avoid possibility of their removal and also to prevent them from contact with the profane sphere. Upon the formal closure of a sacred site, the deposition of votive objects there might also mark the ritual termination of the sacrality of the site (desecration) by ritually ‘returning’ the objects to the earth, from the elements of which they were made (Becker 2009: 90; Glinister 2000: 54, 61, 64-70). This might have been the case with the deposition of the statuettes (or, at least, of a number of them) at Għar ix-Xiħ shrine (4.4.14).

Through their burial, deposited objects are permanently taken out of circulation. This is further achieved if they are also physically destroyed or if they are deposited in locations from where they could not be recovered. Their deposition might also provide an opportunity to lay claim to the site, sacred or otherwise, where they are deposited, as may have happened at Tal-Knisja and Tal-Logġa (4.5.7) or to claim association with the supernatural (Bradley 1998a: 138).

Depositions of an unusual character (in the Classical period) are those made up of precious metal coins – especially if they are of specialised types or forgeries – that are sometimes interpreted as special temple money (Bradley 1998a: 173, 177). Variations in the intensity of coin deposition at different sacred sites must be seen in relation to the local requirements of the cult practice at each site rather than to purely economic considerations which could have been a secondary rather than a primary factor. Each sacred site has its own specific depositional characteristics conditioned, on the one hand, by the nature of the cult and, on the other hand, by the social make-up of the worshippers. Coins, for example, are a major significant element in the depositional character of temples or shrines associated with healing cults where the deposited objects (in this case, coins) are thus ‘sacrificed’ in a manner making it impossible for them to be recovered (King 2008: 26, 38-40).

The deliberate deposition of coins at sacred sites is usually taken as linked to the notion of giving up one's possessions to the gods. To avoid their re-entrance into the realm of the secular world, they might be also deliberately broken or mutilated. Another aspect of coin deposition is represented by 'forged' coins at sacred sites. One silver-plated *denarius* is reported from Ghar ix-Xih shrine (4.4.10). Without excluding purely economic (rather than ritual) reasons for this phenomenon, one possible explanation would be that plated coins were knowingly used for purposes of deposition in the ground so that solid gold or silver coins could be spared, perhaps to be used for temple or ritual expenditure (King 2008: 29-31).

Although coin depositions in sacred sites may have been usually deliberate, it does not follow that there were no instances when they were meant to be recovered afterwards, particularly when they were left at sacred sites for safe-keeping under the protection of the gods or if they were offered with the intention to be spent again in some form of honour to the deities or to cover temple expenses (Bland 2013: 232; Haselgrove 2008: 7, 20; King 2008: 25, 28-9).

Depositions of precious metal coins might perhaps be a good indicator of the religious significance of a site or, at least, of that part of the site where they are deposited. For instance, an unusually large concentration of coins was found deposited beneath the floor of the baptismal font (from a later occupation of the site) at Tas-Silġ (4.1.16). Such an indication of a site's religious significance is further confirmed if coins continue to be deposited there even after the site is no longer in use, thus also showing that the sacred memory of the site is of some importance or, possibly, indicating a limited continued use of the site for cult purposes. The most obvious deposition sites are temples and sanctuaries. But amongst naturally significant places which, in spite of not being of a purely sacred nature, are often found to host similar depositions, one finds also watery sites like rivers, springs, lakes, ponds, and coastal places like beaches. Other significant sites hosting such depositions might include dry-land locations like rocky outcrops, hilltops, rock fissures, and caves. Probably themselves having some degree of

religious significance, these sites too might reinforce the link between precious metal deposition and ritual activity (Haselgrove 2008: 10-7, 20-1; King 2008: 37; Wythe 2008: 43, 52-3. Also: Yates and Bradley 2010). On the other hand, the spatial organisation of the deposition zones (within the sacred site itself) in relation to the zones where the sacrificial actions took place is a spatial element which might have also been significant to ritual practice (King 2008: 26-8). For example, it might not have been coincidental but rather a matter of religious polarity that, at Għar ix-Xiħ shrine, the sacrificial zone was located on one's right on entering the site from the north-east, with the deposition zone concentrated largely on one's left (4.4.10).

One particular medium through which memories can be constructed and transmitted is precisely the deposition of objects. Through their burial, the deposited objects are committed to the ground and, thus, lost from view. This involves a process of incorporation wherein objects with prior significance are taken out of the material world and are appropriated for use in a context of ritual deposition. This process of incorporation is commemorative as it invokes – through the appropriated and deposited objects – memories associated with the past or with other places. Thus, no longer forming part of the material world, the appropriated and deposited objects are consigned to a place in memory (Jones 2001: 217-8, 223-6).

It is not unusual that objects are fragmented prior to their deposition. This has happened, for example, at Tas-Silġ (4.1.15, 22), at Għar ix-Xiħ (4.4.11, 14), and at Tal-Knisja and Tal-Logġa (4.5.2-5). However, the way they are fragmented and 'discarded' is sometimes not accidental but might indicate some form of structured deposition wherein they could still be viewed as being part of the social relations in which they were produced, distributed, consumed, and deposited. Thus, although buried and out of view, the deposited objects would still remain connected to the living, being part of their common past (Chapman 2000: 49; 2008: 187; Gheorghiu 2001: 73-84).

Such connections can be manifested in the ritual deposition, in different places across the landscape, of fragments of a deliberately broken object. This phenomenon may provide one possible explanation for the structured deposition at Tal-Logġa (4.5.4-5). Objects, in this case, would serve as metaphors for people: objectifying their personhood. The ritual deposition, in different places, of fragments from the same broken object would, thus, reflect enchained relations between persons or populations, objects, and places or settlements. When these different places of deposition include both those of a secular and those of a sacred nature, this might imply enchained links between humans and supernatural beings. Similar enchained links between the living and the dead might be implied when the different places include both mortuary and domestic ones while the degree of object fragmentation might, in this case, indicate the degree of closeness of the social relations between the deceased and the living relatives. The practice of ritual fragmentation and deposition not only maintains enchained social relations on both local and, sometimes, wider level but is also particularly effective in both creation and maintenance of cultural memory, place value, and person or population identity (Chapman 2001: 89-102; 2008: 188-99; Gheorghiu 2001: 82).

3.9 - Ritual experience and engagement

Through ritual performance, people are given the opportunity to experience their world physically. They congregate, move around, disperse, and go in and out of places. In doing this, they are guided by certain ritual rules. Thus, they only move in certain directions, go to certain places, and at certain times. In this context, boundaries, pathways, and landscape settings all contribute to shape the people's ritual experience (Edmonds 1999: 7).

Rituals are, therefore, dynamic. This also implies that ritual experience is subject to differentiation on account of different people, their different emotions, different contexts, and different situations (Chaniotis 2006: 234). As it produces different

experiences for different people in different contexts and in different situations, ritual is central to the ways in which people engage on different spatial scales: horizontally, they engage with each other while, vertically, they engage with supernatural beings in heaven or with dead ancestors in the underworld. Through mythology, then, people can engage on different temporal scales too: engaging with the past and with the future. Through ritual, people may also engage with the world they live in by laying claims to or legitimising places (Bender 1993: 2) in the same way as they legitimise power relations and social order (3.7 above). People's engagement with 'their' world is, thus, given meaning through ritual and, often, through myth as well (Bender 1993: 15). And meanings may vary with different people, different settings, and different situations (Edmonds 1999: 7).

Ritual experience, however, may also constitute a shared element among people. This may be achieved through a close emotional relationship and engagement between them while performing or watching rituals. Such a close relationship and engagement create a feeling of togetherness which often gets transformed into a shared ritual of togetherness, often reaching a climax in communal feasting inside specifically allocated places as at Ras il-Wardija (4.2.6, 8, 10-11) and possibly at Tas-Silġ too (4.1.15, 23). This shared ritual overcomes social boundaries and unites the people into a shared experience. Thus, ritual is often a celebration of togetherness, a joint performance, and an experience that is to be shared with others, bringing a community together as a community of worshippers and a community of togetherness (Chaniotis 2006: 214, 226-30, 232).

3.10 - Fertility-related cults

Ritual practices might have been led by the belief that the gods resided in nature and controlled its forces and, for humans, fertility of animals (and of themselves) and of the land was a matter of life and death. These fertility concerns are reflected in the many sacrifices and festivals held in honour of the gods and in the votive

offerings (sometimes, including also farming tools) at sacred sites. In this respect, the fertility of the sacrificed animals or of the offered agricultural products (or tools) might also reflect fertility concerns on the part of those making the sacrifice or the offering. Fertility concerns might also be reflected in the choice of sites (like springs or streams) where to perform the requested rituals or in the gods (like Demeter, the protectress of agriculture and of land and animal fertility) to whom the said rituals are addressed. For obvious reasons, therefore, fertility-related rituals generally took place in rural areas or in places overlooking agricultural plains or linking to an agricultural territory, creating a relationship between ritual, space, and place (Guettel Cole 1994: 199-205, 210-6). Linked not only to maritime activities through its underlying harbour but possibly also to agricultural activity evidenced in and around the nearby valley, the Ghar ix-Xiħ rural shrine might have offered an ideal setting for fertility-related rituals (4.4.6-7, 13, 15).

Closely linked to fertility, objects viewed as sources of life played an important role in fertility-related cults. In this respect, we come across a widespread use of ostrich eggs used in funerary but also ritual contexts where they were given as offerings to the dead in the former and as offerings to deities in the latter (for instance, Savio 2004: 99-100). In Egypt, for instance, ostrich eggs were even imitated in ceramic forms since prehistoric times and deposited in funerary contexts. Similar ceramic imitations, both in form and in painted decoration, come later, in historic times, from Etruria (Savio 2004: 92, 94) and from Punic sites in Africa and Spain where they had been exported to (Savio 2004: 97).

As in the case of seeds, eggs were viewed as sources from where a new life originates and this explains their deposition in funerary contexts. In the Phoenician / Punic world, the funerary and ritual use of ostrich eggs gained widespread distribution. Ostrich eggs used as containers of seeds were found at Villaricos (in Spain) and at Carthage, while the use of similar eggs as containers of red ochre (symbol of life-giving blood) is widespread in many more Mediterranean regions (Savio 2004: 92-4, 96-7, 99, 101). In addition to this, the vegetal decoration – often

consisting of what appear to be germinating seeds, flowering buds, or young sprouting plants – that is frequently found on these eggs (examples in Savio 2004: 39-43, 47, 50, 52-8, 60-7, 72-81, 86-7; also Figure 14 below) also seems to further equate eggs and seeds in respect of their respective statuses as sources of new life.



Figure 14

Ostrich eggs from funerary contexts. The example on the left is from Villaricos necropolis (Spain). It shows what appear to be schematic young sprouting plants opposite each other on both upper and lower registers. The other example on the right is from the necropolis del Puig d'es Molins (Ibiza) and shows what appear to be lotus flowers each flanked by two flowering buds on the lower register. (Source: Savio 2004: 65 (SpIb 60), 75 (SpVi 9)).

But, perhaps more significantly, certain vegetal motifs that seem to represent young sprouting plants on these eggs do appear in combination with triangular motifs. Examples come from the necropoleis of Gouraya in North Africa, Bitia in Sardegna, Villaricos in Spain, Ibiza in the Balearic, and from necropoleis in Cap Spartel and Tipasa in North Africa (Savio 2004: 40-3, 47, 67, 77-81). Like the 'abstract' face that sometimes appears on parts of ostrich eggs at Carthage, this triangular motif (likewise appearing on ostrich eggs) has been interpreted as the sign of Tanit, the Carthaginian goddess of fertility (Savio 2004: 93, 95). If so, this proposed sign of Tanit makes great sense being in combination with (possible)

representations of young sprouting plants, hence further enhancing the link between ostrich eggs on one hand and fertility / new life and Tanit on the other.

Evidence from tombs at Mari in the Levant connects the eggs with glass paste masks that refer to Astarte (Savio 2004: 100), herself also a goddess of fertility while an ostrich egg evidently of an African provenance carries a painted dedication to Baal of Byblos (Savio 2004: 101), a male deity of fertility. As if to further highlight the link between eggs (not necessarily ostrich eggs) and fertility, eggs do sometimes make their appearance in association with Dionysos, himself also a male deity of fertility (Bianchi 1976: 32, Plates 67-8; Kerényi 1962: 6, Plate 55), or with Ariadne, his bride (Kerényi 1976: xx, Illustration 124).

Evidence of ostrich egg-shells also turned up in ritual contexts at Tas-Silġ (4.1.15) and Għar ix-Xiħ (4.4.10), evidently as votive offerings. They might have easily been associated with fertility cults while, at both Tas-Silġ where Astarte's and Tanit's cults are clearly attested and possibly Baal's / Melqart's too (4.1.12, 15, 20; 5.2, 3) and Għar ix-Xiħ where Baal's / Melqart's cult is also possibly attested (4.4.10; 5.2, 3), they might have been even related to these deities' cults in particular.

Divinities were often 'constructed' or tailor-made and they reflected the social and political concerns of the people amongst whom and of the period in which they were worshipped and had meaning (Spaeth 1996: 151). One of the main concerns of any society was its own survival and continuity and these could only be guaranteed by fertility, be it fertility of the crops, fertility of animals, and not least fertility of the humans themselves. Fertility was, therefore, the domain of principal deities like the Phoenician Astarte and Baal, the Carthaginian Tanit, the Egyptian Isis, the Greek Hera, and the Roman Ceres, Proserpina, and Flora whose cults (possibly, including also that of Dionysos) are, in fact, all attested on the Maltese islands: at Tas-Silġ (4.1.12, 15, 20, 23) and at Tal-Knisja and Tal-Logġa (4.5.1-3, 9). (Also 5.2-5, 8 and Figure 15 below).

Three particular and related deities seem to have been especially associated with fertility. These were Demeter / Ceres, Persephone / Proserpina (or Libera), and Dionysos / Liber (or Bacchus). In Rome, Ceres (the Roman counterpart of Demeter), Liber (the Roman counterpart of Dionysos), and Libera (the Roman counterpart of Persephone) were closely associated to the extent that they enjoyed a communal cult. This triadic cult – centred on Ceres – was closely attached to the socially and economically lower class, the *plebs*, and its temple was located on the Aventine Hill, a distinctively plebeian district and also *extra pomerium*. The *aediles* of the *plebs* also served occasionally as priests of Ceres, besides administering the *ludi Cerialis* which were games forming part of the plebeian festival known as the ‘*Cerialia*’ and held in honour of Ceres from 12th to 19th April (Spaeth 1996: xv, 4-29, 41, 44, 66, 70, 81-99).

During the Roman imperial period, Ceres and Liber (Dionysos) were also considered as gods of the countryside (Spaeth 1996: 28-9). Ceres, in particular, was identified with the earth (as Augustine remarks in his *De Civitate Dei contra Paganos*, 4.10) from which crops spring forth, with the grain, and with the bread produced from it. She was also identified with farming and with the farmers themselves as well as with those who dwelt in the country (Spaeth 1996: 16, 20, 24-5, 37). Respectively identified with grain / bread and wine (Spaeth 1996: 16, 38), it is no wonder that Ceres and Dionysos were both popular amongst most ancient Mediterranean societies, particularly the rural and agricultural populations where it would seem highly unlikely to have one deity’s cult without having also the other’s.

Also related to agricultural fertility, the goddesses Proserpina and Flora shared Ceres’ domain. Flora is sometimes even referred to as Flora Cerealis. Both Proserpina and Flora were plebeian divinities. As Augustine states in his *De Civitate Dei contra Paganos* (4.8), Proserpina (who was also Ceres’ daughter) was thought to preside over the germinating seeds while Flora was considered to protect the flowering grain (Spaeth 1996: 2-3, 34, 82, 89-90). Along with Ceres (as well as

Vesta and Juno Lucina), Flora was also linked with the feminine sphere of human fertility, childbirth, maternal love, and the home and the religious acts of their annual festivals were celebrated by female officiants (Dennison 2010: 152).



Figure 15

Sketch of a statuette representing the goddess

Flora. The sketch is to be found in the Agius (de Soldanis) manuscript (National Library of Malta, Ms Lib 145, 206. Also 5.4). The statuette was found in a cave in Żebbuġ, Gozo, in 1720. (Source: Agius de Soldanis [1746]: I, 25).

Flora's link with Ceres was, however, further strengthened by having her temple in Rome sharing the same place with that of Ceres on the Aventine Hill. The temple of Ceres is here used with reference to the temple of Ceres, Liber, and Libera as the

latter is often known in many sources simply as the temple of Ceres. Games similar to those in honour of Ceres (the *ludi Ceriales*) were held also in honour of Flora. Known as '*ludi Florales*', these games in honour of Flora were likewise administered by the plebeian *aediles* (Spaeth 1996: 82, 89, 97).

In the Campanian region in Southern Italy, Demeter / Ceres and Aphrodite / Venus enjoyed cultic associations while, in Roman Egypt, Isis (another fertility deity) was identified with the latter (i.e. Aphrodite / Venus). These female deities – all of whom enjoyed worship in the Maltese islands – were connected, to varying degrees, with fertility. Dionysos may have also been worshipped in Gozo in close association with agricultural fertility (4.2.5, 8, 10; 4.5.3; 5.2, 4-5, 8). They seem to give an overall picture of a network of inter-related deities. Although they do not seem to have shared cultic spaces on the Maltese islands, they seem to have shared a common domain: fertility, a reasonable concern for all agricultural societies like the Maltese and Gozitan communities. And as fertility pertains primarily to the female sphere, it is no wonder that the majority of these deities are indeed female, perhaps also reminiscent of the earlier prehistoric fertility 'Mother-goddess'.

It will be shown further below that, through her association with hunting and flocks, Artemis (Figure 16 below) is linked to the rural world (5.5). But this goddess could also be linked with Proserpina, Ceres' daughter, who is likewise connected with rurality (5.4, 8). In his *Description of Greece* (8.31.2), the second century A.D. Greek travel writer and geographer Pausanias reports that, in Demeter's and Persephone's temple at Megalopolis (in Arcadia, southern Greece), images that were held to represent Artemis and Athena gathering flowers with Persephone (the Greek counterpart of Proserpina) were, in fact, shown carrying flower baskets on their heads. The representation of flowers here would, thus, seem to link Artemis (and Athena) with Persephone / Proserpina (Spaeth 1996: 129). This would further seem to show, here, Artemis sharing a temple with Demeter and Persephone as earlier, in his same *Description of Greece* (8.31.1), Pausanias shows she does, along with Aesculapius.

The sharing of a sacred space might have been a common way of expressing association between certain deities as we have seen, for example, above in connection with Ceres' and Flora's sharing of space on the Aventine Hill in Rome. Sometimes, they might even share cults or sacrifices as an expression of their association. Apart from Artemis, there appear to have been other deities who were likewise somehow linked to Demeter / Ceres or to both Demeter / Ceres and Persephone / Proserpina. Aesculapius seems to have sometimes shared sacred spaces with the goddesses (above), but likewise others did too. Other deities sharing space with Demeter and Persephone at Megalopolis are mentioned by Pausanias in his *Description of Greece* (8.31.3-9). These included Heracles, Apollo, Hermes (the Greek counterpart of the Roman Mercury), Aphrodite, and Hera. Ceres



Figure 16

A headless statue of Artemis. It is said to have been recovered from the seabed in the Grand Harbour, Valletta, Malta. (Source: Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 119).

/ Demeter might even enjoy cultic connections with Bacchus / Dionysos and with Venus while she (Demeter) might also share sacrifices of heifers with Hera (Spaeth 1996: 131-3).

The above-mentioned deities were all evidently worshipped on the Maltese islands (4.1.15, 20,23; 4.2.5, 8, 10; 4.5.3; 5.2-5, 8). There is no evidence showing that, here, they shared spaces, cults, or sacrifices / rituals but the fact that they feature prominently amongst the deities worshipped here may be indicative of associations they might have enjoyed.

As shown by the Tal-Knisja and Tal-Logġa examples, mainly due to fertility concerns, the agricultural countryside could be also an arena for religious ritual. Humans could, thus, reconcile themselves with the forces of nature and gain their favours. However, not only those connected with fertility, but various other religious cults exploited the natural (but also often cultivated and productive) countryside. Features of such cults might be formed in relation to the natural setting rather than simply to patterns of human activity in the area (Osborne 1987: 165-9, 171).

3.11 - More cults related to the rural world

An important element in a rural and agricultural landscape and somehow dependant on the fertility of the land is that made up of vegetation or, more specifically, trees. For several reasons, trees (and woods) have often roused the imagination of humans who saw them, touched them, and used them for food, shelter, heating, and tools. Such an intimate relationship between humans and trees might explain why the latter sometimes became sacred and magical symbols and were seen as symbols of life. This gave rise to vegetation or tree cults or, at least, to rituals in which trees and woods held a prominent position. Consequently, woods and tree groves

(whether natural or planted) were often perceived as the dwelling places of divinities (Arenas Esteban 2007: 196-7; Valk 2007: 205, 207).

Trees might also bear their significance either on account of their age or ancestry relating them to earlier settlements or on account of a role or roles they might play for a community, like that of providing a meeting place or a distribution point or marking a territory or space. Trees, therefore, can also be used as symbolic elements in the exercise of civil and social activities. But other trees might have a purely religious function as might be indicated by their context or any associated features. Examples can, perhaps, be best provided by temple gardens. Possible evidence for one such temple garden comes from Tas-Silġ sanctuary (4.1.15). These trees might become centres of special cult activity or be themselves cult objects either because of their beneficial properties (curative or protective) or because of their identification with a divinity, providing a place and means where the divinity can be represented and communicated with through ritual (Arenas Esteban 2007: 193-6; Lahiri 1996: 258(Plate 15)-9; Valk 2007: 202). In the ancient world, for example, cypress trees were considered as symbols of regeneration on account of their evergreen nature. For this reason and particularly in the Near East, they were identified with deities like Astarte, Baal, and Mithras, as well as with a sun deity or with the 'rebirth' of the sun itself (Steinsapir 1999: 191).

Trees have likewise played a prominent role in the religious landscape of the Mediterranean. Thickly planted groves renowned for their darkness, silence, and mystery were often choice sites for cults. Both groves and individual trees were, in many instances, important visual landmarks of the sacred on account of their prominence and the marked religious significance accorded to them. Consequent to this, they received special treatment in acknowledgement of their sanctity. Different tree species and the different deities respectively attached to them often reflected the contrast between cultivated terrain and uncultivated wilderness to the extent that the former expressed cults that were different from those which focused on the latter. The uncultivated wilderness was also the world of wild animals that were the

object of hunting and, thus, brought in further cults that focused on this practice. Besides these, other contrasts or distinctions between arid and green environments have also found their religious expression (through related cults) in those Mediterranean places where they are most manifest (Horden and Purcell 2000: 414).

But the wilderness and the productive terrain, the uncultivated and untamed world and the cultivated and domestic one, could also be complementary. This complementarity could be found even in the relations between the people of the cultivated landscape and the uncultivated (often marginal) landscape itself. Such a complementarity is best manifested by the role played by sacred groves. In fact, sacred groves could be composed of the trees of the wild and undomesticated woodland as well as of those of cultivated and tended arboriculture. Therefore, in its inclusiveness and flexibility, religion often did not distinguish between wild and tame (even if specific cults might be attached to them respectively and separately) but concerned itself with both wild and domesticated environments, leaving its impression on both types of Mediterranean woodland or vegetation (Horden and Purcell 2000: 423-5, 452).

In a water or sea bound region like the Mediterranean, water has been indispensable for the ritual activities of most of its religious systems. Thus, those elements related to water like pools, springs, water-courses, rivers, and the sea itself (insofar as it is perceived as a medium of both connectivity and liminality) would top the list of those which special religious significance is accorded to. Prominent springs and pools, for instance, had provided the setting for cults since prehistoric times until much later as water cults often tended to survive for a long duration of time. Associated with their sources (usually springs), rivers also shared such cults. Waters with unusual characteristics like those at hot springs or those with therapeutic attributes were considered as particularly sacred and, thus, were the object of special veneration. This might demonstrate that the sacredness of water went even beyond a simple religious response to its usefulness for agriculture or to satisfy

biological needs like the quenching of thirst. Water appears to have been very closely associated with ideas of life and this may explain its therapeutic connections concerned with life's whole well-being rather than life's particular biological needs (Horden and Purcell 2000: 411-3, 416, 420-1).

Contact with the divine could also take place below the earth's surface where, in the cosmological layout, the latter could be perceived as a boundary between the underworld and the world above. Caves provide obvious crossing-points across this boundary (i.e. the earth's surface), connecting one world to the other. Caves also offered a multi-sensory experience which, coupled with their frequent perception as a suitable place for divine habitation, greatly contributed to their sacred character and cultic significance. The Mediterranean landscape is particularly rich in caves and these, therefore, make up a very important component of the sacred geography of the Mediterranean. Other geological features, likewise resulting from tectonic activity, may have their share in the sacred characteristics of caves especially when themselves are located within a cave. Such features might include crevices and springs which, as a result, might also partake in the cultic associations of caves. But even stalagmites and stalactites might have their share here. They are formed as a result of incessant dripping water in the caves themselves and this underground water was often accorded special significance, especially if it was thought to possess healing properties. Thus, these natural features in caves were often the object of special attention. As a result of all this, caves might assume a monumental character with artificial spaces – and, sometimes, even ritual structures – being created in front of them to accommodate congregations. Altars and holy enclosures, on the other hand, might also be erected inside. A good example in this respect might perhaps be provided by the Psychro Cave in Crete (Bradley 2000: 27-8, 99(Fig.29)-100, 104; Horden and Purcell 2000: 414-6; Moody 2009: 248-9).

The relationship of both society and the physical world (in which humans live) to the human body and its functions profoundly affects the way humans physically experience their world. This is more so if the relationship is loaded with cultural

meanings. The physical experience might also become sensual and might even take a religious form, depending not only on culturally specific meanings but also on the nature of the place where the experience takes place. This applies especially to cult caves where bodily movements are rather restricted as opposed to the use of the senses (Whitehouse 2001: 161-2).

Through their often difficult access and restricted entrances, minimal penetration of daylight, and the marked arrangement of their internal spaces, caves may offer a unique experience to their visitor (Osborne 1987: 192; Whitehouse 2001: 162-3). Such an experience allows for the multi-sensory environment of the cave to be sensed, appropriated, and modified during the course of visiting, dwelling, working, or performing inside the cave. Once inside, one is removed from his / her everyday environment and finds himself / herself in an environment which is unfamiliar or visited only on special occasions; an environment which normally generates feelings of awe and fear. The effects on one's senses vary: one may lose any sense of direction being in complete darkness or in minimal light and, as vision is diminished, the other senses – hearing, touch, and smell – are sharpened. But any sounds, sensations of the skin, and smells are experienced differently from the way they are experienced in the outside world. Moreover, their experience also varies culturally and individually as they could be enhanced, altered, or added to. These sensory experiences and the feelings and emotions they generate could be very suitable for the ritual use of caves for cult purposes, particularly when rites of passage are involved (Skeates 2007: 90-1, 93-5; Whitehouse 2001: 163-7). In view of the above, the original presence of a cave (or rock shelter) at the Ghar ix-Xih site might have itself given rise to cult practices long before the shrine took its final shape (4.4.9-10, 13). Likewise, the speleological characteristics of the cave where the alabaster statue of the goddess Flora was found in Gozo might have been crucial elements contributing towards the possible choice of the site for her cult (5.2, 4).

3.12 - Maritime cults

The maritime environment of coastal areas (be they part of islands or mainlands) with their characteristics like pronounced promontories and sheltered inlets seems bound to be impregnated with the divine. This might be explained in view of the way these places are often perceived and in view of the significance which, as a consequence, is attached to them. Such places, therefore, would become the focus of religious worship where deities with maritime connections are not simply venerated but, more importantly, invoked for their aid and refuge. This would, in turn, continue to enhance the places' religious significance.

But besides such religiously significant places, seafarers also developed specialised religious beliefs and practices in response to issues of concern generated by the sea itself and posed by the dangers of sailing. Maritime religion, therefore, is a subset of general religious beliefs and practices that stem from the specific dangers and uncertainties of life and travel at sea. One can identify two broad facets making up maritime religion: divinities with special maritime (and, often, also celestial or meteorological) attributes in aid of seafarers and coastal sanctuaries and temples with special maritime associations. To the latter, one may also add the sacred or divine character of ships, especially when, like coastal sacred places, these are perceived as imbued or invested with the spirits of maritime deities (with whom they are, sometimes, also assimilated) and with their special protective powers. Religious ceremonies undertaken both at coastal sanctuaries or shrines and on board ships to ensure safe voyages constitute an important element of these sacred environments (i.e. coastal sanctuaries or shrines and ships). This specialised religion of sailors and fishermen is a phenomenon to be found amongst seafaring cultures regardless of geographical region or historical period (Brody 1998: 1-9, 19, 102-3).

3.13 - Divinities with maritime attributes

As a preventive measure against the risks undertaken when travelling on the seas, ancient seafarers enlisted the guardianship and protection of a number of deities who, as indicated by their attributes, controlled climatic conditions at sea, most especially winds. Winds could be beneficial to their ships dependent as they were on sail power but could be equally devastating in a storm. Thus, seeking the patronage of these gods and appeasing them was seen as crucial for successful navigation (Brody 1998: 9, 37, 99).

Amongst the divinities in aid of seafarers, one could distinguish between those who controlled the winds and storms and, thus, could propel ships with favourable winds and raise or calm storms and those whose attributes ensured safe and successful navigation (Brody 1998: 9). But, for the purposes of this study, we shall be focusing on those evidenced on the Maltese islands.

Both Aserah (Astarte) and Tinnit (Tanit) are evidenced at Tas-Silġ (4.1.12, 15, 20). Aserah / Astarte was also worshipped in Gozo as shown by a Punic inscription found on that island (5.2-3). Both goddesses had similar maritime and lunar or celestial qualities and connections (respectively represented by maritime motifs like anchors, steering rudders and, sometimes, even dolphins and by the crescent or crescent-and-disk symbols) which further equated them. The latter (i.e. their lunar or celestial qualities) were believed to exert influence over the weather which was crucial for safety at sea (Brody 1998: 5, 26-33, 38, 72, 96-8, Figs.1-2, 6, 11-20, 66-7a-b; Moscati 1973: 180).

It is no wonder, therefore, that both Astarte and Tanit enjoyed worship at the harbour sanctuary of Tas-Silġ which is expected to have been frequented by mariners and other visitors calling at the nearby harbour of Marsaxlokk. There are no known depictions of the goddesses or their symbols from the said sanctuary site like the ones mentioned above but, on a number of 'Romano-Maltese' coins of the

first century B.C., Aserah / Astarte or Tinnit / Tanit is depicted with a crescent diadem on her head (Azzopardi 1993: 40-3).

The cult of the Phoenician (Tyrian) god Melqart and of his Greek equivalent Heracles is also evidenced on the Maltese islands through epigraphy, statuary, and a *sextans* coin issue too (5.2-3). He may have been also worshipped at Ras ir-Raheb (4.3.6) and at Għar ix-Xiħ (4.4.10). At Għar ix-Xiħ, his presumed image shows him bearded and wearing a cap (Figure 53, p.223).

Melqart was a tutelary deity of Phoenician sailors and both headland and port sanctuaries in his honour were to be found all over the Mediterranean. As confirmed by Strabo in his *Geography* (III.5.5) and by Heliodorus in his *Aethiopica* (IV.16.8), Phoenician sailors and merchants made sacrifices to Melqart (or Tyrian 'Heracles') in his sanctuaries both in thanksgiving and also to ensure a safe voyage before setting sail (Brody 1998: 33-4, 38, 58, 75, 98).

A figure – evidently, representing Melqart – is shown on a painting of a war ship on the wall of a sixth-fifth century B.C. Carthaginian tomb at Kef el-Blida, in Tunisia. The god stands on the vessel's prow wielding his guardianship and protection to the vessel and its crew. In what may appear to be a rather archaic Phoenician representation, the god holds an axe and a shield, wears a conical cap, and is bearded (Brody 1998: 33-4, 69, 83, 93, 98, Fig.24). The same god Melqart appears with the same attributes (excepting the shield) – particularly, the cap and beard – on an inscribed stela dedicated to him. The same motifs appear on a seal, a Carthaginian razor, and a decorated bowl but, on several other seals, the shield features as well. As an example of a fearless and bold traveller – and, thus, considered as guardian and protector of travellers on sea voyages – through the tales of his adventurous Twelve Labours, Heracles (the Greek equivalent of Melqart) is sometimes shown on gems sailing on a raft across the waters. Here, he is shown again bearded and wearing a cap (Brody 1998: 34-8, 69, 98, Figs.25-8. For more examples showing Heracles wearing a cap with or without a beard: *LIMC* IV/1:

734-5, 819; IV/2: 446-7(21, 26, 28, 31, 35), 546(1511); V/1: 22-3; V/2: 41(1838, 1845)).

3.14 - The 'divine' character of ships

Thus, such places, like promontories and harbours, might be perceived as imbued with the spirit of the protective god who would, thus, assume the nature of a guardian to seafarers. This was achieved by dedicating the promontory or harbour to the guardian deity through the naming of that same promontory or harbour after the deity in question. The protection and patronage of that deity to seafarers would, thus, be ensured (Brody 1998: 13-21, 29-38, 101).

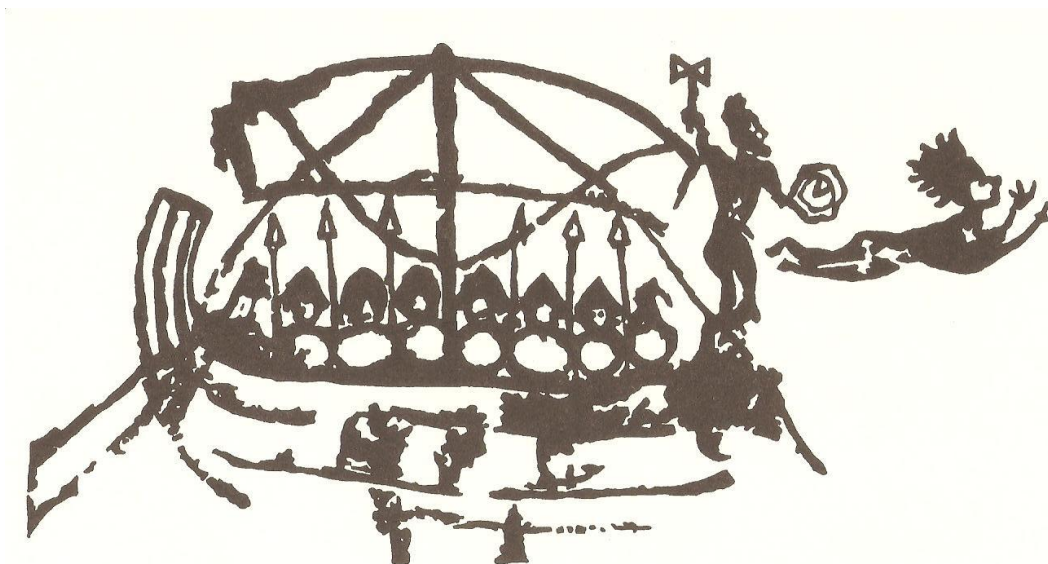


Figure 17

Figure of a god, evidently representing Melqart. The god stands on the prow of a sea vessel to which he provides his guardianship and protection. Besides holding an axe and a shield, he is shown bearded and wearing a conical cap. The wall painting, on which this figure appears, comes from a sixth-fifth century B.C. Carthaginian tomb at Kef el-Blida, in Tunisia. (Source: Brody 1998: 137(Fig.24)).

A ship might likewise be seen as imbued with the spirit of a divine guardian to whom it is, thus, dedicated and whose protective nature it would assume in respect

of the seafarers on board. In this case, the ship (or its representation) would often become a symbol of its protective deity. Not only that, but it might also be considered as the residence of the deity at sea just as temples and shrines were the residence of deities on land. Sometimes, a deity (or its temple site) might also be itself compared to a ship, demonstrating that particular deity's importance for the safety of ships and of those on board. Just as the hull of the ship provided a physical barrier against the sea and its threats, the deity with which the ship was imbued (being the deity's residence at sea) provided a spiritual block against the depths of the sea and the dangers it posed (Figure 17 above). To maintain the link with their divine protectors, seafarers were provided with cultic areas for worship on board the ship. The prow – the guiding point of the moving vessel – was generally considered as sacred space, but the stern – the rear part from where the ship was steered – might likewise be considered as a holy area and, in fact, representations or symbols of protective deities (as well as sacred standards and portable altars) might be mounted on either prow or stern (Figure 18 below). From the prow and / or the stern, seafarers could, thus, perform rituals in honour of the guardian deity to whom the ship was dedicated and also to other deities who might have been deemed important for the safety and well being of the crew (Brody 1998: 15-20, 25-38, 61-

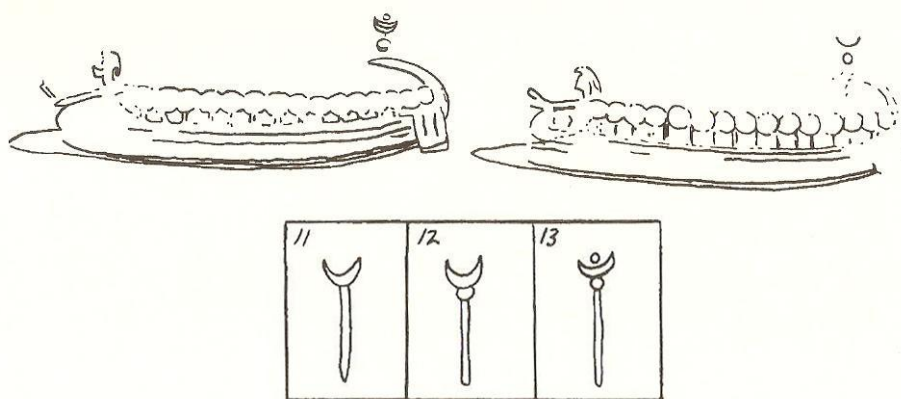


Figure 18

Crescent-and-disk symbols evidently in representation of either Astarte or Tanit. These are mounted as standards on Phoenician ships as shown on coins. Rituals might have been performed on board to honour the guardian deities and ensure the safety of the ship and of those on board. (Source: Brody 1998: 161(Fig.66)).

72, 78-85, 93, 97-101, Figs.24, 66, 73-6a-b). The practice of performing sacrifices on board sea vessels knows no temporal or cultural boundaries. An early modern witness account by a Christian captive on board a Muslim corsairs' vessel describes the sacrifice of a sheep on the bow of the vessel before attacking a Christian sailing ship (Gambin 2010: 149).

Thus, ensuring a deity's protective guardianship to a ship and to its crew might take place either by naming the ship after the deity concerned like when naming a promontory or harbour after a deity (Brody 1998: 13-21, 29-38, 63-7, 72, 95-7) or by placing the deity's symbol, statue / figurine (sometimes housed in a small shrine), or a representation of its totem animal on board the ship (Brody 1998: 20, 25-38, 63-72, 83, 93, 97-100, Figs.16, 24, 66, 68). But apotropaic eyes or *oculi*, found on the sides of ships' prows to ward off danger, harm, and bad luck, might also perform a similar function through being an expression of the deity's spirit residing in the vessel. 'Looking' through these eyes, the deity guides the front of the

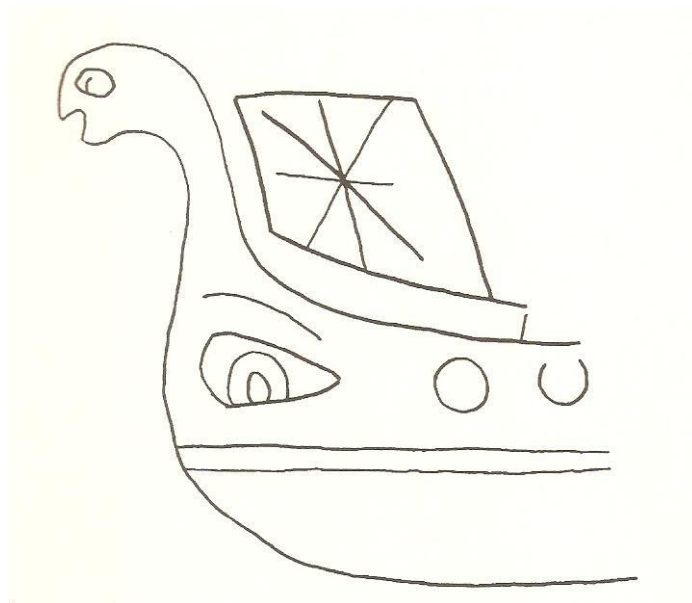


Figure 19

A vessel's prow with apotropaic eyes or *oculi*. These enabled the ship to be guided through by the resident or guardian deity. Shown on a sacrificial stela, Carthage. (Source: Brody 1998: 165(Fig.70)).

vessel (Figure 19 above) and helps to avoid danger, thus affirming its guardianship over the vessel (Brody 1998: 4, 63, 70, 72, 100, Figs.21, 65-7a-b, 70).

Sometimes, a ship's naming after a protective or guardian deity might be indicated or inscribed on its (i.e. the ship's) anchor stock as might have been the case with regards to the example found off Salina Bay, in Malta (5.2, 4). This would have also ensured the guardian deity's protection when the anchor was dropped into the sea (example in Brody 1998: 19).

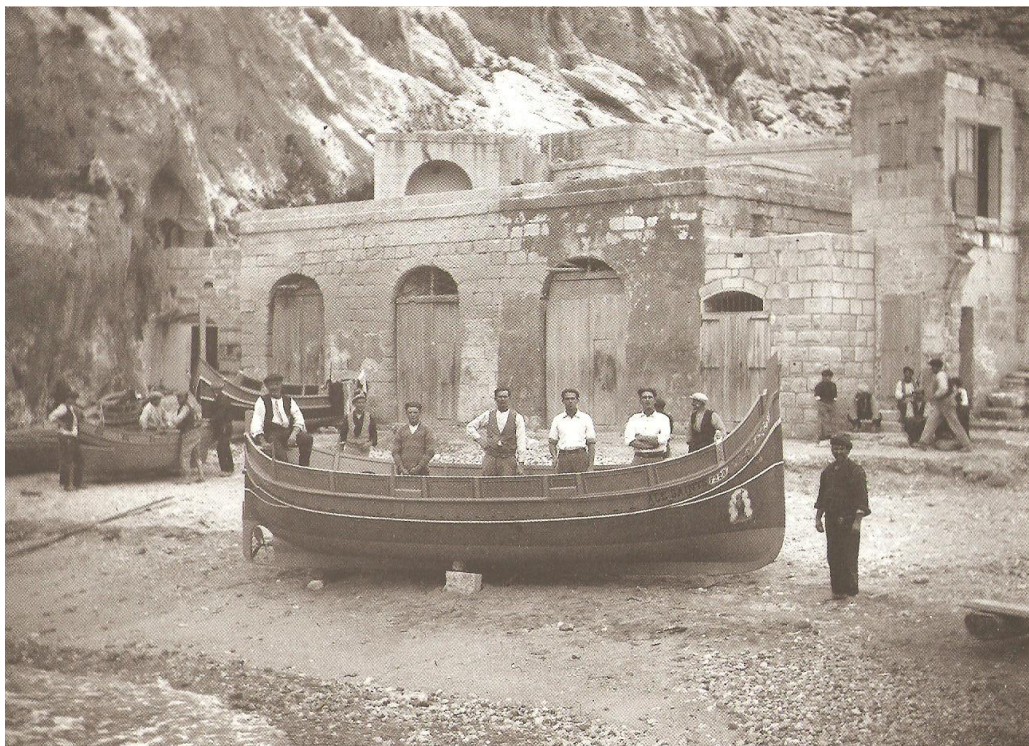


Figure 20

A newly-finished traditional fishing boat (*luzzu*) at Xlendi Bay, in Gozo (Malta). The prow carries the image of St Margaret of Antioch on one side and that of St George (not visible) on the other side. Saints' names and apotropaic eyes feature frequently on many Maltese and Gozitan traditional fishing boats to this day. Picture taken around the 1940s. (Photo: author's collection).

Ships with deities' names inscribed on them or carrying their (i.e. the deities') representations or symbols do not survive from antiquity, except on depictions and in texts. But related traditions do. To this day, fishing boats, in particular, are often

named after Christian saints whose name – and, sometimes, even image – they carry on their prows (Figure 20 above). Though having nothing to do with Christianity, apotropaic eyes also maintain their appearance on the prows of many fishing boats, perhaps in what one might term as a blend of pagan and Christian beliefs, both being evidently residual of a common ancient tradition.

3.15 - Magic, superstition, and religion

It is widely accepted that magic is essentially inexplicable, has no cosmological content, and refers specifically to that which cannot be made orderly and comprehensible. It is presumed to have only expressive functions and an instrumental utility. Nonetheless, humans somehow perceive its relevance to their conception of reality (Hammond 1970: 1352-3). Thus, magic is usually resorted to in situations of uncertainty and as an alternative to empirical or scientific techniques when these fail or are inadequate. For this reason and differently from religion, magic is seen as practical and utilitarian even if closely tied to and fused with religion (Ames 1964: 75-6).

At least in theory, magic and religion are clearly distinguished, but, in their practices, they are thoroughly intermingled. Theoretically, religion is concerned with the fate of the soul and its salvation while magic seeks to appease spirits or supernatural beings to attain relief, recovery, or earthly favours and to satisfy worldly needs. In other words, religion is concerned with the realm of the ‘other world’ while magic is concerned with the realm of ‘this world’. However, as it is ideologically worldly but structurally fused with religion, magic is able to provide a transition between the world of the profane (‘this world’) and the world of the sacred (the ‘other world’). In clearer terms, it can work or mediate to change peoples’ attitudes and maintain their commitment to higher ideals and more religious concerns. Furthermore, a ritual can be itself used for both religious and

magical purposes: it can be used to earn salvation or to ensure agricultural fertility, or both (Ames 1964: 76-80; Evers 1965: 97-8; Hammond 1970: 1349-50).

One could also include other distinctions between magic and religion. While religion establishes and involves a community, magic involves individuals and establishes a clientele. The goals of religion are normally intangible and long-term while those of magic are the achievement of concrete and immediate ends through the exploitation of supernatural mechanisms (Hammond 1970: 1350-1).

In view of the above, magic would rather pertain to the sphere of private life where the individual and his / her needs constitute the main concern. It is expressed in one's private life by way of behaviour and practices that are not usually sanctioned by official religion (below) but, on a personal level, seem to satisfy one's demands and concerns. It can be traced in domestic, funerary, and maritime contexts where it assumes the form of a popular religion better labelled as 'superstition' (below) as examples from the Maltese islands in Chapter 5 would show.

In an evolution of belief systems, some scholars would assign magic to an earlier stage. Such an evolutionary sequence of belief systems represents transitions from magic to religion or the retention, at a later stage, of older elements in religion. The differentiation between the earlier and later stages is based upon personification or non-personification of supernatural powers. Unlike religion (represented by the later stage), magic (represented by the earlier stage) lacks such personification. Since practice follows concept, wherever supernatural powers are personified (as in religion), ritual strives for relationship with them. On the other hand, wherever supernatural powers remain impersonal (as in magic), ritual seeks to control, manipulate, and use them. And this is what magic or magic ritual does. Nonetheless, in seeing magic as an earlier stage of religion, one can perhaps better speak of magic and religion forming a *continuum* (Hammond 1970: 1349-52).

To synthesise, one could say that, as religion or religious practices express belief in supernatural beings who can be approached by prayers, gifts, and sacrifices, magic or magical practices express belief in human agency as an effective controlling and manipulating force. This does not put religion and magic in discordance with or in opposition to each other but merely shows that gods do not rule alone. Their will and power are accompanied by those of (certain) humans. Cosmological concepts in religion are complex and, as they would show, belief in supernatural beings is only one aspect of religion. Magic is, thus, not distinct from religion but, being a form of ritual behaviour, it is an element of religion (Cumont 1956: 187; Hammond 1970: 1355; Rives 2007: 191-2; Turcan 1996: 267-9, 271-4; Warrior 2006: 94). And being so, magic constitutes one of the many practices by means of which religious material culture (in the form of devotional objects or images) constructs the world of belief (Keenan and Arweck 2006: 14).

Nonetheless, elements of material culture (like amulets) used for magical purposes might be also borrowed from the sphere of religion or religious cults, especially those cults that enjoy widespread popularity. Foremost examples are those provided by Egyptian cults and deities that found favour amongst various Mediterranean communities, including the Maltese and Gozitans (5.2, 4, 7-8; 6.3). The popularity these cults (and their material elements) enjoyed was largely reserved to the private sphere but, for the population at large, maintained great significance and reflected the relevance these cults had in private life and the value attached to them.

This does not mean, however, that magic always meets with approval from the religious or even political élite, even if it might refer to or be inspired by contemporary religious streams (Mastrocinque 2007: 387-8). The debate centres about what constitutes ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ religious behaviour; even if the boundaries between the two could be negotiated. It is at this point that ‘superstition’ – in contrast to ‘religion’ – comes in. The two terms are often seen as referring to two different forms of human relations with the gods. While ‘religion’ might refer to officially acceptable, traditional and, therefore, orthodox form of honours paid to

the gods, 'superstition' might denote an improper or excessive form of popular religious behaviour or 'irregular' popular religious practices which do not follow the official, traditional, and orthodox customs. Therefore, 'superstition' differs from 'religion' in its 'improper' and 'irregular' devotion and commitment towards ritual and the gods which might even be seen as motivated by an 'improper' and 'irregular' desire for earthly favours. Thus, rather than perceived as a false religion, superstition might be seen as a debased form of religion and, thus, a dangerous popular practice which might threaten the stability of orthodox religion itself and, sometimes, even of the state (Beard *et al.* 1998a: 215-7, 225).

3.16 - Summary

Religion is largely a matter of meaningful relationships between ordinary and supernatural beings as expressed through practices labelled as 'rituals' enacted by the former in honour of the latter. These ritual practices include mainly sacrifices and offerings. Such practices often involve emotions and active engagements, ultimately building up a unique experience. They might also have specific intentions like appropriation or legitimisation of power. The enactment of these ritual practices often takes place in designated spaces which might be anthropogenic or natural but rich in significance and meaning.

But it is not always easy to define what is truly religious and what is not, or to distinguish between the religious and the secular. Many human actions might be, in fact, characterised by shades of both. This applies not only to human actions but also to structures or places providing the setting for the enactment of these actions to the extent that, sometimes, sacred places and secular ones are not easily distinguishable either.

However, certain landscape settings may provide useful indicators when they are suggestive of specific movements or activities associated with ritual dynamics.

Other distinctive – and, perhaps, more decisive – elements might be architectural ones which are specific to sacred structures, like processional pathways. Other distinctive elements might be in the form of physical objects bearing symbolic meanings / expressions or representational ones, like votive statuettes or sacred images, which one normally expects to find more in a religiously specialised context or in association with ritual. Here, one may also add miniature objects acting as substitutes and which cannot be used for utilitarian purposes. Treatment and disposal of objects, like structured deposition or purposive destruction or fragmentation, may likewise provide good indicators while the depositional character of a site might even be indicative of the nature of the cult involved.

Finally, one distinguishes between institutional and popular religion. While the former has more to do with faith and doctrine and can, perhaps, be defined as formalised belief expressed through organised and structured worship, the latter is more practical and might even enter the realm of superstition and magic from which it is often not clearly distinct either. It is, nonetheless, a kind of personal interaction with supernatural beings in addressing one's own needs and concerns by means of material representations and activities usually restricted to private life. In view of this, it might also permeate people's lives to such an extent that it becomes an integral part of their culture. In this sense, it also contributes towards their identity. Though often not sanctioned by religious or political authorities, popular religion is a people's religion which is kept alive by their concerns, their emotions, and their engagements. Religion is a life's experience and it is indeed through experience that it can be best grasped.

CHAPTER 4:

MALTESE SACRED SITES AND RITUAL ACTIVITIES: FIVE CASE STUDIES

4.1 - Maltese cult sites: an introduction

As already indicated in Chapter 1 (1.2), during the period under review (i.e. *c.*700 B.C. – *c.*A.D. 500), there were two main urban settlements, each in the centre of Malta and Gozo respectively. But in addition to these, there may have been some other smaller and minor settlements in the countryside and, particularly, near certain harbours like today's Salina Bay and Marsaxlokk.

The population of these settlements – especially those near certain harbours – might have been rather fluid both in numbers and in composition. This would not have been at all unexpected in an environment where visitors and locals mingled together and exchanged ideas, influences, habits, and tastes in the realm of culture and not least in that of religion. In this respect, these settlements might have borne a multi-cultural character while the sacred places that were to be found in some of these might have borne a similar character as some evidence from the sites presented as case studies below seems to suggest.

As occupation of the Maltese islands shifted from one power to another, such shifts brought about changes (by way of colonial relationships and alliances) not only in the sphere of politics but also in that of religion (1.2). Reflections of such shifts (and of the resultant changes) will be seen in certain examples provided in Chapter 5 as well as in the examples presented as case studies below, particularly the first one: the multi-period sanctuary at Tas-Silġ.

Also in the sphere of religion, new cults were introduced (as can be shown, for instance, at Tas-Silġ: 4.1.13-7) although, initially, these may have been syncretised forms of earlier cults. The ‘newly-introduced’ cults also brought in new forms of religious architecture which, rather than imposed, involved a re-working or adaptation of existing forms. The best and most evident examples can be seen again at Tas-Silġ (4.1.13-7).

This chapter comprises five case studies: the first four deal respectively with four coastal / rural cult sites: Tas-Silġ, Ras il-Wardija, Ras ir-Raheb, and Għar ix-Xiħ, while the last case study combines two rural sites: Tal-Knisja and Tal-Loġġa that seem to have hosted ritual activities without having had any associated physical cult structures (Figure 1 for sites’ respective locations). Each case study first presents the broader geographical and human landscape context, before examining the evidence of the focal site itself; finally, each case study concludes with analysis and interpretation. The sites and the presumed ritual practices undertaken there are, thus, set within their surrounding landscape context and against the wider Mediterranean background to gain a more comprehensive picture and enable a better understanding of religious beliefs and behaviour – particularly, in rural contexts – on the Maltese islands.

4.1.1 - TAS-SILĠ: A RITUAL FOCUS IN THE SOUTH-EAST REGION

On account of its multi-period character, Tas-Silġ is an important site in Malta for the study of ritual activities and religious beliefs from prehistory into Christian times. Its significance also lies in the light it sheds on the people worshipping there who might have been both residents (whether indigenous or otherwise) and occasional visitors.

These people lived and laboured in nearby locations, some of them going and coming from abroad making use of the closest harbours. They traded and maintained contacts both amongst themselves as well as with the outside world. Therefore, if any activity going on at Tas-Silġ cannot be viewed in isolation from its ‘actors’, any study of the site of Tas-Silġ itself cannot ignore the surrounding landscape with its settlements where these people lived, earned their livelihood, and maintained contacts with the external world. The principal aim of this case study is, therefore, not simply to focus on the site itself but also to present it in its wider landscape context.

To this end, the first part of this case study will involve the collection of data throwing light on these people’s settlements and, by way of these, even on their lives and their occupations. These data will be collected from within an approximately 3km-radius with the Tas-Silġ site as the focal point (Figure 21 below). Therefore, the data gathered from the surrounding region are, in one way or another, related to the Tas-Silġ site.

The Tas-Silġ site itself will be focused upon in the second part where it is presented in the context within which it emerged and persisted. This will involve also the presentation and consideration of data on the site itself. These same data are also intended to help us gain a picture of what was going on at Tas-Silġ and what developments were taking place.

The data presented in the first two parts are gathered from various sources. However, preference is given to primary sources, particularly the contemporary ones or, at least, the earliest available.

Finally, in the third part, the data are synthesised and interpretations proposed. This is done with reference to wider literature in order to place the Tas-Silġ sanctuary in the context of contemporary religious beliefs and practices, particularly in the Mediterranean region. The proposed interpretations seek to address the following aspects: visibility and monumentality, durability and continuity, re-utilisation and re-interpretation, deliberate destruction and deposition, mobility and communication, and centrality and liminality.

4.1.2 - Tas-Silġ and its environs: geographical extent and topographical features

The Tas-Silġ site is situated in the south-east region of Malta. Nearby habitation centres today include Żabbar, Żejtun, Għaxaq, Kirkop, and Hal Far while, along the coastline, one would find adequate landing places like Marsaskala Bay, St Thomas Bay, and Marsaxlokk Bay. The latter incorporates St George's Bay and Pretty Bay at Birżebbuġa as well as the inner Marsaxlokk harbour at Marsaxlokk. As will be shown, all these places provide evidence of human activity, most of them since prehistoric times.

But, like any human productive landscape, this region might be identified with certain topographic conditions and with the availability of certain raw materials and natural resources needed for agricultural or pastoral production and industrial facilities (as in Doonan 2004: 43-5).

Together with the above-mentioned places in its surrounding area, Tas-Silġ stands on a globigerina limestone bed. Coralline limestone appears to a lesser extent wherever the relatively few and short valleys present in this area cut into it. Relatively easily extracted and ideal for construction purposes, the rich presence of globigerina limestone may have encouraged settlements in the area. The large-scale use of globigerina limestone at Tas-Silġ site itself as well as in the Roman farm building at Ta' Kaċċatura (below) are two such examples.

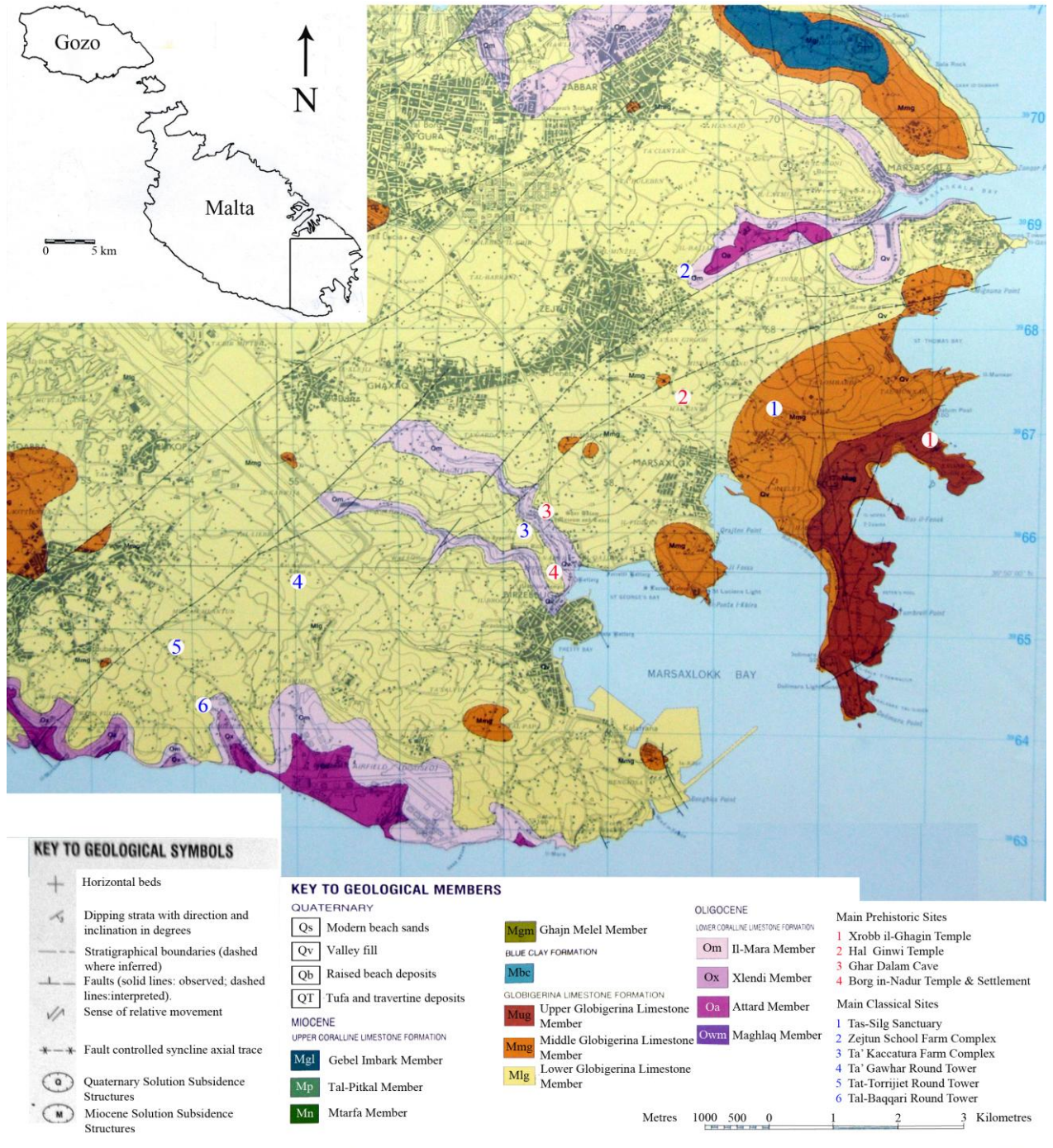


Figure 21

Geological map of south-eastern Malta. It shows the distribution of the main sites mentioned in the text.

(Source: Geological Map of the Maltese islands: Sheet 1, Oil Exploration Directorate, Malta (1993)).

On the other hand, agricultural fields in this area abound in rich soils. Soils here include xerorendzinas, brown rendzinas, soils of the L-Iklin and Tad-Dawl complexes, and terra soils (Lang 1962: 84(Fig.27)). No documentation of the origins of these fields is as yet known, but the presence of many of them in places known to have been settled since earlier (or, indeed, since prehistoric) times, renders it highly unlikely for them not to have been associated with these ancient settlements. The terrain on which they are to be found varies. They can be found on fertile valley beds as at Wied Dalam, on top and on the sloping sides of hillocks like Tas-Silg itself, and on the slopes of headlands or promontories like Delimara.

Though rich in good building stone and soil, the region under review is relatively poor in water resources as there are few valleys and related perennial springs. However, to make settlements viable, this situation might have been mitigated by resorting to the construction of water reservoirs for the collection of rainwater as will be shown by evidence provided further below.

Turning seawards, one would find not only landing places such as those mentioned above but, stretching from Marsaxlokk Bay to Marsaskala Bay, one would find also a series of visually linked headlands or promontories. This coastal stretch with its headlands was well exploited for military purposes since, at least, the Knights' period as indicated by the building of military structures like watch-towers and defence batteries. This phenomenon leads us to make two observations: firstly, the position of these promontories was strategically significant and, secondly, need was felt to guard the bays and inlets along the same coastal stretch. Yet the latter leads us to a further conclusion: these inlets provided adequate and safe landing and, thus, were frequented by friendly visitors and foes alike. If these headlands were strategically significant and the inlets provided adequate and safe landing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this same situation may have prevailed even before.

4.1.3 - Continuous human presence and activity in the territory around Tas-Silg: the evidence

The south-east region of Malta is among the few places that have hosted the earliest settlers of the Maltese islands in the Għar Dalam phase (5000-4300 B.C.) of the Neolithic period.

Evidence is provided by Għar Dalam (Dalam cave or cave of darkness) in much the same manner as it is provided by the site of Skorba for the north-west region of the island and by Il-Mixta cave for the sister island of Gozo. All three sites are, in fact, of a domestic nature. It seems, therefore, that this region has been attractive to human settlement since the arrival of the first known settlers. And, as we shall see, it remained so throughout the subsequent periods of human occupation (TABLES 2 and 3 below).

But this continuity in human occupation was not without changes in settlement patterns and in the dynamics of human activity. For example, burials and agro-industrial units would later, in the historic period, outnumber religious places (TABLE 3 below). In some instances, places were re-utilised, sometimes for different purposes. There are likely to have been newly emerging circumstances or exigencies responsible for these changing preferences.

4.1.4 - Cave occupation

Perhaps requiring few anthropogenic interventions to adapt them for sheltering purposes, caves may have provided ready-made dwellings which could be immediately made use of. The earliest sites known to have been occupied for settlement purposes in the region under review were, in fact, caves. These were also situated along valley sides, possibly to exploit any water resources like springs which one would normally expect to find in valleys.

Most significant, in terms of the data it yielded, is the above-mentioned Għar Dalam on the north-eastern side of Wied Dalam (Dalam valley). This valley opens onto St George's Bay on the north-west end of the larger Marsaxlokk harbour. Evidence shows occupation of Għar Dalam not only since the earliest human presence on the islands at around 5000 B.C. (above) but also well into the early historic period. Another cave was Għar in-Ngħaġ (Sheep's cave) situated at the northern end of a small ravine called 'Wied il-Mixta', not far from Bengħisa. This provides evidence for human occupation and activity for a shorter duration but throughout almost the entire prehistoric period (Evans 1971: 18-21; *MAR* 1935-6: XIX-XX).

There is no evidence showing that these cave dwellers frequented Tas-Silġ or any other religious site for ritual purposes as yet in that region. But ritual evidence is also missing at the

early (Għar Dalam phase) settlement sites of Skorba and Il-Mixta cave mentioned earlier. It seems, therefore, that distinctive religious places would appear later in prehistory and the Tas-Silġ region does not seem to have been an exception.

4.1.5 - From caves to built structures

In later stages of the prehistoric period, particularly (but not exclusively) during the Bronze Age, the nature of settlements would come to include also built structures, sometimes with massive walls. Almost overlooking St George's Bay and located high up between two converging valleys (the Wied Dalam and the Wied Ħas-Saptan), the site at Borg in-Nadur accommodates the remains of a walled settlement. Already in use during the Temple Period for religious purposes and possibly for habitation too, the site was later, in the Bronze Age, occupied by oval huts constructed behind a massive semi-circular 'bastion-like' wall (Evans 1971: 6-18; *MAR* 1922-3: ii; 1923-4: i; 1955-6: 7; 1959-60: 3-4). Sagona (2003: 8) suggests that such walled settlements might have been nuclei of differing kin-based or tribal territories. As by this time, the Tas-Silġ site was already in use as a worshipping place, it might have been frequented by any of these kin groups proposed by Sagona.

4.1.6 - Subsistence organisation

There is not much evidence showing what the inhabitants did to sustain themselves, particularly during the prehistoric period. Nonetheless, recent studies of the palaeo-environment at Tas-Silġ itself conducted by Fenech (2001: 53-78) have shown that, almost in contrast with modern agriculture in the area which might have suffered soil erosion or transfer in later times, the same area seems to have had a thicker soil and vegetation cover during the Bronze Age and the early historic phases. This would also suggest anthropogenic intervention possibly by way of field systems that would retain deposited sediments and prevent soil erosion on a sloped terrain like that at Tas-Silġ. Agricultural activity might have also involved crop rotation. On the other hand, animals like the pig and sheep / goat appear to have been reared for meat consumption. Marine fauna and poultry seem to have also formed

TABLE 2
List of prehistoric sites (within study area)

Locality	Habitation sites	Religious buildings	Dolmens and / or tombs	Small sites or features	References
Għar Dalam, Birżebbuġa	●*				Evans 1971: 18-21
Wied il-Mixta	●				Evans 1971: 21; <i>MAR</i> 1935-6: XIX-XX
Ta' Kaċċatura, Birżebbuġa	●*(?)				Ashby 1915: 52-66, Plate V
Ta' Ġawhar, Kirkop	●*(?)				<i>MAR</i> 1960: 6-7, Plates I-IV
Tal-Baqqari, Hal Far	●*(?)			● Cart-ruts	<i>MAR</i> 1921-2: 1-2
Borġ in-Nadur, Birżebbuġa	●	●	● Tombs* and dolmen		Evans 1971: 6-18, 195; <i>MAR</i> 1922-3: ii; 1923-4: i; 1955-6: 7; 1959-60: 3-4; Sagona 2002: 780
Hal Ġinwi, Marsaxlokk		●*			Evans 1971: 25-6; <i>MAR</i> 1917-9: xi; Sagona 2002: 267
Xrobb il-Għaġin		●			Evans 1971: 26-8; <i>MAR</i> 1914-5: ii
Tas-Silġ, Marsaxlokk		●*		●* Cart-ruts	<i>MISSIONE</i> 1964-73; 1964: 112, 150; 1965: 181; 1973: 100, 104
Hal Far		●*(?)			Bonanno 1977: 73, 76; Evans 1971: 22; <i>MAR</i> 1921-2: 2
Bir id-Deheb, Żejtun				● Unknown nature but cart-ruts nearby	Evans 1971: 169
Wied Żembaq, Birżebbuġa			● Dolmen		Evans 1971: 195
Wied Żnuber			● Dolmen		Evans 1971: 195
Tal-Garda, Għaxaq			● Dolmen		Evans 1971: 195-6
Ix-xagħra, Żabbar			● Dolmen	● Megalithic wall remains	Evans 1971: 197
St George's Bay, Birżebbuġa				● Cart-ruts and silos	Evans 1971: 7; Magro Conti & Saliba 2005: 86-9; <i>MAR</i> 1960: 5; Trump & Cilia 2004: 283, 291
Bulebel, Żejtun				● Pits	Evans 1971: 200
Żejtun				●* Silos	<i>MAR</i> 1973-4: 51

* Re-utilised in Classical times

TABLE 3
List of Classical period sites (within study area)

Locality	Agro-industrial units and estates	Round 'towers'	Religious buildings	Industrial units	Miscellaneous buildings or dwellings	Burial sites	Under-water finds	Harbours and anchorage sites	References
Ta' Kaċċatura	●*			●(?) Textile?		●			Ashby 1915: 52-66, Plate V; Sagona 2002: 267
Żejtun	●*					●			MAR 1911-2: 3; 1912-3: 9; 1961: 5; 1964: 6; 1972-3: 72; 1973-4: 51; Sagona 2002: 1136-45
Hal Far	●*				● Unknown nature	●			Bonanno 1977: 73, 76; Evans 1971: 22; MAR 1921-2: 2; 1960: 4; 1977-8: 63; Sagona 2002: 833-7
Ghar Dalam					●* Cave				Evans 1971: 18-21
Borg in-Nadur						●*			Sagona 2002: 780
Ta' Ġawhar		●*	●(?)						MAR 1960: 6-7, Plates I-IV; Zammit 1917: 8
Tat-Torrijiet, Żurrieq		●							
Tal-Baqqari		●			●* Unknown nature but cart-ruts nearby	●			MAR 1921-2: 1-2; 1930-1: V
Mdorbu, Kirkop						●			Caruana 1898: 7.79
Tas-Silg			●*						MISSIONE 1964-73
Xaghret Medewiet				● Bricks and tiles		●			Caruana 1882: 102; 1884: 4 (and facing illustration, B-C); 1898: 7, 45, Plate 1(Figs 2-3); 1899a: 3; Sagona 2002: 561(Fig.241(6.9)) 1128-9
Hal Ġinwi					●* Unknown nature; baths?				Sagona 2002: 267
Ben-ghisa					● Wall; tower or bastion?	●	● Amphora		Ashby 1915: 51; Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 81; Caruana 1882: 36-7; 1898: 7-8, 51, Plate IV(Fig.1); MAR 1964: 7, Plate 7
Marsa-skala					● Baths	●	● Amphorae and pottery	●	Ashby 1915: 51; Bonanno 1977: 73, 76; MAR 1907-8: E9; 1960: 4; 1965: 4

Locality	Agro-industrial units and estates	Round 'towers'	Religious buildings	Industrial units	Miscellaneous buildings or dwellings	Burial sites	Under-water finds	Harbours and anchorage sites	References
St Thomas Bay								•	
Marsaxlokk	•(?)				• House with baths		• Pottery	•	Bonanno 1977: 73, 76; 2005: 116-7; MAR 1931-2: V; 1933-4: IX-X; 1965: 4
Delimara					• Unknown nature		• Anchor stock		MAR 1965: 5
Żabbar					• Unknown nature	•			MAR 1964: 5, Plate 4; Sagona 2002: 1131
Tal-Barrani, Żejtun						•			MAR 1965: 4, Fig.4
Bulebel il-Kbir and iż-Żghir, Żejtun						•			MAR 1910-1: 5-6, Plates I, III; 1911-2: 2
Kalafra						•			Sagona 2002: 843
St George's Bay							• Stone head		Sagona 2002: 267-8
St George's Bay							• Olive mill		Cagiano de Azevedo 1963: 6

* Re-utilising previous prehistoric site

part of the diet. In addition to this and as shown below, three particular sites in the region and known to have been occupied since prehistoric times would later, in the early historic period, remain in use as farming complexes.

One such site is located at Ta' Kaċċatura, between Wied Dalam and Wied Haş-Saptan and not very far from Borg in-Nadur. It commanded a good view over the valleys but was perhaps better accessed from St George's Bay up Dalam valley. Already occupied in prehistoric times, the site turned up evidence showing its later association with what might have been an estate or a farm where olive-oil was produced. Perhaps the nearby toponym 'Birżebbuġa' (from Maltese *bir* meaning 'well' or 'cistern' and *żebbuġa* meaning 'olive') might indicate cultivation of olives nearby although, admittedly, it does not indicate the period when this possible cultivation might have taken place. Further converging evidence seems to be provided by an olive crusher reported on the sea-bed, apparently at nearby St George's Bay. Architectural elements retrieved from the site would also show that it might have included a residential

building, possibly where the estate or farm owner himself resided. It even included a water storage system consisting of a number of cisterns and related channels (Ashby 1915: 52-66, Plate V; Cagian de Azevedo 1963: 6). This storage system may indicate that, for some reason, the industry concerned could not rely on the nearby valleys for the amount of water it needed and, therefore, mitigation measures might have had to be implemented to ensure the necessary water supply. Nonetheless, one of the cisterns led Sagona (2002: 267) to associate the site with a textile industry.

Another site to be found at Żejtun was likewise occupied since (late) prehistoric times when storage of foodstuffs might have taken place as suggested by the presence there of two rock-cut silos. But evidence for the Classical period (on this site) would seem to suggest industrial activity associated with olive-oil production. Interestingly, the toponym 'Żejtun' (from Maltese *żejt* meaning 'oil') might also suggest association of the locality with olive-oil production even if, strictly speaking, the toponym itself does not provide any indication as to when this production might have taken place. Nonetheless, like both 'Birżebbuġa' and 'Żejtun' examples, toponyms might carry memories of activities – sometimes, extinct – associated with the respective locations. The presence of water storage cisterns and water channels on this site (referred to above) would again possibly suggest reliance on anthropogenic measures to ensure the necessary water supply (*MAR* 1961: 5; 1964: 6; 1972 (1st April)-1973 (31st March): 72; 1973 (1st April)-1974 (31st March): 51).

A similar measure might have been provided by a water tank accidentally discovered between Żejtun and Marsaxlokk (*MAR* 1933-4: IX-X) and by another one between the military airfield at Hal Far and the nearby cliffs (*MAR* 1960: 4). Both might have been associated with farms or estates. Likewise might have been a series of connected pits of the late prehistoric period recorded from Bulebel at Żejtun (Evans 1971: 200).

Finally, prehistoric megalithic remains from Hal Far would seem to provide evidence for another site in continuous use from prehistoric to later times when it might have been used in association with the olive-oil industry (Bonanno 1977: 73,76; Evans 1971: 22; *MAR* 1921-2: 2).

Farms or agricultural estates may have been also provided with watch towers as in the north-west of the Mantinike in Eastern Arkadia (Greece), at Costa (Ragusa) in Sicily, in North Syria, and in North Africa where they formed part of farm complexes (Di Stefano 2010: 241, 245(Fig.4); Jost 1994: 224; and Krings 2008: 32(Fig.2.2)). The remains of three circular structures held to be round towers are clustered on the south-western periphery of the region under review. These are the Ta' Ġawhar, Tat-Torrijiet, and Tal-Baqqari 'towers'. The way they are clustered indicates that they might have enjoyed quite good intervisibility between them, possibly having formed part of a chain-like network of watch towers. At the same time, or alternatively, they could have supported a territorial structure by serving as a demarcation line between different estates as a network of intervisible hillforts in Östergötland (in Sweden) did since the Late Bronze Age and during the Iron Age. These 'towers' might have also borne further territorial significance if, with their presence, they acted as tokens for land ownership in a role perhaps similar to that played in later times by certain manor houses (Sahlqvist 2001: 86-7, 93). Remains of a wall built in the '*opus quadratum*' technique on the promontory of Benghisa were also interpreted as having belonged to a tower or bastion wall (Ashby 1915: 51).

Excavations at Ta' Ġawhar showed that the site had been in use since prehistoric times although the precise nature of this early use remains unknown (MAR 1960: 6-7, Plates I-IV). A water storage cistern was earlier discovered not far from the circular structure (Zammit 1917: 8) while tombs reported by Caruana (1898: 7,79) in the neighbouring area known as 'Mdorbu' might indicate human occupation nearby.

There were other industrial activities undertaken in this region. As Alessandro Quercia (2007: 352) and Maria Giulia Amadasi Guzzo (2007: 295) remark, the engraving of dedications at Tas-Silġ on ceramic vessels before their firing would imply that, quite likely, these same vessels were produced specifically for ritual use in the sanctuary (Also Gleba 2009: 72). Caruana (1899a: 3) reports on industrial activities at Xaghret-Medewiet. He relates these to ceramic production, while the nearby ruins he mentions could have been the sanctuary remains at Tas-Silġ overlooking Marsaxlokk harbour. In fact, masonry remains on this site had been

visible long before the commencement of its excavation in the 1960s. A nearby settlement is possibly indicated by the tombs discovered in the same locality of Xaghret-Medewiet (Caruana 1882: 102; 1884: 4 (and facing illustration, B-C); 1898: 7, 45, Plate I(Figs 2-3); Sagona 2002: 561(Fig.241(6.9)), 1128-9). As there is no evidence of ceramic production on the Tas-Silġ site itself, this would seem to increase the probability that the workshop producing ceramic vessels (particularly the ones with dedications) for the sanctuary at Tas-Silġ could have been located somewhere nearby; possibly, at Xaghret-Medewiet. Workshops (and / or related paraphernalia, like moulds) associated with sanctuaries are known, for example, from the Levant and from Europe too (Brody 1998: 55-6; Ghey 2007: 27; Gleba 2009: 76-81; Nakhai 2001: 147).

4.1.7 - Burials and other elements as indicators of nearby settlements

Tombs or burial monuments might perhaps confirm the possible presence of settlements nearby. Five late prehistoric dolmens are known from the Tas-Silġ region. One is located on the side of Wied Żembaq, opposite Borg in-Nadur, while another lies about 70 metres away from the massive wall mentioned earlier at Borg in-Nadur itself (Evans 1971: 195). Citing other sources, Sagona (2002: 780) mentions tombs of both prehistoric and later date too at Borg in-Nadur. The other three come respectively from Wied Żnuber, from Tal-Garda to the south of Ghaxaq village and overlooking Birżebbuġa to the east, and from Ix-Xagħra to the south-east of Żabbar village. Remains of a megalithic wall stand not far from the last one (Evans 1971: 195-7).

Tombs of the Classical period are more numerous. They form four main clusters: one at Żejtun which is the closest to Tas-Silġ, another cluster at Ħal Far, another one at nearby Bengħisa, and the last one at Żabbar. The majority of the recorded tombs are of the ‘shaft and chamber’ type.

The largest concentration of tombs – some sixteen in all – occurs at Żejtun and in its limits (MAR 1910-11: 5-6, Plates I. III; 1911-12: 2-3; 1912-13: 9; 1965: 4, Fig.4; Sagona 2002: 1136-45). The locality of Ħal Far also yielded a good number of tombs: eleven, including one from Tal-Baqqari and another one from Kalafra (MAR 1930-1: V; 1977 (1st April)-1978 (31st March): 63; Sagona 2002: 833-7, 843). The smallest concentration of tombs occurs at Żabbar:

four in all (*MAR* 1964: 5, Plate 4; Sagona 2002: 1131). The number of tombs at Bengħisa is unknown. A tomb discovered there in 1761 yielded the inscription *CIS* 1, 124 mentioning a certain ‘Hannibal son of Barmelech’ (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 81; Caruana 1882: 36-7; 1898: 7-8, 51, Plate IV(Fig.1)). On the remaining tombs at Bengħisa, Caruana (1898: 51) simply states that the promontory and sea-coast there hosted several others similar to the one discovered in 1761.

A small tomb near the farm complex at Ta’ Kaççatura might have originally held cremations but was later adapted to take inhumations (Ashby 1915: 66). Finally, a hypogeum with a unique Christian inscription is to be found near St Thomas tower in Marsaskala (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 267, 334; *MAR* 1907-8: E9).

Likewise indicative of settlements nearby, might have been the bath complexes. Remains of baths were reported by Ashby (1915: 51) and Bonanno (1977: 73, 76) at Marsaskala, on the promontory to the north of St Thomas Bay, while other baths adjoining a house (apparently of the second century A.D.) were recorded at Marsaxlokk Bay (Bonanno 1977: 73, 76; *MAR* 1931-2: V).

It would appear, therefore, that the natural harbours of Marsaxlokk Bay (including St George’s Bay together with Borġ in-Nadur and Ta’ Kaççatura), Marsaskala Bay, and St Thomas Bay were all inhabited. Coastal settlements were, then, to be found at Hal Far and nearby Bengħisa. On the other hand, the largest hinterland settlement might have been at Żejtun while smaller ones might have been located at Żabbar, Ġħaxaq, and Kirkop. The ones at Żejtun and at inner Marsaxlokk harbour appear to have been the closest settlements to Tas-Silġ.

4.1.8 - Activities centred on religious buildings

Other activities of a different nature were centred on religious buildings since prehistoric times. There are four such prehistoric sites known from the Tas-Silġ region. One is situated at Hal Ġinwi, between Marsaxlokk harbour and Żejtun (Evans 1971: 25-6; *MAR* 1917-19: xi). Another one lies on a coastal cliff edge at Xrobb il-Ġħaġin. In terms of its enclosing wall, it

provides parallels to a structure from the religious complex at Borġ in-Nadur (Evans 1971: 26-8; *MAR* 1914-15: ii). Finally, and situated almost at the focal centre of the above-mentioned three sites, there is the Tas-Silġ site itself.

With the exception of the one at Xrobb il-Għaġin, the other three sites provide evidence of continuity in later times. But it is the one at Tas-Silġ which maintains its religious nature. The site at Borġ in-Nadur survived only as a settlement to later prehistoric times, though possibly to early historic times too as suggested by tombs mentioned by Sagona (2002: 780), while the one at Hal Ġinwi might have been later turned for habitation purposes, perhaps of a high social standing too (Sagona 2002: 267). There might have been socio-political considerations influencing choices regarding both location and use, to the extent that three prehistoric sites show continuity in use – albeit at the expense of their original nature, in the case of two of them – while the fourth one declined completely.

4.1.9 - Communication systems

Human activities in the Tas-Silġ region are likely to have been aided by communication systems linking the various places with which these same activities were associated. The most clearly evident are the cart-ruts to be found in various places. While their dating is quite insecure, they are widely associated with some sort of transport system (Magro Conti & Saliba 2005).

At Bir-id-Deheb, south of Żejtun, cart-ruts could be seen not far from the remains of a semicircular structure with which they might have been associated (Evans 1971: 169). Another pair of cart-ruts north of the Tal-Baqqari round ‘tower’ remains lay close to a site occupied by a demolished countryside chapel but likely to have been previously occupied by a much earlier structure with which the ruts might have been likewise associated (*MAR* 1921-2: 1-2). A pair of cart-ruts running from Marsaxlokk Bay uphill to Tas-Silġ were detected through aerial photography (*MISSIONE* 1964: 112, 150; 1965: 181; 1973: 100, 104). These might have formed a track along which stones were transported to the sanctuary area on top of Tas-Silġ hill during one or any of its re-structuring phases. Quite unique are perhaps a pair of cart-ruts

to be seen by the shoreline at St George's Bay, Birżebbuġa and which lay near a number of rock-cut pits (Evans 1971: 7; *MAR* 1960: 5). Any foodstuffs that could have been stored in these pits might have been transported thereto or therefrom along the nearby cart-ruts; although, admittedly, the relationship between these pits and the nearby cart-ruts could be questioned (Magro Conti & Saliba 2005: 86-9).

4.1.10 - Maritime interaction and trade

On account of their very close location to the shoreline, these same pits might have been used for the storage of grain awaiting export or, else, to hold freshly imported grain awaiting transfer to its final destination on the island as Trump quite plausibly suspects (Trump & Cilia 2004: 291). If so, this would imply trading activity and contacts with other Mediterranean communities. This scenario of maritime interaction seems to be confirmed by the underwater finds of ceramic remains, particularly Roman amphorae, at Marsaskala, Marsaxlokk, and off Benghisa promontory, together with occasional finds such as a Roman anchor stock found off Delimara and a carved stone head (perhaps fallen overboard) retrieved from St George's Bay, Birżebbuġa (*MAR* 1960: 4; 1964: 7, Plate 7; 1965: 4-5; Sagona 2002: 267-8). Such contents from an underwater context could also illuminate the nature of maritime interactions in this region (as in Doonan 2004: 43). As will be shown later on, many goods and materials – some of which, of high quality – were also imported for the sanctuary at Tas-Silġ. Like other imported goods from other sites, these are clearly indicative of foreign trade and exchange. Within the scenario of maritime activity and interaction, would fit the natural harbours provided along the south-east coast by Marsaskala Bay, St Thomas Bay, and Marsaxlokk Bay incorporating St George's Bay and a small rectangular artificial basin which might have been a *cothon*: an artificially-built harbour (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 116-7). These may have also themselves accommodated maritime communities and facilitated interaction which may have provided the basis for any trading activity (as in Doonan 2004: 42-3).

4.1.11 - The Tas-Silġ Sanctuary site: evidence of continuous occupation

After having had a look at the places occupied and exploited by the people in the landscape around Tas-Silġ, we shall now focus on the place itself. What we shall be looking upon are basically processes: processes of change which, to a high degree, might have guaranteed continuity. In other words, changing circumstances might have brought about different responses reflected in the ritual practices and in the use of the place for worshipping purposes. Reflecting the changing circumstances, these different responses may have, at the same time, ensured the survival of both ritual itself and of the cultic use of the Tas-Silġ place which, otherwise, could have declined.

The place was frequented since prehistoric down to later times. As we have seen above, there was more than one worshipping place in the Tas-Silġ region during the prehistoric period. But, in the early historic period, religious activity seems to have been largely centred at the Tas-Silġ sanctuary which may have better suited the newly-emerging requirements possibly brought about by new belief systems, new territorial organisation, or a new political set-up; the previous prehistoric worshipping places appear to have been either abandoned or underwent a change of use.

4.1.12 - Interest in the Tas-Silġ site: a brief historical outline

The aim of this section is to briefly demonstrate how interest in this place originated and evolved over the centuries, what were the debates that went on and what was their outcome and, ultimately, what impact did these leave particularly with respect to the meanings, interpretations, and importance attached to the site.

The place today known as ‘Tas-Silġ’ is formed by a small low hill – whose summit rises about 46m above sea level – with a commanding view over Marsaxlokk harbour in the south-east region of Malta. But its present name ‘Tas-Silġ’ does not go back earlier than the mid-seventeenth century. It was, in fact, a small church in that area dedicated to the Holy Virgin ‘*ad*

Nives' which in Maltese translates into 'Tas-Silġ' and whose origins go back to around that time (i.e. around the mid-seventeenth century), that lent its name to the place.

Tas-Silġ had attracted attention and aroused interest long before it was excavated by the Italian Archaeological Mission during the 1960s and 1970. In his *Geographia* (IV, 3, 13), Ptolemy gave the geographical position of Gozo and Malta together with that of a temple of Hercules which was to be found in the latter. A temple of Juno (also in Malta) forms part of the subject matter in Cicero's orations where serious accusations are directed against Verres, proconsul of Sicily, for having plundered the temple (Cicero, *In Verrem* II, 4, 103-4; 5, 184).

For a long time, the temple of Hercules was held by various antiquarians and scholars to have been located in the area of Marsaxlokk on the basis of Ptolemy's coordinates, but no one gave the precise location. The first writer to appear to have expressed some doubts on Ptolemy's attribution was Jean Quintin d'Autun in his *The Earliest Description of Malta* (1536: 22-3).

In his *Della Descrittione di Malta* (1647: 108), Gian-Francesco Abela proposed Kasar as the place where Hercules' temple site once stood. This place was located in the area of Marsaxlokk. Taking into consideration the fact that the place nowadays known as 'Tas-Silġ' is located in this area and that the small church of the Holy Virgin *ad Nives* was not yet built at the time of his writing, it is possible that Abela's mention of 'Kasar' refers to older ruins of today's 'Tas-Silġ'. This is further supported by his reference to ancient remains and relics of archaeological value present in this same place which, since times earlier than his, was visited by treasure hunters in search of precious items hidden there. To strengthen his point, Abela further argues that the name 'Kasar' dates back to the Mediaeval period and signifies a fortified location where precious items were kept in earlier times.

Abela's proposal received support by Giovannantonio Ciantar (1772: 100, 319-20) who added new facts and observations while confirming the area today known as Tas-Silġ as the site of Hercules' temple in agreement with Abela.

Abela's view received further confirmation by the French traveller Jean Hoüel (1787: 92-3, Plate CCLV) who described and designed the visible remains of a huge wall traditionally held to have belonged to the temple of Hercules. This wall ran along the road which leads from Tas-Silġ to Delimara. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Hoüel's version was embraced by Onorato Bres (1816: 61-2, 143-4).

An inspection carried out by the Museums Department of Malta in 1923 in a field at Tal-Hereb between Żejtun and the small church of the Holy Virgin *ad Nives* / Tas-Silġ confirmed what on-site quarrying in the area had already revealed: promising indications of a buried site by way of ashlar foundations, architectural fragments, and the quantity of pottery unearthed. Ancient relics were similarly noted in the surrounding area. The Museums Department's plans were to dig trial trenches in the neighbouring fields, especially closer to the top of the hill (*MAR* 1923-4: V). But, with the exception of some excavations carried out by Sir Temi Zammit in 1934 (*MISSIONE* 1964: 54), these plans seem to have never materialised.

Following a survey, conducted in 1962 by Michelangelo Cagiano de Azevedo of the Catholic University of Milan, of various potentially archaeological sites in both Malta and Gozo, the Tas-Silġ site was among the shortlisted three – together with San Pawl Milqi (in Malta) and Ras il-Wardija (in Gozo) – and earmarked for excavation (Cagiano de Azevedo 1963: 5-7). The excavations were undertaken by the *Missione Archeologica* of the Institute of Near Eastern Studies of the University of Rome between 1963 and 1970 (*MISSIONE* 1964-73). In recent years, excavations at Tas-Silġ have been resumed by the *Missione Archeologica*, focusing on the prehistoric temple area.

The *Missione Archeologica* excavations have confirmed that Tas-Silġ was an important sanctuary site as it has long been believed by many earlier scholars and visitors, but whose main deity was Astarte rather than Hercules. Though apparently not touched upon by these scholars (but it does not necessarily mean that it has escaped their attention) most of whom focused mainly on the visible remains, the physical formation of the terrain on which the site stands and the surrounding topography would seem to highlight the significance and importance attached to the identified location.

4.1.13 - Earliest known occupation at Tas-Silġ

The summit of the Tas-Silġ hill appears to have witnessed human activity since the earliest known occupation of the site as a whole. Prehistoric structural remains consisting of huge stones following a curvilinear plan in the eastern zone of Area 2 (Figure 22) seem to have belonged to a temple. From the surviving remains, this temple appears to have been a four-lobed one with an outer encompassing wall, a concave facade, and a central passage way joining the entrance from the facade to another doorway on the facing end. The temple plan looked like that of the eastern (and, presumably, the earliest) temple at Ħaġar Qim prehistoric temple complex (*MISSIONE* 1965: 7; 1967: 116, 126; 1968: 41-2; Recchia 2007: 250-1(Fig.22)).

Evidently related to it, sherds of the Late Neolithic or Late Temple Period (3,150-2,500 B.C.) mixed with a small amount of earth were found sealed in a hole drilled in a large (prehistoric) stone slab on the eastern extremity of the prehistoric curvilinear structure. Furthermore, sherds of the same period were found deposited with animal bones close to a shallow basin incorporated within the said structure at a much later date (*MISSIONE* 1967: 35-6). These may seem to attest to some sort of activity of a ritual nature, perhaps ritual depositions.

But activity during the same period does not seem to have been restricted to the summit of the hill (or Area 2). A large prehistoric stone basin and a huge *betylus* next to it in Area 6, to the north-west of the prehistoric curvilinear structure, may have also been associated with ritual activity. A nearby well and canal might have supplied water to the basin, possibly highlighting the use of water as part of this activity. A spherical stone typical of those usually found in Maltese prehistoric temples was also found south of the basin and in the same area (*MISSIONE* 1969: 36-46, 118-9).

Evidence of prehistoric (including later prehistoric) occupation came also from the southern zone (Areas 3 and 4) by way of recycled megaliths and prehistoric pottery of both Late Neolithic (or Late Temple Period) and Late Bronze Age (1,500-700 B.C.). A small stretch of a

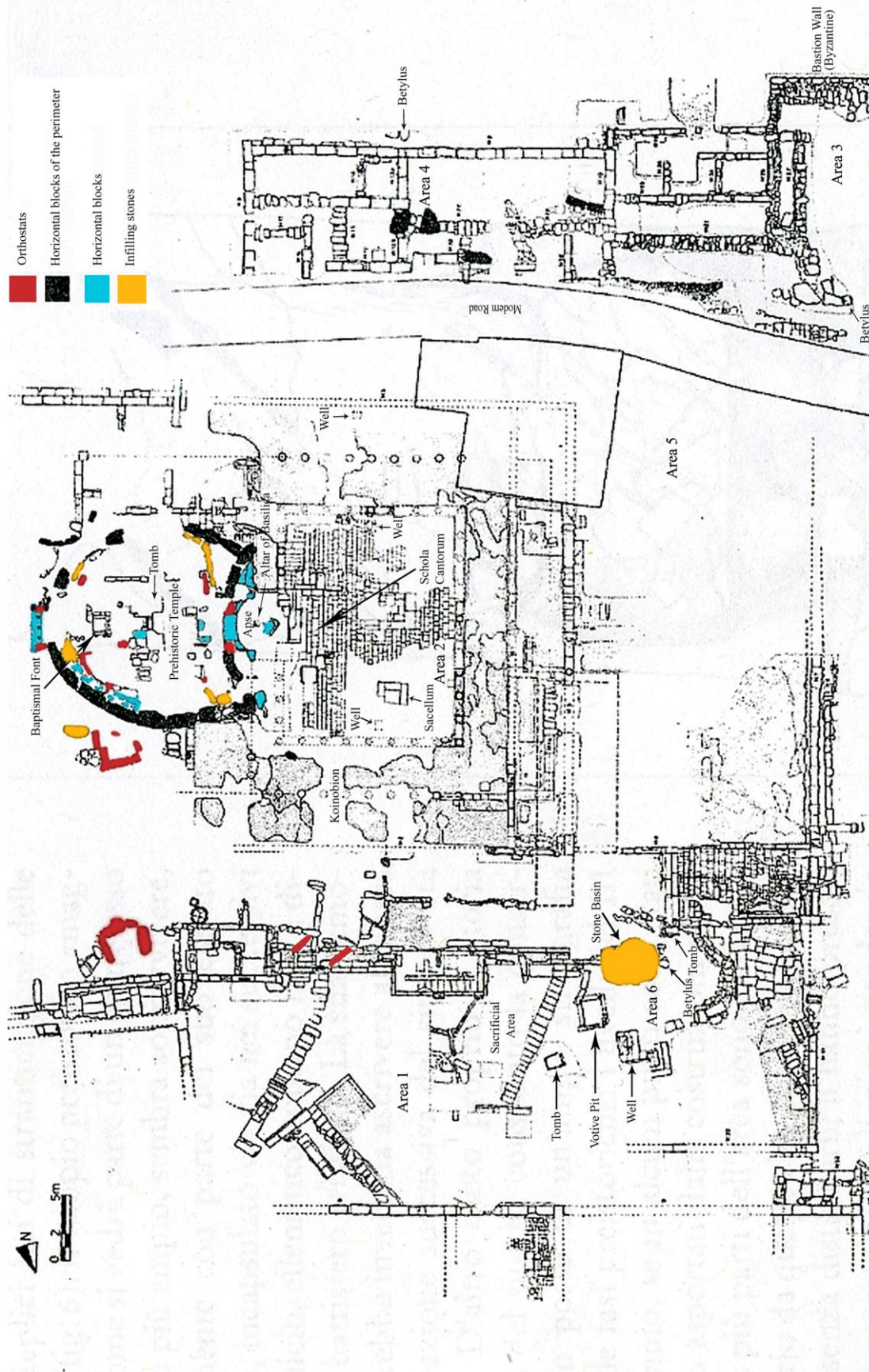


Figure 22
General plan of Tas-Silg Sanctuary. It is divided into areas mentioned in the text. (After Recchia 2007: 238(Fig.6)).

megalithic wall, in particular, appeared to have formed part of a curvilinear building dated by the excavators to the Late Bronze Age. Other remains testifying to prehistoric activity in the southern zone included three other spherical stones and two other *betyli*, each from Areas 3 and 4 respectively (*MISSIONE* 1964: 66-7, 70-2; 1973: 55). A recent study of the palaeo-environment at Tas-Silġ has shown a high occurrence of juvenile land snails and of seeds of the goosefoot weed in a sample column from this zone. As land snails respond to changing and disturbed environments by reproducing more young while goosefoot also flourishes in disturbed habitats, this would seem to indicate a possibly changing and disturbed environment which might have resulted from the above-mentioned activity. It seems, therefore, that anthropogenic interventions in this zone were forcing the ecosystem here to become a more specialised habitat (Fenech 2001: 55-6, 59-63).

On the other hand, a number of prehistoric pottery sherds in Area 3 (in the southern zone) were found to have been disposed of there like other material from later periods. Likewise, what appeared to have been dumping pits in Areas 1 and 6, north of the sanctuary and on the northern slopes of the hill, contained material from different periods which was mixed with ashes and bones of small animals. This material included also prehistoric pottery, mostly of the Late Bronze Age (*MISSIONE* 1965: 63-7; 1969: 29-30, 32). These areas might have served also as dumping sites for what might have been considered as 'sacred waste' already since the earliest occupation of the sanctuary.

4.1.14 - New generations, new ideas, new demands

Already in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. but, possibly, earlier too, the prehistoric temple was used in a slightly modified form which respected the earlier structure and its axis as also happened, for instance, at the sanctuary at Baetocaece in the coastal mountains of Syria (Steinsapir 1999: 188). These modifications (at Tas-Silġ) included the addition of a forecourt in front of the prehistoric temple. The building of this forecourt involved the addition of two lateral arms to the temple's concave facade, with each arm terminating in a pillar oriented

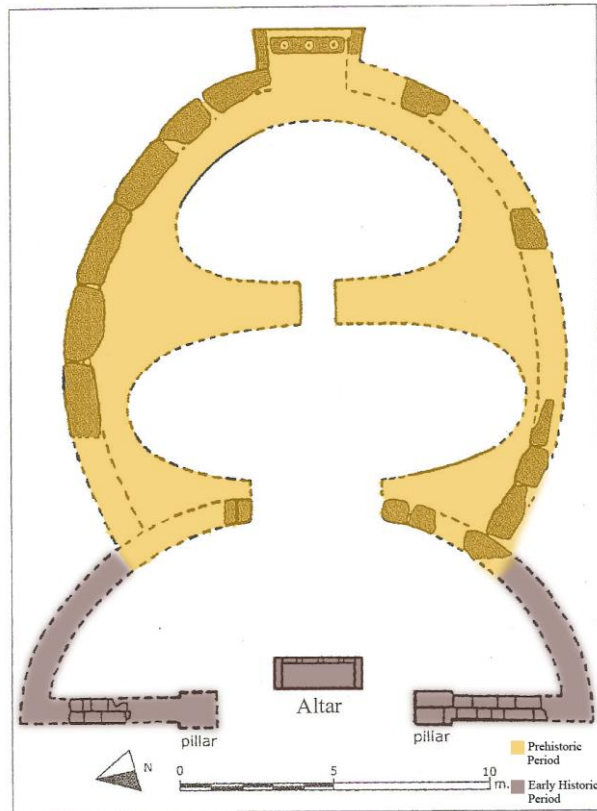


Figure 23
Tas-Silg Sanctuary around the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. Plan showing reconstruction of the early historic temple integrating the earlier prehistoric one. (After Recchia 2007: 240(Fig.8)).

towards the forecourt's entrance in the centre. As part of this structural re-organisation, a 'ground altar' was inserted in the rock-floor almost between the two newly-added walls and in alignment with the entrance of both forecourt and temple. On the other hand, the earlier prehistoric temple was integrated and maintained as the central and, evidently, the most important part of the whole re-organised temple complex (*MISSIONE* 1966: 26; 1967: 118, 127-8; 1968: 42; 1973: 22-3; Rossignani 2007: 356, 358(Fig.4)).

The result of these structural developments was a tripartite temple with a pillared entrance (Figure 23). This temple structure seems to be paralleled by the Period G2 temple at Sukas, south of Ras Shamra on the Eastern Mediterranean coast (Figure 24 below), and by the North Syrian temples at Tell Tayinat and Ain Dara. It is also similar to the descriptions of the

Solomonic temple built in Jerusalem by Phoenician craftsmen (Brody 1998: 52-4, Figs.51-3). Perhaps not accidentally, a double Egyptian-style cavetto cornice capital which may have crowned one of the pillars flanking the newly-added outermost entrance (at Tas-Silġ) is paralleled by similar ones from the Ma´abed porticoed temple at Amrith, also in Syria (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 49, 120).

On the other hand, the ‘ground altar’ inserted in the rock-floor between the two newly-added walls might have held three standing betyls, probably representing a group of three deities. The grouping of deities in three as represented by such triads of *betyli* demonstrates a tendency typical of Phoenician religion (Moscati 1973: 181-2, 196). A similar arrangement was to be found at Kition in Cyprus and at Kommos in Southern Crete (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 49), evidently under Phoenician influence.

Possibly contemporary to this structural re-organisation at Tas-Silġ and, perhaps, related to it too, was a wall built of roughly hewn quadrangular blocks and which was uncovered south of the prehistoric temple structure. It may have represented a system by which the prehistoric temple was integrated into later structures during the early historic period (700-550 B.C.) (MISSIONE 1968: 28-9).

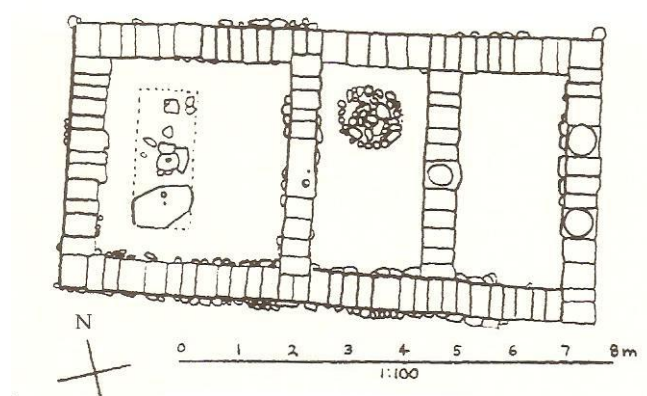


Figure 24

A tripartite temple with a pillared entrance. This example is at Tell Sūkās, south of Ras Shamra on the Eastern Mediterranean coast. A similar structural development appears to have taken place at Tas-Silġ Sanctuary during the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. when the prehistoric temple was developed into a tripartite temple with a pillared entrance. (Source: Brody 1998: Fig.51).

4.1.15 - First major restructuring

A society's religious experience is expressed through concepts which are, then, materialised in physical realities like rituals and monuments (Ceccarelli 2007: 322). As Alberto Davico rightly remarked, the history of this religious complex (at Tas-Silg) is narrated essentially by its own architecture as a concrete expression of religious concepts and of the rites performed there (*MISSIONE* 1968: 41). Changes in cult practices would necessitate spatial re-organisations of the sacred area (Rossignani 2007: 359). In view of this, the Tas-Silg site witnessed a series of successive structures built along the same axis of the prehistoric temple, wholly or partially enclosing it, thus creating a sanctuary: a complex of sacred buildings and articulated squarish courtyards related to a central monument and comprising an open air altar. The entire sanctuary was bordered by a large rectangular wall, creating a monumental *temenos* (*MISSIONE* 1964: 113, 152; 1966: 160; 1967: 117, 127; 1972: 132, 135; 1973: 78-80, 98, 100, 102, 104).

A major restructuring process – evidently, the first one of its kind and scale at Tas-Silg – took place between the third and first centuries B.C.: a period of growing monumentalisation throughout the Mediterranean (Figure 25 below). This monumentalisation of sanctuaries could be seen as a political statement: underlying the importance of ancient indigenous cults in response to growing foreign domination and influence which, by this time, was personified mainly in Rome (Horsnaes 2002: 233). Essentially, the first major restructuring at Tas-Silg involved the construction of a colonnaded courtyard in Area 2 (Figure 22 above) and in front of the prehistoric temple, a monumental entrance facing west, and a number of ancillary structures, besides the above-mentioned huge boundary wall surrounding the entire sanctuary complex. These new structures respected the previous axis and the prehistoric temple itself which was kept at the heart of the whole complex. The courtyard system with its associated structures would later extend towards Area 5, while monumental structures made their appearance in Area 4 as well. All these structures remained long in use, although not without minor alterations which were done from time to time in response to arising demands or changes in cult practices (*MISSIONE* 1964: 76-7; 1965: 60-1; 1966: 43-5, 160; 1968: 44; Rossignani 2007: 355-6, 358-9).

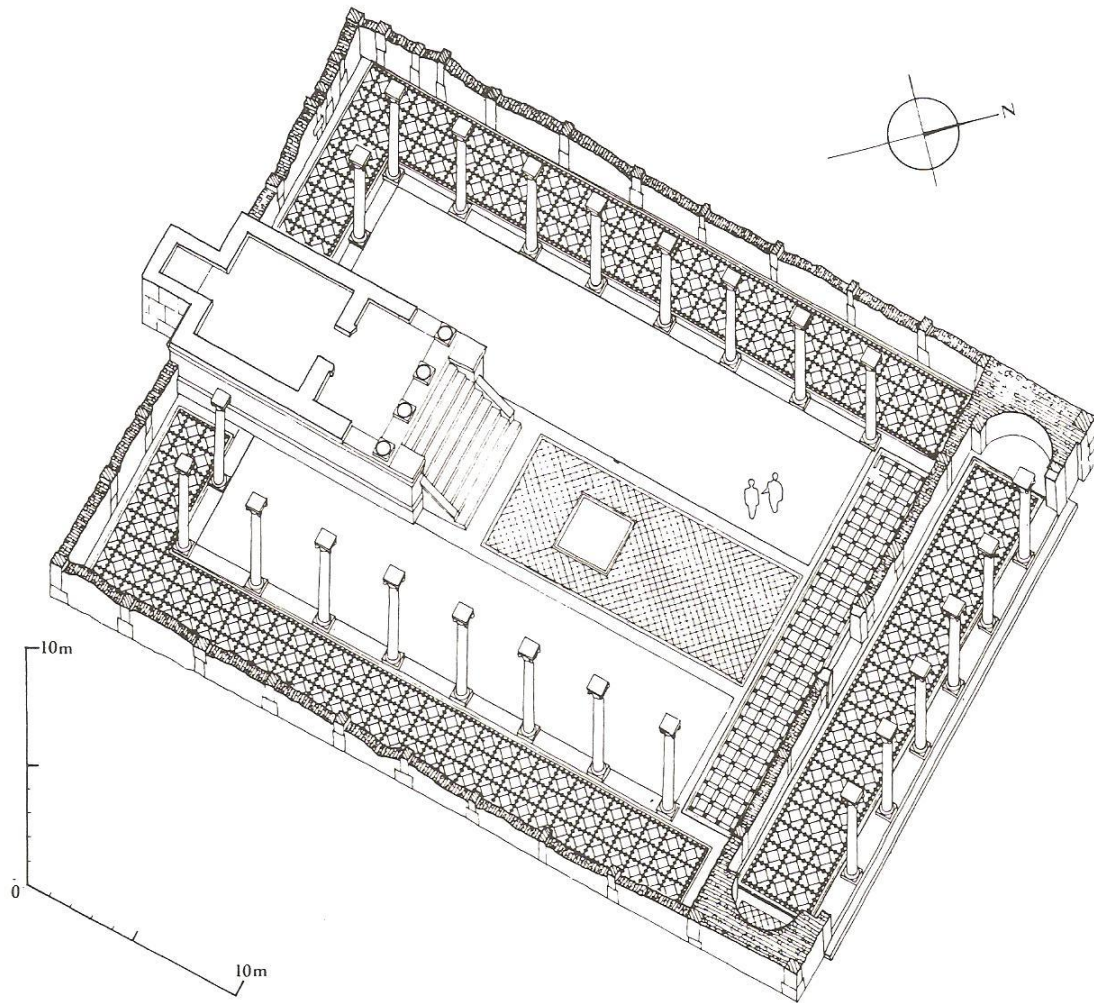


Figure 25

Axonometric view of the East Temple at Thuburbo Maius in Tunisia. The squarish colonnaded courtyard is very much similar to that built at the sanctuary at Tas-Silg during the first major restructuring. However, in the latter, the *cella* was not contained within the courtyard as in the East Temple at Thuburbo Maius but re-utilised the prehistoric temple connected to the courtyard. The same East Temple at Thuburbo Maius provided evidence for a temple garden such as those well known in the ancient world (Jashemski *et al.* 1995: 573). Possible evidence for another temple garden recently came to light at Tas-Silg Sanctuary as well, beyond Area 1 and the *temenos* wall to the north (Semeraro 2007: 313-7, 319(Fig.9-10)). (Source: Jashemski *et al.* 1995: 571(Fig.13)).

TABLE 4
List of inscriptions from Tas-Silġ Sanctuary (not including those of dubious reading)

Type of inscription	Language / quantity / material	Text or transliteration	Translation	Provenance
Dedicatory	Phoenician / several / pottery	L'ŠTRT; sometimes LT (After Amadasi Guzzo 2007: 295-6)	To Astarte	Areas 3, 4, 5, and 6
Dedicatory	Phoenician / several / pottery	LTNT (After <i>MISSIONE</i> 1964: 151)	To Tanit	Areas 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5
Dedicatory	Greek / seven / pottery	HPAC; sometimes HPAI or HPA	Of Hera	Area 2
Dedicatory	Phoenician / one / stone	1. LRBT L'ŠTRT 'NN HM[ZBH... (After Amadasi Guzzo 2007: 288)	1. To the lady Astarte of Malta [this] is the al[tar...]	Area 2
Dedicatory	Phoenician / one / bone	1. LRBT L'ŠTRT ['NN.. 2. 'BST Z 'Š NDR..... 3. BN B' LHLS BN K... [KŠM' 4. QL DBRY M/WPG ŠT.... 5. 'N..... BN KNŠ (?)... (After Amadasi Guzzo 2007: 289)	1. To the lady Astarte [of Malta ?.(.) 2. this «basin» is (that) which NP (son of?) has dedicated 3. son of Ba' lhalos son of K..... [as (the deity) has heard] 4. the voice of his words. And (?)..... ..son of KNŠ (?)...	Area 2
Dedicatory	Phoenician / one / ivory	1. '.]N HSPR 'Š BQRB 'B[2. '.] BN BD' BN YTM BN BDMLK BN B'LŠLK KŠM' QL[(After Amadasi Guzzo 2007: 291)	1. '.] NP, the scribe, who stays inside (?)... 2. '.] son of Bodo, son of Yatom, son of Bodmilk, son of Ba' lshillek; as (the deity) has heard his (?) voice[...?	Area 1
Dedicatory	Phoenician / one / stone	1. 'PSYTN NDR 2. BRK LRBT L 3. 'ŠTRT (After Amadasi Guzzo 2007: 293)	1. 'PS-yaton has dedicated. 2. May he be blessed by the lady 3. Astarte	Area 4
Commemorative ?	Latin / one / marble	1. [S]EMPRO[NIUS]... 2. ...[A]TRATIN[US].. 3. AUG(USTAE) IMP(ERATORIS)... 4. ...M(ARCI) F(ILIUS) OPTAT[US]... 5. ...SUI HONO[RIS]..	Text is too fragmented to translate	Area 6
Dedicatory ?	Phoenician / one / pottery	SHAPHOT (After <i>MISSIONE</i> 1965: 85)	Shapot	Area 2 ?
Dedicatory ?	Greek in Phoenician script / one / pottery	ANTIGONOS (After <i>MISSIONE</i> 1965: 85)	Antigonos	Area 2 ?
Dedicatory ?	Greek in Phoenician script / one / pottery	AGESILAOS (After <i>MISSIONE</i> 1965: 85)	Agesilaos	Area 2 ?

To accommodate the new sanctuary structures, the hill itself had to undergo a number of alterations by way of levelling and infilling to create suitable platforms for the various structures. This process may have already begun in connection with the building of the main prehistoric temple on top of the hill and the other prehistoric structures on the southern slope facing Marsaxlokk Bay. But, in the following periods, it reached grander proportions with extensive dumping on the hill slopes in order to extend the flat area on top. This involved also the destruction of the prehistoric structures with the exception of the central temple on the summit of the hill (Fenech 2001: 65-6, 76-7; *MISSIONE* 1964: 150; 1965: 180; 1972: 132-3, 136-7).

This major restructuring process brought about the clearance of what appeared to have been sacred or votive materials and their eventual deposition in what one may perhaps call ‘sacred pits’ or *favissae*. These depositions were largely concentrated in Areas 1, 2, 3, and 6 (Figure 22) and, apart from broken ceramic vessels, they contained also animal bones, remains of marine fauna and, sometimes, ashes. The vessels represented were of both local and foreign production and were largely composed of commonly used domestic wares associated with food preparation. Quite a large number of the ceramic sherds carried incised dedications. On a few, the dedications were painted. Mostly, dedications were made either to Astarte – sometimes, invoked as ‘Astarte of Malta’ – or to Tanit while some were made to Hera (TABLE 4). Other objects in these depositions included statue / statuette fragments, representations of human anatomical parts like hands, fragments of zoomorphic representations, and architectural fragments. Very significant were fragments of stone temple models which might have represented the Tas-Silġ sanctuary itself. Also included were coins, ostrich egg-shells, fibulae, rings, glass paste beads, pendants, metal objects, and objects carved in bone. Less frequent were ivories and corals. Also quite few were inscriptions like those engraved in ivory, bone, marble, or other kinds of stones (TABLES 4 and 5). One particular inscription was carved on what was evidently a previous seventh-fourth centuries B.C. altar stone which was re-utilised, however, during the second major restructuring process, as many other stones were during any of the restructuring processes (Amadasi Guzzo 2007: 288-94, 299; *MISSIONE* 1964: 61-9, 76, 113, 151-3; 1965: 43, 47-8, 51-2, 58, 60, 62-7, 75-8, 179, 191; 1966: 26-42, 44, 53-5; 1968:

23-4, 26, 30; 1969: 29-46, 77-9, 119-20; 1972: 22-3, 42-6, 48, 60, 132-4, 136-8; 1973: 46-7, 49, 51, 53, 55-6; Perassi 2007: 371-6, 382-6; Semeraro 2007: 317-8).

What is likely to have been a miniature perforated stone anchor (height: 4.5cm) (Figure 26 below) came from the topsoil in Area 2. Although the excavators favour interpretation of the object as a loom weight (*MISSIONE* 1964, 65, (Plate 17,5)), the religious context (a sanctuary), its proximity to the sea, and the object's small dimensions (regarding small votive anchors, see, for example, Apollonius Rhodius's *Argonautica* (1.955-60) cited in Brody 1998: 40) seem to be rather suggestive of a dedicatory anchor as a maritime *ex voto*, possibly to the goddess Tanit who was worshipped there (4.1.20 below and 2.11 above). A consideration of the appearance of sacred anchors (even if not stone anchors) together with the sign of the goddess Tinnit / Tanit on sacrificial stelae, possibly symbolising the goddess's protection of sailors from storms (Brody 1998: 5, 33, Fig.17), and the evidence for a cult of Tanit at the sanctuary at Tas-Silg may lend further weight to this suggestion. This presumed small stone anchor might have, therefore, been offered by a mariner to Tanit at the Tas-Silg sanctuary, either in fulfillment of a vow or in thanksgiving for the goddess's protection during a voyage (2.11 above).

Votive objects would seem to have acted as agents between the human and the divine. But even more than that, the dedicated objects were, like the sanctuary's structural elements, the deity's property. Therefore, they had to remain within the sanctuary. This has happened, for instance, at the urban temple of Casarinaccio in the city of Ardea south of Rome where votive objects were deliberately deposited also in association with a restructuring of the sanctuary (Ceccarelli 2007: 324; Glinister 2000: 67-9). A sacred law at the temple of Marica at Minturnae expressly forbid anyone to take away anything brought inside the sanctuary (*Id.*, citing Maras 2005: 44). Their deposition would have also prevented their contact with the profane sphere (Glinister 2000: 69). Furthermore, the objects might have been deliberately broken before deposition to prevent their re-use as happened at the so-called 'Fosse Temples' at Lachish and, apparently, also at the Isthmian shrine (Kleibrink 2002: 213; Morgan 1994: 114; Nakhai 2001: 147).

TABLE 5

Distribution list of items found deposited at the Tas-Silġ Sanctuary

Items	Quantity	Provenance	Reference
Architectural fragments	Unspecified	Areas 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	<i>MISSIONE</i> 1964: 64, 70, 76, 151; 1965: 47-8, 52, 58; 1966: 29, 32, 35, 37, 44; 1968: 23-4, 26; 1969: 30, 32-3, 38, 40, 43, 46; 1972: 42, 46, 132-3, 136-7; 1973: 53, 55
Statue / statuette fragments (in various materials)	Unspecified	Areas 1, 2, 4, 6	<i>MISSIONE</i> 1965: 43, 47, 58, 77-8; 1966: 32, 35-7, 42; 1968: 23; 1969: 30-2, 34, 38, 46; 1972: 60
Inscribed stones (including those of dubious reading)	8	Areas 2, 4, 5, 6	Amadasi Guzzo 2007: 288-9, 292-4; <i>MISSIONE</i> 1964: 70, 76, 83-7, 151; 1965: 47, 52; 1966: 44, 53-5; 1969: 38, 79, 119-20
Coins	24 (and 278 others found deposited beneath the floor of the 'baptismal font')	Areas 1, 2, 3, 4, 6	<i>MISSIONE</i> 1965: 48, 51-2, 60, 63, 65-6; 1966: 35-6; 1969: 33, 38, 41-2, 46; 1972: 23, 48; Perassi 2007
Objects carved in ivory or bone (including inscriptions)	Unspecified	Areas 1, 2, 4, 6	Amadasi Guzzo 2007: 289-92; <i>MISSIONE</i> 1965: 48, 52, 62; 1966: 29-30, 32, 35, 37-8; 1969: 31-2, 36, 42
Metal objects (like fibulae, rings, and nails but excluding coins)	Unspecified	Areas 1, 2, 6	<i>MISSIONE</i> 1965: 52; 1966: 35-9; 1969: 31, 33, 36, 42, 46, 77, 119
Representations of human anatomical parts (in various materials)	7	Area 2	<i>MISSIONE</i> 1965: 52; 1966: 35-7, 39
Glass paste beads	Unspecified	Areas 1, 2, 6	<i>MISSIONE</i> 1965: 52; 1966: 35, 38, 40; 1969: 33, 36, 42; 1972: 23
Ostrich egg-shells	Unspecified	Areas 2, 3, 4	<i>MISSIONE</i> 1965: 63, 66; 1966: 38, 40
Human representations in stone relief	1	Area 2	<i>MISSIONE</i> 1965: 75-6, 179, 191
Temple model fragments	Unspecified	Area 4	<i>MISSIONE</i> 1964: 76, 113
Fragments of zoomorphic representations	7	Areas 2, 6	<i>MISSIONE</i> 1966: 36-7, 39, 44; 1969: 46
White coral branches	Unspecified	Areas 2, 6	<i>MISSIONE</i> 1966: 38, 40; 1969: 45, 79

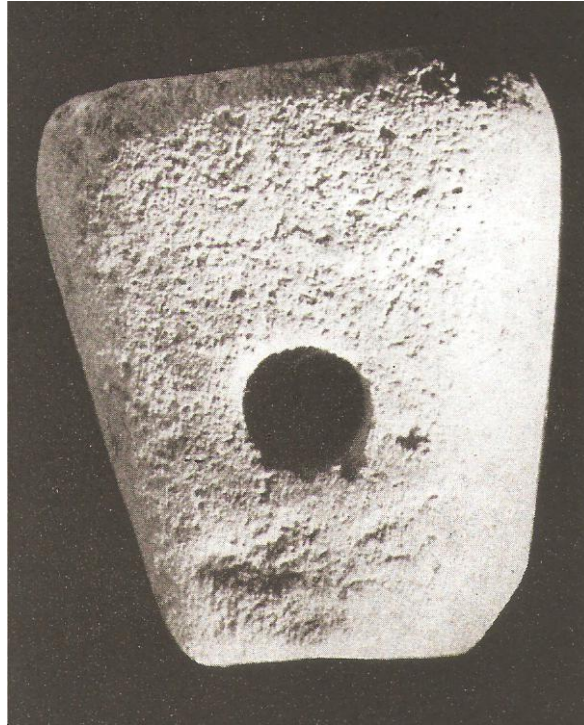


Figure 26

A possible miniature perforated stone anchor from Tas-Silg Sanctuary. It was found in Area 2 and might have been offered at the sanctuary by a mariner either in fulfillment of a vow or in thanksgiving for the goddess's protection during a voyage. Height: 4.5cm. (Source: *MISSIONE* 1964, Plate 17,5).

As part of the same restructuring process, an artificial water storage system consisting of a series of wells and canals was also developed, thus highlighting the importance and extensive use of water in the sanctuary, evidently in association with the rituals taking place there. Two stone basins – one prehistoric and monolithic (though broken) and the other turned later into a votive or ‘sacred’ pit – with a well very close to them in Area 6 would seem to confirm the importance and use of water already in earlier times. These basins may have been associated with ritual washing (*MISSIONE* 1969: 36-46, 118-9). But an integrated water storage system consisting of underground interconnected galleries accessed through a number of wells and fed by water channels was later developed in Area 2. Rainwater may have been collected from the

courtyard itself and / or from the rooftops (*MISSIONE* 1965: 55; 1968: 25-8). More channels associated with rainwater collection came from Area 1. But three water channels directing water towards an underlying cistern in this area might have either formed part of the water storage system in nearby Area 2 or else formed another separate system (*MISSIONE* 1967: 120, 130; 1969: 34-5). This complex water system at Tas-Silġ might have been intended to mitigate the shortage of nearby natural water supplies, especially permanent ones. However, the presence of both fresh water snails as well as other snails requiring a humid environment and recently retrieved from stratigraphic layers in a trench in the southern zone might indicate that, at least, a running fresh water source, like a spring, was very close (Fenech 2001: 79). But either on its own this was not sufficient or, else, an artificial water storage system had to be developed when the spring dried up.

The provisions described above would demonstrate that the site's environment was largely dry. Yet, the site's choice and eventual development for ritual use would indicate the great importance and significance attached to it in spite of its unfavourable dry conditions. Water seems to have been an essential requirement in view of its use in association with rituals. Therefore, a strategically wise management and control of water came to be more imperative in order to overcome the restrictions imposed by the dry conditions of the site (and of the region in general). This management and control of water is manifested by the elaborate water storage system purposely devised.

4.1.16 - A second major restructuring

During the first two centuries A.D. in particular, there seem to have been no significant structural changes. The only exception was the successive building of a number of structures to the north and south: a process already begun since the second century B.C. and which continued until the fourth century A.D. Apart from this, structural works might have been restricted to restorations, maintenance works, and partial reconstructions. It seems that the sanctuary at Tas-Silġ might have declined in significance, perhaps in the face of competition brought about by the infiltrating Christianity which, ultimately, was to take over even the Tas-Silġ site itself (below). In fact, after a period of what one might term as a gradual decline in

activity at Tas-Silġ especially between the end of the second century A.D. and the fourth century A.D., as suggested by the scarcity of material finds from this period, the site was to witness another significant restructuring programme apparently associated with Christianity (*MISSIONE* 1967: 118, 128; 1968: 44; 1973: 100, 104).

An enlargement of the courtyard area came to include the building of additional structures, reaching another major restructuring phase in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. with the building of what the excavators claimed to have been a quadrangular Christian church and a monastic complex occupying more or less the same footprint and along the same previous axis. Columns from the previous colonnaded courtyard – whose space was now occupied by the presumed church – were re-utilised in the building of this structure. This structure, in fact, followed a basilical plan consisting of three naves divided by two rows of (re-utilised) columns and what the excavators termed as a ‘*schola cantorum*’ in front of the altar. The altar, located in an apse on the eastern end, consisted of a table supported on a central pillar whose base was square and was embedded in the pavement. The west-facing facade of the ‘church’ had three entrances aligned with the three naves respectively (*MISSIONE* 1964: 55; 1965: 44-8, 53-4; 1967: 25-7, 118-20, 128-30; also Figure 27 below).

During this second major restructuring process, the prehistoric temple itself also underwent internal alterations. The most notable was the insertion, within the prehistoric temple structure and behind the apse on the eastern end of the ‘church’ structure, of a rectangular basin suggested by the excavators to have been a baptismal font accessed by two steps on each of its shorter sides. This basin, which was covered with marble, was dated by the excavators to the period between the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth centuries A.D. (*MISSIONE* 1967: 33-5, 119-20, 129-30). It looks very similar to what was described as an early Christian baptismal font discovered at Ajaccio in Corsica in 2005 and which is based on a North African prototype. Although it has an elongated cruciform plan, the Ajaccio ‘baptismal font’ is accessed by a short flight of steps on each end of the longer arms (Schlanger 2006: 29) like the one at Tas-Silġ. Perhaps the Tas-Silġ ‘baptismal font’ could be a rather simplified version of the same North African prototype on which the Ajaccio one is based. Furthermore, the

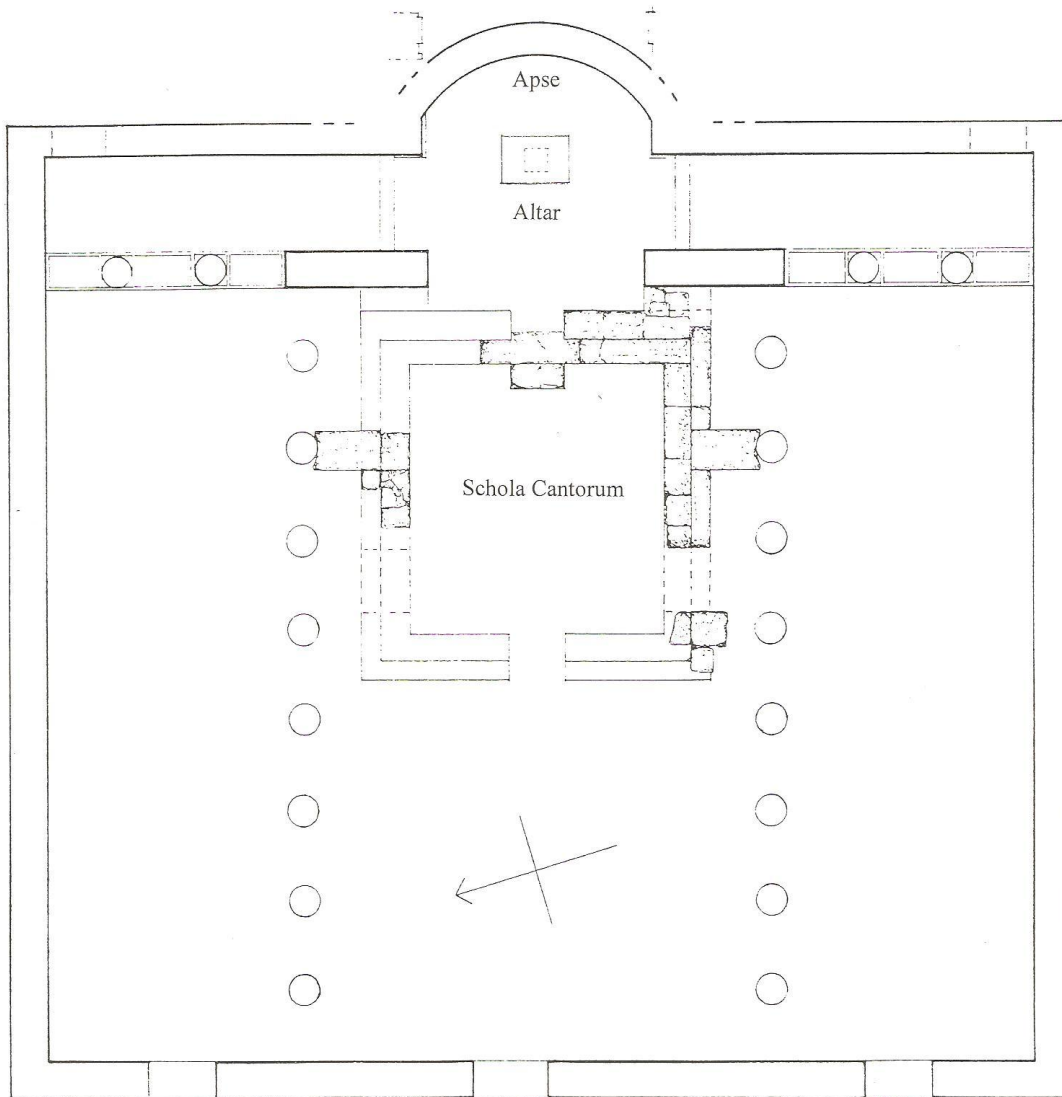


Figure 27

Plan of the presumed basilical church built at Tas-Silg. It was built between the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century A.D. (After *MISSIONE* 1968: Fig.3).

presumed basilical church and baptismal font at Tas-Silġ may possibly reflect a settlement in Malta (perhaps close to Tas-Silġ itself) of North African Christian immigrants, perhaps fleeing the Vandal persecutions. This does not necessarily imply, however, that the community at Tas-Silġ by this time were the first Christians to establish themselves on the Maltese islands. There would have certainly been other ways facilitating the introduction of Christianity, even before this time.

As recent as 1999, during cleaning and consolidation works of the ‘baptismal font’, a deposit of 278 coins was found beneath its floor. They were concentrated beneath and around the water escape-hole where they may have been washed down every time a baptism was performed. Evidence for deposition of coins in baptismal fonts comes from Milan and Chersonesos (Crimea) but interpretations attached to such a practice may vary quite a lot (Perassi 2007: 376-81).

Following an edict of A.D. 380 by emperor Theodosius I, old temples and shrines along with their possessions were donated to the Catholic Church. On the basis of both the presumed baptismal font and the type of altar with central support which were dated by the excavators to the period between the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth centuries A.D., a similar date was attributed to the ‘church’ structure. This may further suggest that the presumed church might have been built on the site of a previous pagan sanctuary following the above-mentioned edict (*MISSIONE* 1966: 160-1, 172; 1967: 118-20, 128-30; 1968: 44-6, 110-1).

4.1.17 - Final stages of occupation

In later stages of the site’s occupation, activity appears to have partially changed its nature from a ritual to a defensive one. This defence-associated activity also seems to have been centred at the southern zone which also happens to overlook Marsaxlokk Bay below the Tas-Silġ hill. Newly emerging circumstances – like the ones indicated below – are likely to have necessitated this move.

In fact, what might have been walls of a defensive nature were brought to light in Area 3 (Figure 22) in the southern zone facing the sea. They were dated to a very late period of the site's occupation – around the ninth century A.D. – and might have been built as part of defensive measures against threats of invasions that may have endured for a relatively long time (*MISSIONE* 1967: 119, 129; 1972: 75; 1973: 52, 57, 84, 99, 103).

Perhaps at an even later stage which might have been rather 'peaceful' and during which new uses of and / or new values attached to the site have emerged, the prehistoric temple underwent internal alterations with the building of what the excavators termed as a mosque complete with a *mihrab* (*MISSIONE* 1972: 134, 138). Apart from this structure and, at the same time, somehow impacting upon the religious nature of the site, a burial (more or less dated to the same period as the mosque) complete with skeleton was placed inside a poorly-built 'sarcophagus' also within the prehistoric temple (*MISSIONE* 1968: 29). Two other possible tombs of the same period but lacking any skeletal remains came from Area 6. One of them was found to contain only a bronze ring while the only object found inside the other was a fragment of a Latin inscription (*MISSIONE* 1969: 45, 119). Even less in conformity with the site's religious nature was what appeared to be an isolated circular hut dated to the same Arab / Islamic period on the basis of a brazier found associated with it. This hut, whose remains were found in the northern extent of Area 2, was suggested by the excavators to have been possibly used as a provisional dwelling place (*MISSIONE* 1967: 25-6, 120, 130).

As the nature of values attached to the site changed and the site's potential for ritual purposes was completely lost and forgotten, the site was subsequently turned into fields for agricultural use which included the building of a farmhouse in the seventeenth century and still extant.

4.1.18 - Tas-Silġ and its regional context: an interpretative analysis

In this third part, a number of interpretative themes (enumerated below) are presented. The aim is to address various aspects of the Tas-Silġ sanctuary and show their relevance and significance, in the context of contemporary religious beliefs and practices, for Malta and the Mediterranean more widely.

4.1.19 - Visibility and monumentality

The sanctuary at Tas-Silġ occupies the crest of a small hill overlooking the innermost part of Marsaxlokk Bay from which it is also not far. Its location on top of a hill rendered it visible from many places in the surrounding area, not least from Marsaxlokk Bay and the nearby coast and, possibly, even from beyond that coast too. Likewise, these same places were also visible from the site itself even if, at present, much of this visibility is hindered by the urban sprawl in the area and, not least, by the site's modern boundary wall.

Although visibility of a site or a monument could not have been necessarily always planned or deliberate but, in many cases, could have been purely accidental, the choice of the Tas-Silġ location might have been intended to put the temple (and, later, the sanctuary) within sight of the settlements, tombs, and pastures with which it might have been associated (as in Briault 2007: 135-7). Moreover, this chosen location might have been intended to make the site visible not only from the surrounding area but also from any approaching sea-craft beyond the coastline. Its accessibility from a nearby port seems to have made the choice even more obvious.

Visual experiences are vital to the experience of place and landscape (Van Dyke and Alcock 2003: 6). With its alignment along an east – west axis, the sanctuary complex on top of the Tas-Silġ hill offered a lateral but magnificent view to those approaching it from below while, with its huge boundary wall, it might have appeared like a fortified sanctuary or, indeed, very much like a walled acropolis on top of the hill (Fenech 2001: 80; *MISSIONE* 1964: 112-3; 1968: 107-8). Mostly for topographical reasons, this view might not have been possible to achieve on any nearby high places, particularly those on the coastal promontories. This might, therefore, explain the significance and eventual preference of the Tas-Silġ hill which, in contrast with any other nearby high places, seems to have better satisfied the desired visual effects.

On the other hand, especially with regards to the sanctuary's interior, visibility may have played an important role in controlling knowledge of, and within, the sanctuary. Certain areas of the sanctuary or certain activities taking place there might have been brought within sight of certain groups and kept out of sight of others. This could have been achieved by highlighting or hiding these places or activities through the sanctuary's architectural arrangement and layout (as in Stoddart 2002: 181).

Nevertheless, because of their superior position and awe-inspiring character, high places have always impressed humanity (Tilley 2004: 6) and, thus, were often monumentalised. High and prominent places like hills or mountains were, in fact, amongst the commonest places chosen for religious monuments and rituals (Briault 2007: 123). Projecting up towards the skies, high places like mountains are sometimes viewed as links or entry points to the supernatural world (Crumley 1999: 272) or as points of contact between heavens and earth (Bradley 2000: 26-7). Carla M. Sinopoli (2003: 21) identifies sacredness or sacred associations like those inscribed in 'holy' hills among the main factors contributing to the location of a settlement. On the other hand, the early presence of temples would have further enhanced the sacredness of a place. The Tas-Silġ hill may have, therefore, been long inscribed with a sacred character, not least on account of the early presence there of the prehistoric temple. The same may have perhaps accounted for the choice of a high place for the Borg in-Nadur prehistoric settlement and its temple.

In her study of the Vijayanagara temples in India from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries A.D. (which could be applicable to other places and periods), Sinopoli shows that, as they tower over any surrounding settlements, temples would turn themselves into a distinctive and highly visible feature marking the presence of the gods. And the grander their physical scale, the better their visibility and distinctiveness (Sinopoli 2003: 25). This might have likewise been the prime reason not only for the choice of the Tas-Silġ hill to host the temple (and, later, the sanctuary) but also for the undertaking of the two major restructurings, each time making the sanctuary look grander and more conspicuous. And the more it dominated the surrounding landscape through its architecture, the more it may have assumed a powerful role in the daily lives of the people (as in Bradley 2000: 106).

Although the significance of the place might have promoted its own monumentalisation which, in turn, would have given it additional significance while underlying the importance of the ancient cult (as in Horsnaes 2002: 233; Jones 2001: 221), every time the Tas-Silg sanctuary was renewed through restructuring, the earlier remains might have taken on new meanings and this could have possibly been another reason why they were often monumentalised. Thus, as Lynn Meskell (2003: 36) would put it in respect of the Deir el Medina village in Egypt, the materiality of the Tas-Silg sanctuary remained available – both visually and sensually – to later generations / groups, even if the inhering cultural specificities were altered. On the other hand, the restructuring of the visually available features might have also served to make likewise visible a relationship between the community or group frequenting the sanctuary and the physical form of the sanctuary itself (as in Tilley 1996: 167).

4.1.20 - Durability and continuity

A landscape is physically transformed and ‘domesticated’ through the building of durable constructions like monuments. These monuments, on the other hand, gain significance as they might enshrine belief systems in a durable and permanent form. This process may be further reinforced by the repeated ritualising of associated practices taking place thereat (Bradley 2000: 159; Knapp and Ashmore 1999: 10; Sanches 1996: 228). Once their ritual significance becomes established, the monuments may remain in continuous use over a number of centuries, sometimes spanning different cultural and religious contexts (Sahlqvist 2001: 91-2) as evidenced at Tas-Silg through both its structural and other material remains.

Evidently, the building of the temple (and, later, a more complex sanctuary) at Tas-Silg implied a monumentalisation of the site. As Michael Rowlands (1993: 145) remarks, monumentalisation gives duration to the monumentalised place. Monuments intended to endure and in whose erection, therefore, a huge amount of labour would have been invested, had a special religious significance attached to them (Richards 1996: 192-3). This seems to have been the case of the sanctuary at Tas-Silg whose great and special religious significance

might be explained by the major restructurings (and monumentalisation) it underwent and the huge amount of labour that each time had to be invested in these same restructurings.

By their very stable and durable nature, monuments appear as landmarks of continuity (Alcock 2002: 28). This element of durability guaranteed a continuous occupation – albeit not without occasional declines – of the Tas-Silg site. The same can, perhaps, be said in respect of certain sites in the surrounding region. For example, restructurings of the settlement at Borġ in-Nadur or of the farm complexes ensured their durability and, at the same time, their continuous use. The visibility of durability also seems to be important as visible durable remains from the past might inspire ongoing activity (Meskell 2003: 50).

The adoption and re-adoption – and, hence, the continuous occupation – of a sacred site by new groups or generations of people could have meant that they recognised – as their predecessors did – the sacred character of the site. And as new groups kept coming, the same site will have continued to be recognised as sacred. But in the process of adapting their belief systems, earlier traditions might have been retained while newly-borrowed belief systems were incorporated, thus creating ‘shades’ of ‘old’ and ‘new’ which might not be always and easily distinguishable (Sundstrom 1996: 187-8). For Tas-Silg, this might have meant retaining essentially the same deity but not without successive changes in name, thus: Astarte to Tanit, then to Hera and, finally, possibly also to Juno.

To accommodate the new needs and demands arising in association with the new belief systems, the sanctuary itself also had to undergo structural alterations or renewals but the older temple was always maintained and its alignment respected. In this way, the new or the newly-restructured sanctuary was referring to the old temple, thus creating what Colin Richards (1996: 202) would term as ‘a memory of landscape’; in our case, would be rather ‘a memory of the monumentalised landscape’. Not only was the old temple physically maintained, but even its relationship to the adjoining structures was kept constant. So, whatever form or extent characterised each restructuring, the old temple always formed the heart of the entire sanctuary complex. This might betray what for Rowlands (1993: 144), citing Gombrich (1979), is a common ‘template held in the collective mind’ of the groups responsible for the various

restructurings or renewals of the Tas-Silg sanctuary. In this way and as Sinopoli (2003: 31) would put it in respect of the Nayaka period temple constructions in India, the old prehistoric temple at Tas-Silg might have also represented the past which remained at the core of the sanctuary complex while the added or renewed external ‘crust’ might have represented the continuous present.

The restructurings undertaken at the Tas-Silg sanctuary also involved the physical superimposition and juxtaposition of structures from different epochs. This might have also contributed towards an element of permanence and, somehow, might have contrasted with – if not ‘overcome’ – the temporariness of human life in the mind of those responsible for such restructurings (as in Jones 2001: 226). On the other hand, according to Alcock (2002: 4-5, 113), such superimposition and juxtaposition of structures does not only create patterns of return and repossession or re-use but also stimulates memories of different epochs. Thus, this might have allowed the persistence (at Tas-Silg) not only of its continuous occupation but also of any past memories and / or concepts attached to it. This persistence of past memories may have played back and ensured both continuous occupation and the sacred character of the sanctuary at Tas-Silg, as has happened to the Santa Comba mountain (in Northern Portugal) whose inclusion into the collective memory of the communities that frequented it (i.e. the mountain) allowed its sacred character and role to be maintained for a long period (Sanchez 1996: 226).

4.1.21 - Re-utilisation and re-interpretation

If, as we have earlier seen, the sanctuary at Tas-Silg had a special and great religious significance, one might expect that a special and great religious significance was likewise attached to the architectural elements or, at least, to some of them of which it was made up. This may explain the phenomenon of re-utilising and re-incorporating architectural elements with prior significance from the earlier structures or contexts (which may have likewise been significant) instead of discarding them away each time a re-building was under way (as in Glinister 2000: 54). It may also explain what Alcock (2002: 118) would term as the widespread memorial investment in the sanctuary’s past brought about by patterns of return and re-use.

The deliberate and purposeful re-integration (and, at times, careful re-arrangement) of ancient building material (*spolia*) within the fabric of a later building can be an outspoken indicator of a group's or a generation's attitude towards the past (Papalexandrou 2003: 56). Re-incorporation of older architectural elements into later buildings at Tas-Silg implied fragmentation of the same architectural elements. But this fragmentation should not be viewed necessarily as an act of desecration, destruction, or barbarism. Rather, it should be seen within the context of a specific attitude towards fragmentation. Indeed, older *spolia* at Tas-Silg might have been purposefully re-utilised and assigned a new meaning or re-interpretation through their re-incorporation into the later buildings and in places where they could be seen. Speaking of similar scenarios from Byzantine Christian contexts in Greece, Amy Papalexandrou (2003: 75-6) likens this phenomenon with the fragmentation and dispersal of saints' relics: these are dispersed precisely because of the enormous value attached to them. In other words, the re-use of older *spolia* might have implied a re-definition of these same *spolia* in new terms generated by new groups or generations (as in Hingley 1996: 241).

One possible explanation of this phenomenon at Tas-Silg is that, through its fragmentation and re-use, ancient building material from the earlier buildings might have been intended to aid the memory of the viewers. According to Papalexandrou (2003: 68), such fragments could act as visual stimuli for remembrance. Re-integration or re-working of materials with prior significance (as at Tas-Silg) would activate memories associated with other times (Jones 2001: 223). The re-integration of prehistoric materials like the stone basin in Area 6 (Figure 22) and the *betyli* in Areas 3, 4, and 6 in later restructurings of the Tas-Silg sanctuary during the Classical period may provide a case in point.

However, through their re-use, earlier architectural fragments at Tas-Silg might have not only aided the transmission of memory as a conservative tool but might have also rendered it creative if they were invested with new meanings (as in Meskell 2003: 36): meanings which might prove difficult to identify but which were perhaps provided by newly-borrowed belief systems. The re-use of the earlier architectural elements at Tas-Silg helped them maintain their sacred character while, at the same time, it incorporated previous beliefs and traditions within a

new socio-ideological order. In other words, it allowed the construction of a new socio-ideological order based on the appropriation of the past. Thus, it involved both permanence and discontinuity (as in Gregory Warden 2009: 110 and Parcero Oubina *et al.* 1998: 174).

Certainly, the process of re-usage and re-incorporation would re-work and transform the landscape (Jones 2001: 222-3). In our case, it might have made out of the sacred landscape at Tas-Silg what Meskell (2003: 50) would term as a historically layered landscape imbued with visible remains from the past, yet inspiring an ongoing system of activities.

4.1.22 - Deliberate destruction and deposition

Another act of incorporation might include periodic deposition of objects, be it in a funerary or religious context, and it may likewise evoke memories (Jones 2001: 224). Periodic depositions of votive materials also took place at the Tas-Silg sanctuary often as a result – or, perhaps, rather as part – of the restructuring processes. The concentrations of deposited materials would seem to suggest communal deposition activities or multiple visits by individuals or groups (as in Briault 2007: 131). As shown earlier, apart from metal objects and tiny ones like beads, items from the votive deposits at Tas-Silg were all broken or fragmented.

But before proceeding, it is pertinent to have a brief look at the nature of the votive objects themselves. Like memorials where visitors can speak to the dead and where, by implication, the dead are present (Sturken 2002: 367), sanctuaries provide the spatial context where people can speak to and communicate with the divine (Mylonopoulos 2006: 75) and where, therefore, the gods or goddesses are present. In sanctuaries, people would also transfer their private needs and concerns into a collective experience which one might term as ritual. In some rituals, people would bring personal objects to leave at the sanctuary as offerings. Through the offering, the objects get ‘transposed from personal to cultural artifacts’ (Sturken 2002: 367) as they publicly bear witness to divine favours received and are, thus, also released to shared memory. Objects left at a sanctuary also often included statuettes, as at Tas-Silg. With the exclusion of those possibly representing deities, these statuettes might have played the role of agency, representing – and, thus, substituting – the offerants who, obviously, could not

physically remain permanently in the presence of the deities at the sanctuary. The offerant might have thus given his presence at the sanctuary an element of durability and permanence through the offered statuette acting as his agent. Offerings of zoomorphic statuettes (like those found in fragments at Tas-Silg), on the other hand, might have substituted sacrifices of real animals (Morgan 1994: 120).

But quite often, and especially in the context of building renewal like that undertaken more than once at Tas-Silg, votive objects offered at a sanctuary would have needed to make way for others. Never leaving the sanctuary's footprint on account of their significance as divine property and also not to get in contact with the profane sphere, they would be buried – after being deliberately broken to avoid re-usage – in designated parts of the sanctuary, perhaps as part of annual rededications (Barrett 1993: 245; Becker 2009: 90; Glinister 2000: 54, 67-9).

The deliberate destruction of such objects at the Tas-Silg sanctuary can thus be viewed as in itself an act of sacrifice which disconnected these same objects from their original status. In this way, any possible repetition of their use would have been eliminated. Through their deposition or burial, then, they were separated from their social or living context, taken out of circulation, lost from view, and became 'absent'. But, in their absence, they might have become a memory: 'a memory in their absence'. That means that, as condensed and disposed objects, the (destroyed) votive objects buried at Tas-Silg might have become themselves embodied or objectified memories, things to be remembered, and to be remembered and be given value for themselves and not for what they might have previously stood for (as in Rowlands 1993: 146-7). In other words, committed to the ground and thus no longer taking active part in the sanctuary life, the votive objects would appear to have been consigned to memory (as in Jones 2001: 218).

The periodic deposition of (destroyed) votive material at Tas-Silg might perhaps be also viewed as itself an act of re-incorporation which, as shown earlier, might have likewise evoked or re-worked memories to later visiting groups who might, thus, be able to interact with the past. Both re-use and deposition seem to be, therefore, associated with processes of memorialisation (as in Jones 2001: 224, 226).

4.1.23 - Mobility and communication

We have just seen, at the Tas-Silg sanctuary, the movement of votive objects to places of deposition whereby they might have become themselves objects of memory. Likewise, we had earlier seen the movement of architectural elements for re-use and re-integration whereby they might have aided the transmission of memory. The movement or re-location of votive objects and architectural fragments within the sanctuary at Tas-Silg might have not only changed their significance and meaning, but might have also changed their value as they were transformed from one object form to another through their destruction or fragmentation (as in Rowlands 1993: 149). The same might be said with respect to the movement of objects from outside (e.g. the nearby settlements) into the sanctuary where they would, then, undergo transformation of form (e.g. on being destroyed during sacrifice) and, hence, transformation of value and meaning.

But now let us turn to the sanctuary itself or, rather, to its architectural layout. By imposing a sense of order on the contexts of people's daily lives, architecture determines their practices and activities (Richards 1996: 193). In the context of sanctuaries, architecture might have then played an even more important role. Through their architecture, sanctuaries offered for the community members an arena for mobility, sociability, and communication (Alcock 2002: 143).

Through its architectural layout characterised by enclosed spaces like the colonnaded courtyard and, more importantly, the older prehistoric temple at the core, the Tas-Silg sanctuary might have intentionally restricted access to these and, at the same time, directed the people's movement to other places within the sanctuary complex. It might have achieved this through specific relationships created between certain parts (of the sanctuary) and particular activities. This would have meant that there might have been places, possibly like the older prehistoric temple, where only few members of the community could have entered. This architectural orderliness may have, therefore, maintained distinctions even between the community members themselves as it structured their experiences and activities by determining the degree of their participation in rituals inside the sanctuary complex at Tas-Silg (as in Barrett 1993:

238-9; Bradley 2000: 104, 107-9). A hierarchy would have thus been sustained not only between the various structures inside the same sanctuary, but also between community members of unequal social status and, by implication, between their activities.

Another element which prompted mobility and which, in certain instances, also had to do with the architectural layout was visibility. Intervisibility between structures or features in the landscape would guide people in their movement from one structure or feature to another. And the more visually conspicuous and arresting they are, the more these structures or features do inform movement. If apart from being visible they are also in proximity of routeways or in proximity of each other, this would also encourage both mobility and communication. In fact, it is also on account of their visibility that structures or features can 'communicate' (Jones 2001: 220-1, 225).

The sanctuary at Tas-Silġ might have been located on the route from Marsaxlokk Bay to the nearest urban centre which, on the basis of burial concentration there, may have been where today Żejtun is, or in its immediate proximity. The sanctuary itself might have also been visible and attracted attention from both places. Thus, anyone moving from Marsaxlokk to this urban centre, or vice-versa, is unlikely to have bypassed the sanctuary. Visibility and proximity, therefore, seem to have connected the Tas-Silġ sanctuary to its surrounding urban centres and ports. Moreover, besides the sanctuary's durability made possible by its repeated restructuring and monumentalisation, visibility and proximity might have also been additional factors which further guaranteed the continuous use of the sanctuary at Tas-Silġ. Having possibly been on the route linking Marsaxlokk and the above-mentioned urban centre and, at the same time and as we shall see below, a possible central meeting place, the Tas-Silġ sanctuary might be paralleled to the Isthmian shrine which likewise secured its continuous existence on account of similar factors (Morgan 1994: 140).

Although evidence shows that personal objects, food, and animal sacrifice were offered at Tas-Silġ, it is not known what rubrics were followed in the rituals carried out. Nor is it clear whether any communal meals were undertaken, although this cannot be excluded in view of the evidence of food at the sanctuary.

But whatever rubrics were followed during the rituals performed at Tas-Silg, they are likely to have aimed primarily towards communication with the gods or goddesses. The acts of dedication and ritual sacrifices at the Tas-Silg sanctuary might have been intended to create what Joannis Mylonopoulos terms as ‘a pathway of contact to the divine’ in an attempt to reach the deities. This communicative interaction is likely to have been mediated by priests, especially through the sacrifices which they, as representatives of the divinities, may have actually carried out on behalf of the offerants. Communication with the divine could also take the form of ritual drama involving the staged representation of divine myths (Mylonopoulos 2006: 70, 73-6, 94-103). But no evidence of this latter form of communication has surfaced at Tas-Silg so far.

However, through their performative element, rituals could have created communication on other levels too. Through the visual experience provided by ritual, groups or individual members might have interacted and participated in the cult by means of sight, by observation, and by their visual absorption (Mylonopoulos 2006: 92-7). It seems that, at the Tas-Silg sanctuary, this visual participation might have been aided by the fact that the altar was never roofed over except in later times with the building of the basilical church during the second major restructuring. We have earlier seen that, since the addition of an open forecourt in front of the prehistoric temple during the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. and throughout the first major restructuring, the altar has always been placed in an open court where its view could be enjoyed by a wider audience. The visual capacity of the altar at Tas-Silg may have increased even more with the building of the colonnaded courtyard which could allow visibility even from between the columns themselves. A somewhat parallel situation might have been provided by the so-called ‘altar court’ at the sanctuary of the Kabiroi in the northern part of Samothrake (Mylonopoulos 2006: 97-9).

Finally, if the sacrificial ritual was concluded by a communal feast as the vessels associated with food preparation might also suggest, this might have provided a moment when the members of a sacrificial community or group at Tas-Silg could communicate most intensively and increase cohesion amongst themselves by the common activity they shared. Possibly

celebrated in any of the ancillary structures associated with the sanctuary's colonnaded courtyard as in certain Classical Greek sanctuaries (like that of Artemis in Attic Brauron or the Argive Heraion), the communal meal may have played a further role. Like the sacrifice carried out earlier, it might have reinforced – through the shared ritual experience – a sense of a collective identity for the participating members who may have hailed from the various settlements surrounding Tas-Silg (as in Chaniotis 2006: 226-30, 232; Jost 1994: 229; Mylonopoulos 2006: 77-80, 83).

There might have been, however, another element affirming the identity of a group. This was exclusiveness (as in Mylonopoulos 2006: 84). We have already seen that certain parts of the sanctuary at Tas-Silg – and, by implication, perhaps certain activities too – might have been accessible only to specific groups, whether on the basis of gender, social status, or role. This discriminatory practice emphasised exclusiveness whereby the group concerned might have defined and confirmed its identity as a group precisely through comparison with and exclusion of the 'others'. And as different groups may have experienced rituals and communicated through them on different levels, such differences may have also continued to highlight the dynamism of rituals (as in Chaniotis 2006: 234).

Both celebrations (like sacrifices, communal meals, and processions) and dedicatory gifts might have also themselves entailed a multi-levelled communicative process. Visiting a sanctuary was normally associated with a celebration or the dedication of an object. Although the main purpose was to visibly express the offerant's own piety, a celebration or a dedication might also serve as a medium for the display of wealth, power, and status and sometimes, especially in the case of dedications, even of one's gender. In fact, different types of votive dedications could represent not only different classes but also different genders of worshippers. For example, fibulae and pendants from the Tas-Silg sanctuary would represent female dedicators while the material and workmanship of the objects may represent their wealth and social status. Similar dedications from Greek sanctuaries might suggest that dedications by women of this kind of personal possessions like jewellery could have marked occasions of personal significance like childbirth or marriage. At the Tas-Silg sanctuary this may have made much sense in view of Hera's associations with women and matrimony. Thus, through a

celebration or a dedication, an individual worshipper or a whole group might instigate a communicative process comprising an interaction with the gods on the one hand and with the other worshippers / groups on the other hand. The dealings with the divine would be mediative while those on a human level would be usually competitive (Becker 2009: 87-9; Chaniotis 2006: 218, 232; Horsnaes 2002: 231; Morgan 1994: 118, 128, 133; Mylonopoulos 2006: 84-92).

But rituals, particularly those involving dedications, are not only a medium of interaction between a dedicator and a divinity or between a dedicator and others. Dedications might also communicate more subtly by competing amongst themselves, with both past and contemporary dedications (Becker 2009: 87-9; Mylonopoulos 2006: 87-92). Thus, one could perhaps imagine dedicated gifts at the Tas-Silg sanctuary competing with each other for attention, demonstrating not only the significance of the deity but also their own wealth, reflecting the power and wealth of their respective donors.

If, on the other hand, processions were also involved, these may have created further interaction not only between the participants themselves but even between these and sacred spaces as well as between the sacred spaces themselves. Processions might, in fact, take a wider landscape dimension if they moved away – across the landscape – to another sacred space or, else, in the opposite direction.

A procession is itself a ritual action with heightened performance or heightened interaction. Colonnaded courtyards like that at the Tas-Silg sanctuary might have furnished ideal procession routes with adequate space for viewing. Furthermore, the stone columns with their resemblance to timbers may have recalled avenues which were often the preferred routes for processions. However, being more durable than timber, the stones (of the columns) may have also contributed a sense of endurance, adding significance to the place. The festive elements (like music) of the procession may have further contributed to a heightening of the audiovisual interaction between the ritual action and the viewers. But as it moved from place to place, a procession also connected places as it allowed their spatial comprehension and thus enabled communication even between these. There is yet another level at which a procession might

have created communication. Through their hierarchical positioning and participation in the procession, the participants may have defined and communicated their respective identities which, as we have seen with regard to dedicatory gifts, might have not been free of competitive elements (Chaniotis 2006: 213; Edmonds 1999: 148; Mylonopoulos 2006: 70, 104-8).

4.1.24 - Centrality and liminality

As shown above, communication at Tas-Silg may have assumed more than one dimension if it was staged at different levels. But, ultimately, it would have made out of the Tas-Silg sanctuary a central meeting place perhaps not only for the people from the nearby settlements but also for people coming to Tas-Silg from overseas as suggested by the presence of overseas imports at the sanctuary.

The contact with people from overseas, as evidenced at Tas-Silg, occurs at a time when long-distance travelling was far less common than it is nowadays. This fact may have added prestige to those places which, like Tas-Silg, hosted people from far-off places and brought them into contact with each other as well as with the local people. These contacts might have consequently lent an 'international' character to sanctuaries like the one at Tas-Silg, turning them into what one might call 'international sanctuaries' or 'international meeting places' / *emporia*, sometimes not lacking in their ability to control these same contacts (Prent 2003: 94. Also 6.4).

The presence of a sanctuary functioning as a central meeting point was typical of regions which hosted modest settlements but lacked significant urbanism (Zifferero 2002: 250). This might have been true of the Tas-Silg region too. In this way and in providing an excellent opportunity for the people to meet and trade, the sanctuary at Tas-Silg might have promoted contacts between different groups to the extent that it could have been itself a focal point in an exchange network. On the geographical level, then, the Tas-Silg sanctuary may have assumed a liminal role or created a sacred frontier by marking division, through its possible location on a settlement's periphery, between its associated settlement and the open country or between the former and other neighbouring settlements. The sanctuary may thus be viewed as having

generated both division (on the geographical level) but also contact between different groups; contact which might have itself also helped the sanctuary at Tas-Silg to flourish (as in Zifferero 2002: 246, 250). At the same time, its possible peripheral location, separating it from the mundane environment, might have helped to secure an aura of sacredness and ritual cleanliness (as in Guettel Cole 1994: 216; Mather 2003: 27, 36; Prent 2003: 87; Steinsapir 1999: 192).

The sanctuary at Tas-Silg seems, therefore, to have enjoyed both centrality on account of its role as a central meeting place and also marginality due to its geographical location in respect to its associated settlement/s. This dual nature which, as shown above, may have generated both division but also contact between different groups of people, may have thus shaped and determined the type of relationship between the sanctuary's associated settlement/s and the countryside and / or between the former and other neighbouring settlements (as in Morgan 1994: 105). Having a sanctuary which is both central and, at the same time, peripheral might have been a response to the specific needs of a growing urban society and / or might have reflected an increasingly complex ritual, perhaps involving processions linking the sanctuary with its associated settlement/s, with its rural territory, and / or with other neighbouring settlements (as in Guettel Cole 1994: 214-5).

4.2.1 - RAS IL-WARDIJA: ON THE SOUTH-WEST APPROACHES TO GOZO

The sanctuary site at Ras il-Wardiya is situated on a coastal headland facing south-west. It consists of eight natural terraces going uphill from the first terrace which is by the cliff edge (Figure 31, p.168) rising about 120m above sea level. The only and most important structural remains consist of what appears to have been a 'temple' building and an artificial cave on the first and fifth terraces respectively. Other associated features are a water cistern and a basin both of which are cut in the rock surface on the fifth terrace. The entire sanctuary complex appears to have been in use from the third century B.C. to the second century A.D., and, possibly, even as late as the fourth century A.D.

Throughout the first part of this case study, the regional context of the sanctuary (Figure 28 below) will be examined to locate associated settlements and highlight the activities that formed part of the daily life in these settlements. But, as suggested by its coastal location, the sanctuary seems to have been strongly connected to maritime life as well. The neighbouring coastline with its cliffs, inlet, and harbour, thus, features prominently as part of the sanctuary's regional set-up. The first part of this case study will, therefore, look also into the life of the maritime people who, through their temporary visits to the nearby inlet and harbour – and, presumably, to the sanctuary too – contributed to the sanctuary's dynamism and significance in no lesser degree than the permanently settled population.

Wherever possible, data are drawn from primary sources, particularly the Museums Annual Reports which give yearly accounts and details of archaeological fieldwork and chance discoveries. But in many instances, features or finds have never been officially recorded or published. Nonetheless, as they often physically survive (and, thus, are subject to observation), they are integrated.

The second part of the case study focuses on the sanctuary itself. Site data for this second part are also drawn mainly from primary sources. These include the reports of the excavations undertaken at Ras il-Wardiya in the 1960s by the *Missione Archeologica* (MISSIONE 1965-8).

The gathered data leads on to the third part of the case study where this same data is synthesised and used to propose interpretations of the site and of its associated ritual practices. Reference to wider literature will help us put the sanctuary within the contemporary religious context of the wider Mediterranean region.

4.2.2 - Ras il-Wardija and its regional context: geographical extent and topography

Ras il-Wardija is situated on a high coastal promontory facing south-west. It is flanked by Xlendi harbour to the south and Dwejra inlet, an anchorage or sheltering port, to the west. These are the only places providing access to and from the sea as the remaining coast along the Ras il-Wardija area consists of sheer cliffs.

The general topography of the area is rather varied with plateaux, hills, and winding valleys opening up into Dwejra and Xlendi bays. The Xlendi valley remains green practically all year round as it is fed by perennial springs in the Tal-Lunzjata valley which is a tributary of the larger Xlendi valley, the Ghajn Tuta spring, and by other perennial springs likewise feeding an old public wash-house in the small village of Fontana (Ghajn il-Kbira), not far from the larger village of Kerċem.

The present-day villages in the area of Ras il-Wardija stand on plateaus surrounded by the hills and quite close to the valleys. These villages include Għarb, San Lawrenz, Kerċem, and the hamlet of Santa Luċija. On the basis of archaeological evidence examined further below, their origins are known to date back at least to Classical times. Though now no longer inhabited, some of the hills – like Ghajn Abdul and, possibly, even Ta' Dbiegi – also provide evidence of human occupation in earlier times: Ghajn Abdul, for instance, hosted cave dwellings since Neolithic times.

The valleys, in particular, are home to terraced fields with good agricultural soil. Fertile fields are located on the bottoms of Tal-Lunzjata and Xlendi valleys and terraced ones flank the sides of these same valleys. More fertile fields are to be found on the slopes of hills like Ghajn



Figure 28

Map of western Gozo. It shows the distribution of the main sites mentioned in the text. (Source: Geological Map of the Maltese islands: Sheet 2, Oil Exploration Directorate, Malta (1993)).

Abdul and the adjacent Għar Ilma and in their respective surrounding areas. Both of these hills have perennial springs from which they derive their respective names: Għajn Abdul ('the spring of Abdul') and Għar Ilma ('the cave of water' or 'the cave from where water springs forth'). Other terraced fields are to be found on the sides of the Dwejra valley and of its tributary Wied Pisklu (Pisklu valley) and on the slopes of Ta' Dbiegi hill. This extensively agricultural region bears witness to the extent to which the population of the area relied – until relatively recent times – on agriculture for its subsistence.

The region is also relatively rich in one of the most commonly-sought mineral resources, namely good building stone. To this day, Globigerina limestone quarries in the area supply the island of Gozo. Although most of the quarries operating today are modern, evidence of stone extraction from this region in earlier times is attested, particularly from Ras il-Wardija itself as will be shown further below.

4.2.3 - Human occupation in the Ras il-Wardija region since earliest times

The south-west region of Gozo seems to have attracted human presence no later than the previously discussed south-east region of Malta (4.1.3-4). Caves at Għajn Abdul provide evidence of human presence there as early as *c.*5000 B.C. in the Għar Dalam phase of the Neolithic (*MAR* 1969: 5).

As shown below, maritime activity associated with the same area is also quite strongly evidenced particularly in the bays of Xlendi and Dwejra. This maritime activity may have complemented other human activity in the hinterland and the coastal sanctuary at Ras il-Wardija may have served as a catalyst of this complementarity.

4.2.4 - Continuous human presence and activity

The earliest people inhabiting the caves at Għajn Abdul are likely to have arrived via Xlendi Bay or, perhaps, the bay of Dwejra, after a sea journey from Sicily.

Later in the prehistoric period – possibly, during the Temple period – another settlement may have sprung up near the later village of Kerċem. The remains of a megalithic structure were brought to light in this village early in the twentieth century (*MAR* 1905-6: 3). A prehistoric burial of the Tarxien phase (3150-2500 B.C.) – the only prehistoric burial ever discovered in the south-west region – came to light in 2008 in the area where presumably the above-mentioned megalithic remains had been earlier found (personal observation). Although excavated, this burial is still awaiting publication.

Human presence at Kerċem seems to have remained continuous in succeeding periods. In the beginning of the twentieth century, remains of a house described as ‘Phoenician’ were found not very far from the prehistoric megalithic structure mentioned above but were destroyed soon after discovery (*MAR* 1907: 3). The small Late Roman catacomb of Għar Gerduf on the outskirts of the same village indicates activity at the end of the early historic period too.

Human presence and activity in and around the caves at nearby Għajn Abdul likewise remained more or less continuous throughout later prehistoric phases and even as late as the Medieval and Modern periods (*MAR* 1969: 5-6). The nearby fresh water spring and fertile soils might explain this likewise continuous human presence and activity at Għajn Abdul.

Human occupation and activity is also evidenced at the village of San Lawrenz and at the adjacent one of Għarb at least from Classical times onwards. However, most of the evidence comes from accidental and unrecorded discoveries but, in several cases, the finds themselves at least managed to make their way to the archaeology museum of the island where they are still preserved. Of notable significance are the sites of Ix-Xaqqufija at Għarb and Tar-Rokon at San Lawrenz. Ix-Xaqqufija is known for its surface ceramic scatter apparently representing various periods (personal observation). Tar-Rokon has yielded a statuette fragment of the late sixth or early fifth century B.C. allegedly found in a cistern, and a number of burials never officially reported and documented. These burials are alleged to have yielded a number of clay cinerary urns of the Classical period which were later donated by their private owners to the Cathedral museum in the Gozo Citadel (Tony Mercieca and Joseph Bezzina personal communication).

Apart from agriculture, the local people also engaged themselves in the processing of certain agricultural products. Not only fields are abundantly present in the area surrounding these two villages but a rock-cut wine-press on the surface of one of the sides of Wied Pisklu in the limits of San Lawrenz (Jaccarini and Cauchi 1999: 427-8, 433, Plate 8) might indicate grape-pressing (even if, perhaps, not on a large scale) and, indirectly, viticulture in the nearby fields.

So far, the only evidence for ancient stone quarrying comes from Ras il-Wardija itself (below). However, given the wide availability of good building stone in the whole area, it seems likely that people in this area engaged themselves in this useful activity in ancient times too. This may lead us to plausibly suggest that along with agriculture and some degree of maritime activity like fishing, stone extraction might have been another main human occupation in the area.

The extent of human presence in the Ras il-Wardija area might be further testified by a substantial number of both natural and man-made small ‘rock-shelters’ noticeable in the entire area, particularly in the countryside, if, as suggested by the type of rock-cut recesses and troughs found therein, these were used as burials possibly of late Classical times. The people in the area may have been directly responsible for the erection and upkeep of the sanctuary at Ras il-Wardija. However, the sanctuary’s possible use by visitors to Xlendi and Dwejra bays is likely to have brought the local community into contact with external people and their cultures. Such contacts seem to be confirmed elsewhere in Gozo (and Malta), as discussed in the previous and following case studies.

4.2.5 - Maritime connections and related activities

In Classical antiquity, Xlendi harbour might have also been inhabited as seems to be indicated by a single but collective Classical period tomb discovered there (*MAR* 1923-4: III; 1965: 3-4). But above all, the harbour appears to have witnessed a relatively intensive maritime activity over a long stretch of time. Visiting cargo vessels to the port are attested by at least two wrecks located at the mouth of the bay and dated respectively to the second century B.C. and fifth

century A.D. on the basis of ceramic material (largely amphorae) retrieved from the seabed. The probable presence of even more wrecks has been revealed by recent underwater investigations (Atauz 2004: 23-4, 28-32, 64(Fig.18)-6, 375-81; Gambin 2005: 17-8; *MAR* 1961: 6-7, Fig.5; *Report 1961 & 1970*; Trump and Mallia 1964).

Very significantly, Xlendi is situated along the sea-route that would have been taken by any vessels crossing between North Africa and the eastern coast of Sicily. Furthermore, the harbour itself must have been more spacious as it extended inland by some 200m more than it does nowadays (Gambin 2003: 134(Fig.1), 143; 2005: 16, 18-9). Coupled with the relatively small dimensions of ancient sea-vessels, this may have enabled the ancient harbour to accommodate many vessels, their crews, and the activities which these would have generated.

Further west, is Dwejra Bay. Being smaller than Xlendi, it might not have offered the same facilities, but its deep and sheltered inlet behind Fungus Rock might have served as a suitable anchorage, perhaps providing temporary shelter and some basic services to visiting vessels (Gambin 2005: 17, 20). Undated cart-ruts in the Dwejra Bay area bear witness to some degree of human activity there, perhaps in association with the port itself.

The sea-bed extending from San Dimitri Point (further north of Dwejra Bay) down to Dwejra, Ras il-Wardija, Xlendi, and even further beyond to the south seems to be littered with material debris associated with sea-borne activity (local fishermen personal communication). Very recently, another wreck tentatively dated to the fourth century B.C. has been spotted off Ras il-Wardija and, thus, not far from either Xlendi or Dwejra. Judging from the surviving remains, it appears to have been a small vessel and might have been leaving or heading towards either port (Timmy Gambin personal communication). Though possible, it is not clear whether a lead anchor stock retrieved recently (August 2002) from the sea-bed below Ras il-Wardija promontory (where the sanctuary is situated) has anything to do with this wreck or with other possible wrecks in this same area.

Enjoying good views over the sea route approaching Xlendi (Figure 32, p.170) on one side and over Dwejra itself on the other side (Figure 29 below), the Ras il-Wardija headland

accommodates the sanctuary which is seen not only from Dwejra but also from any vessel far out at sea on its way to either Dwejra or Xlendi.



Figure 29

The fifth terrace at the Ras il-Wardija Sanctuary. Seen in the background on the right is the artificial cave along with views of Dwejra inlet in the background on the left, and the rock-cut well in the foreground. The surface rock-cut features (like ‘benches’ and pavements) inside and in front of the artificial cave are now buried. (Photo: the author).

Coupled with the visibility the sanctuary enjoyed, the known shipwrecks may explain the significance of the sanctuary and of its location. The wrecks, particularly the ones concentrated at the mouth of Xlendi Bay, would seem to indicate that approaching Xlendi harbour might have not been an easy task under certain wind conditions. Caught in such conditions, aided by underwater currents generated by the reef at the mouth of the harbour, an approaching sea-vessel would have found it extremely difficult to make it to port safely. Ill-fate might have struck those infrequent vessels and their crews who, unaware of these perils, might have

sometimes found themselves trapped in such a situation. On the other hand, for the more frequently visiting vessels and their crews, more familiar with the Gozitan coast, the Dwejra port might have provided a temporary shelter until the dangerous winds calmed (Atauz 2004: 23, 28-9, 32, 66; Gambin 2005: 17).

The fear sailors often experienced on account of these or similar perils is attested by one of three lead anchor stocks retrieved from the mouth of Xlendi Bay (5.7, including Figure 69). This particular stock carries a set of four astragals (or sheep's knucklebones) mirrored on each of its arms (Gambin 2005: 18(Fig.6); *MAR* 1961: 7, wherein the astragals are mistakenly identified as undecipherable letters). On account of their association with lot casting and the reading of omens, the astragals were believed to bring good luck and, thus, used to be sometimes reproduced (in a favourable combination) on the arms of anchor stocks in the belief that such anchors would bring good luck to the sailors at sea (Brody 1998: 84, 102; Radic-Rossi 2005: 34-5). This particular anchor from Xlendi, however, does not appear to have satisfied this expectation; unless it was simply abandoned, perhaps on getting irretrievably stuck.

There could have been several factors – be they related to political, social, or economic considerations or to the site's interfacing location between land and sea – which led to the choice of the site for the location of a sanctuary. But the perils outlined above and sometimes encountered by vessels approaching Xlendi harbour might have generated the need of divine protection which could be sought from a place well visible when need arose or, else, whenever approaching or leaving harbour. As said earlier, the sanctuary could have been set up by the locals who, more than anyone else, are expected to have had good knowledge of these dangers. The selected location, on the other hand, might have been intended to put the sanctuary within sight of incoming visitors from overseas who might have also visited it in thanksgiving soon after their safe arrival and / or before their departure to invoke a safe voyage (Gambin 2005: 16-7).

A convex ceramic object with relief globules attached to its outer surface looking like a bunch of grapes (Figure 30 below, right) was recently retrieved by a sport diver from the sea-bed at

the mouth of Xlendi Bay. It shows breakage along its widest end only. This intriguing object might have originally formed part of a Heracles bearded face mask (examples of Heracles' bearded face masks in *LIMC* IV/1: 744; IV/2: 462(265, 268)). Heracles was a maritime deity invoked by mariners for their safety and well-being at sea (Brody 1998: 33-4, 38, 58, 75, 98). Ships could also be dedicated to Milqart / Heracles as their guardian deity by having his figure set up on their prows. A painting of a war ship on the wall of a sixth-fifth century B.C. Carthaginian tomb at Kef el-Blida (in Tunisia) depicts a figure – evidently, representing Milqart / Heracles – on the vessel's prow wielding his guardianship and protection to the vessel and its crew (Brody 1998: 33-4, 69, 83, 93, 98, Fig.24. Also 3.13 and Figure 17, p.95). Thus, as it comes from a maritime context, such a mask might have originally been mounted on a (later wrecked) ship where it might have enjoyed worship by those on board (below).

However, the relief globules looking much like a bunch of grapes make this object more likely to have been part of a Dionysos Botrys face mask with a beard in imitation of a bunch of grapes (Figure 30 below, left). It may date to the last centuries B.C. or to the early centuries A.D. Signifying a bunch of grapes, 'Botrys' was sometimes used as a qualification of the wine-god Dionysos, while sometimes it designated a deity of grapes linked to the cycle of Dionysos (*LIMC* III/1: 143-4; III/2: 123(2-3)). In case this object was part of such a mask, this mask might have equally been on its way to be deposited by its owner (a mariner or, perhaps, a wine-merchant) as a votive offering at the nearby sanctuary of Ras il-Wardija. But terracotta masks could be also used in rituals. In ritual contexts (particularly, those in connection with outdoor cults), such masks set up on poles or columns adorned with appropriate garments might be used as temporary representations of the deity to whom ritual offerings were made (Brody 1998: 50; Larson 2007: 135-6(Fig.10.2); Osborne 2007: 251(including Fig.7.2)-2).

To ensure divine guardianship and protection to a ship and to its crew, a deity's symbol, statue / figurine (sometimes housed in a small shrine), or even a representation of its totem animal might also be placed on board the ship. To maintain the link with their divine protector/s, seafarers were provided with cultic areas (generally, on the prow or on the stern) for worship on board the ship. Thus, representations or symbols of protective deities (as well as sacred



Figure 30

A Dionysos Botrys terracotta face mask from Delos on the left and a convex ceramic object with relief globules attached to its outer surface on the right. The latter (height: 19.5cm maximum) was retrieved from the sea-bed at the mouth of Xlendi Bay. The lack of mouth and eye openings on the former would seem to exclude use of the mask in drama performances. (Source of photo on the left: *LIMC* III/1: 143-4; III/2: 123(3). Photo on the right: the author).

standards and portable altars) might be mounted on either prow or stern (Figure 18, p.96) from where the seafarers could perform rituals in honour of the guardian deity and also to other deities who might have been deemed important for the safety and well being of the crew (Brody 1998: 20, 25-34, 37-8, 61-72, Figs.16, 18-9, 24, 65-6, 69). Therefore, it is equally possible (especially as it comes from a maritime context) that our presumed mask might have been used on board a (later wrecked) ship in the manner described above to perform rituals – possibly in honour of Heracles but, more likely, in honour of Dionysos – to secure divine

guardianship and protection, perhaps over the wine cargo and, not least, over the crew and ship itself. In our case, however, it must be pointed out that the ship might have been foreign.

4.2.6 - The sanctuary at Ras il-Wardija

Having had a look at the larger area with its individual places providing the background and context to the sanctuary site, we shall now focus on Ras il-Wardija itself and its sanctuary. The sanctuary site stands on a promontory with vertical cliffs rising some 120m above sea level. The site consists of eight terraces descending down towards the cliff edge (Figure 31 below) and a man-made quadrangular cave of around the third century B.C. with rock-cut features both inside and outside in front of it (Figure 29, p.163). A circular rock-cut cistern (with a rectangular opening) and a rectangular open basin, along with structural remains further down beyond the cave, add to the structural complex. The site is best accessed from Kerċem or from Santa Luċija.

4.2.7 - The toponym ‘Ras il-Wardija’

Also met with in connection with other places in Malta and Gozo, the name ‘Wardija’ is a corruption of the Italian word ‘*Guardia*’ which means ‘watch’. Possibly of Medieval origins, the toponym indicates a look-out post or guard station (Zammit Ciantar 2000: 75, 113). All places named ‘Wardija’ or whose toponyms include ‘Wardija’ are strategically located on hilltops or promontories from where one could easily watch or guard over the surrounding area or nearby coast.

The toponym ‘Ras il-Wardija’ is sometimes also indicated in its English version as ‘Wardija Point’. ‘*Ras*’ (‘point’ or ‘cape’) would refer to the headland on which a look-out post (‘*Guardia*’ / ‘*Wardija*’) might have once stood. Remains of a tower (not pre-dating the Knights’ period) are visible to this day on the highest part of Ras il-Wardija. The wide and unobstructed views enjoyed from the promontory would confirm the potential offered by the place for watch purposes. This same visual potential offered by Ras il-Wardija appears to have

been exploited in the earlier Classical times even if not in direct association with watch practices.

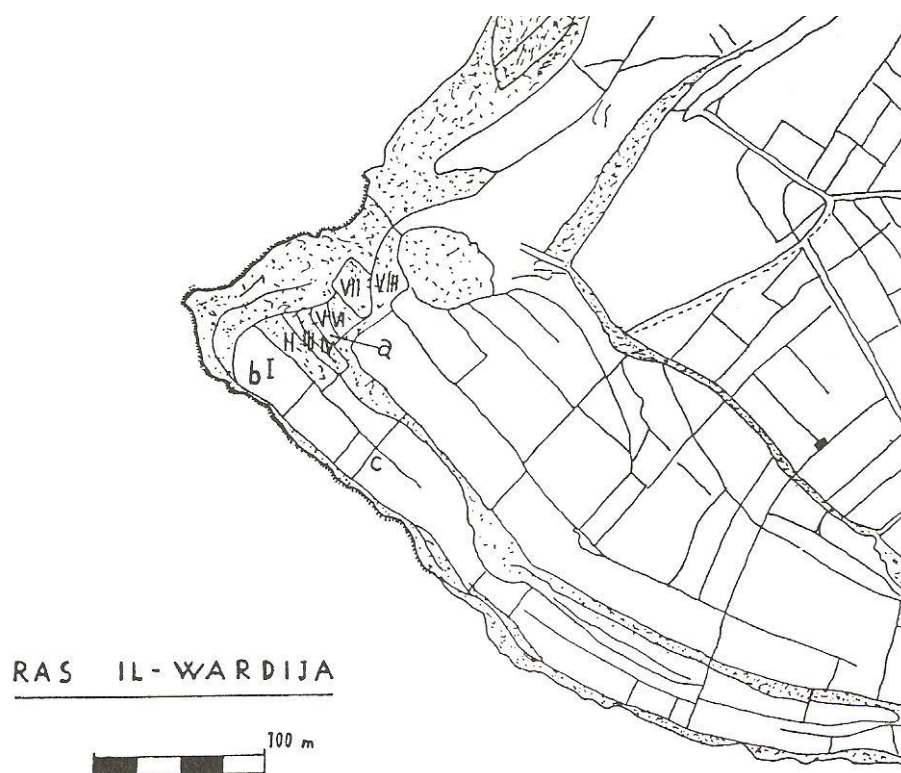


Figure 31

Location map of Ras il-Wardija. The sanctuary's eight terraces are numbered I-VIII on the promontory.

(Source: *MISSIONE* 1965: Fig.11).

4.2.8 - Origins and development of the sanctuary

With the exception of the first and fifth, the other terraces of the sanctuary site did not yield any material evidence either by way of rock-cut features, built structures, or significant amounts of ceramics. The sanctuary at Ras il-Wardija seems to have been a terraced sanctuary with, essentially, a stone-built structure on the first terrace (lowest) probably serving as the temple of the sanctuary and a rock-cut cave complex on the fifth terrace. It was in use between the third century B.C. and the second century A.D.; possibly, even as late as the fourth century A.D. (*MISSIONE* 1965: 168-76; 1966: 125-37, 141-2, 147-51, 164, 168, 177, 180; 1967: 81, 87, 110, 123, 133; 1968: 93).

Without excluding mere coincidence, the recent identification of a *c.* fourth century B.C. shipwreck off Ras il-Wardija promontory in Gozo (Gambin personal communication), where the sanctuary of around that same period (or slightly later) is situated, may suggest a possible link between this shipwreck and the erection or foundation of the mentioned sanctuary on the overlooking promontory. Such a possible link might have been either by way of commemoration of the shipwreck (2.11), marking a dangerous area (as confirmed by the presence of the shipwreck itself) (2.11), or setting up a sanctuary in thanksgiving or fulfillment of a vow by any survivors of the wrecked vessel (2.11). Though possible, it is not clear whether a lead anchor stock retrieved recently (August 2002) from the sea-bed below Ras il-Wardija promontory (where the sanctuary is situated) has anything to do with this wreck or with other possible wrecks in this same area.

Nonetheless, the terraced promontory where the sanctuary stands (Figure 32 below) seems to have been purposely selected. Occupying an area of around 5000m² and situated on a high promontory, the sanctuary assumes the nature of a ‘high place’, visually dominating the sea and the adjacent coastline, while itself is quite visible from far out at sea. As shown, the sanctuary is terraced and occupies eight terraces sloping down towards the cliff edge and in the direction of the sea. These terraces are partly natural and partly artificially levelled (*MISSIONE* 1965: 167, 188, 195, Fig.11; 1966: 125, 133-7, 141; 1967: 81, 90-1; 1968: 93, 104, 114). Such a terrace arrangement may perhaps recall the more magnificent terrace complexes of sanctuaries known from the contemporary Mediterranean world (Horsnaes 2002: 233).

On the first and lowest terrace, near the cliff edge, what might have been a quadrangular structure was built (Figure 33, p.172). Its surviving remains occupy an area of around 169m². This structure was orientated east – west and was built of dry Globigerina stone blocks cut in various forms and dimensions. Both its internal and external wall surfaces seem to have been covered with fine plaster, as fragments of this were found both inside and outside what remained of the structure. This would give the impression of an elegantly decorated – and, hence, important – building. Moreover, some sort of practices involving the use of fire might have taken place inside the building and, possibly, outside too. This was suggested by the

presence of ashes found both inside and outside the building during excavation. The rock floor inside the building was also reddened by fire, while traces of a hearth were also found outside.

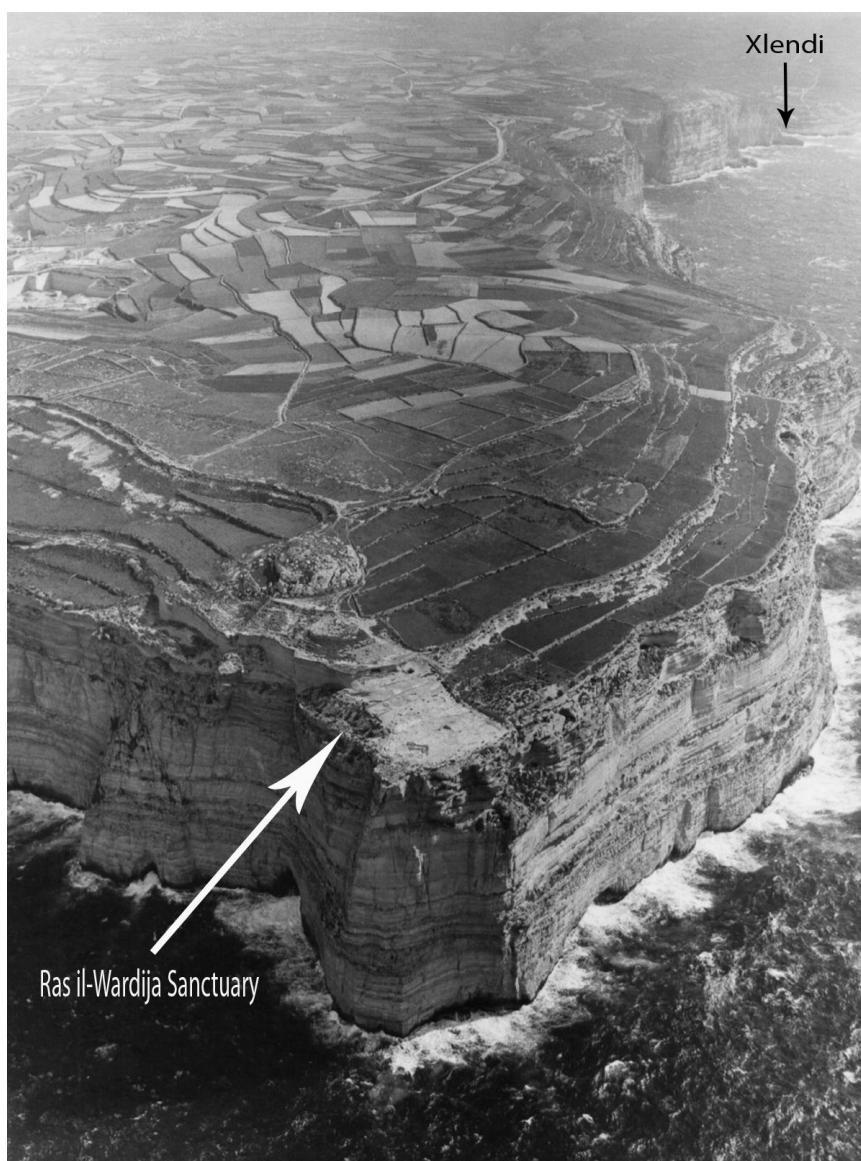


Figure 32

Ras il-Wardija promontory. The terraced sanctuary is arrowed in the foreground while Xlendi is slightly visible to the right in the background. Air photo probably taken in the 1960s or early 1970s. (Courtesy: National Archives, Gozo Section).

This structure might have served as a temple, possibly roofless. It might have also contained plastered altars or supports for *ex voto* offerings. What the excavators labelled as an offering table lay outside the structure and in front of its entrance's threshold to the east. With its two

circular perforated cavities – perhaps to take libation offerings – and what could have been a stone bench next to it, it closely resembled the two others on the fifth terrace (below), while it might also recall similar features in the Maltese prehistoric temples. In addition to its possible function as an offering table, it might have also served – together with the stone slabs adjacent to it – as an entrance’s threshold of an enclosure wall or *temenos* with which the entire ‘temple’ structure may have been surrounded. However, this enclosure wall could have also been the outer wall of a portico (or portico-like structure) surrounding the possible roofless space (the ‘temple’) in the middle which might have contained altars or supports for *ex voto* offerings (above). As suggested by remnants of a mortar pavement (which could not be attributed to the ‘temple’ if its floor was provided by the natural rock surface), there might have been another building or buildings on the first terrace. This building or buildings might have been auxiliary to the ‘temple’ (*MISSIONE* 1965: 173-6, 195; 1966: 147-51; 1967: 81-2, 87, 96-106, 111, 124, 134; 1968: 87-90, 94, 104, 114).

In later times, the ‘temple’ building appears to have undergone restorations and structural renewal, employing smaller and irregularly-shaped stones, while its internal walls may have been plastered anew (*MISSIONE* 1965: 174; 1967: 97, 99, 105, 111).

Also on the same terrace, there is evidence of quarrying. Stone blocks and slabs might have been extracted from here for the nearby sanctuary structure/s on the same terrace (*MISSIONE* 1966: 145-7).

Further up, a quadrangular room, measuring 5.60m by 4.60m, was cut into the rock-face overlooking the fifth terrace (Figures 34-5, pp.174-5). This room or artificial cave was orientated east – west, with its wide-open entrance facing the sea to the west (*MISSIONE* 1965: 168, 195; 1966: 126).

More features were cut into the walls and on the floor inside the room as well as on the floor outside and in front of the room. Five large niches were cut into its three walls and were surmounted with features in imitation of architectural mouldings. A rock-cut U-shaped ‘bench’ and pavement ran along the three walls of the room, leaving a ‘passage’ in the middle and

oriented towards the room's entrance. This 'passage' extended outside and beyond the room's entrance where it perpendicularly intersected an external passage flanked by pavements and 'benches' on both of its sides and running parallel to the room's facade. The last-mentioned

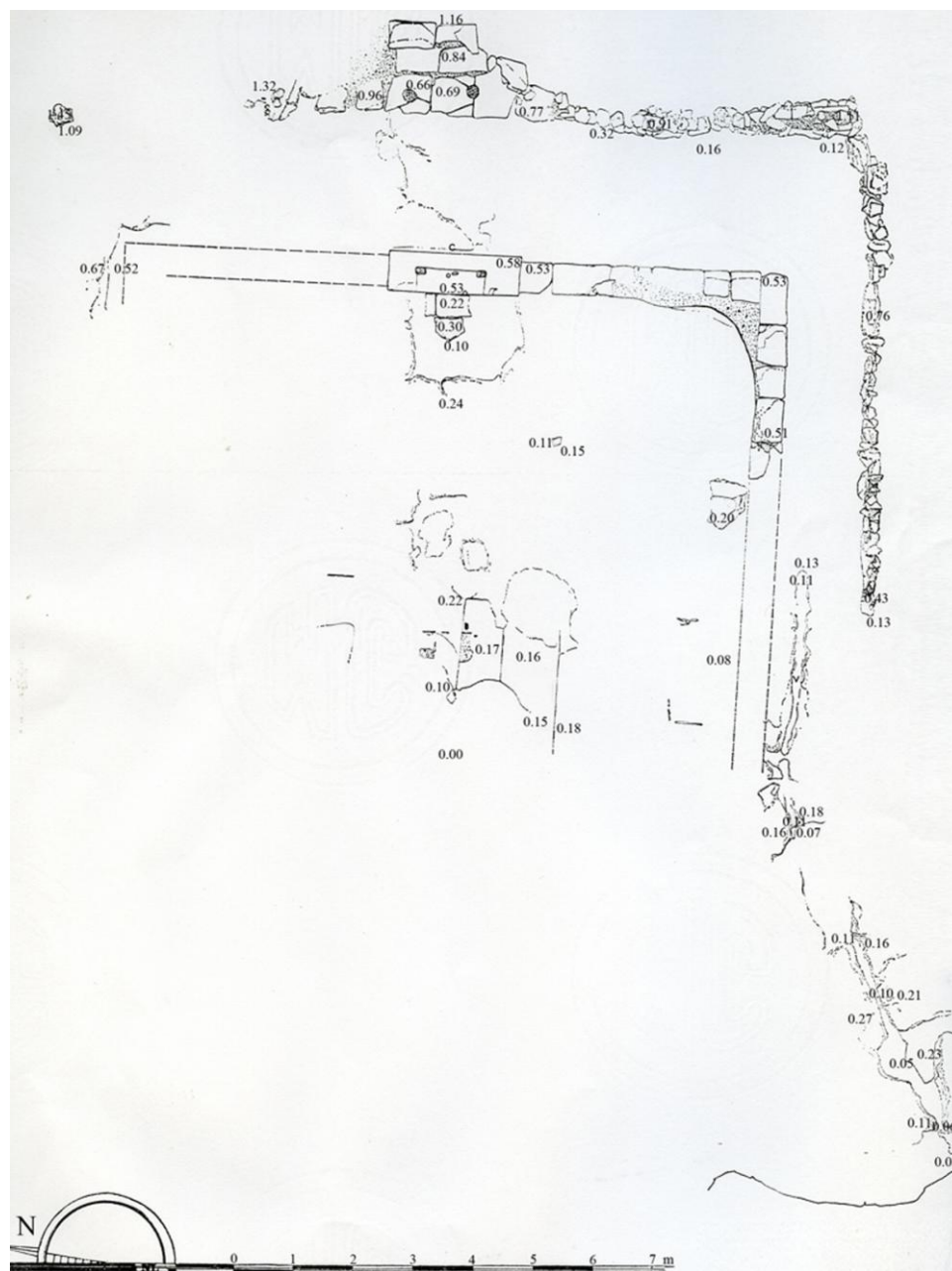


Figure 33
Plan of the 'temple' remains at the Ras il-Wardija Sanctuary. They are to be found on the first terrace of the sanctuary complex. Level readings are given in metres at various points on the plan. (After *MISSIONE* 1968: Fig.9).

external passage was intersected almost at its centre inasmuch as the room itself was likewise cut almost in the middle of the rock-face. As suggested by surviving plaster fragments, the external pavements might have been levelled either with plaster or with stone slabs on a plaster bedding (*MISSIONE* 1965: 168-171, 195; 1966: 127-8, 130, 132, 141-2, 165, 168, 178, 180).

A very striking parallel to our rock-cut room or artificial cave on the fifth terrace is provided by the cult caves in the sanctuary of Poseidon near the Isthmus of Corinth (Greece). Although, unlike the one at Ras il-Wardija, they are natural caves, these are equipped with rock-cut couches and were used as banqueting rooms for the communal feasts of a cult group dedicated to Melikertes/Palaimon and to Dionysos in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. The ‘hall’ set-up with couches for banqueting seems to highlight the interaction between ritual practice and architecture (Mylonopoulos 2006: 79-80).

Seemingly recalling the reclining couches seen in a *triclinium* or dining room set-up, the rock-cut U-shaped ‘bench’ inside the artificial cave at Ras il-Wardija may have also accommodated communal feasts or banquets. As the latter were a common – yet not exclusive – feature of Dionysiac cults, one might consider a cult of Dionysos (or, perhaps, even its Punic counterpart Shadrappa) among those practised at Ras il-Wardija (also 4.2.5 above in connection with the possible Dionysos Botrys face mask). And as at the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore on the Akrokorinth (at Corinth, Greece) (Mylonopoulos 2006: 80), the ‘banqueting’ cave on the fifth terrace impressively dominates the ‘temple’ structure on the first terrace down below to the extent that the communal feasts possibly undertaken inside the cave might have surpassed the other ritual activities.

What the excavators termed as an offering table with two conical cavities on its surface was set up on the southern side of the cave, next to its entrance. A quadrangular socket – perhaps to hold a cult object in front of which offerings could have been placed on the ‘offering table’ – was cut on the table’s rear. Another rectangular socket to the east of the other might have held a stela (*MISSIONE* 1966: 128-9). Then, on the southern side of the westernmost and external extension of the ‘passage’ which originated inside the room, lay what might have been a

sacrificial altar next to a small rectangular basin. This basin might have been fed with water through a small rock-cut canal on its southern side (*MISSIONE* 1965: 171-2; 1966: 131, 141, 165, 178).

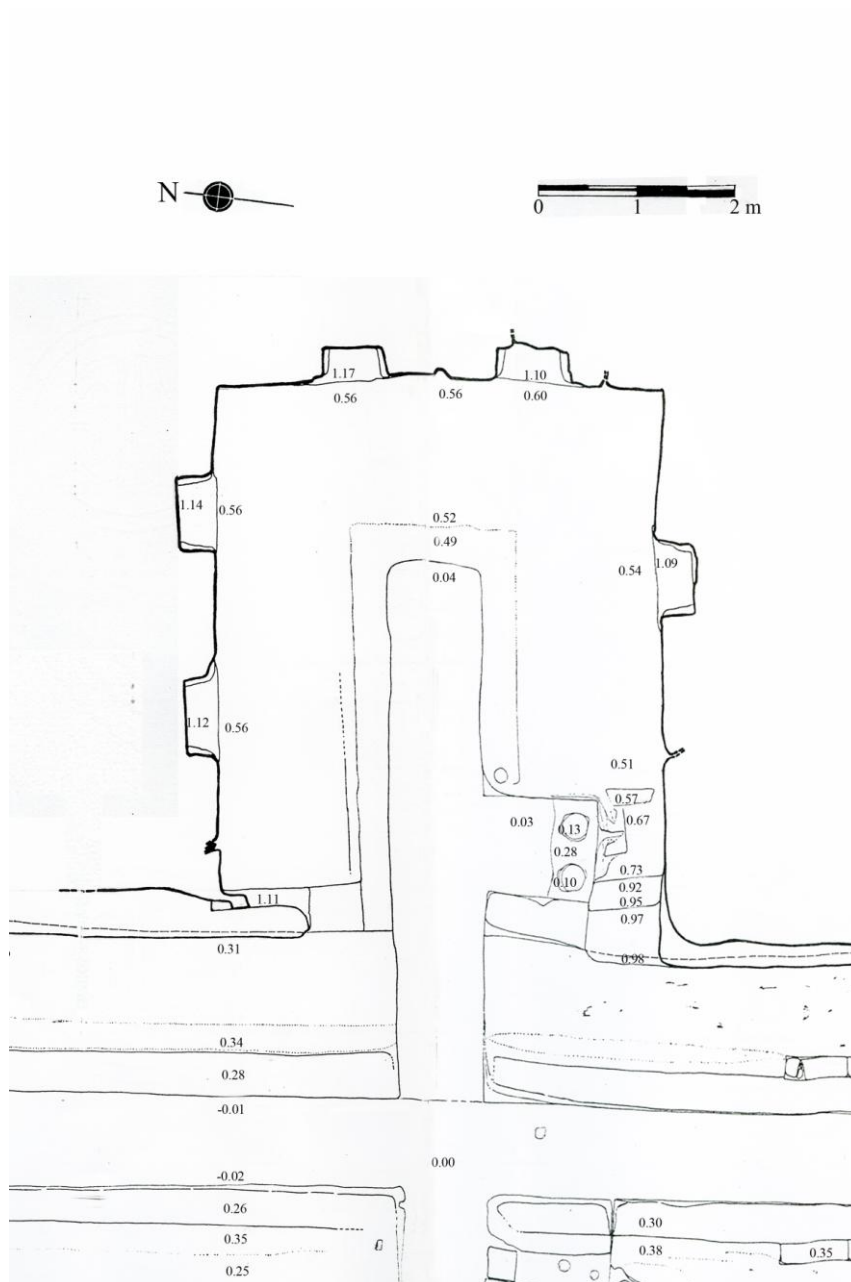


Figure 34

Plan of the artificial cave at the Ras il-Wardija Sanctuary. It is to be found on the fifth terrace and has an internal U-shaped rock-cut bench. Different levels are given in metres at various points on the plan. (After *MISSIONE* 1966: Fig.8).

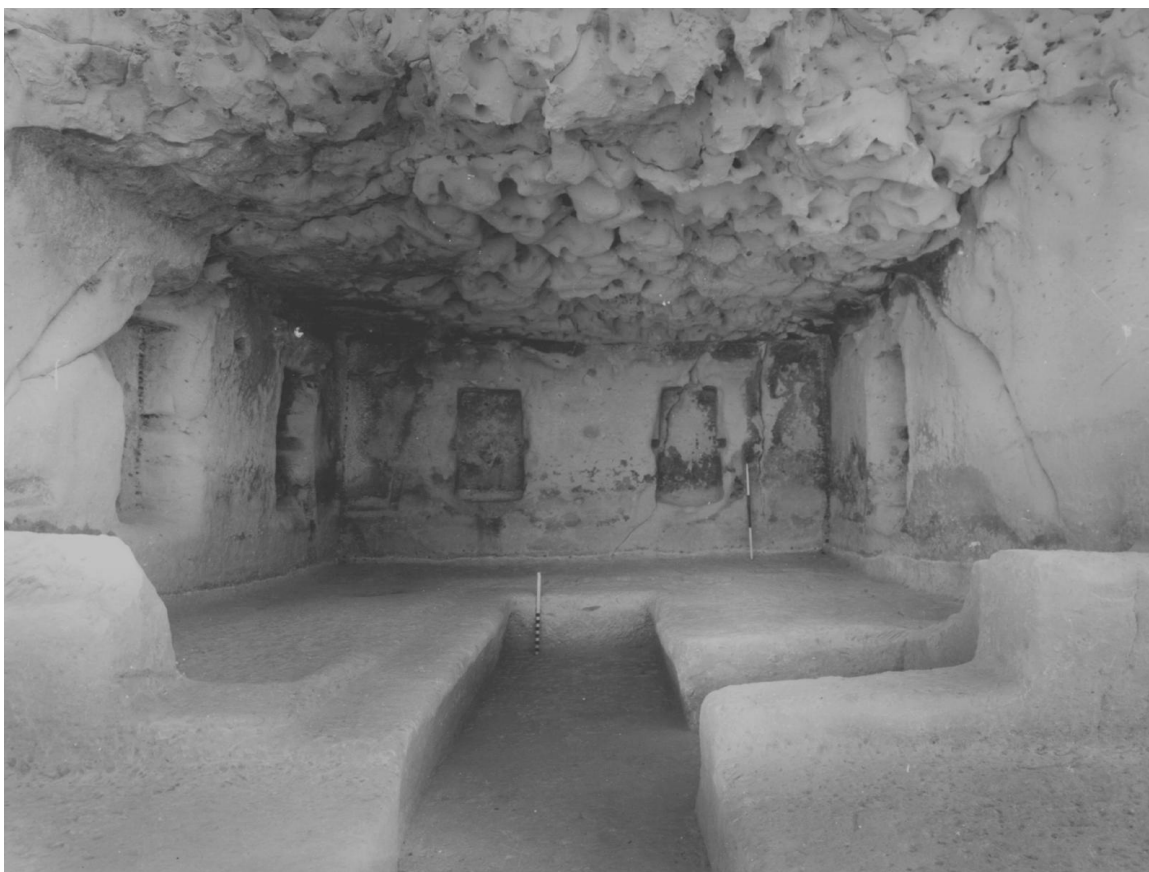


Figure 35

The interior of the artificial cave at Ras il-Wardija. The rock-cut U-shaped ‘bench’ running along the walls evidently recalls a *triclinium* set-up. Photo taken during excavations in the 1960s. (Courtesy: National Archives, Gozo Section).

Further south, beyond the external passage, a large basin or pool (Figure 36, below) with an internal flight of steps reaching down to its bottom, was cut at an unknown precise date perhaps for ritual bathing or immersion (possibly of initiates). This function seems to be suggested by the basin’s or pool’s location before one reaches the heart of the sacred area on the fifth terrace (also below). At a likewise unknown later stage, the pool was enlarged. To the west of the southern half of the external passage, a bell-shaped well was dug. It has a rectangular opening with a raised border. At an unknown later stage, this well was also widened and deepened. As on the first terrace, the rock surface in the surrounding area of the well (on the fifth terrace) shows signs of rock extraction in the form of (detached) rectangular

stone blocks. Similar signs of rock extraction make their appearance also on the third and fourth terraces. Whether this rock extraction was contemporary to the sanctuary was repeatedly questioned by the excavators (*MISSIONE* 1966: 130, 133-7, 165-7, 178-9; 1967: 82-5, 88-90, 124, 133). To the west of the northern half of the external passage, the rock surface seems to have been adapted to accommodate a ramp joining the fifth terrace to the fourth terrace below (*MISSIONE* 1966: 133-5; 1967: 88, 91). On the other hand, the fifth terrace is likely to have joined the sixth above through a ramp on its southernmost extent, passing first along the western side of the large basin or pool and, then, turning eastwards beyond the basin or pool. This same ramp might have also been itself the main entrance to the sacred area focused on the central and southern parts of the fifth terrace, comprising the basin or pool, the well, the cave, the possible offering tables, and the possible sacrificial altar (*MISSIONE* 1966: 135-6; 1968: 92-3, 105, 115).

In later times, the ‘benches’ and pavements flanking the external passage running parallel to the room’s facade might have also undergone re-plastering as suggested by fragments of plaster datable to an unknown later period (*MISSIONE* 1965: 172; 1966: 132). Another ‘offering table’ with two conical cavities and similar to the one in the room was also later added – possibly, during the first century A.D. – along with an additional short passage at the southernmost end of the external passage (*MISSIONE* 1966: 130, 142). Restorations also appear to have been undertaken in unknown later stages. A small rectangular stone block forming part of the bench at the southernmost end of the external passage might have been inserted there to restore the mutilated bench (*MISSIONE* 1966: 131-2). On the other hand, centuries later – perhaps, in modern times – the ‘passage’ inside the room was paved with Globigerina stone slabs of various forms and dimensions. Also in more recent times, three figures with uplifted arms were engraved inside one of the niches and on the wall between two other niches inside the room (*MISSIONE* 1965: 169-70; 1966: 126-7, 141-2, Plate 83).

Activity at Ras il-Wardija – particularly that related to rock-cut or built structures – seems to have been focused on the first and fifth terraces. The presence of architectural elements like column fragments – albeit surviving only in a small number – seems to confirm the presence of ‘monumental’ structures (Figure 37 below). In association with this activity, use was made of



Figure 36

The terraces at the Ras il-Wardija Sanctuary. The large basin or pool (3.50m by 3.25m) on the fifth terrace is seen in the foreground on the right and the well is visible further behind. These overlook the other terraces all the way down to the first terrace by the edge of the promontory seen in the background. (Photo: the author).

pottery vessels which, in their majority, were apparently commonly in use during the third-second centuries B.C. Later activity on the site also employed ceramic vessels of the first and second centuries A.D.; possibly, even of a fourth century A.D. date. Also in use were a number of small portable stone basins. These might have served as small portable offering-tables in connection with votive offerings. In fact, they might have been a simpler version of a type of small portable offering-tables like those used in the Fazzān region in Libya (Mattingly & Edwards 2003: 199(Fig.6.22a), 210-2, 222). Seventeen such basins are still preserved in the reserve collection of the Gozo Museum of Archaeology. Having been found all deposited in the fifth terrace's pool, they might have been deposited there as part of the sanctuary's ritual closure when both sanctuary and pool went out of use, at the same time, keeping them within



Figure 37

The ‘temple’ remains on the first terrace of the Ras il-Wardiya Sanctuary. They can be seen in the foreground, facing uphill towards the artificial cave on the fifth terrace. (Photo: the author).

the same sacred precinct and preventing their re-use (*MISSIONE* 1965: 168-75; 1966: 125-42, 147-51, 164; 1967: 85-6, 92-4, 104-5, 107-10, 123-4, 133-4, Plate 60; 1968: 92, 94). But as significant accumulations of objects (especially if concentrated in small areas) in votive or ritual contexts might indicate production rather than religious activity (Gleba 2009: 78, 81) and as suggested by signs of stone extraction on the first, third, fourth, and fifth terraces, these stone basins might have also been surviving products of a workshop associated with the sanctuary. Sanctuary workshops, in fact, are known from elsewhere in the Mediterranean world, possibly, including also Tas-Silġ and Għar ix-Xiħ (4.1.6 above and 4.4.10 below).

4.2.9 - The Ras il-Wardija Sanctuary: interpretation

Sacred landscapes are often perceived and experienced in particular ways. This might render their understanding and interpretation all the more unique. The following is an attempt to understand the Ras il-Wardija sacred landscape and the ways in which it was experienced and how it was perceived. This is done in the light of a broader contextual background incorporating the Mediterranean region in order to, ultimately, come forward with proposed interpretations.

4.2.10 - The sanctuary at Ras il-Wardija: relationship between the sanctuary and the physical form of the landscape

With their building of the sanctuary complex down the natural terrace at Ras il-Wardija, the people responsible for it might have been seeking to formalise, materialise, and make explicit a symbolic relationship between the landscape they knew of and themselves as a (religious) community. On similar lines, the construction of the sanctuary might have also highlighted another symbolic relationship between the sanctuary itself and the naturally terraced landscape. At the same time, the construction of the sanctuary complex down the natural terrace may have emphasised the cultural significance of the naturally terraced landscape. In so doing, the construction of the sanctuary also established a material, tangible, and enduring relationship between the ritual practices enacted there and the terraced landscape, while freezing the latter in time (as in Tilley 1996: 167).

The manipulation and development of the natural terrace might have been intended not only to create formal surfaces accommodating activities like dining and gatherings, but also to cater for a growing number of people. The latter might bring to the fore the possibility of social differentiation both in terms of access to certain spaces and also in the overall use of space (as in Morgan 1994: 125-6).

The first and fifth terraces may have provided the stage for the main activities undertaken at the sanctuary. The rest of the terraces, on the other hand, might have provided the stage for

subsidiary activities like processions. But apart from these terraces, the passages (particularly those outside the cave) might have also witnessed processions along them. According to the site's excavators, the passages' narrow width could have restricted the procession participants to proceed one after the other in a single row, while the 'benches' and the pavements beyond them may have accommodated spectators: seated on the 'benches' and others standing on the pavements behind (*MISSIONE* 1966: 166, 178). The terraces themselves too might have served a similar function (apart from that of providing stage for processions), especially when spectators were in great numbers. This tiered arrangement of spectators may have enhanced their observation and visual experience of the ritual performance: in this case, the procession. Likewise, it may have enhanced the communicative potential of the procession. Tiered arrangements for spectators – even if on a larger scale than that or those at the Ras il-Wardija sanctuary – are especially (but not exclusively) frequent in sanctuaries of Dionysos and of Demeter and Kore like those in Corinth, in Lykosoura, and in Pergamon (Mylonopoulos 2006: 94-7).

Together with the passages for procession participants and the related tiered arrangements for the spectators, the basin or pool on the same terrace may have also been integral to the experience of the sanctuary site on account of any rites – like purification rites – it may have been associated with. And, through the enacted rituals, processions, and pilgrimages, this experience of the sanctuary site itself may have also extended into that of the surrounding landscape (as in Ghey 2007: 26).

4.2.11 - Regulating relations through ritual

One of the main roles of ritual is that of regulating relations between humans and divine beings (Morgan 1994: 107-8). Already the isolated location of the sanctuary, on a high and liminal 'unpolluted' place, might have secured the ritual cleanliness often demanded of sacred spaces (as in Guettel Cole 1994: 216). On the other hand, the mobilisation of the nearby community or communities for ritual activities in the sanctuary may have served to increase the cohesion of the social groups (of which the community or communities was / were composed) or, equally,

the social power of certain individuals or groups through the common activities which the rituals may have involved (as in Jost 1994: 229).

Ritual sacrifices or offerings taking place in the ‘temple’ on the first terrace may have been perceived as a pathway to make contact with the divine. On the other hand, the subsequent communal meals that may have taken place inside the cave on the fifth terrace may have reached a communicative climax as they intensified contact among the community members partaking in the meal and, thus, also confirmed their common identity perhaps by exclusion of any outsiders or certain social groups like slaves, women, or non-citizens / non-local people (as in Mylonopoulos 2006: 70, 77, 79, 83-4).

Perhaps rather than boundaries, the terraces themselves with their walls could have created a ritual topography with pathways through which the community members moved around, perhaps in processions, went into or out of places like the cave on the fifth terrace or the ‘temple’ on the first terrace, congregated, and dispersed. Therefore, such formal patterns of movement did not only link the ritual components of the sanctuary complex itself. They also brought the community members into a sort of relationship which shaped their ritual experience through both their encounter with the sanctuary itself and their communal ritual performance there. In a sense, the power of certain rites may have derived precisely from their enactment within or around the sanctuary complex. Thus, both sanctuary itself (as a sacred space) and ritual might have been central to the way they, as a community, perceived themselves, their roles, and attached meaning to them. In other words, their perception of who they were and what was expected of them might have been shaped by – and, to a certain extent, might have also shaped – their participation in the rituals (as in Edmonds 1999: 7-8, 134, 145; Mylonopoulos 2006: 70, 109).

4.2.12 - Materiality and durability

The sanctuary at Ras il-Wardija seems to have remained in use for a relatively short span of centuries, especially when compared to the Tas-Silġ sanctuary (4.1.13-7) and, perhaps, even when compared to the ones at Ras ir-Raġeb (4.3.6, 9) and at Għar ix-Xiħ (4.4.9-11). No precise

explanation can be given. However, they could have been the site's own enduring material qualities (or the site's very materiality) – the fact that, for its greatest part, the site consists of rock-cut rather than built features – which may have constrained subsequent alterations and, thus, hindered a longer use. In simpler terms, because of the nature of its materiality, the site may have not been deemed worth remodelling to conform to newly-arising demands. It does not necessarily mean that resources or the organisational infrastructure did not exist. But, on the other hand, it might have been very costly and, in certain instances, perhaps physically very difficult to modify rock-cut features. This situation may have rendered the lack of adaptation tolerable only for a while but not for too many centuries (as in Wandsnider 2004: 77).

The material qualities of the Ras il-Wardija site have, therefore, affected the durability of the site's use but, likewise, affected the human activities taking place there. After the creation of the sanctuary, the site was maintained and used for an unknown duration of time; presumably, a relatively short one. But when the site as a working / worshipping and living space could no longer accommodate human activities and no alterations could be made, it is very likely to have been no longer maintained and, thus, was left to decay (as in Wandsnider 2004: 78). In this way, the site's material qualities may have been responsible – or, at least, were among those factors responsible – for the presumed relatively short life-span of both human activity on site and of the site itself.

4.2.13 - Visual domination of the seascape

Considering its altitude and extreme exposure to natural elements, particularly the winds, the Ras il-Wardija site cannot be imagined to have attracted any permanent settlements. Yet, due to its particular location, it dominates the seascape from where it can be seen for miles around. It seems, therefore, that visibility was a crucial factor in the choice of the sanctuary location.

Another factor which may have contributed towards the visibility of the sanctuary site could have been the possible monumentality of the 'temple' structure on the first terrace. If the sanctuary site was meant to be seen, particularly from far out at sea, the possible monumentality of the 'temple' structure not only dominated the sanctuary's seascape but also

rendered the sanctuary site more visible (as in Bradley 2000: 106). As visual experiences are crucial to the experience of place (Van Dyke and Alcock 2003: 6), the sanctuary appears to have been meant to be seen in order to be eventually visited.

But apart from enabling the sanctuary site to be seen from far out at sea, another factor, namely the significant height of the cliffs on which the sanctuary itself stands, seems to reflect the earth – heavens cosmic axis. This height renders the sanctuary on top of the cliffs not only awe inspiring and visually impressive but, perhaps more significantly, it relates the sanctuary to the skies towards which it (i.e. the height of the cliffs) points up. As they are the domain of the spirit powers, the skies always tend to be culturally and emotionally privileged (Tilley 2004: 6).

4.3.1 - RAS IR-RAĦEB: A LANDMARK ON THE WEST COAST OF MALTA

In a very similar way to Ras il-Wardija in Gozo, Ras ir-Raħeb is located on another promontory on the western coast of Malta. It is likewise situated by the cliff edge, rising some 61m above sea level. The site hosts the remains of a structure built of large ashlar masonry datable to the Classical period. Nonetheless, it incorporates megaliths from an evidently earlier structure occupying the same site in prehistoric times. The entire structure is surrounded by a wall which may have served as a terrace or a boundary wall. On the basis of both structural evidence and the material retrieved, the site seems to have been of a religious nature and shows evidence of probable occupation already from prehistoric times until around the fourth century A.D. This occupation, however, need not have been continuous. The surrounding region too had been inhabited – perhaps, at varying degrees of intensity – since prehistoric down to present times.

A number of places in the Ras ir-Raħeb region shed light on human occupation in the same region. But, unfortunately, the site does not shed light on itself to the same degree, not least because of the way in which it was unsystematically and unscientifically investigated by a Royal Navy team in 1961-2. So much so, that certain scholars like Bonanno and Buhagiar still question its real nature (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 322-3; Buhagiar 1988: 69-72).

As in the previous two case studies, the first part below will focus on the region and its people with their settlements and occupations, while the second part will concentrate on the site itself and on what might have been going on there. In both parts, the data are derived from mainly primary sources. The third and final part will be devoted to a synthesis in order to provide the basis for interpretation. This interpretation aims to incorporate the site within a wider regional context – both local but especially Mediterranean.

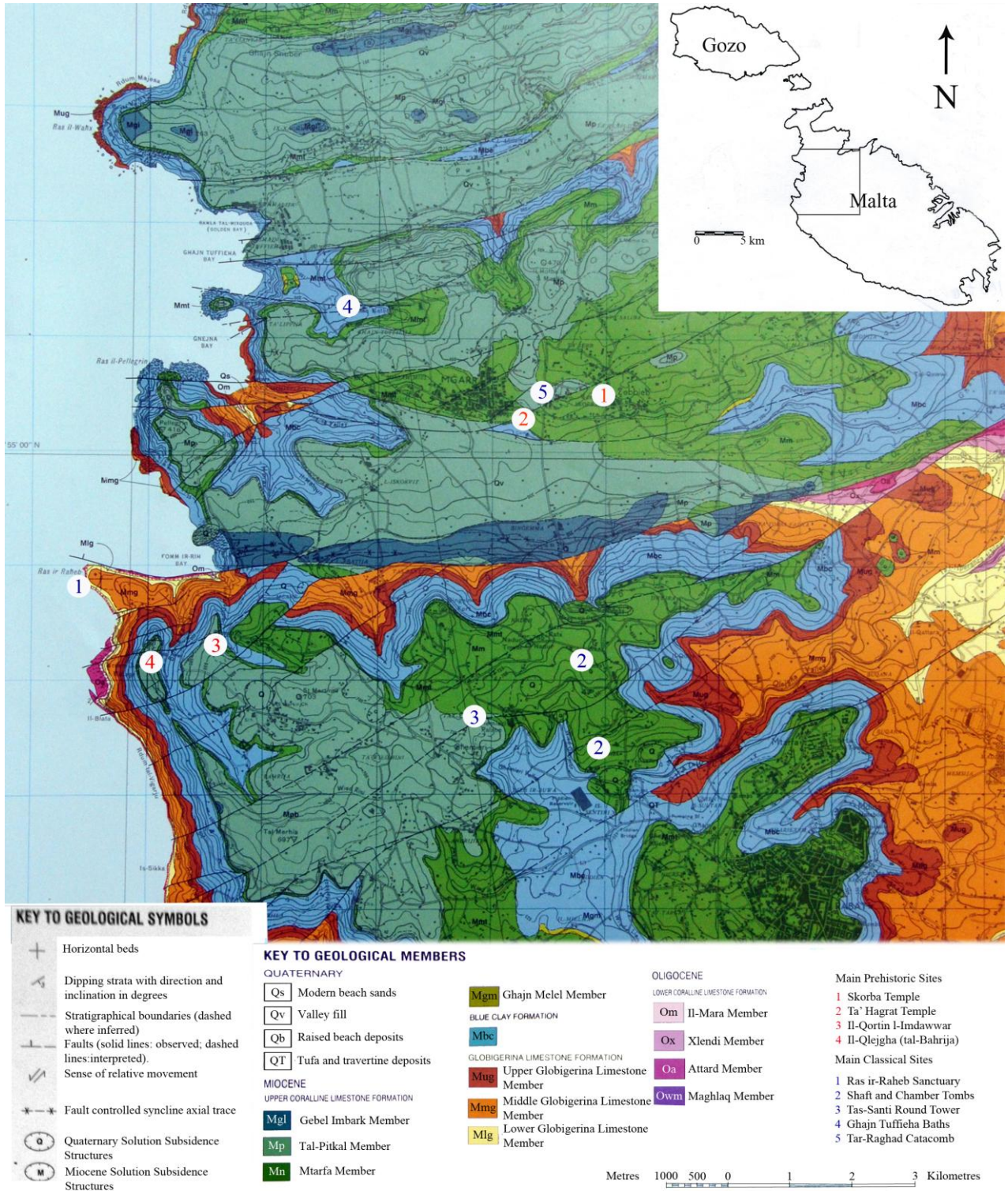


Figure 38

Map of north-western Malta. It shows the distribution of the main sites mentioned in the text. (Source: Geological Map of the Maltese islands: Sheet 1, Oil Exploration Directorate, Malta (1993)).

4.3.2 - Ras ir-Raheb region: extent and topography

Ras ir-Raheb lies on a well-marked-out promontory on the western coast of Malta (Figure 38 above). The coastal terrain south of the promontory is largely inaccessible, rendering landing from anywhere along this coastal stretch difficult. The region is, therefore, much better accessed (from the sea) through any one of the inlets which, stretching northwards of the promontory, include the closest Fomm ir-Riĥ Bay, then, Ġnejna, Ġhajn Tuffieħa, and Golden Bays.

Compared to other regions in the Maltese islands (including those dealt with in the previous two case studies) the Ras ir-Raheb inland region does not show evidence of extensive human occupation – other than for agricultural purposes – at least in recent times. The closest settlement is Mġarr village and the nearby hamlets of Żebbiegħ and Baħrija. Other settlements are located beyond a 3km-radius. Yet the surrounding landscape is rich in fertile soils – particularly, Terra Rossa soils – spread on wide Upper Coralline plateaus and fed by a number of valleys, making the region (including its northern extent) the best agricultural area in Malta to this day. Blue Clay deposits also contribute to the fertility of the area besides having presumably supplied, in the past, one of the prime materials commonly sought after for the manufacture of utensils and vessels in daily use.

The Blue Clay deposits, in particular, explain the presence of fresh water resources which abound in the region. The impermeability of the clay creates overlying water storage which is extracted either through purposely-dug wells or through lateral water-galleries. In fact, these water extraction devices are seen here in relatively great numbers (4.3.5 below).

Whether intentional or not, the site on the Ras ir-Raheb promontory enjoys visual links with the sites at both Ras il-Wardija and Għar ix-Xiĥ (the following case study), respectively on the south-west and south coast of Gozo. Like these two, it is a coastal site and, similarly to the Ras il-Wardija site, it lies on a pronounced promontory.

4.3.3 - Human settlement and religious activity in the Ras ir-Raheb region

The region under review hosted one of the earliest known settlements in Malta. In fact, the site of Skorba in the limits of the village of Żebbiegħ was occupied as early as c.5000 B.C. (Għar Dalam phase) by people with a culture comparable to those contemporarily occupying Għar Dalam in the south-east of Malta and Għajn Abdul caves in Gozo. Here, at Skorba, these earliest people practised agriculture, producing crops like emmer wheat and barley. The Skorba settlement was to remain in occupation throughout subsequent prehistoric phases to as late as the Tarxien Cemetery phase (*MAR* 1961: 1-4, Figs.1-2, Plates I-IV; 1962: 3-5, Figs.1-3, Plates 1-3; 1963: 2-3, Fig.1, Plate 1; Trump 1966).

As early as the Red Skorba phase (c.4400-4100 B.C.), the inhabitants of the settlement were already making use of shrines in connection with some sort of religious practices, but it was later – in the Ġgantija phase (c.3600-3200 B.C.) – that a monumental temple (the West Temple) was to make its appearance on the site. Later, during the Tarxien phase, a second temple (the East Temple) was added alongside it. This second temple was to remain in use until the Tarxien Cemetery phase when it fell into ruin while the first one was partially re-used (Evans 1971: 36-9; Trump 1966: 2-14). This phenomenon of the re-use (in the Bronze Age) of an earlier religious building has already been noted at Borġ in-Nadur in the south-east region of Malta (4.1.5).

At the same time as the temples at Skorba were erected (in the Ġgantija phase) or, possibly, even a bit earlier (but always in the same phase), another religious complex composed of two connected temples made its appearance not far away, at Ta' Hāgrat, on the limits of the village of Mġarr. Likewise, this complex was built on a site already occupied before the Ġgantija phase and remained in use throughout subsequent phases (Evans 1971: 30-5).

Another possible centre of religious activity might have been provided by the Temple period 'apsidal building' at Il-Qortin l-Imdawwar (Rdum l-Imdawwar) between the hamlet of Baħrija and Fomm ir-Riħ Bay. However, there might have been other activities, perhaps rather

agricultural in nature like crushing and grinding, taking place there. Domestic animals as well as both land and marine shells may have been consumed or given as offerings; or both (Buhagiar 2008: 366-7; Evans 1971: 109; *MAR* 1938-9: VI-IX).

4.3.4 - Settlements: location preferences

Besides the places mentioned above, caves in the Ras ir-Raheb region also seem to have provided a suitable place for settlement purposes. They served this purpose till late Medieval and early Modern times and a great number of them are often to be found at the base of cliffs surrounding plateaus or on valley sides. They were either adapted from natural ones or entirely man-made.

To counter newly arising demands, caves were often enlarged or modified at different times. Examples are to be found on the western side of Santi valley where they are cut into an Upper Coralline stratum known as 'Mtarfa Member' which is even easier to quarry than the relatively soft Globigerina Limestone (Buhagiar 2008: 362-4). Not far from the old St Martin's chapel in Bahrija, a circular subsidence structure provided the setting for another cave settlement taking advantage of the shelter offered by this natural depression (Buhagiar 2008: 368-9).

But perhaps more relevant to the Ras ir-Raheb site, are a number of caves located at the foot of the cliffs – particularly those facing east and west – surrounding the nearby raised plateau known as 'Il-Qlejgħa (tal-Bahrija)' (Figure 39 below) close to Fomm ir-Riħ Bay to its north. One particular cave on the north-west side of this plateau was possibly inhabited since the prehistoric Tarxien phase until later times (Buhagiar 2008: 369-70, 373; *MAR* 1959-60: 5).

Not any less significant is the Late Bronze Age settlement on top of the same raised plateau. Perhaps purposely selected on account of the cliffs surrounding it, this was a naturally-defended settlement. The inhabitants of this settlement may have produced textiles but their main occupation seems to have been agriculture. They also seem to have made quite an extensive use of bronze. At least six grain storage pits of around this period were, at a later date, interconnected to form two cave units apparently for dwelling purposes, showing that this

plateau may have remained in occupation afterwards too (Buhagiar 2008: 370-1; Evans 1971: 105-7; *MAR* 1909-10: IV-V; 1959-60: 4-5).

Whether the prehistoric settlement on top of the Il-Qlejgħa (tal-Baħrija) raised plateau and any possible others at the foot of the same plateau did extend to Ras ir-Raħeb itself cannot be easily determined. One can, nonetheless, observe the presence of two standing megaliths at Ras ir-Raħeb – apparently, from a prehistoric structure – on the site of which a Classical sanctuary seems to have been later built (below and Buhagiar 2008: 373). In addition, numerous fragments of what was described as ‘household pottery’ have been reported in the fields surrounding the Ras ir-Raħeb site (*MAR* 1922-3: 5; Scott 1962a: 2). The concentration of pottery in this particular area may possibly indicate either a distinct settlement at Ras ir-Raħeb itself or an extension to Ras ir-Raħeb of either the settlement on top of Il-Qlejgħa (tal-Baħrija) raised plateau or of one at the foot of the same plateau.

Another Bronze Age (Borġ in-Nadur phase) settlement might have been likewise well located and easily defended on the flat-topped headland known as ‘Qarraba’. This prominent headland is surrounded by cliffs and projects into the sea between Ġnejna and Ghajn Tuffieħa Bays. Traces of massive walls suggestive of defended settlements (like those at Borġ in-Nadur, in Birzebbuġa) can also be seen at Il-Fawwara, near Ghajn Tuffieħa Bay (Trump & Cilia 2004: 252).

Nonetheless, human occupation during prehistoric times was not restricted to the above-mentioned places. There are, in fact, scattered structural remains – sometimes, barely recognisable – which, overall, give the impression of a region probably more densely inhabited in prehistory than it was in later – including present – times. But the evidence provided by these remains is so scanty that not much can be gleaned from them.

Evidence for settlements in the Classical period is rather poor. Apart from a small bathing complex possibly associated with a villa near Ghajn Tuffieħa Bay (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 318-21), indications for Classical period settlements are perhaps better provided by burials. A



Figure 39

Il-Qlejgha (tal-Bahrija) raised plateau. It is shown here (in the background) as seen from the site of the Ras ir-Raheb sanctuary remains (in the foreground). Two standing megaliths can be seen on the left. (Photo: the author).

small catacomb of late Classical times is known from Tar-Ragħad in the limits of Mġarr (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 275). Other known surviving burials are either of the shaft and chamber type or cliff-face chambers, sometimes possibly adapted from natural caves. Examples of both types were, subsequently, often mutilated. Examples of the shaft and chamber type include around six at the Tax-Xini area, three more on Tal-Fantin promontory, two at Wied Rini, and another one to the south-east of the prehistoric temple remains at Il-Qortin l-Imdawwar (Rdum l-Imdawwar) (Buhagiar 2008: 358-9, 365, 368; *MAR* 1959-60: 6). The Santi valley, on the other hand, contains an example of the second type and, possibly, another one of the same type both cut into its western side (Buhagiar 2008: 360-2). Two others of a completely different type were recorded from the village of Mġarr. One looked like a bell-shaped silo while the other ‘silo grave’ was pear-shaped (*MAR* 1924-5: II).

Finally, surviving cart-ruts might have linked the settlements in prehistoric and / or later times. Cart-ruts can be seen in the Tax-Xini area, east-north-east of the small village of Bahrija (Buhagiar 2008: 360) and on Tal-Fantin promontory, south-east of the same village (Buhagiar 2008: 365). More such ruts litter the area of Ix-Xagħra tal-Kuncizzjoni, north-west of Bahrija, while others now lie buried beneath modern asphaltting in the square of Bahrija village itself (Buhagiar 2008: 368). Cart-ruts can also be seen on the eastern outskirts of Mgarr village. These possibly linking cart-ruts might, therefore, indicate activities involving a number of settlements.

4.3.5 - Economic infrastructure and support systems

It has already been shown that agriculture played an important role in the lives of the people in this region as early as the Għar Dalam phase, as evidenced at Skorba. At Il-Qortin I-Imdawwar (Rdum I-Imdawwar), evidence shows that agriculture may have been supplemented with animal rearing (4.3.3), while evidence from the Late Bronze Age site of Il-Qlejgħa (tal-Bahrija) points to the production of textiles and, possibly, bronze too in addition to agriculture (4.3.4 above).

Further evidence for agricultural activity may come by way of what appear to be the remains of a round ‘tower’ of the Classical period at Tas-Santi (Buhagiar 2008: 361, Fig.6). As discussed earlier in the Tas-Silg case study, these ‘towers’ might have been associated with farms or agricultural estates and so their presence might be indicative of agricultural activity. The role of these ‘towers’ might have been later taken over by corbelled dry-stone huts, known as ‘*giren*’. Likewise associated with agricultural land as watch stations (and, possibly, also as farming tool sheds), these often circular huts still abound mainly in the north-west area of Malta and, to no lesser extent, in the Ras ir-Raheb region (Fsadni 1992: 9-14). The occasional clustering of *giren* might have been a later development. Examples can be seen to the east of Tal-Fantin promontory, overlooking Wied Rini (Buhagiar 2008: 365-6, Fig.11).

In the region under review, agriculture was aided by the presence of no less than five valleys, field terracing, and the exploitation of a number of fresh water resources in the same region. These elements also encouraged the establishment of settlements nearby.

A water gallery, extracting water from the perched aquifer, was cut to provide a perennial water supply inside one of the caves at Santi valley. Another such gallery, likewise providing a perennial water supply, was cut into the southern side of Tal-Fantin promontory. Like the one inside a cave at Santi valley, this gallery employed stone canals and reservoirs to supply water to the underlying fields (Buhagiar 2008: 364-5). Two other water galleries provided water to a cave settlement cut into the western cliff-face of the Il-Qlejgħa (tal-Bahrija) plateau while feeding the underlying terraced fields associated with the same settlement (Buhagiar 2008: 373). These same terraced fields might have earlier sustained the Late Bronze Age village on top of the same plateau. Other water galleries might be used to feed reservoirs as in the case of the gallery known as ‘L-Għajn ta’ Snajnsna’ below the ravine at Il-Qortin l-Imdawwar (Rdum l-Imdawwar) (Buhagiar 2008: 368).

Perhaps to a lesser extent than agriculture, stone quarrying was another activity which the people in the Ras ir-Raheb region engaged in. Such an activity was vital for providing them with the much needed material – stone – for constructing their dwellings or even for creating partitions and screening walls if they resided in caves. Evidence of ancient surface quarrying, in fact, comes from Tax-Xini area and from Tal-Fantin promontory (Buhagiar 2008: 358, 365), while remains of a deep quarry (now turned into a field) can be seen from the road which leads to the small village of Bahrija from Rabat. More evidence for quarrying comes from the immediate vicinity of the sanctuary on the Ras ir-Raheb promontory but, as shown below, these quarries might have been associated with the sanctuary building itself.

Finally, another material which the people in the Ras ir-Raheb region might have found useful, especially for fashioning chipped stone tools, could have been provided by the chert nodules lying exposed on rock surfaces or in rock sections in the coastal zones. A significant concentration of these can be seen particularly in the area between Il-Blata (tal-Melħ) and the Ras ir-Raheb promontory (Buhagiar 2008: 358). A great number of flaked chert tools were, in

fact, recovered from the prehistoric temple remains at Il-Qortin l-Imdawwar (Rdum l-Imdawwar) (Buhagiar 2008: 367) and from the Skorba settlement (*MAR* 1962: 4; 1963: 2; Trump 1966: 26(Fig.22), 29).

4.3.6 - The sanctuary at Ras ir-Raheb

Having possibly already hosted a megalithic structure or structures in prehistoric times, the Ras ir-Raheb promontory was occupied by a succession of at least two buildings, the latest and most extensive remains of which dates to the Classical period.

The prehistoric megalithic structure seems to be represented by two standing megaliths and by others later displaced and re-utilised as foundations for the outer walls of the Classical period structure. The two standing megaliths appear to be the only ones remaining in situ but integrated in one of the outer walls of the Classical structure. The location, therefore, might have originally hosted a prehistoric monumental structure and, in later times, a Classical one re-utilising stones from the earlier prehistoric structure (*MAR* 1922-3: 5; 1962: 6; Scott 1962a: 1-2; 1962b: 6; also Figure 43, p.197).

The present remains seem to have belonged to a building consisting of a small quadrangular room paved with small lozenge-shaped clay tiles and fronted to its east by a courtyard surrounded by a portico possibly with square columns. The entire structure seems to have been built of well-dressed stones and appears to have been accessed from the east. Two other well-dressed stones lay almost in the middle of the presumed courtyard, while the north-eastern corner of the presumed portico held a rock-cut bell-shaped water cistern internally lined with plaster and sealed with a large laterally-perforated stone over its (i.e. the cistern's) rectangular opening. This cistern might have been fed by a fresh water spring situated to the south-east of the site. An ancient wall going round the edge of the promontory might have served as a terrace or boundary wall for the building in question (Figures 40-1 below). Not far from the sanctuary site and to both its south and south-east, old quarries might have been the source which supplied stone for this building. Thus, almost as at Ras il-Wardija, stone could have

been extracted from a source close by (*MAR* 1922-3: 5; 1962: Fig.4; Scott 1962a: 1-2; 1963: 12).



Figure 40

The sanctuary remains on the promontory of Ras ir-Raheb. Picture taken from the air presumably by the time the site was being excavated. An ancient wall goes round the edge of the promontory, having possibly served as a terrace or boundary wall for the sanctuary (above). (Courtesy: Daniel Cilia).

Finds from the site include part of a small ivory plaque showing a crouching boar in low relief. Its stylistic origins have been traced to fifth century B.C. Etruria. Also included are five coins, two of which have been identified and interpreted as ‘Siculo-Punic’ while another one was of Constantius II (A.D. 337-61) (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 323; *MAR* 1962: 6, Plate 4(c); Scott 1962a: 3; 1962b: 6; 1963: 12). Along with the surviving prehistoric megaliths, the latest coin would seem to suggest a duration of time (during which the site was in use) spanning from the prehistoric period to around the fourth century A.D., albeit not necessarily without any interruptions.

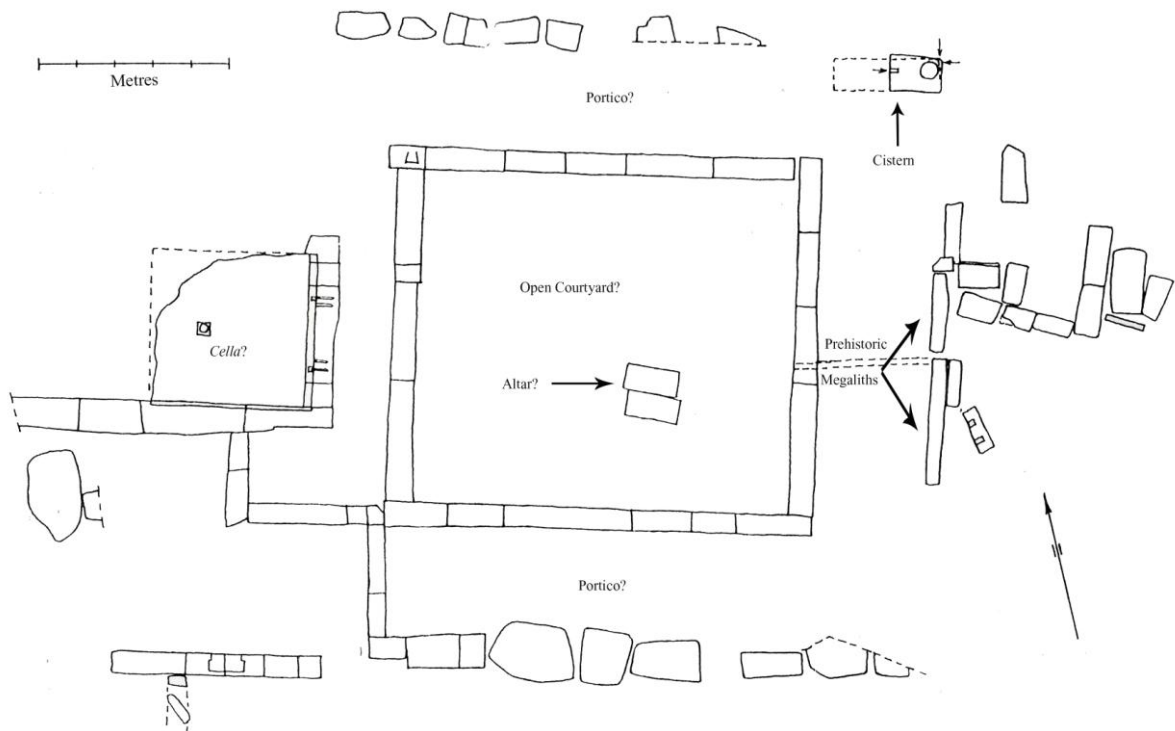


Figure 41

Plan of the Ras ir-Raheb Sanctuary remains. (After MAR 1962: Fig.4).

The majority of the finds represented mainly ceramic coarse wares like plates, pots, and jugs of the Classical period. Significantly, there were also a number of statuette fragments and anthropomorphic parts (like satyr masks) from clay vessels, most of which could have been of a votive nature. However, two particular statuette fragments deserve special mention. One of these depicts a figure wearing a cloak over a short tunic knotted around the neck and waist, seemingly recalling Heracles syncretised with the Tyrian Melqart. The other, showing a partly cloaked but otherwise nude male figure, might have also possibly represented Hercules / Heracles with a lion skin (MAR 1962: 6, Plate 4; Scott 1962a: 2-4; 1962b: 6; 1963: 12; also Figure 42 below), evidently more aligned with Hellenistic tradition (Brody 1998: 69). An identification of the building with the temple of Hercules / Heracles (or, perhaps, rather the Punic-Hellenistic Melqart-Heracles) on the island of Malta mentioned by the Alexandrian geographer Ptolemy has also been recently plausibly suggested (Vella 2002: 83-112). As will

be shown further below, promontory sanctuaries dedicated to Melqart / Heracles were to be found in several places across the Mediterranean (4.4.10 and 5.3 below).



Figure 42

A broken statuette from Ras ir-Raheb Sanctuary. It may represent Heracles holding a lion's skin, evidently more aligned with Hellenistic tradition. (Photo: Daniel Cilia).

Even if originating in later times, the toponym of the site 'Ras ir-Raheb' meaning 'the Cape or Head / Headland of the Monk' or its alternative one 'Ras il-Knejjes' meaning 'the Cape or Head / Headland of the Churches' might possibly (though to a more limited extent) be also taken as indicative of a religious nature (*MAR* 1922-3: 5; Scott 1962a: 1; 1962b: 6).

The building, therefore, might have been a small rural and coastal sanctuary consisting of a small *cella* (the small quadrangular room) fronted to its east by an open-air space or courtyard



Figure 43

Large ashlar stone remains at the Ras ir-Raheb Sanctuary. The stone remains (seen in the foreground) are located to the east of the two standing megaliths (in the background). (Photo: the author).

surrounded by a portico. The two well-dressed stones lying almost in the middle of the presumed courtyard might have been the foundations of an altar or of a support for *ex voto* offerings like the presumed ones in the possible open-air temple on the first terrace at Ras il-Wardija in Gozo or like the altar in the colonnaded courtyard at Tas-Silġ. The water cistern, on the other hand, might have supplied the water required during the ritual performances, as did the cisterns at Tas-Silġ and Ras il-Wardija sanctuaries.

4.3.7 - An interpretation of the Ras ir-Raheb Sanctuary and its regional context

Having provided a synthesis of the evidence pertaining to Ras ir-Raheb and its regional background, the following interpretative analysis aims to provide a deeper insight into Ras ir-Raheb and its meaning, particularly for those involved. Furthermore, it should help us perceive Ras ir-Raheb not only as a meaningful, but also as a living and dynamic, place with its actors (the people) in constant engagement amongst themselves and with the place.



Figure 44

The two standing megaliths among the sanctuary remains on the Ras ir-Raheb promontory. Visible in the background is the Ras il-Wardija promontory (arrowed) on the edge of the Gozo coastline. (Photo: the author).

4.3.8 - Ras ir-Raheb: a socialised landscape

A primary medium of socialisation is previous knowledge of the place. This involves a practical mastery and control of the place which, then, becomes a primary resource in the creation of social hierarchies (Tilley 1996: 162, 172-3). From this point of view, therefore, the knowledge, control, and eventual socialisation of the Ras ir-Raheb landscape since prehistoric times could be also viewed as an enculturation of the same landscape: transferring it from the domain of nature and wilderness to the domain of culture and humans through the mediation of the sanctuary. This would also imply giving it a new meaning or significance and purpose or function (as in Bender 1993: 15).

One of the most effective media through which control of knowledge of the place – and, hence, control of the place itself – could be attained was vision (Stoddart 2002: 181). For example, porticos (like the one at Tas-Silġ (4.1.15) and the presumed one at Ras ir-Raheb) may have also facilitated visual access by providing a viewing zone (as in Ghey 2007: 23). Through its arrangement of *cella* and open courtyard in front, the sanctuary at Ras ir-Raheb was equipped with a central line of sight or axis of vision which could be manipulated to bring in or out of sight any activities taking place, especially inside the *cella*. Further devices, like closing doors, could be also employed to enhance the effect of both restricted vision as well as restricted access and, ultimately, restricted knowledge.

As implied above, the performative aspect of rituals and its visibility or non-visibility may have possessed great significance. At least on certain occasions, the visual experience of and the participation in rituals enacted at the Ras ir-Raheb sanctuary – particularly, if enacted in its open courtyard – may have involved observation and visual absorption by the audience. As a result, this may have enhanced the communicative potential of the rituals by creating an interaction between the ritual performers and the audience (as in Mylonopoulos 2006: 92-4, 103).

4.3.9 - Continuity and assertion of new values

As shown above and unlike other prehistoric sites in the surrounding region, Ras ir-Raheb seems to have witnessed a prolonged use of the site from prehistoric times to the Classical period (Figures 43-4 above). It seems that the site was recognised and respected and that earlier activity there was acknowledged by and influenced the location of the sanctuary in later (Classical) times. This continuity factor seems to suggest a *longue durée* trend in spite of any social and economic changes that are very likely to have taken place in the meantime and which might have affected the other sites but, for some reason, not so much the Ras ir-Raheb sanctuary (as in Ghey 2007: 19, 27; Zifferero 2002: 250).

Nonetheless, though evoking continuity, the Classical period may have brought in new values, the assertion of which may have taken place in harmony with the evocation of continuity in an uninterrupted line between past and present (as in Edmonds 1999: 134).

However, the prolonged occupation of the site and the attachment of new significance to it by the associated community of the Classical period seems to imply that they might have also been aware of or acknowledged its antiquity. In fact, certain megaliths were left intact and others were re-utilised. This might have taken place because the religious significance (as well as the antiquity) borne by the site was already understood. At the same time, they may have viewed the site not any differently from their contemporary religious structures and, thus, utilised (or, rather, re-utilised) it in the same way as the latter were utilised. In this case, they may have not drawn any distinction between the site at Ras ir-Raheb and their contemporary religious sites. Therefore, it may have seemed quite natural – and, perhaps, quite easy too – for them to assimilate the earlier site of Ras ir-Raheb and renew its significance (as in Bradley 2002b: 122-3).

4.3.10 - Attitudes towards the sea

As at Ras il-Wardija, the coastal location of the Ras ir-Raheb sanctuary would indicate the attitudes of the associated community towards the sea. As the sanctuary could be seen from the sea but not so much from the hinterland unless one got close, it seems to have been an outward looking society as, perhaps, might have been expected from an island society and as, indeed, was to happen in Malta even in later times (Stoddart 1999: 144).

Nonetheless, the coast was often also a marginal area located outside the sphere of normal domestic life. It was situated on an edge of the settled land, a place where opposites met, where earth met the sea, or where the world of the living humans came in contact with the depths of the non-human 'world' of the sea. But as the sea not only provided marine foods, maritime communication, and a living, but often also threatened human life, the coast was also a sacred or ritual place where, amongst other rituals, one could offer sacrifices or make offerings before undertaking a perilous journey; or else, offer thanksgiving following return from such a journey (Bradley 2000: 27; Scarre 2002: 9).

Coastal landforms might sometimes be themselves perceived in the form of a built monument. Alternatively, in the absence of such a landform or perception, an actual monument might be built as a cultural elaboration of the actual landform as, apparently, was the case at Ras ir-Raheb. From its prominent location on the impressive promontory, the Ras ir-Raheb sanctuary might have been a natural landmark for sailors. The significance of the sanctuary might have been further enhanced by the use of building material probably quarried from its immediate surroundings to the extent that it might have blended with its geological and topographical surroundings. Therefore, in using local building materials in such a visible manner, a powerful resonance might have been established between the built sanctuary and its local setting. The integration of the sanctuary in the natural setting of the Ras ir-Raheb promontory might have invested the former with some of the special qualities of the latter. The building of the sanctuary on that particular promontory might have also been intended to highlight an aspect which was seen as inherent in that landscape (as in Scarre 2002: 9-10).

4.3.11 - Inter-visibility with other sanctuary sites

While the Ras il-Wardija and Ghar ix-Xih sanctuary sites (previous and following case studies respectively) enjoy no inter-visibility with each other, both of them enjoy inter-visibility with the Ras ir-Raheb sanctuary site (Figure 45 below). Thus, while being a liminal site, the latter was situated with clear sight-lines of the other two sanctuary sites as was the Etruscan liminal sanctuary of Poggio Colla, north-east of Florence in Italy, with clear sight-lines of two other Etruscan sanctuaries (Gregory Warden 2009: 109-10). As in the last example and also as shown below, therefore, the sanctuaries at Ras ir-Raheb, Ras il-Wardija, and Ghar ix-Xih may have defined zones of cultural interaction and influence. In at least two of our sanctuaries: the one at Ras ir-Raheb and the other at Ras il-Wardija, one factor which may have not only dominated their seascape but may have also contributed towards their inter-visibility could have been their possible monumentality (as in Bradley 2000: 106). If they were intended to be seen, their respective monumentality could have made them more visible even from one another, albeit surely to a limited extent due to the distances involved. Quoting Peatfield (1994: 25), Briault (2007: 135) indicates that such inter-visibility ‘provides an opportunity for the expression of ritual unity that may have transcended political boundaries’.

Another possible role of this inter-visibility could be explained in terms of the possible function of these three sanctuaries as beacons used for guiding participants in rituals or even ships at sea. Ash deposits were, in fact, found at both Ras il-Wardija and Ghar ix-Xih sanctuaries. At the same time, no burnt remains of associated consumed material were found at Ghar ix-Xih (4.4.10). Nor were any reported from Ras il-Wardija (4.2.8). As Peatfield (1983: 277), quoted by Briault (2007: 135), suggests in respect of the inter-visibility among certain Cretan peak sanctuaries, our three sanctuaries might have formed a network of sacred beacons uniting the three respective regions perhaps during religious festivals at night.

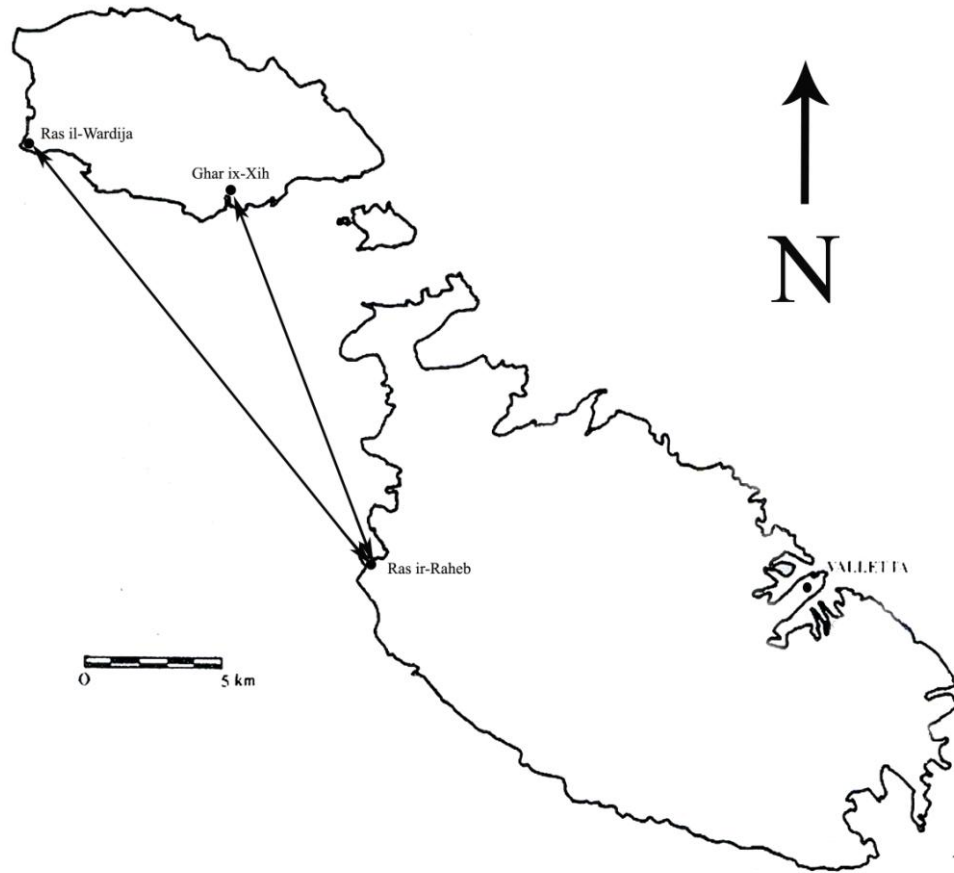


Figure 45

Map of the Maltese islands with sight-lines. It shows sight-lines between Ras ir-Raheb and Ras il-Wardija and between Ras ir-Raheb and Ghar ix-Xih. (Graphics: Max Xuereb).

4.4.1 - A VALLEY AND HARBOUR LANDSCAPE SACRALISED: GHAR IX-XIH, TAL-KNISJA, AND TAL-LOGĠA

Conspicuously located on a high ridge overlooking and dominating a presumed ancient harbour: Mgarr ix-Xini (4.4.7 below; also Figures 46 below and 48, p.213), a small rural shrine at Ghar ix-Xih enjoyed wide extensive views not only of the presumed underlying harbour but also of the sea beyond. Mainly due to this advantageous attribute, this religious site could, therefore, also afford refuge to the mariners and visitors frequenting the said harbour in much the same way as the sheer rocky sides provide shelter to the same harbour which they flank.

However, the Ghar ix-Xih shrine could be linked to two places and, at least, to two communities respectively attached to them. One of these places is the presumed harbour itself with its presumably small but changeable maritime community. The other place is the valley, called ‘Mgarr ix-Xini valley’: a long winding valley opening up into Mgarr ix-Xini harbour. This valley was itself an agricultural resource and hosted a community (or, perhaps, even more) of agriculturalists engaged also in producing wine and olive-oil. In fact, the shrine seems to have been located at a point where it could be seen from and commanded views not only of the underlying harbour but also of the valley entrance and a short stretch within, up to a point where the curve of the valley hinders view of the extent beyond. Therefore, conceptually speaking and like the previously discussed sanctuaries, the Ghar ix-Xih shrine lay close to the sea and to the soil alike and, thus, could oversee a world of connectivity and commerce where farmers, mariners, and merchants interacted and exchanged ideas, technologies, and goods (as in Knapp and Blake 2005: 12-3). Interestingly, the sanctuary overlooked not only the harbour but also what appears to have been the latter’s access road (Figure 46 below). In this way, it seems to have provided refuge not only to those down at the harbour or about to sail but also to anyone on his way down to the harbour. Moreover, situated by this road leading up from the harbour to a possible settlement site perhaps located further up and beyond, the shrine might have been a convenient place of offering for those approaching or leaving this presumed harbour settlement. It may have, thus, performed a role similar to that of a small shrine founded outside the harbour settlement site of Ashkelon, on the Syro-Palestinian coast, and along the

road leading up from the harbour to this same settlement, where it may have served as a focal point of maritime cult practices (Brody 1998: 56, 99, Fig.55).

The agricultural community (or communities) attached to the valley may have not only frequented the sanctuary but, being permanently settled there, may have been also responsible for its erection and continuous maintenance. The rather fluid and hybrid maritime community frequenting the harbour may have also contributed especially to its upkeep.



Figure 46

The high location of the Ghar ix-Xih Shrine. The shrine (top, middle) overlooks the presumed old Mġarr ix-Xini harbour access road (indicated in red) when the harbour extended further inland. (Also Figure 48). (Photo: the author; graphics: Max Xuereb).

As the three sites studied here share a common landscape background, their treatment differs slightly than that of the previous three sites. The study commences with a presentation of the

data pertaining to the region surrounding the three sites (Figure 47 below) and anthropogenic activities associated with it. Then, Ghar ix-Xiħ on one hand and Tal-Knisja and Tal-Loġġa together on the other hand are focused upon as two separate case studies. Strictly speaking, the sites at Tal-Knisja and Tal-Loġġa are of a non-religious nature but they appear to have hosted some sort of occasional religious celebration and ritual. Thus, broadly, the treatment of the data and interpretation follows the same methodology adopted in the previous three case studies.

Since they are not yet published, the data gathered from the excavations of the sites will be presented here in a preliminary format, based on the writer's personal observations and field-notes taken during his active participation in and co-direction of the excavations. On the basis of these data, likewise preliminary interpretations with reference to the wider Mediterranean regional context will be also presented.

4.4.2 - Ghar ix-Xiħ, Tal-Knisja, and Tal-Loġġa: geographical area and topographical characteristics

As already indicated above, the Ghar ix-Xiħ area with its shrine's remains lies at the mouth of a valley: the Mgarr ix-Xini valley. This winding dry valley is deeply cut, mainly in Lower Coralline limestone. It is flanked by agricultural fields, most of which are still worked to this day. Two of these fields – one at Tal-Knisja and the other at Tal-Loġġa – were recently subjected to small-scale excavations and, thus, provide the data for the final two of these case studies. The southern side of this valley is overlooked by the north-facing ridge of the Ta' Ċenc plateau. A number of springs still survive beneath this ridge, but these only form a portion of a larger number of springs which, until the relatively recent past, enriched the entire area of the valley. Nowadays, most of the fields are watered from wells, most of which store sufficient water throughout the year.

The area beyond the valley lies mostly on a Globigerina limestone bed but is host to several agricultural fields which, now less than before, support the villages in the area, namely: Sannat,

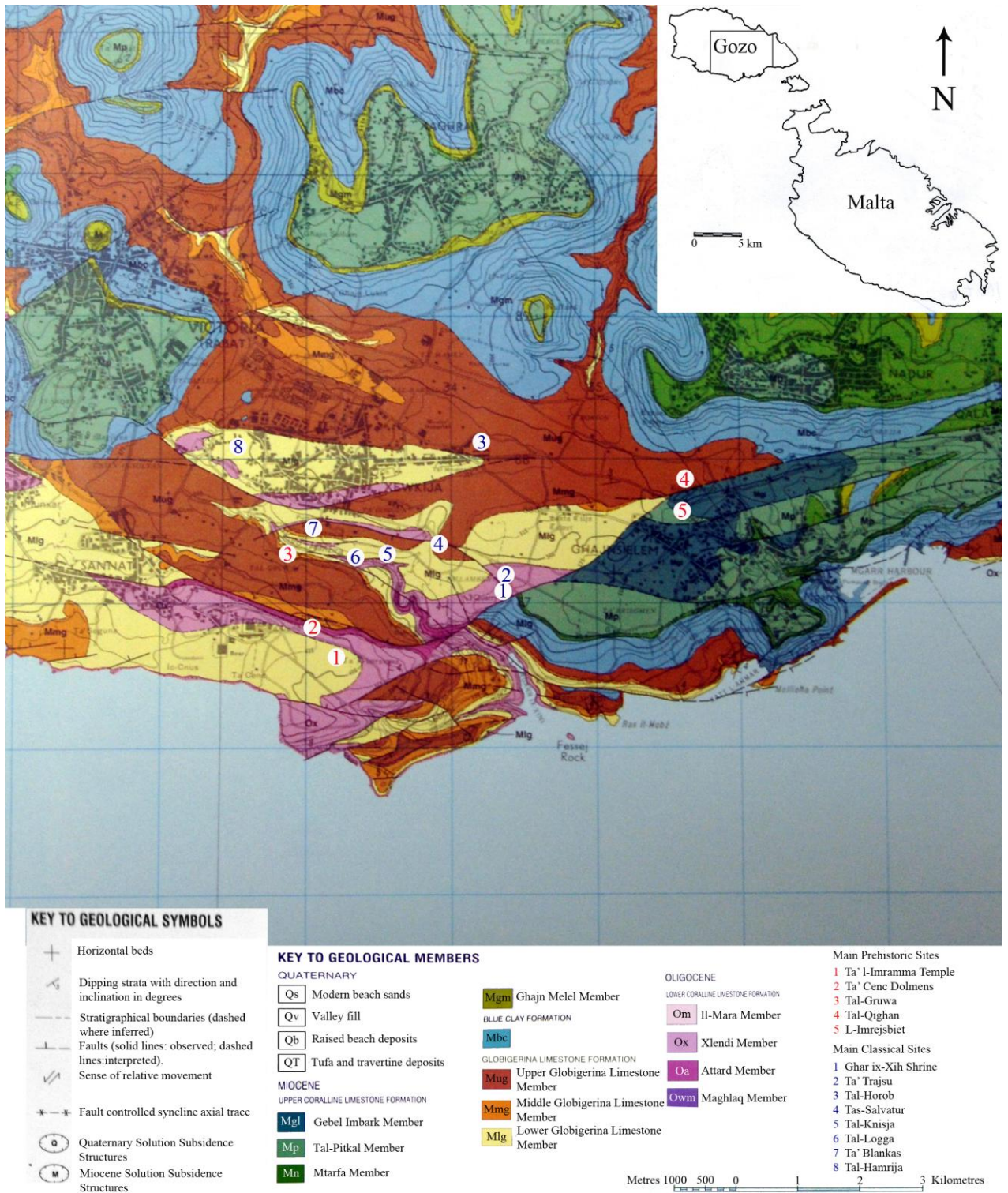


Figure 47

Map of southern Gozo. It shows the distribution of the main sites mentioned in the text. (Source: Geological Map of the Maltese islands: Sheet 2, Oil Exploration Directorate, Malta (1993)).

Xewkija, and Ghajnsielem. Good Globigerina limestone in the area, however, has enabled a quarrying industry to thrive in this area until this industry was shifted to the western part of the island where it became more viable. When they went out of use, most of the quarries in the area under review were turned into agricultural fields.

From the same spot where it is located, the Ghar ix-Xih area overlooks a deep and narrow harbour: Mgarr ix-Xini. It is a naturally sheltered harbour, not only providing refuge from the winds but also hiding views of vessels like those engaged in piracy or other illegal activities. Nonetheless, although a relatively small harbour, it still supported a certain degree of commercial activity and foreign trade (below).

As the western coastal flank of this harbour is composed of sheer cliffs gradually increasing in height westwards, the closest harbours or inlets are to be found on the eastern flank, reaching, first, Xatt l-Aħmar and, then, Mgarr Harbour. Both harbours have proven their utility. With its salt-pans, Xatt l-Aħmar contributed – and, perhaps to a smaller extent, still does – to the local salt industry. On the other hand, since ancient times, Mgarr Harbour has linked the Maltese islands and still serves this vital role after having undergone several upgrading phases in past years to meet newly-emerging demands as Gozo’s ferry terminal.

4.4.3 - Human occupation and activity: the anthropogenic impact on the region around Ghar ix-Xih, Tal-Knisja, and Tal-Logġa

The region under review here hosts the modern settlements of Sannat, Xewkija, and Ghajnsielem. But older settlements – nowadays, barely traceable – might have stood alongside these or even preceded them, to judge by the material remains known from the area.

Human presence and activity in these settlements – whether surviving or not – spans a long stretch of time with the origins of certain settlements going back to prehistoric times. As will be shown below, anthropogenic occupation was, nonetheless, subject to changing dynamics: shifts, discontinuity, or short duration with respect to certain areas but, overall, the entire region shows evidence of continuous occupation and activity from prehistory to this day.

4.4.4 - The initial human settlement and later development patterns

In the case of Sannat village, what looks to be a prehistoric religious building (popularly known as ‘Ta’ l-Imramma Temple’) of an irregular form and with a possibly associated settlement lay on the nearby Ta’ Ċenċ plateau: now largely barren land (Evans 1971: 171-2). Another possible prehistoric settlement with its own ‘temple’ might have been located on the eastern limits of the same village (National Museum of Archaeology (Valletta) photo archive). Both presumed settlements, therefore, seem to have been located on the periphery of the present-day village. Surviving remains of another prehistoric megalithic structure have been also recently detected almost in the core of the modern village, bearing testimony to what could have been another or related occupation in prehistoric times.

A partially similar development might have taken place in respect of Ġhajnsielem village. Prehistoric remains still survive at L-Imrejsbiet and nearby Tal-Qiġhan (Borġ Ġharib) on the western limits of the modern village (Evans 1971: 170-1). The nature and function of these megalithic remains is difficult to interpret but, nevertheless, the same remains do bear witness to human presence and activity there already in prehistoric times. Remains of two prehistoric (Temple period) house structures were also discovered and excavated in the same village along Mġarr Road (Malone *et al.* 1988: 297-301; Malone (personal intervention) 2009: 349-50; Malone, Grima, *et al.* 2009: 42-56; Malone, Stoddart, *et al.* 2009: 7). Their true nature and function are not easy to define. Nor is it clear whether they formed a small isolated settlement or formed part of a larger one. Similarly situated on the periphery of the modern village, the presumed settlement or settlements might have also shifted in later times.

Quite dissimilar and at the same time quite significant, however, seems to have been the prehistoric settlement pattern at Xewkija. The megalithic remains reported in the beginning of the twentieth century on the site of the parish church seem to have been those of a prehistoric temple (Evans 1971: 191-2; Magri 1906). This temple may have been located at the centre of a settlement, in which case, both the religious centre represented by the temple and the presumed settlement appear to have maintained their basic framework with their respective locations in respect to each other even in later times. In fact, the temple site was later occupied by the old

parish church which, in recent years, was replaced by a newly-built one also occupying the same site, thus, always maintaining a religious nature. Throughout its existence, the settled area in Xewkija also kept 'radiating out' from the religious centre whether this (i.e. the latter) was occupied by a prehistoric temple or by a parish church, old or new.

4.4.5 - Irregular trends in settlement dynamics

In the aftermath of the prehistoric era, new settlement preferences or developments become evident, perhaps as a result of newly-emerging situations. The Sannat settlement may have drastically shrunk, if not even diminished; the only surviving evidence comes by way of a single and isolated burial of the second half of the fourth century A.D. which might represent an isolated rural habitation somewhere nearby rather than a fully-fledged settlement (Azzopardi 2008a: 40-6; *MAR* 1928-9: V).

Għajnsielem does not seem to have fared much better. A number of Classical period burials overlooking Mġarr harbour perhaps do not present evidence any more than for a limited human presence presumably in that same area or quite nearby (*MAR* 1928-9: V).

Again, quite different is the situation throughout the same period in Xewkija. This village might have hosted an olive-oil industry with an associated agricultural estate concentrated in the Tal-Hamrija area. On the basis of an olive crusher found in the area and also of both fine and coarse ceramics collected from a refuse pit in the same area, the industry might have been a private enterprise whose rich owner may have had his residence attached to the estate itself (*MAR* 1905-6: 3; 1977-8: 63). Nonetheless, it is expected to have employed a number of labourers who, on the other hand, might have formed a settlement somewhere nearby in that same area.

Another settlement might have flourished at the Tal-Ħorob area, at the opposite end of the same village, where structural remains were reported. Material evidence from this area survives mainly in the form of amulets (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 55, 58; Gouder 1978: 312, 314; *MAR* 1950-1: XVIII, wherein no mention is made of the amulets).

4.4.6 - Agro-industrial activity and settlement linked to Mġarr ix-Xini valley and possibly also to Għar ix-Xiħ Shrine

Stronger evidence is forthcoming for agro-industrial activity in and along the Mġarr ix-Xini valley, between the villages of Sannat and Xewkija. It is also at the end of this same valley, where it opens into Mġarr ix-Xini harbour, that the Għar ix-Xiħ rural shrine is to be found. A current survey project in the valley area is showing that the valley and its immediate environs were characterised by relatively intensive agricultural activity and an associated industry processing agricultural products. It might have also involved exportation of any surplus production and the valley might have developed as a productive territory and prospered on account of this external trade facilitated by the presence of the nearby harbour.

A total of at least seventeen rock-cut trough sets have been identified both along the valley sides and even within the valley itself. On the basis of the evidence collected so far, these features appear to have been primarily wine presses. In some cases, associated fields where the processed product might have been cultivated show evident links with these features, as at Tal-Knisja and at Tal-Loġġa. Perhaps to a lesser degree, olive-oil was also produced, employing a *trapetum* (olive crusher) found at Tas-Salvatur area on the northern side of the valley (MAR 1958-9: 4). The evidence gathered so far is showing that olive-oil and wine production in the Mġarr ix-Xini valley area shared the same landscape, as they did also in other Mediterranean places (Walsh 2000: 153).

Ancillary economic activities may have operated in close relationship with the adjacent agricultural system (as in Barker 2000: 75). At Mġarr ix-Xini valley, such activities seem to have included surface quarrying, extracting stone for the dry-stone rubble walls and, perhaps, huts. The formation of the terraced field systems on the sides of the valley might have also involved rock cutting in certain places, in which case any cut rock could have been profitably employed in the building of rubble walls surrounding the same fields. On the other hand, those other areas not suitable for agricultural development could have been exploited as pasture land for grazing flocks: a practice which was still alive in the valley area until a few decades ago.

A network of rock-cut steps and footpaths on both sides of, and within, the valley might have linked together all the above-mentioned activities. In particular, they provided access to and serviced the fields and the processing installations both in respect of oil and, especially, wine. This communication network extended also to the Mġarr ix-Xini harbour and, perhaps, even beyond by way of cart-ruts at Ta' Blankas (where these might have been associated with quarries at Tal-Logġa – 4.5.1 below) towards the western end of the valley and at Ta' Trajsu (near Ta' Lambert) on the valley's eastern end and not far from the Għar ix-Xiħ shrine.

A very recently detected site at nearby Tal-Gruwa area might have accommodated an associated settlement which might have been associated also with the Għar ix-Xiħ rural shrine further down the valley. A cluster of a number of paired and inter-connected cisterns in the area might have originally been shaft-and-chamber tombs later adapted for water storage purposes. These cisterns have been recently subjected to an ROV survey the results of which are awaiting publication but they would, nonetheless, indicate a settlement site in the vicinity. The presumed site, situated on a promontory-like highland formation overlooking the valley, also lies almost at the foot of the north-facing Ta' Ċenċ ridge on which two Bronze Age dolmens still survive and overlook the site (Evans 1971: 197-8). These two monuments, in fact, may have dominated not only the skyline but also the consciousness of those who lived down below on the presumed settlement site and worked in the surrounding fields and in the valley (as in Edmonds 1999: 3). The origins of this presumed settlement may go back to Bronze Age times but, then, may have remained in occupation in Classical times too as suggested by the ceramic scatter of both periods, though the latter is better represented.

4.4.7 - Possible links between Mġarr ix-Xini harbour, valley, and Għar ix-Xiħ Shrine

The relatively large number of wineries and the associated agro-industrial activity concentrated in such a relatively small area seems to suggest surplus production of wine in which case it might have been exported. The deep and sheltered cove of Mġarr ix-Xini – where structural remains possibly forming part of ancient harbour works and evidence of mooring facilities consisting of rock-cut bollards and holes can still be seen – is likely to have been the most

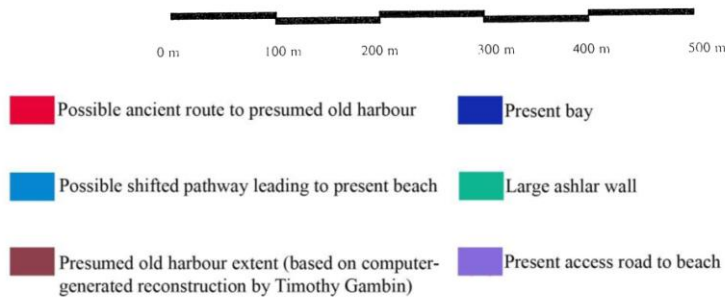
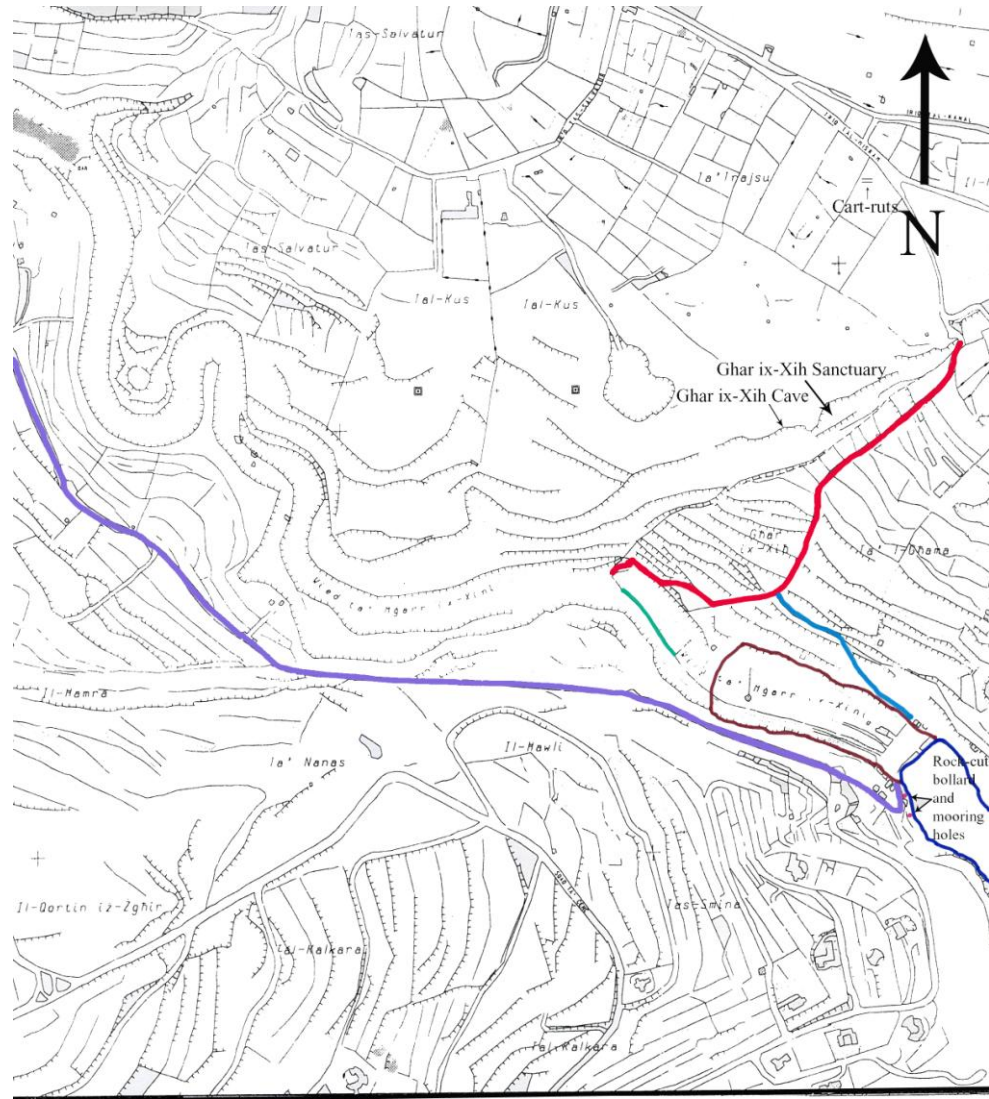


Figure 48

Map showing the presumed Mġarr ix-Xini harbour's changed extent. It also shows the possible resultant shift in access routes. The large ashlar wall remains and the old rock-cut bollard and mooring holes might have formed part of the presumed old harbour facilities. (Graphics: Max Xuereb).

suitable place nearby for activities associated with external trade. The fact that, in ancient times, the cove extended further inland (while merchant sea-vessels were smaller than modern ones) might have rendered it more convenient for such activities (Figure 48 above). A wreck consisting of a shipload of amphorae in very deep water outside the presumed harbour might confirm this (Reuben Grima personal communication). Very similar landscapes (even if, perhaps, on a larger scale) could be seen in Eastern Greek Sicily where agricultural communities mostly located near natural harbours (as in our case) were engaged in extensive trading activity (Leighton 1999: 224).

The presumed harbour and its associated activity, on the other hand, appears to have been under the watchful protection of the small rural shrine located high up at the end of the valley and overlooking the presumed Mġarr ix-Xini harbour. The shrine overlooked not only the harbour itself but also what is likely to have been the road leading to the ancient harbour (when it extended further inland) (4.4.1 (including Figures 46, p.205 and 48 above)).

GĦAR IX-XIĦ: A HOLY SENTINEL OVER MĠARR IX-XINI HARBOUR

4.4.8 - Għar ix-Xiħ: characteristics of the site and of its immediate surroundings

Facing south-east, the site is a small rock enclosure – partially natural and partially anthropogenic – located high on a Lower Coralline limestone ridge commanding good views of the underlying Mġarr ix-Xini cove and the mouth of Mġarr ix-Xini valley. Yet, like mountain peak sanctuaries in Arkadia, in ancient Greece (Jost 1994: 218), the shrine site is not located on the very top of the ridge, where conditions can be exposed and inhospitable, but slightly lower down on an anthropogenically altered terrace.

Further anthropogenic interventions by way of rock-cutting are visible on some of the site's rock outcrops and also on its rear elevation. Its terraced surface is presently occupied by an agricultural field, for the last six decades or so, left uncultivated. The site is bordered by a rock elevation to the north-west, a terrace wall to the south-east, and rock-cut steps accessing the site from the south-west and north-east respectively.

A few metres west of the site lies a cave called 'Għar ix-Xiħ' meaning 'The Elder's Cave' (Figure 49 below). This small tunnel-like and natural cave, in fact, lent its name to the surrounding area, including the site under study. The cave also shows signs of human intervention by way of some rock-cutting on its floor. This rock-cutting consists of an internally-smoothed tapering socket, 17cm deep, surrounded by a small levelled platform measuring around 1m by 0.5m, apparently having accommodated some sort of rotating mechanism. This cave's very close proximity to the site seems to suggest that it might have been somehow associated with it.

Down at the foot of the ridge lie a stretch of agricultural fields resting on a clay bed, and serviced by a number of wells dug into the clay. Further west of the site and of Għar ix-Xiħ cave itself lie some two more caves, themselves also showing signs of possible human occupation. One of these two caves can perhaps be better described as a rock shelter but the

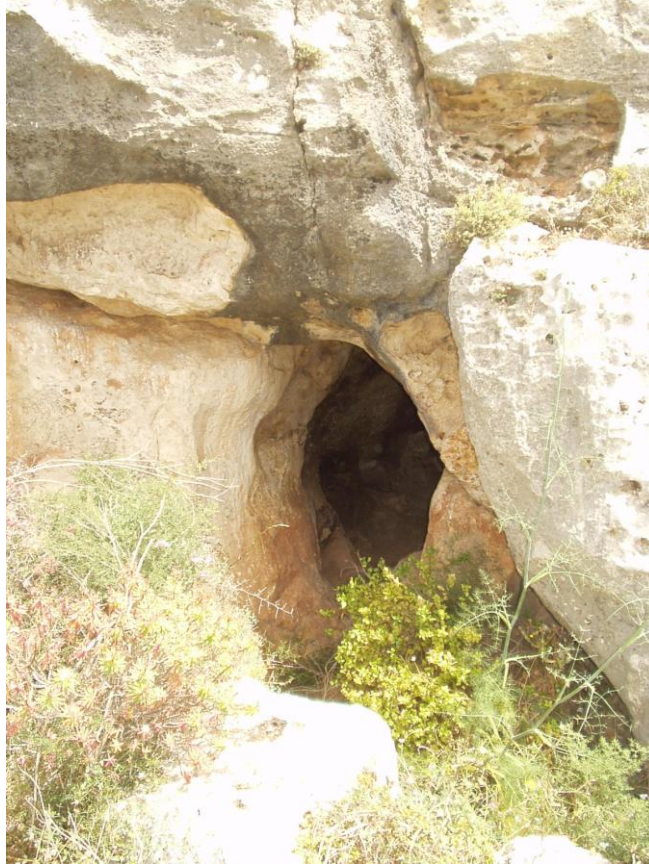


Figure 49

The entrance to the Ghar ix-Xih cave. It shows signs of human modification in its interior. (Photo: the author).

other one consists of three interconnected chambers. The latter's facade is screened by a dry-stone rubble wall leaving a doorway serving as an entrance to the cave complex. Human occupation is evidenced by the presence, in one of the chambers, of a rock-cut basin with an under-flow or discharge tunnel-hole linked to its bottom. The precise function of this basin is unclear, although its association with the use of liquids like water is very likely.

4.4.9 - The Ghar ix-Xih site: origins and early formation

As already shown, caves and rock shelters are not lacking in the immediate area of the site under study. Its excavation having just been completed in 2010 (though not yet published), the site appears to have originally comprised a cave or a deep rock shelter. During the Pleistocene epoch of the Quaternary period (*c.*1.8 million years ago), when the sea-level was much higher

(Pedley *et al.* 2002: 87-8), fast-flowing water, presumably from the then shallower valley (or, rather, raised valley bed), pushed material into the cave, not least animal bones like those of red deer (now extinct from the Maltese islands). Future studies of marks detectable on some of these bones may determine whether these were caused by human or other animal predators.

Some of the material containing the calcified bones survives in situ in the form of a cut section in the remaining innermost part of the cave but it was also found to extend beneath the cultural levels which later came to cover the floor of the original cave. More of the same material was spread beyond the original cave limits, evidently as a result of the site's enlargement to create more space for a shrine during Classical times.

It is not clear whether the cave had collapsed or was intentionally destroyed to create more space for the shrine. Nor is it known when this happened. But the site shows signs of anthropogenic enlargement, after either the cave's natural collapse or its deliberate destruction. This enlargement evidently took place to accommodate a shrine: either a completely new development or an extension of an already existing one. The original existence of a cave may have been an important factor in the choice of the site to host the shrine. Its high and well-visible location seems to have been another such factor.

4.4.10 - The Ghar ix-Xih Shrine: a divine presence in a rural area

A few Early Bronze Age (*c.*2500 – 1500 B.C.) sherds unearthed during the course of excavations might have been residual but, nonetheless, are indicative of possible human presence and activity before the Classical period. However, as suggested by the much larger corpus of material evidence, the earliest significant human activity at Ghar ix-Xih seems to date to the late sixth or early fifth century B.C. It might have been at this stage that the site's first adaptation for worshipping purposes took place. With this alteration, the site might have already taken the shape of an enclosure (in front of but, possibly, also incorporating the cave / rock shelter), possibly unroofed. The cave or rock shelter itself, on the other hand, might have been retained as the most sacred area – perhaps equated to the *cella* one usually finds in urban and larger sanctuaries – preceded by the remaining space.



Figure 50

The Ghar ix-Xih Shrine site. It consists of a largely man-made enclosure with a terrace wall in front (not visible). Photo taken during one of the earliest excavation seasons. Agricultural fields resting on a clay bed and part of the possible access road to the presumed old Mġarr ix-Xini harbour (visible beyond the fields) can be seen in the top right corner. (Photo: the author).

The site's use reached its peak during the first centuries B.C. and A.D. after having possibly undergone structural alterations for a second time, perhaps including the building of a new terrace wall. This wall was positioned slightly further down and on a roughly north-east – south-west axis in alignment with the extension of the site in a north-eastern direction. The building of the new terrace wall seems to have employed also stones from the previous shrine's structure (as happened at Tas-Silġ). The ritual act of using elements from the earlier shrine might have reinforced the sanctity of the boundary marked by the terrace wall (as in Gregory Warden 2009: 117-8).

The newly-enlarged enclosure (Figure 50 above) faced south-east while the site itself was accessed through a flight of rock-cut steps on each of its lateral sides. Alternatively, these two sets of rock-cut steps on the opposing sides of such a small site (Figure 51 below) might be also suggestive of processions leaving and approaching the cultic site from different directions.

It seems to have been also during this period that small altars or supports for votive offerings were erected. These may have been complemented by a small number of niches cut into the rock on the newly-extended rear elevation of the enclosure and in front of which certain altars or supports for votive offerings seem to have been erected. If so, the latter might be contemporary with the said niches. The most conspicuous and largest of the niches – a squarish recess on the extended part of the rear elevation of the enclosure (though not centrally-placed) (Figure 52, p.222) – might have held the main deity representation. What appears to be the surviving foundation of an altar or votive offering support was found at its foot. Looking like a small chapel, the niche might reflect a somewhat loose imitation of Egyptian models which were already widely used and the influence of which is extensively felt in Phoenician and Punic religious contexts wherever this feature (i.e. the niche) is reproduced (Moscati 1973: 195-6). Evidence of ‘hearths’ appears to imply also the use of fire during certain ritual activities, even if no significant burnt objects or material have turned up. One of these ‘hearths’ appears to have formed the focal point of a rectangular stone structure aligned on an east – west axis. The western end of this structure – where the ‘hearth’ was situated – abutted the (diminishing) rear elevation of the enclosure at its westernmost extent. The precise nature and function of this structure are unclear but its size and layout may suggest it was a platform that may have served as an altar (as in Gregory Warden 2009: 118).

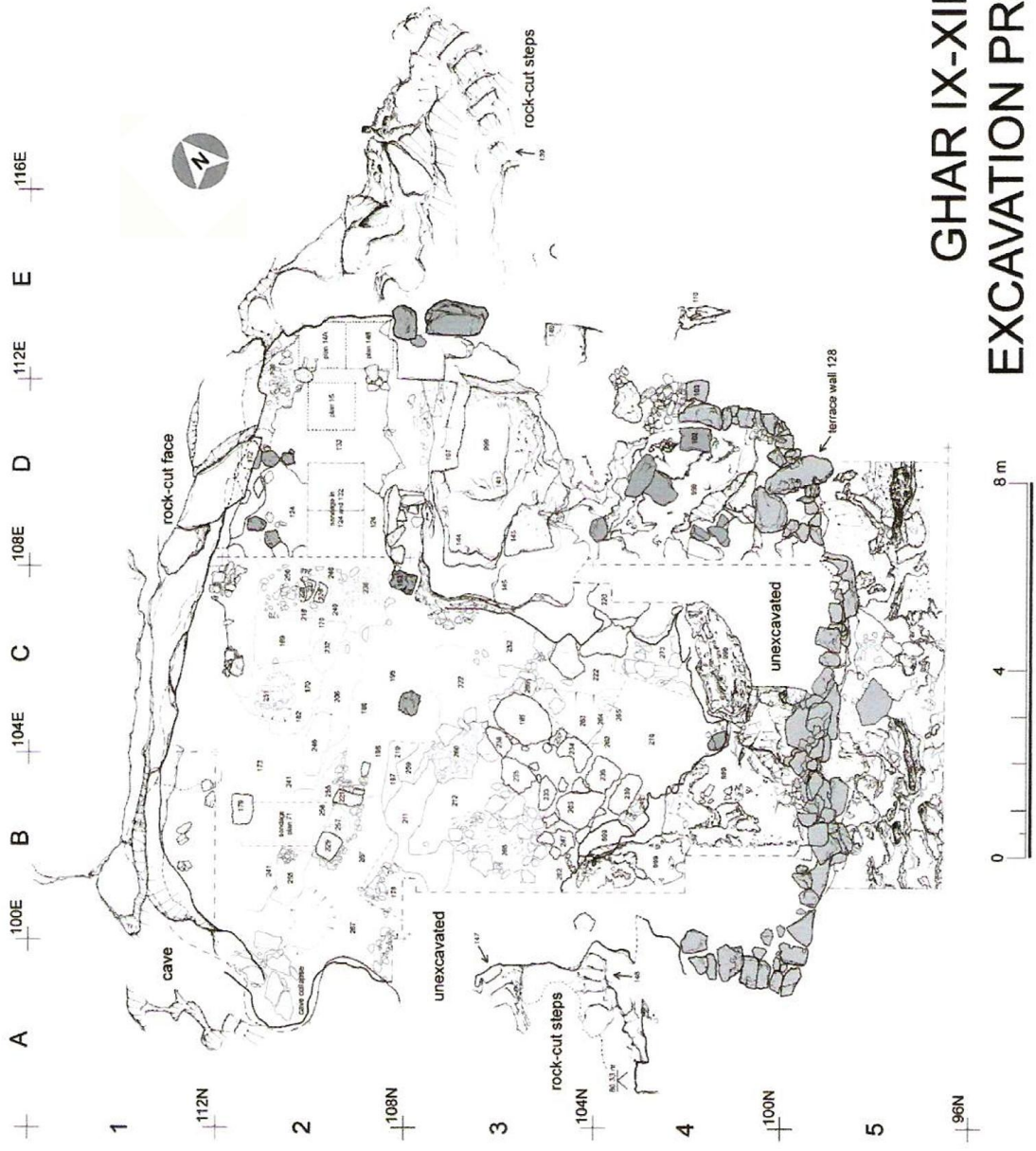
All these features – niches, altars / votive offering supports, and ‘hearths’ – were concentrated in the innermost area of the enclosure, alongside the rear rock-cut elevation. This space might have been, therefore, the newly-enlarged most sacred area – likewise, perhaps, equated to the *cella* one normally finds in urban and larger sanctuaries – preceded by the newly-extended open space. The latter seems to have provided the Ghar ix-Xih shrine with a deposition zone concentrated largely on one’s left on entering the site from the north-east for the re-deposition

of previous offerings (4.4.11 below), with the sacrificial and most sacred zone located on one's right. This spatial arrangement might have not been coincidental but rather intentional as a matter of religious polarity (as in Gregory Warden 2009: 118).

If, on the other hand, three equally-spaced stone bases (one of which was found missing but its imprint survived) in the innermost area of the enclosure are to be interpreted as the foundations of three stone pillars rather than altars or supports for votive offerings, these might suggest that this area was roofed. Nails, possibly associated with wooden roofing, were also found.

Clay statuettes, both male and female, were deposited or offered at the sanctuary where they might have represented deities in the niches or, else, stood on votive offering supports especially if they represented votaries. One of these statuettes (of which only the head survives / was found) – apparently, a bearded male wearing a cap (Figure 53, p.223) – might have represented Melqart or his Greek equivalent Heracles (3.13 for such characteristics in the deity's iconography). Considered as a divine protector and guardian of seafarers and sea travellers, this deity was widely worshipped in coastal or seaside temples and shrines across the Mediterranean, including harbour shrines like that at Għar ix-Xiħ (5.3). In view of this, it is not unlikely that Melqart / Heracles might have been one of the deities whose guardianship and protection were sought at Għar ix-Xiħ by the seafarers frequenting the associated harbour of Mġarr ix-Xini. It is also worth observing that Għar ix-Xiħ and Ras ir-Raħeb (that hosted a temple likely to have been dedicated to the same divinity) are visually linked (4.3.6, 11 above and 5.2-3 below).

A number of ceramic containers – especially small bowls and cups – represented by the various sherds unearthed could have held food and liquid offerings which, likewise, might have stood on altars or on votive offering supports. The food offered appears to have included sea-food, like urchins and limpets, likely to have been collected from the nearby coast. If ritual meals were also held, these containers (or some of them) could have held the food to be consumed. In fact, unearthed fragments of cooking ware associated with food preparation could indicate preparation of food for both offerings and consumption.



GHAR IX-XIH EXCAVATION PROJECT

RZ, MA 2010

Figure 51
Plan of the Ghar ix-Xih shrine site. It shows the extent of the site's excavation towards the completion of the project. (Courtesy: University of Malta, Department of Classics and Archaeology).



Figure 52

The Ghar ix-Xih Shrine site during one of its earliest excavation seasons. The squarish recess (niche) is seen on the enclosure's rear elevation (top, middle). (Photo: the author).

On the basis of their fabric, some of the ceramic containers appear to have been imported and may have been either brought along and offered there by external visitors to the sanctuary or else may have been exchanged with local goods and offered by local worshippers, even if they were perceived as 'foreign'. Other containers could have been manufactured locally and likewise offered either by local worshippers or by external visitors buying or exchanging them with goods they brought. It is not yet clear whether the locally-manufactured containers (and, perhaps, even some of the clay statuettes) were fashioned out of clay sourced from the Ghar ix-Xih area itself, precisely from the clay bed at the foot of the ridge where the shrine is situated. The evidence for some sort of rotating mechanism – possibly, a potter's wheel installation – inside the nearby cave, the presence of a natural clay source at the foot of the shrine itself



Figure 53

A statuette head showing a bearded male wearing a cap.

Possibly, a representation of Melqart or his Greek equivalent Heracles, given the maritime context in which it was found: the coastal shrine at Ghar ix-Xih, in Gozo. (Photo: Frank Chetcuti).

(4.4.8 above), and the discovery of a few wasters during the course of excavations, seem to suggest pottery production (possibly in the nearby cave) associated with the shrine. Workshops (and / or their paraphernalia, like moulds) associated with sanctuaries or forming part of them are also known from elsewhere in Europe and in the Mediterranean (Brody 1998: 55-6; Ghey 2007: 27; Gleba 2009: 76-81; Nakhai 2001: 147) and possibly from Tas-Silġ and Ras il-Wardija too (4.1.6 and 4.2.8 above). This might have provided worshippers with the elements they needed to make their offerings besides having possibly equipped the sanctuary or shrine with the right mechanism to exert control on the products offered and / or consumed there.

Other offerings appear to have included ostrich egg-shells and eight coins, including a silver-plated *denarius* (3.8 for possible explanation of deposition of plated coins in ritual contexts). More interestingly, one coin found at the base (or in the foundation trench) of what remains of

a wall evidently dividing the innermost area and the open space in front might have constituted a foundation offering as a way of consecrating the place if not the wall itself (as in Gregory Warden 2009: 117). The other coins – or, at least, some of them – found in other spots across the site might have been also deliberately deposited. The coins were from the final four centuries B.C. (Suzanne Frey-Kupper written communication) when the site's use was gradually reaching its peak.

4.4.11 - Renewal and decline of the sanctuary

In later times – evidently, during the second and third centuries A.D. – the sanctuary seems to have undergone structural changes at least for the third time, albeit not major ones. With the exception of the niches, structures like the altars or votive offering supports in the innermost area of the enclosure were cleared away and a new plaster floor resting on small pebbles and marking the same area was laid out, perhaps re-affirming the area's most sacred nature.

As a result of this renewal process, previously offered clay statuettes, along with ceramic offering containers, may have been deliberately broken and re-deposited (if not dispersed) on the site of the sanctuary itself. In fact, not one single statuette or offering container was found entirely intact, but were all found in fragments. Perhaps more significantly, the majority of the statuette fragments consisted of detached heads or headless torsos with the remaining parts missing (Figure 54 below). This phenomenon of missing parts is a good indication of deliberate fragmentation with the missing parts being dispersed or re-deposited somewhere else, possibly even beyond the site itself (as in Chapman 2008: 188, 195-6). In fact, in no instance was any fragment found consisting of a head still attached to a torso or to a complete statuette while matching (statuette) fragments were absent.

But the phenomenon of deliberate fragmentation and dispersed deposition at Ghar ix-Xih is perhaps best illustrated by the discovery there of what appears to be a fragmented relief terracotta *pinax* (a votive tablet / plaque) (Figure 55 below). Three fragments – only two of which were matching – of this *pinax* were found face down together in situ while the remaining ones were absent.



Figure 54

Nude male torso. A statuette fragment from Ghar ix-Xih Shrine. (Photo: Frank Chetcuti).

Therefore, it appears that, while of the discovered fragments, the two matching ones may have come from an in situ accidental breakage, this last breakage was preceded by another breakage that was deliberate and the fragments might have been likewise deliberately deposited or disposed of in different places.

Chippings from Globigerina stone structures were also deposited. These chippings (many of which show signs of having been worked) could have come from stone structures (like the altars, votive offering supports, or even walls) which were mutilated either to make way for new ones as part of the renewal process or as part of a *profanatio dei sacra publica* or *damnatio memoriae* of the sanctuary itself. Nonetheless, they were maintained within the sanctuary precinct because of their ‘sacredness’; at the same time, adding to the ‘sacredness’ of the place.



Figure 55

The *pinax* fragments found together at Ghar ix-Xih Shrine. They include two matching ones. The rear side (not seen in the picture) shows thumb marks resulting from pressing wet clay in a mould. (Photo: the author).

As suggested by the less abundant material from this period, it seems that during the second and, particularly, during the third centuries A.D. the shrine may have already been experiencing a gradual decline. It may have been losing its significance, perhaps because maritime and agro-industrial activity in the presumed Mgarr ix-Xini harbour and valley area may have been also gradually diminishing by that time. This decline in activity and significance might have been brought about by changing economic circumstances.

It is difficult to tell precisely when the shrine was completely abandoned. However, it seems unlikely to have lingered for any long duration of time after the third century A.D., after which

fragmentation and re-deposition of statuettes or shrine elements is unlikely to have ever been repeated again as it might have been no longer deemed meaningful.

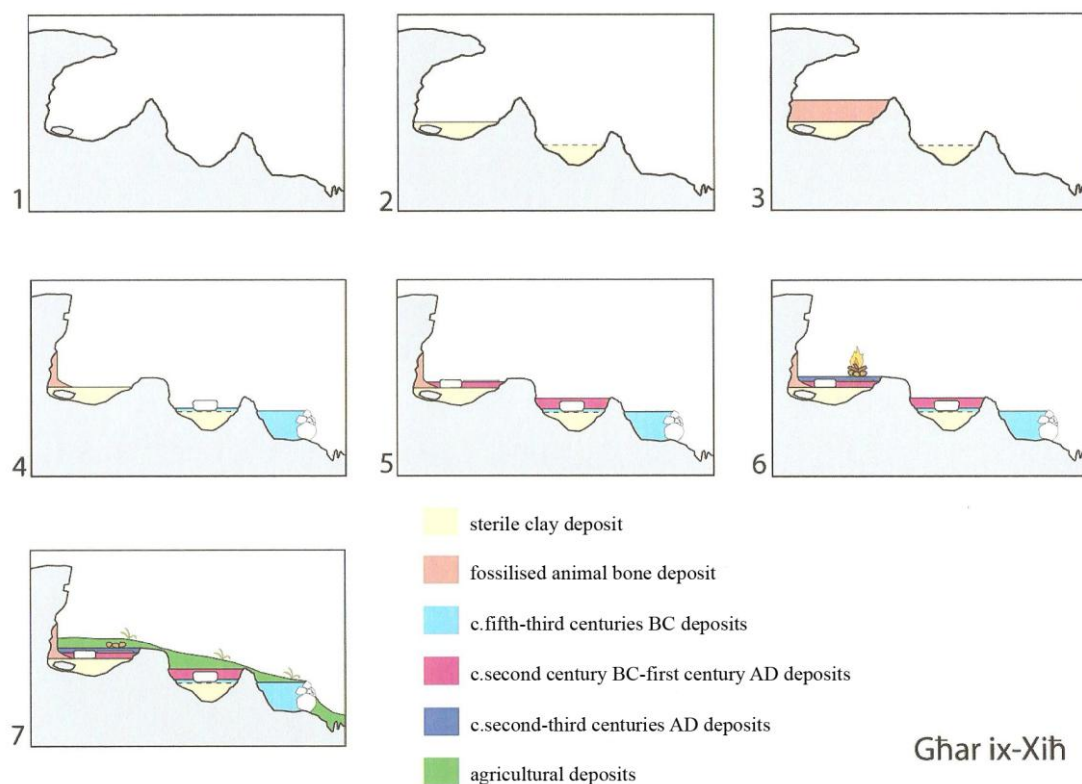


Figure 56

The excavators' proposed site formation sequence at Ghar ix-Xih. A preliminary reconstruction.

(Courtesy: University of Malta, Department of Classics and Archaeology).

4.4.12 - An interpretative analysis of Ghar ix-Xih site and its contextual setting

The Ghar ix-Xih surrounding landscape was a lived landscape – and, thus, a dynamic one – embodying relationships and engagements (as in Thomas 2001: 173-4) not only among the people themselves but also between these and the landscape components with which they interacted in their daily life. However, the different categories of people – agriculturalists, herdsman, fishermen, merchants / traders, sailors, and visitors – contributing to this dynamic landscape may have perceived and experienced this landscape (together with the sanctuary) in different ways according to their diverse ethnic, regional, and cultural backgrounds. Thus, their

respective engagements with the landscape could have likewise evolved in diverse manners reflecting the diverse categories' respective backgrounds.

To better understand the Ghar ix-Xih shrine and its connected activities, both on the site itself as well as in any associated places, a number of interpretative themes are explored in an attempt to bring the sanctuary and its related activities back to life. In particular, the sanctuary and its connected activities are analysed and interpreted within the framework of a religious scenario typical of a small rural shrine.

4.4.13 - Reconfiguring and enhancing the landscape: a new experience of place

A cave or rock-shelter like that at Ghar ix-Xih might have been itself a landmark already embedded with cultural significance. Even more so if it was thought of as a sacred place and, thus, could have been quite distinct from the rest of the landscape. Therefore, building a shrine there in later times may have meant an incorporation of this cultural significance into the newly-built shrine (as in Bradley 2002b: 119; Tilley 1996: 167).

However, choosing a site previously occupied by a cave or rock-shelter and re-shaping it accordingly to house their shrine, the Ghar ix-Xih people did not necessarily intend to erase the identity of the chosen place and its associated landscape by imposing their shrine on it. Through their alteration of the place (Figure 56 above), they might have rather intended to reconfigure and enhance the place and its associated landscape. This possible intention might perhaps be traced in their laying out of a terraced shrine replicating and being in harmony with the surrounding naturally terraced terrain, to the extent that the shrine could be viewed as a microcosm of the surrounding landscape (as in Bradley 1998b: 18; Richards 1996: 202-6; Thomas 2001: 178-9). This contrasts with the sanctuary at Ras il-Wardiya where the people creating it appear to have consciously exploited an existing naturally terraced landscape which they also had knowledge of (4.2.10). In this way, the laying out and architecture of the shrine at Ghar ix-Xih might have acted as a lens through which the people perceived the landscape surrounding the shrine (as in Bender 1993: 10). This perception can be said to have played the role of mediator between the landscape and the people's mind (as in Witcher 1999: 17).

On the other hand, the transformation of this particular place and the creation of a shrine in it is expected to have brought about new experiences of the place and, perhaps more importantly, a closer identification of the people with the place (as in Given 2004: 18; Thomas 2001: 177). When they ‘re-organised’ the place at Għar ix-Xiħ, the people concerned did not simply engage with it but, possibly, they also consciously appropriated it and used it to create a sense of identity as a group or community. In this sense, therefore, the place at Għar ix-Xiħ was not simply created but might have also been itself creative in that it might have created (or enabled the people to create) a sense of identity (as in Bender 1992: 735; 1993: 3; Head 1993: 492).

As it was linked to at least two groups of people whom it might have provided with a sense of identity, the place hosting the shrine at Għar ix-Xiħ might have, furthermore, been a common symbolic centre or a communal ‘home’ for these two groups: the one associated with the harbour and the other one (or others) associated with the valley. The former might include visitors to the harbour. The shrine at Għar ix-Xiħ was, thus, crucial to the recognition of their bonds (as in Bradley 1998b: 17; Edmonds 1999: 134). To this extent, the shrine might have played also a social role besides its main religious one (as in Wilkinson 2003: 44).

4.4.14 - Obliteration through fragmentation and deposition?

During the period under review, dedication of votive objects – often in the form of figurines – usually accompany visits to a sanctuary. Many offerings of votive objects may reflect small-scale personal acts rather than organised rituals. Through their visible expression of piety, they act as a medium for interaction between the dedicator and the deity as well as with observers and with past and contemporary dedications. Frequently, these objects are fashioned out of non-perishable material like clay, presumably to represent the dedicator’s own piety in a durable form. At the same time, the relative wealth of figurine offerings at Għar ix-Xiħ may also bear witness to the significance of the deity or deities worshipped there, apart from the piety of the responsible community (as in Ghey 2007: 25; Mylonopoulos 2006: 84-5, 88, 91-2, 109).

However, as representational objects, figurines might also bear commemorative functions. Through their representation, they might provide a graphic and non-linguistic access to the past by lending themselves to purposes of remembrance. But there might come instances, like renewal or abandonment of the sanctuary or shrine, when they might also lend themselves to purposes of obliteration (rather than remembrance) by way of their own destruction. In this way, their memory is diminished through the destruction of their identity. This could have been demonstrated at Għar ix-Xiħ by the way the statuettes there were fragmented. As already shown above, the statuettes' heads were detached as if to annihilate their identity and, thus, possibly also any memory associated with them (as in Alcock 2002: 26-7; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003: 3, 5). Thus, this head detachment or outright destruction of the statuettes might have been a deliberate act of iconoclasm or, in a context like ours, what John Chapman (2008: 187) terms as the 'ritual "killing" of objects'.

In a more general sense, such fragmentation could have resulted from any of the following factors. It could have been the result of either a violent destruction of the shrine, a deliberate destruction of the (old) shrine with appropriate ritual burial of the statuettes, or as part of a redevelopment / restoration programme of the shrine whereby old or obsolete material is replaced. It may have been also possible that the statuettes were buried as part of a purificatory ritual of the shrine site either to eradicate a previous desecration or in preparation of the site for a newly recreated shrine, sometimes following accidental damage or destruction. The statuettes may have been also ritually deposited in connection with a change of the deity or deities worshipped there (*exauguratio*) (as in Glinister 2000: 61, 63-6).

In all these cases, fragmentation and burial of the statuettes seem to have involved an annihilation of identity and / or memory associated with the statuettes. This confirms that, perhaps with the exception of a violent destruction of the shrine, the fragmentation and deposition of the statuettes in various spots across the site may have been also deliberate while, in the case of a redevelopment / restoration programme of the shrine, a newly recreated shrine, or a change of the worshipped deity / deities, they may have marked a transition rather than an end (as in Gregory Warden 2009: 118-9).

On the other hand, like structural elements of the shrine itself and any other votive offerings, the statuettes are likely to have been considered as divine property and, thus, were sacred. Therefore, even if obsolete, they were to be kept within the shrine precinct and this may further explain their deposition or burial inside the shrine precinct. Their burial within the shrine precinct did not remove their sacred character. Rather, it prevented them from coming in contact with the profane sphere (as in Glinister 2000: 67-9).

Finally, the deposition of these statuettes (or, at least, of a number of them) at the Għar ix-Xiħ shrine may have also represented the ritual ‘closure’ of the shrine when this was to function no longer, perhaps sometime around the third century A.D. The ritual burial of the statuettes (or of a representative selection of them) within the shrine precinct may have, thus, marked the formal termination of the sacred character of the site (deconsecration) symbolised by the return to the earth of the statuettes, themselves also made from the earth (clay). If so, the ritual deposition – possibly including also private votive offerings – may have taken place perhaps when the shrine was already falling into ruins (as in Glinister 2000: 69-70).

4.4.15 - The liminal and boundary roles of the shrine

With its location where the valley meets the presumed harbour, the Għar ix-Xiħ shrine might have established a limit between two spheres of influence: one is represented by the permanent (local) group or groups centred around the valley, while the other is represented by fluid (external) visitors (traders and sailors) coming in through the harbour. This limit might be viewed as having been under the protection of the god/s worshipped at the shrine (as in Zifferero 2002: 246-7).

But besides this and also due to its location, the shrine might have also assumed (from an anthropological perspective) the role of a boundary by promoting contact between these two groups of people who had a common and mutual interest in the economic and productive activities carried out mainly in the valley area but, inevitably, involving also the presumed harbour. Thus, the shrine also served as a focal point in an exchange network between the above-mentioned two groups of people. At the same time and further confirming its complex

role, from its location as a visible marker, the shrine highlighted the counterposition of, yet established a border and balance between, the land (whose coast it might have protected) and the sea (as in Zifferero 2002: 246, 262).

At times when sea communication was easier and quicker than overland communication, the sea facilitated not only the movement of people, but also that of objects, ideas, and technologies. This movement and interaction permitted not only economic development but also diverse social systems as well as artistic and cultural achievements. It was in this way, in fact, that the Mediterranean Sea has nurtured its diverse cultures and instigated an array of cultural developments throughout the entire region (2.3). The maritime interaction and exchange facilitated by the presence of the nearby presumed Mġarr ix-Xini harbour may have served these same functions (even if, perhaps, on a smaller scale) in respect of the Għar ix-Xiħ region and the community or communities it hosted. Thus, the harbour may have facilitated the transfer of certain subsistence goods and commodities to the largely rural population of the region (as evidenced by certain pottery finds at the Għar ix-Xiħ shrine itself) but it may have also provided their own products with access to open markets. Likewise importantly, the maritime interaction facilitated by the harbour may have motivated technological developments (as evidenced by technological changes to certain wineries along the Mġarr ix-Xini valley) which might reflect new economic situations, newly-introduced demands and, above all, reception of new ideas and knowledge (as in Knapp and Blake 2005: 1, 9-10).

4.4.16 - Visibility and symbolic relationships

The dominant location of the Għar ix-Xiħ shrine high on a visually impressive ridge seems to highlight a specific symbolic relationship between the shrine itself and the natural rock formation on which it stands. The association of the shrine with the visually impressive ridge may have been particularly significant. The shrine was meant to be seen, climbed up to, and visited for ritual activities. The construction of the shrine, therefore, may have helped to establish a material and enduring relationship between the ritual practices and the landscape with its topographical features. In this way, the topographic space became also incorporated in

the construction of the shrine and, making the shrine visible, may have enabled it to draw power from the landscape to exert ritual control (as in Tilley 1996: 167).

The shrine's high and prominent location along with its visual domination over the presumed Mġarr ix-Xini harbour with its associated activities could have made out of the shrine a distinctive and highly visible feature which perhaps could be seen even from a relatively long distance out at sea. The shrine's conspicuousness may have served to those living in, frequenting, or approaching (by both land and sea) the harbour area as a symbolic reminder of the presence of the gods and, possibly, of any of the shrine's benefactors too (as in Sinopoli 2003: 25). Through its conspicuousness, the shrine and the god/s it housed or represented remained 'visually' available not only to its builders or its contemporaries, but also to later generations as well (as in Meskell 2003: 36).

CELEBRATING AND SECURING THE FRUITS OF THE VINE: POSSIBLE RITUAL FEASTING AND DEPOSITION AT TAL-KNISJA AND TAL-LOGĠA

4.5.1 - Presumed vineyards with associated wineries

Evidence of what might have been some sort of religious celebration associated with the harvest of agricultural products – in this case, grapes – is forthcoming from small-scale excavations undertaken in two selected terraced fields evidently associated with wine presses. The two agricultural fields are respectively located at Tal-Knisja and Tal-Logġa, on the northern flank of Mġarr ix-Xini valley. Although further analyses are to be carried out, the fields were presumably cultivated with vines. The field at Tal-Logġa, in particular, exhibited evidence of quarrying prior to its transformation into an agricultural field. In fact, the stones forming the oldest surviving stretch of the field's boundary wall (the latest re-building phase of which is datable to the Byzantine period) appear to have been extracted from the same place. The excavations formed part of a current survey project in the said Mġarr ix-Xini valley, between Sannat and Xewkija in Gozo (also 4.4.6 above).

4.5.2 - Possible ritual activities at Tal-Knisja and Tal-Logġa

Fragments of drinking-cups – even if not in great numbers – have been retrieved from levels dating as early as the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. in the two fields under study (Alessandro Quercia written communication). In one of these fields – the one at Tal-Knisja – some of the retrieved drinking-cup fragments were found in a rock fissure where they may have been deliberately deposited (as in Briault 2007: 136) (Figure 57 below).

The presence of drinking-cups would seem to point to wine consumption. But the context in which they are found is suggestive of wine production rather than consumption. It is also unusual or not under normal circumstances – and, certainly, not frequent – that wine production and consumption share the same environment. In the writer's opinion, the most viable explanation would be that wine might have been consumed here only on rare – perhaps,

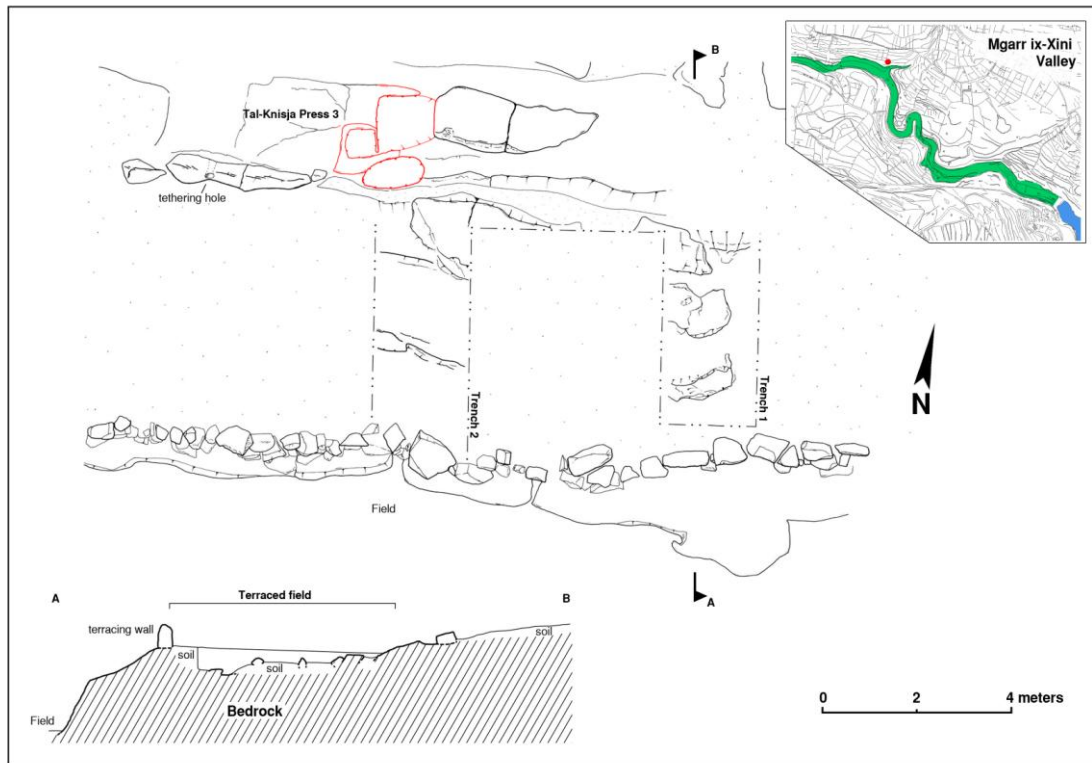


Figure 57

The field at Tal-Knisja associated with a press. The press is outlined in red on the plan. The rock fissure yielding some of the drinking-cup fragments lies in the trench joining trenches 1 and 2 to the north. Other drinking-cup fragments were found in trench 2. (Courtesy: Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, Malta).

yearly – occasions and this might also explain the presence of drinking-cups in small numbers. These yearly occasions might have been some sort of local and rural agro-religious festivals welcoming the vintage season or celebrating the harvest of grapes around September or October: a sort of a celebration of the ‘first fruits’ / *primitiae* (as in Morgan 1994: 120). Consumption of wine – presumably, from the first batch of harvested grapes – might have been deemed most fitting during such festivals. Such ritualised drinking might have also facilitated social interaction and helped channelling the flow of social relations (as in Hodos 2010: 86).

Due to the small amount of grapes they could process, nearby small installations consisting of rock-cut cavities joined to what appear to be adjacent crushing platforms might have served as ‘wineries’ reserved for the crushing of the first harvested grapes. On the other hand, solution

pans with over-flow gutters might have provided purified fresh water to be mixed with the wine. This seems to be suggested by at least one specific example at Tal-Logġa which appears to have been intentionally created beneath an overhanging rock from where it could receive dripping water that has also left stains. Purification would be achieved either by the scooping of floating impurities through the over-flow gutter, through the sinking of heavy impurities to the bottom by suspension, or both.

4.5.3 - Ritual feasting associated with the vintage

A religious festival connected with the vintage is documented, for example, from the Campanian region in South Italy. An inscribed religious calendar of A.D. 387 marks the days on which local (possibly, also minor) rituals or festivals were celebrated. According to this calendar, a festival connected with the vintage was celebrated at Acerusa (Lake Acherusia) in the vicinity of Capua on the 15th October (Beard *et al.* 1998b: 77; Horden and Purcell 2000: 451). Interestingly, by the sixteenth century A.D., the grape harvest throughout the Mediterranean was still celebrated with merrymaking and not least with madness (Braudel 1972: 258) perhaps reminiscent of the wine-god Dionysos of Classical antiquity, the rituals or festivals celebrated in his honour, and the madness that often characterised the Dionysiac celebrations.

Celebration continues to characterise most wine festivals taking place in several Mediterranean places today where the grape's bounty is still celebrated by drinking its product, wine, as the following two examples show. Taking place between 2nd and 11th September, the Limassol Wine Festival in Cyprus recreates the ancient Dionysiac celebrations with dancing, theatrical performances, feasting, and, not least, wine drinking. The Madeira Wine Festival in Portugal runs from 1st to 4th September. Apart from the traditional dancing and feasting, the festival includes the harvest and the treading of grapes. In fact, the festival had long been an integral part of the harvest. In this way, the festival provided a means for the entire community to get involved in the production of the local wine (n.a. 2011: 37).

Alienation of part of the yield in the form of a first-fruit offering to the rural or agricultural gods (without depleting one's own resources) constituted one of the basic acts of rural religion (Becker 2009: 96; Horden and Purcell 2000: 430; Spaeth 1996: 112). The grape harvest might, thus, be celebrated by sacrifices performed in honour of the wine god as two agricultural calendars – *CIL*, VI, 2305-6 – hailing from Rome show (Chisholm and Ferguson 1981: 419). A special offering of the first fruits of the grape harvest that used to be made to the wine god was called 'sacrima'. In his dictionary *De Verborum Significatu* (17, s.v. *sacrima*), the lexicographer Sextus Pompeius Festus attributes this term (*sacrima*) to the new wine which used to be offered to the wine god in order to preserve the vineyards, the vessels, and the wine itself. He parallels this offering to the *praemetium* of the first harvested grain ears that were offered to Ceres in her role as protectress of the fields and of the grain itself. Festus flourished probably in the later second century A.D. but his lexicon is based on the lost one of Marcus Verrius Flaccus (c.55 B.C.-A.D. 20) who had used the lost *Antiquitates rerum humanarum et divinarum* compiled by Marcus Terentius Varro (116-27 B.C.) in 47 B.C. In his *Naturalis Historia* (18.2.8), Gaius Plinius Secundus / Pliny the Elder (A.D. 23-79) adds that the new fruits or wine were not even tasted before the offering of the first fruits (*primitiae*) was made (Spaeth 1996: 39, 41, 112).

The practice of offering to the gods of the countryside the first fruits (*primitiae*) of the vines is attested in Oea (modern-day Tripoli) in Libya by Apuleius in his *Apologia* (56, 16-7), delivered sometime between the years A.D. 156 and 158. This Roman-period writer hailing from the Roman province of Africa mentions this offering – which, presumably, also assumed the form of a ritual or festival – in the context of his blaming of a certain Aemilianus for failing in his religious duties, one of which was the above-mentioned first fruit offering (Di Vita *et al.* 1999: 37).

A common way of inaugurating such festivals might have been also by way of pouring wine on the ground as the Romans did at the *Vinalia* which they celebrated on 23rd April in honour of Jupiter. The earth symbolically drank the wine for the gods who dwell in the earth. Apart from being itself a sign of life (like blood), wine may have also symbolised the wine god's blood or personified the wine god himself (Pieraccini 2011: 132-5). As stated by St Augustine of Hippo

(A.D. 354-430) in his *De Civitate Dei contra Paganos* (4.11), written in the early fifth century A.D., the wine god's very divine power was even thought to reside in the vine (Spaeth 1996: 41).

Thus, ritual actions like rural festivals might equally take place outside a cult site (Mylonopoulos 2006: 108-9). Possibly not confined to specific architectural and sacred structures, these festivals might have not only taken place in fields or open spaces but were possibly not even presided over by any special groups of people like priests (Sarpaki 2009: 66). On the other hand, the ceramic vessels employed during such festivals might have been deliberately broken after the festival and left on site perhaps in an act of sacralisation (Morgan 1994: 114-5. Also above and 4.5.4 below). The deposition of a number of fragments (from the broken ceramic vessels) particularly if placed inside a rocky feature like the natural rock fissure at Tal-Knisja (4.5.2 above) or the rock hollow (that contained only one but substantial ceramic fragment) at the foot of the field wall's external face at Tal-Loġġa (4.5.4 below) might have highlighted a connection to bedrock which, in turn, emphasised the sacredness and ritual 'value' of the bedrock in a context that may not exclude association with a chthonic-related cult (as in Gregory Warden 2009: 114-6).

It is unclear if any festivals possibly celebrated at Mġarr ix-Xini valley – particularly, at Tal-Knisja and Tal-Loġġa – and perhaps involving wine consumption might have had any associations with the god Dionysos on account of the (possible) offering and consumption of wine. But it has already been shown that, on account of a possible Dionysos Botrys (without excluding other less possible representations) terracotta face mask recovered from Xlendi Bay (which, however, might have originated from a foreign ship), Dionysos might have not been totally unfamiliar in Gozo (4.2.5) whereas at Ras il-Wardija sanctuary, a cult and/or ritual banquets might have been celebrated in his honour too (4.2.5, 8, 10).

4.5.4 - Deliberate fragmentation and deposition at Tal-Loġġa

The field at Tal-Loġġa also yielded evidence suggesting further activities of a possibly ritual nature. What is particularly intriguing here is the discovery of a substantial vertical portion

(including entire profile) of a biconical pot (jug / dipper cup?) (Figure 59 below) apparently deposited deliberately in relative isolation almost at the bottom of a dark brown soil deposit (approximately 66cm by 62cm and 28cm thick / deep).

On the basis of its shape and fabric, it is tentatively dated to the Bronze Age Borg in-Nadur phase : *c.*1500 – 700 B.C. (Alessandro Quercia written communication). But being thus also one of the very few Bronze Age (and, thus, earliest) ceramic pieces found on site, this substantial fragment may have come from a residual pot that may have still remained in circulation in post-Bronze Age times perhaps on account of any significance it may have enjoyed; unless it was an early Classical period pot still carrying an archaic form (and type of fabric) persisting from earlier times.

This substantial pot fragment came to light upon completion of a single and small but deep trench dug on the external side of the field wall's oldest stretch (Figure 58 below). Apart from this substantial pot fragment, there were only about four other tiny – almost insignificant – ceramic fragments (none of which exceeds 1cm between extreme points) within the same deposit. But, while similar to each other's, their fabric was different from that of the pot fragment and, therefore, they could not have belonged to it. The deposit rested on a layer of relatively small stones but was beneath two other layers, respectively consisting of large stones (lower layer) and small stones (higher layer), upon part of which ran the huge field wall. Along with these stone layers below and above it, the dark brown soil deposit was contained within a rock hollow. The pot portion stood in an almost upright position on what remained of its base and was retrieved from an extension of the same dark brown soil deposit (also above and beneath a similar extension of the respective stone layers) at the foot of the field wall's external face (Figure 60, p.243).

A close parallel is provided by what has been interpreted as a 'foundation deposit' (in this case, consisting of loom weights) carefully placed in direct contact with the foundation blocks of a late fourth century B.C. house in Gela (Sicily) while another example comes from an agricultural context (like ours at Tal-Logġa) where a 'foundation deposit' was found underneath a foundation wall of a fourth century B.C. farmhouse at nearby Manfria (Gleba



Figure 58

Findspot of the pot fragment at Tal-Logga. The picture above shows the rock hollow (within the cut trench) at the foot of the field wall's external face after excavation of the dark brown soil deposit containing the pot fragment and of the stone layers above and below it. (Photo: the author).

2009: 76). Another parallel may be provided by what was probably another foundation deposit at the Etruscan acropolis sanctuary of Poggio Colla, north-east of Florence in Italy. The contents (which were complete) were contained in a pit directly east of the west wall of a courtyard. The pit was covered with stone and tile (Gregory Warden 2009: 113).

Nonetheless, the discovered pot fragment could not stand upright on its own. So, had this pot fragment accidentally fallen or been dropped, it is highly unlikely to have remained in the almost upright position in which it was found and not fell on its side. Moreover, some degree



Figure 59

The pot fragment from Tal-Logga. It was found in relative isolation almost at the bottom of the dark brown soil deposit. It is shown here standing upright (supported from behind). (Photo: the author).

of breakage would have been expected, in which case some more fragments from the same pot fragment would have been found. But, with the exception of the few tiny and alien ceramic fragments mentioned above, no more ceramic sherds – whether belonging to the same pot or to other containers – were found within the same deposit in which it was found. Had it been carried by rainwater until finally got stuck within the rock hollow containing the dark brown soil deposit, the pot fragment is likewise highly unlikely to have been able to remain upright on its own; besides, it (particularly its edges) would have been more extensively worn. Therefore, the discovery of this pot portion in this context and under these circumstances might possibly indicate a deliberate ritual fragmentation of the pot, a likewise deliberate ritual deposition of this particular pot fragment and, possibly, an enchainment process, an appropriation exercise, an attempt to re-establish the *pax deorum*, or a foundation offering involving the pot fragment/s (below). On the other hand, the two stone layers above the dark brown soil deposit (containing

the pot portion) and over part of which ran the huge field wall might have been deliberately created to seal the deposit containing the pot portion. As the said field wall ran over part of these presumed 'sealing' layers, the apparently structured deposition of the pot portion might pre-date or be contemporary to the building (or, possibly, re-building at a later stage) of the same field wall.

4.5.5 - Ritual fragmentation and deposition in a rural context

One particular medium through which memories can be constructed and transmitted is precisely the deposition of objects. Through their burial, the deposited objects are committed to the ground and, thus, lost from view. This involves a process of incorporation wherein objects with prior significance are taken out of the material world and are appropriated for use in a context of ritual deposition. This process of incorporation is commemorative as it invokes – through the appropriated and deposited objects – memories associated with the past and / or with other places. Thus, no longer forming part of the material world, the appropriated and deposited objects are consigned to a place in memory (Jones 2001: 217-8, 223-6).

It is not unusual that objects – often the same one/s used in the ritual – are fragmented prior to their deposition and this is sometimes not accidental. This has happened, for example, at both Tas-Silġ (4.1.15, 22) and Għar ix-Xiħ (4.4.11, 14). But as shown by the pot fragment from Tal-Loġġa, this phenomenon appears to have taken place even outside sites designated for rituals (like sanctuaries or shrines) but, possibly, not excluding an associated ritual. Furthermore, in contexts like the field at Tal-Loġġa, fragmentation and deposition of objects was also a religious act addressed to deities and for purposes that may have not differed from those behind similar acts that took place in sanctuaries and shrines. In the case of the pot fragment from Tal-Loġġa, the pot's fragmentation and deposition (of the fragment) may have been undertaken in view of one of the four reasons elaborated below (4.5.6-9).

Through their burial, deposited objects are permanently separated from their social or living context and taken out of circulation. This is further achieved if they are also physically destroyed or if they are deposited in locations from where they could not be recovered. They



Figure 60

The pot fragment in situ at Tal-Loġġa. It is shown here as found in relative isolation and in an upright position during excavation of the dark brown soil deposit within the rock hollow at the foot of the field wall's external face. (Photo: the author).

might be also deliberately broken or mutilated precisely to avoid their re-entrance into the realm of the secular world. Their deliberate breakage might also be viewed as in itself an act of sacrifice disconnecting them from or annihilating (or transforming) their original status and, thus, also eliminating any possible re-use of them. Alternatively, what might be sought through their breakage or mutilation could be the creation of a single representative fragment (e.g. an orphan sherd) intended to be deposited as one part for all (*pars pro toto*) or to represent an absent whole vessel. The objects' / fragments' deposition, then, might also provide an opportunity to lay claim to the site (where they are deposited) or even to claim association with the supernatural (Bradley 1998a: 138; Delfino 2010: 173-4, 178; King 2008: 29; Rowlands 1993: 146-7, 149).

However, the way objects are fragmented and ‘discarded’ might also indicate some form of structured deposition wherein they could still be viewed as being part of the social relations in which they were produced, distributed, consumed, and deposited. Thus, although buried and out of view, the deposited objects would still remain connected to the living, being part of their common past (Chapman 2000: 49; 2008: 187; Gheorghiu 2001: 73-84).

4.5.6 - Enchained links

Such connections can be manifested in the ritual deposition, in different (and, possibly, special) places across the landscape, of fragments of a deliberately broken object. Objects, in this case, would serve as metaphors for people: objectifying their personhood. The selective and ritual deposition, in different places, of fragments from the same broken object would, thus, allow identification of groups of people with specific territories or places and reflect enchained relations between persons or populations, objects, and places or settlements. When these different places of deposition include both those of a secular and those of a sacred nature, this might imply enchained links between humans and supernatural beings. Similar enchained links between the living and the dead might be implied when the different places include both mortuary and domestic ones while the degree of object fragmentation might, in this case, indicate the degree of closeness of the social relations between the deceased and the living relatives. The practice of ritual fragmentation and deposition not only maintains enchained social relations on both local and, sometimes, wider level but is also particularly effective in both creation and maintenance of cultural memory, place value, and person or population identity (Chapman 2001: 89-102; 2008: 188-99; Gheorghiu 2001: 82; Gregory Warden 2009: 116-7).

The relative isolation in which our pot fragment was found deposited might imply the possible deposition of the remaining fragment or fragments in some other unknown place or places. What one can say is, perhaps, that this single pot fragment seemingly deposited deliberately in this particular place (i.e. the field at Tal-Logġa) by the people associated with this same place might be a manifestation of enchained links or relations between this place / field and the presumed other place or places where the remaining pot fragment or fragments might have

been likewise deposited; or between the group of people associated with this place / field and some other group or groups of people associated with the presumed place or places where the remaining fragment or fragments might have been deposited.

4.5.7 - Appropriation

Through ritual, people may also engage with the world they live in by laying claims to or legitimising places. This engagement with ‘their’ world and their claims to places are, thus, given meaning through ritual (Bender 1993: 2, 15). Thus, if the pot’s remaining fragment or fragments were, on the other hand, deposited in another place or places in the same field (which was not entirely excavated) or along its wall, this might be an expression of an appropriation of the field by a group of people.

4.5.8 - Conciliating or placating rituals

As any anthropogenic intervention in or alteration to the natural landscape – whether by way of construction or destruction / obliteration – was perceived as a violation or profanation of the place (especially if the place enjoyed a sacred character), it could be also considered as a sacrilegious act not only disturbing the spirits / deities inhabiting the place but also disrupting their bond with the place they inhabit. This disruption or sacrilegious act could be rectified and good relations with these spirits / deities (*pax deorum*) could be restored through conciliating or placating rituals, often including object or (sometimes single) fragment depositions (Delfino 2010: 173-4, 176-9). The construction of the field (and any ancillary facilities, especially the wall) and the consequent violation or profanation of the place at Tal-Loggà might have, therefore, necessitated a conciliating or placating ritual involving the deposition of this pot fragment in a cavity by the field wall’s foundations in an attempt to re-establish the *pax deorum*.

4.5.9 - Foundation / re-foundation offerings

Alternatively, one might also think of the structured deposition of the pot fragment as a foundation deposit wherein, possibly along with organic offerings (subsequently, decomposed), the pot fragment's deposition might have formed part of a ritual associated with the creation / re-creation or 'foundation' / 're-foundation' of the field (Gleba 2009: 75-6, Wilson 1999: 297, 300, 302-3, and Woodward and Woodward 2004 for examples of foundation deposits, often involving animal bones but sometimes involving also substantial pot fragments and / or complete pots, albeit in association with foundations of towns, settlements, or sacred buildings). As the symbolic context for the ritual deposition of bones and / or artefacts in pits (including foundation pits) might have been often formed by concerns of fertility renewal or protection and averting of evil (Wilson 1999: 297, 302-3), they might have been similar concerns (particularly, that of agricultural fertility renewal or protection) that created a symbolic context for the deposition of our pot fragment (possibly along with organic offerings) in a cavity by the field wall's foundations.

If the ritual foundation / re-foundation offering involved also organic offerings, these might have consisted of a representative specimen of the field's agricultural produce (whether in solid or liquid form, like wine) offered to the patron deity or deities (along with the pot fragment) through its deposition in a cavity beneath the newly-built (or re-built) field wall and, thus, also under the earth. The specific location of the presumed offering might also bear particular significance. Located at the foot of the field wall and within a cavity over part of which ran the same field wall, the offering might have been meant to secure the deity's or deities' protection for the field's crops as much as the field wall itself did protect the same crops. In this way, the field wall might have also been perceived as imbued with the same protective powers as the deity's or deities' (Gleba 2009: 76 for similar symbolic meanings attached to foundation offerings).

If the pot's remaining fragment/s were deposited in another place or places beyond the field, the presumed ritual fragmentation and deposition of our pot fragment and of the same pot's remaining fragment/s may have not only maintained enchain social links or relations

between this place / field and some other place or places; or between the group of people associated with this place / field and another group or groups of people associated with the other place or places. Like the alternative and possible deposition of the pot's remaining fragment or fragments in another place or places in the same field or along its wall (presumably in manifestation of an appropriation of the field), it may have also helped in maintaining cultural memory, place value, and / or group identity. This same effect might have been, to varying extents, also achieved by the other two possibilities: the deposition of the pot fragment as part of a conciliating or placating ritual to restore the *pax deorum* or as (part of) a foundation / re-foundation offering.

As these depositions – including those at Tal-Knisja (4.5.2 above) – seem to confirm, practices of deposition are often associated with peasant communities (rather than urban elite) whose cult activities and beliefs they would seem to represent. They would further demonstrate that ritual activity – particularly, in the countryside – may not necessarily be confined to clearly-defined cult places. Thus, humble acts of offering like the above might take place even outside defined cult sites (as in Hingley 2011: 755. Also: Gleba 2009: 74-5 with specific reference to foundation offerings in secular places like the field at Tal-Logġa).

4.6 – CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

All the sites under discussion provide evidence of continuity through the presence of earlier structures (or features) that keep developing and changing in response to newly-arising religious situations and demands. With the exception of the sanctuary at Ras il-Wardija which may have undergone the shortest time-span of continuity, all appear to have origins going back to prehistoric times but betray continuity for more centuries to follow.

A natural feature that may have characterised all of our sanctuary sites were freshwater springs. Freshwater springs (now, dry) have been identified at Tas-Silġ sanctuary site (4.1.15) and near the temple site on the Ras ir-Raheb promontory (4.3.6). Situated at the mouth of Mġarr ix-Xini valley and overlooking a clay outcrop (4.4.8), the shrine at Għar ix-Xiħ may have also had a freshwater source nearby. As the presence of cisterns in isolated sanctuaries and shrines might follow a tradition wherein such sanctuaries and shrines often marked freshwater sources (Brody 1998: 60), the cistern at the isolated sanctuary of Ras il-Wardija in Gozo (4.2.5-6, 8) might be also indicative of a freshwater source there. It is to be noted that cisterns are also present at Tas-Silġ sanctuary (4.1.12, 15) and at the temple site on Ras ir-Raheb promontory (4.3.6) where freshwater springs have been identified (above). Although of unknown antiquity, field cisterns in close vicinity of the shrine at Għar ix-Xiħ in Gozo (4.4.8) might have been also associated with it if they were contemporary (or earlier). The use of cisterns, then, indicates water storage, which implies the use of and reliance on water much needed both for purification and as a constituent of ritual (as in Guettel Cole 1994: 207).

Other common traits include the possible association of workshops with the sanctuaries at Tas-Silġ and Ras il-Wardija and with the shrine at Għar ix-Xiħ. At Ras il-Wardija and at Ras ir-Raheb, stone seems to have been supplied from a nearby source. At Ras il-Wardija, in particular, stone may have been also employed in the presumably associated workshop.

Also notable is their east – west alignment, where the sanctuary complex at Tas-Silġ was entered into from the west while the Ras il-Wardija and Ras ir-Raheb ones were accessed from the east. The shrine at Għar ix-Xiħ was also accessed from the east in its earliest phase. With

the exception of the last one, entry into these sanctuaries was oriented seawards: a phenomenon which might have borne certain significance perhaps out of association with the sea.

A strong maritime association is further borne by the fact that all four sanctuaries were built close to the sea from where they could be seen. The ones at Ras ir-Raheb (in Malta) and at Ras il-Wardija (in Gozo) were built by the edge of a coastal cliff with strikingly good visibility from the sea but very limited visibility from the hinterland, particularly the one at Ras il-Wardija. Built as it is down a terraced slope facing the sea, the latter could only be seen to a limited extent from Dwejra inlet on its northern flank and from the approaching pathway but from nowhere else in the hinterland on its rear. The sanctuary at Tas-Silġ (in Malta) and the shrine at Għar ix-Xiħ (in Gozo) are well visible both from the sea and, especially, from their respective underlying harbours: respectively, Marsaxlokk and Mgarr ix-Xini. View of the shrine at Għar ix-Xiħ (in Gozo) from the hinterland is also particularly limited as the shrine is located slightly down below the very top of a high ridge which, thus, hinders any views of the shrine from the hinterland on its rear.

Another factor which may also underscore a maritime association is the inter-visibility enjoyed in some instances between our sanctuaries. The Tas-Silġ sanctuary enjoys no visual links at all with any of the other three sanctuaries, neither across the land nor across the sea. In the same way, nor do the Ras il-Wardija sanctuary and Għar ix-Xiħ shrine enjoy any inter-visibility between them. The only visual links occur between Ras ir-Raheb and Ras il-Wardija and between Ras ir-Raheb and Għar ix-Xiħ and, in both instances, these visual links are across the sea (4.3.11).

But most notable is the layout of the first three sites, namely Tas-Silġ, Ras il-Wardija, and Ras ir-Raheb. Their central space seems to consist essentially of a courtyard which, in all of these three sites, may have been surrounded by a portico. This courtyard accommodated the altars or supports for offerings: what one might label an ‘altar court’. Maintaining and incorporating the earlier prehistoric temple, the sanctuary at Tas-Silġ included a *cella* aligned with the entrance to the colonnaded courtyard. This architectural arrangement seems to be replicated – albeit on a smaller scale as it might have perhaps catered for smaller congregations – at Ras ir-Raheb

where the *cella* in the form of a quadrangular room on the opposite end of the presumed courtyard entrance seems to be rather contemporary with the rest of the building. No evidence for a *cella* has been found so far in association with the ‘temple’ on the first terrace at the Ras il-Wardija sanctuary. However, one cannot completely exclude the possible presence of a *cella* on the end facing the entrance to the presumed courtyard as, in this part, any remaining walls were missing. These missing walls leave unclear both the remaining extent of the presumed courtyard and the possible presence of any adjoining structures like a *cella* to which the remnants of a mortar pavement (4.2.8) might have belonged. A small cave or rock shelter in the Għar ix-Xiħ shrine might have also served the purpose of a *cella* in the shrine’s earliest phase. At that stage, the open terrace in front could be perhaps equated to an open courtyard in front of the small cave or rock shelter / ‘*cella*’. In a later stage, the ‘*cella*’ may have been shifted by the enlargement of the first terrace and the creation of a new terrace in front of the new ‘*cella*’ (4.4.10).

Terracing, on the other hand, is evidently typical of the Gozo sanctuaries, although it is not to be excluded that the outer boundary wall surrounding the Ras ir-Raħeb sanctuary (in Malta) might have been meant to create a terrace around this sanctuary too. But the terracing arrangement in the case of both of the Gozo sanctuaries seems to be more clearly evident. On the other hand, although it extends down the slope of Tas-Silġ hill, the sanctuary there is built on a more or less flat area which rather involved the dumping of material to neutralise the terracing effect and create the desired flat surface (4.1.15).

Finally, as shown by the last case study centering on Tal-Knisja and Tal-Loġġa in Gozo, ritual activity was not restricted to places designated specifically for this purpose, like temples or sanctuaries. Thus, even open-air spaces like the agricultural fields at Tal-Knisja and Tal-Loġġa might occasionally host popular festivals of a religious nature which might not necessarily involve specialised priesthoods either. Ritual activity of this kind and in this sort of environment is usually associated with rural communities whose concerns (mainly agricultural) it usually tended to manifest and address.

CHAPTER 5:

RELIGIOUS CULTS AND PRACTICES EVIDENCED FROM OTHER SOURCES

5.1 Aims and method

In the previous chapter, cults and religious behaviour were analysed on the basis of evidence provided by surviving material remains from excavated sites. To complement this evidence, this chapter considers the same theme of cults and religious behaviour but in relation to specific deities rather than individual sites. It uses related evidence provided by material objects surviving in public collections or documented in both published and unpublished sources. This evidence includes epigraphy, coinage, statuary, and other objects such as amulets and anchor stocks. For reasons outlined in due course (5.5 below), the coins considered are restricted to those minted and circulating locally. The evidence is given in the following sections (5.2-7) of this chapter. The final section (5.8) is devoted to an analysis and critique of the Maltese religious mindset and attitudes.

5.2 - Religious cults and practices attested in the Maltese islands in classical antiquity

Distinguishing between religion and cult, as well as adopting a contextual approach in his investigation of the Maltese prehistoric temples and their material assemblages, Barrowclough (2007: 45-53) suspects the presence in Neolithic Malta of a number of individual localised cults rather than a single 'Maltese' religion. It

will be shown, particularly in this chapter, that a similar (and perhaps more evident) situation might have prevailed in the Maltese islands even in Classical times. In fact, as we shall see, the prevailing scenario in the Maltese islands as anywhere else in the Mediterranean was characterised by a polytheistic pantheon (TABLE 6) wherein each deity enjoyed its individual cult, sometimes restricted to certain localities or environments only.

5.3 - Guarantors of fertility: Astarte and Baal / Heracles

Epigraphic data from Tas-Silġ sanctuary have already shown the flourishing cult which the Phoenician Astarte (variably referred to by the Punic name ‘Tanit’ and the Greek equivalent ‘Hera’) enjoyed in Malta, particularly when occasionally her name appears with the epithet ‘of Malta’ (4.1.15). That Astarte’s cult extended to include Gozo as well is shown by a third Century B.C. Punic inscription (*CIS*, I, 132) from that island (Figure 61 below and Appendix I). This inscription mentions a temple of the goddess as one of those constructed and / or renovated by the people of Gozo. Amongst these constructed and / or renovated temples, the inscription mentions another one in honour of Baal – Astarte’s male consort and, like her, protector of fertility – under the composite name of ‘Sadambaal’. The dedicatees of the remaining temples are not known due to *lacunae* on the inscription (Heltzer 1993: 198, 202-3).

It appears that Baal’s cult extended to Malta too. The best evidence is again epigraphic in nature. An inscription with the name of Baal comes from a tomb amongst those found at Taç-Ċaġħqi, on the outskirts of Rabat, Malta (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 122). But more evidence comes from a pair of two identical marble *candelabra* each carrying two inscriptions: the main one in Punic, followed by a Greek version of it (Figure 62 below and Appendix II). In spite of the Punic inscription, these *candelabra* are currently dated to the second century B.C. On no

TABLE 6
List of deities and evidence for their cults in the Maltese islands

Deities / cults	Attributes / concerns	Source/s of evidence	Provenance	Reference in this chapter
Anubis	Afterlife protection to deceased (in our context)	Amulet (containing also Horus)	Tomb at Ghajjn Klieb, limits of Rabat (Malta)	5.7
Aphrodite / Venus	Agriculture and animal husbandry (in our context)	Marble headless female torso*	It-Tokk in Victoria, Gozo	5.4
Apollo	Flocks and cattle (in our context), providing help and warding off evil. Also, as an urban god	Inscriptions <i>CIL</i> , X, 7495 and 8318	Near Benedictine monastery at Mdina	5.5, 7, 8
		Bronze statue	Nadur, Gozo	5.5, 7
Artemis	Hunting, flocks, young animals	Small headless marble statue	Unknown	5.5
Astarte / Tanit / Hera / Juno	Fertility	Various dedications	Tas-Silġ sanctuary	5.3
		Inscription <i>CIS</i> , I, 132	Gozo	5.3
		<i>Semis</i> coin*	Struck and circulated in Malta but, otherwise, unspecified	5.3
		<i>Quincunx</i> coin	Struck and circulated in Gozo but, otherwise, unspecified	5.3
		Various other coins	Struck and circulated in Malta but, otherwise, unspecified	5.3

Deities / cults	Attributes / concerns	Source/s of evidence	Provenance	Reference in this chapter
Baal / Melqart / Heracles	Fertility	Inscription <i>CIS</i> , I, 132	Gozo	5.3
		Inscription	Tomb at Taç-Ċaghqi, on the outskirts of Rabat (Malta)	5.3
		Punic-Greek inscriptions on two identical <i>candelabra</i>	Allegedly from Marsaxlokk area	5.3
		<i>Sextans</i> coin*	Struck and circulated in Malta but, otherwise, unspecified	5.3
		Marble statue	Allegedly from Tas-Silġ sanctuary	5.3
		Marble statue	Allegedly from 'ta' berrini', in or near Victoria, Gozo	5.3
		Veiled head*	Near <i>Domus Romana</i> , in Rabat (Malta)	5.3
		Two statuettes*	Ras ir-Raheb sanctuary	5.3
		Statuette head*	Għar ix-Xiħ shrine	5.3
Bes	Afterlife protection to deceased (in our context)	Three amulets	Tal-Horob, limits of Xewkija, Gozo	5.7
Demeter / Ceres	Agricultural fertility	Inscription <i>CIL</i> , X, 7501	Victoria, Gozo	5.4, 6, 8
		Marble statue*	Victoria, Gozo	5.4, 6, 8
Dionysos	Agriculture	Rock-cut dining set-up (4.2.8, 11)	Ras il-Wardija, Gozo	5.8

Deities / cults	Attributes / concerns	Source/s of evidence	Provenance	Reference in this chapter
Dionysos (cont.)		Drinking-cup fragments (Tal-Knisja and Tal-Logġa case study)	Mgarr ix-Xini valley, Gozo	5.8
Emperor / Empress	Imperial benevolence	Inscriptions <i>IG</i> , XIV, 601; <i>CIL</i> , X, 7501 and 7507	First one: Greek tomb near Mdina; Last two: Victoria, Gozo	5.4, 6, 8
Flora	Flowering or blossoming plants	Alabaster statuette	Underground cave in Żebbuġ, Gozo	5.4
Horus	Afterlife protection to deceased (in our context)	Seven amulets: one containing also Anubis, a hollow one containing an Isis papyrus text, and five 'udjat' solar eyes (of Horus)	Tomb at Ghajn Klieb, limits of Rabat (Malta), tomb at Tal-Virtu', Rabat (Malta), and Tal-Horob, limits of Xewkija, Gozo, respectively	5.4, 7
		Hollow Horus-headed amulet (containing Isis text on papyrus fragment)	Tomb at Tal-Virtu', Rabat (Malta)	5.4, 7
Ibis	Afterlife protection to deceased (in our context)	Amulet	Tomb at Ta' l-Ibraġ, limits of Victoria, Gozo	5.7
Isis	Earth, childbirth	Headless statue*	Unknown	5.4
		Various coins	Struck and circulated in Malta but, otherwise, unspecified	5.4

Deities / cults	Attributes / concerns	Source/s of evidence	Provenance	Reference in this chapter
Isis (cont.)	Afterlife protection to deceased (in our context)	Papyrus fragment (contained in Horus-headed amulet)	Tomb at Tal-Virtu', Rabat (Malta)	5.4, 7
	Safety at sea (in our context)	Lead anchor stock	Off Salina Bay	5.4
Magna Mater / Cybele	Great Mother	<i>Gallus</i> in inscription <i>CIL, X, 7506</i>	Victoria, Gozo	5.6
Mercury	Merchandise and its transportation	Small metal statue	Żurrieq	5.5
Proserpina	Agricultural fertility	Inscription <i>CIL, X, 7494</i>	Mtarfa hill	5.4, 8
Sarapis	(combination of Osiris – Isis' male consort – with Apis)	Lead anchor stock	Off Salina Bay	5.4

* Representation not certain but plausibly assumed on the basis of available features and / or attributes

sound evidence, they are claimed to have originated from the Marsaxlokk area. While one of them is still in Malta at the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta, the other one is now in the Louvre Museum in Paris after it had been donated to King Louis XVI of France in 1780. The inscriptions record an offering made to Melqart (as Baal is sometimes also known) or to his Greek equivalent Heracles. The latter's name appears in the Greek version while the former's is given in the main Punic inscription. Likewise, the donors' names are given in both Punic and Greek versions in the respective inscriptions (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 73, 121, 150-3).



Figure 61

The third century B.C. Punic inscription (CIS, I, 132) from Gozo. It provides evidence of temples in honour of Astarte and Baal (under the composite name of ‘Sadambaal’) on the island. The inscribed stone measures 14.9cm by 16.3cm. (Source: Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 80).

A bearded image of Baal Hammon appears on the obverse side of a coin (a *sextans*) struck and circulating in Malta in the late third century B.C. The reverse side of the same coin carries a sacrificial cap and three Punic letters within a wreath (Azzopardi 1993: 39). The sacrificial cap might have been associated with cult rituals of the deity depicted. A Punic caduceus (symbol of the messenger god Baal Hammon) appears on the right side of the deity’s image (on the obverse) mistakenly

identified by some scholars as that of the god Eshmun, the Punic counterpart of the Roman healing god Aesculapius (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 122-3, 189. Also: Moscati 1973: 180).



Figure 62

The bi-lingual marble *candelabrum*.

One of a set of two, this is kept at the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta (Malta). Its total height is 1.02m. It has a Punic inscription recording an offering to Melqart (Baal) followed by a Greek version. (Source: Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 152).

A cult of Heracles is confirmed by some further evidence. A marble statue representing Heracles with a club and a lion's skin is reported by Gian-Francesco Abela according to whom it may have come from the Tas-Silġ sanctuary which he

believed to have been dedicated to this god (Abela 1647: 108, 155-7). Another marble statue of Heracles is reported to have been seen in the eighteenth century by Agius (de Soldanis) in a private possession but claimed to have been found in the land 'ta' berrini' in the district of St George's, presumably in or near Victoria, Gozo (Agius (de Soldanis) [1746]: 206). Furthermore, a veiled head of a bearded male divinity portraying facial features rather typical of Heracles was found in 1924 in excavations near the *Domus Romana* in Rabat, Malta (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 224-5; *MAR* 1924-5: IV).

Two Classical period statuettes from Ras ir-Raħeb sanctuary in Malta might have also represented Heracles. One depicts a figure wearing a cloak over a short tunic knotted around the neck and waist, recalling Heracles syncretised with the Tyrian Melqart. The other shows a partly cloaked male figure seemingly representing Heracles with a lion's skin. Furthermore, an identification of the same sanctuary with the temple of Heracles on Malta mentioned by the Alexandrian geographer Ptolemy has also been recently plausibly suggested (4.3.6).

One of the clay statuette heads found at Għar ix-Xiħ shrine site is that of a bearded male wearing a cap, possibly representing Melqart or his Greek equivalent Heracles. Having been the divine protector and guardian of seafarers and sea travellers, while considering the worship he thus enjoyed in coastal or seaside temples and shrines across the Mediterranean, it is not surprising that he may have been one of the deities worshipped at the harbour shrine at Għar ix-Xiħ (4.4.10).

However, Astarte's cult is attested widely too and likewise enjoyed much popularity. Astarte's image, in fact, appears also on certain coins struck and circulating in Malta during the second and first centuries B.C. A (sacrificial?) tripod appearing on some of these issues might have formed part of the ritual paraphernalia used in her cultic rites; unless this tripod is used here as a symbol of the god Apollo (Kerenyi 1962: 7-8, Plates 94, 96 and Kerényi 1976: xiv, Illustrations 62-3 for examples of association of tripod/s with Apollo). On a *semis*

of c.15 B.C., what appears to be Astarte's head profile and a (sacrificial?) tripod with visible handles and vertical legs occupy the obverse and reverse sides respectively (Figure 63 below). On the other hand, a particular coin (a *quincunx*) minted in Gozo during the second half of the first century B.C. depicts images that, on the basis of the accompanying crescent moon and military attributes, might equally represent the Phoenician Astarte / Tanit and her Roman counterpart Juno (Azzopardi 1993: 38-41, 43). This possible assimilation of Phoenician / Punic and Roman deities would show that, while Roman culture was gradually replacing the earlier Punic one, essentially the same deity was maintained even if also under another new name or artistic representation; perhaps implying also that the same concerns prevailed (also 6.5 below).



Figure 63

A *semis* of c.15 B.C. It shows a (sacrificial?) tripod with the Greek legend (transliterated into Latin script) *MELITAS* on its reverse (shown above) and what appears to be Astarte's head profile on its obverse side. (Source: Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 157).

5.4 - Demeter / Ceres: protectress of agricultural fertility

If fertility – whether it concerns agriculture, animals, or humans – was of prime importance to ensure survival not only of animals but also of human society itself, agricultural fertility in particular was the most indispensable of all as on it relied both animals' and humans' survival. Agriculture, therefore, was of prime concern for most societies and, in particular, for those communities whose economy was largely based on agriculture. Certain religious allegiances of the Maltese would further confirm the Maltese' heavy reliance on agriculture as evidently were many other communities around the Mediterranean, including those in nearby Sicily.

Agriculture and its fertility constituted the special domain of Demeter and her Roman counterpart Ceres. The agricultural character of the Maltese and Gozitan communities might have, therefore, facilitated the adoption of a Demeter / Ceres cult. Ceres' cult is evidenced in Gozo by means of a Roman inscription (*CIL*, X, 7501) of the first half of the first century A.D. commemorating a dedication to Iulia Augusta / Livia Drusilla (second wife of the first emperor Augustus) deified as Ceres. It was not unusual for this imperial lady to be identified with Ceres (Spaeth 1994: 88-9, 92-3; 1996: 47). The inscription is carved on a pedestal-like stone with a double-holed socket on its top surface (Figure 64 below and Appendix III). It is reported by Abela (1647: 215) to have been found amongst the foundations of a (ruined?) private house in Gozo. This house might have been located in the immediate vicinity of St George's church in Victoria and in whose walls the inscribed stone is reported to have remained, for a long time, incorporated (Caruana 1899b: 289-90). Evidently, the stone held a statue representing Iulia Augusta and which, according to the inscription, was consecrated or dedicated by Lutatia, her priestess, together with her five children. The statue might be a surviving one presently kept in the Gozo Archaeology Museum along with the inscription (Figure 64 below). This statue bears evident stylistic and iconographic resemblances to surviving statues and statuettes of Demeter / Ceres from elsewhere (examples in *LIMC* IV/1: 851, 855, 898; IV/2: 566(50), 570(92), 602(73-5)) which, along with

our statue, might have been imitating (to varying degrees of precision and artistic licence) a common prototype. Furthermore, on stylistic grounds, this statue is also dated to the same period as the inscription that carries the dedication to Iulia Augusta identified with Ceres and onto which it (i.e. this statue) would have proportionwise fitted perfectly (Figure 64 below). The statue's original provenance is unknown but by Abela's time of writing (1647: 216-7), it was to be found in a niche (on top of another inscribed stone to which it could not have belonged) near the Citadel's main gate where it seems to have been placed in 1623 according to another inscription commemorating the completion, in that year, of a new access road to the Citadel and its embellishment with an ancient statue and ancient inscriptions (Azzopardi 2008b: 19-20). Having, in all likelihood, originated from the urban centre of Gaulos (Gozo), both statue and inscribed pedestal (i.e. *CIL*, X, 7501) may have adorned some fine building where the statue, with its sheer height, may have impressed its viewers as, indeed, it may have been intended to.

Also significant within the same context, is the cult of Proserpina evidenced on the island of Malta by means of an inscription (*CIL*, X, 7494) of the late first century B.C. or early first century A.D. mentioning repairs to a temple of this goddess (Appendix IV). Proserpina is the daughter of Ceres and, thus, she is also the Roman counterpart of the Greek Persephone, daughter of Demeter. This may possibly indicate that the cult of the protectress of agriculture, along with that of her daughter, were familiar in both islands. Proserpina's temple might have been located on Mtarfa hill (on the outskirts of Rabat and Mdina) where the inscription was found in 1613 (Abela 1647: 207-9; Bres 1816: 334; Caruana 1882: 135; 1899b: 289). Like the Cretan peak sanctuaries (Bradley 2000: 106-7), this temple might have not only invested Mtarfa hill with additional significance, but it might have also dominated the surrounding landscape and assumed a powerful role in the daily lives of the people, particularly those who tilled the fields down below.



Figure 64

White marble statue (1.47m high) possibly representing Iulia Augusta deified as the goddess Ceres. It might have stood on the marble pedestal below. Measuring 63.7cm by 34.4cm by 46cm, this pedestal carries inscription *CIL*, X, 7501 which commemorates a dedication of a statue it evidently carried (possibly the one above it) by the priestess Lutatia and her five children in honour of Iulia Augusta deified as the goddess Ceres. (Photo: the author).

Unless it was an offering stand or a support (*thymiaterion*) on which incense was burned in front of her cult statue, the pillar mentioned in the inscription to have been gilded (such was the significance attached to it!) by Chrestion – the *procurator* of the Maltese islands and the one who carried out the repairs to the temple – might have been a cippus or a *betylus* representing the goddess or a herm carrying her bust. It might have been also a pillar on which the cult statue stood. In all cases, it is expected to have stood in the temple's *cella*.

Originally the goddess of the earth and one of the chief Egyptian divinities, Isis was also identified with Demeter / Ceres by the Greeks. The cult of Isis was introduced in Rome towards the end of the republic and became very popular among the Romans under the empire when it spread throughout the Mediterranean. In the Roman world, Isis was particularly associated with childbirth (Eiland 2004: 24). It might have been also during the Roman imperial period and, possibly, in association with the Demeter / Ceres cult already familiar in the Maltese islands, that the Isis cult reached these islands. An archaising female draped and headless statue may have represented Isis on the basis of the hair style surviving down her neck and the belt knot below her chest. Presently kept at the *Domus Romana* Museum in Rabat (Malta), the statue's provenance is unknown. It probably dates to the age of emperor Hadrian (A.D. 117-38) (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 163, 225).

Isis also appears along with Osiris (her male consort) and Nephthys on the reverse of a coin issued and circulating in Malta during the first half of the second century B.C. The same three Punic letters appearing on the Heracles *sextans* (5.3 above) make their appearance on the reverse side of this coin too (Azzopardi 1993: 39). Moreover, the typically Egyptian head-dress adopted by the female head profile appearing on certain coins struck and circulating in Malta during the late third and mid-second centuries B.C. (Azzopardi 1993: 39-40, 44) might also recall the same goddess. In this case, however, it might have been rather an assimilation of the Phoenician Astarte and the Egyptian Isis as the female head profile itself would rather represent the former on account of an Astarte-Tanit sign appearing next to the head profile on one of these coin issues (Figure 74, p.295).

Another unique depiction of Isis appears on a tiny fragment of papyrus found enclosed in a hollow bronze amulet with a Horus-headed cover and discovered in a tomb at Tal-Virtu', Rabat (Malta). This find is datable to the sixth century B.C. The papyrus fragment carries also a text containing words presumably uttered by Isis by whose image it (i.e. the text) is accompanied. Among the Egyptian divinities, Isis was the great enchantress, the speaker of spells, besides fulfilling her role as

protectress of the dead by guiding them through their journey to the afterlife. In fact, the words on the papyrus fragment are directed against the evil spirits that harass the soul of the dead during their journey to the other world (Appendix V). As it comes from a Phoenician context, the text might be also taken to indicate the views of the early Phoenicians arriving in Malta regarding life after death (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 62, 122; Gouder 1978: 313-5; *MAR* 1968: 9).

Finally, Isis (both on her own but also in conjunction with Sarapis) appears to have been also invoked by mariners or by those travelling at sea to ensure their safety and prosperous navigation (Chisholm and Ferguson 1981: 394-5; Di Vita *et al.* 1999: 35). Her name appears, along with that of Sarapis (an anthropomorphic hybrid of her male consort Osiris with the bull god Apis), on the respective arms of a lead anchor stock found in 2006 on the sea-bed off Salina Bay, in Malta (Gatt 2006: 64-5; also Figure 65 below).

A general belief among traditional seafaring societies held that a sea vessel is imbued with the spirit of a divine guardian. Thus, the sea vessel itself (or its representation) often becomes a symbol of its protective divine guardian. For this reason, ships might be dedicated to a protective deity by having the ship adopting the name of that same deity and, in certain instances, names of protective deities might be inscribed on ships' anchor stocks. In this way, the ship would be assuming the nature of a protective guardian to the seafarers travelling on board (Brody 1998: 15, 17-20, 26, 29-30, 76). The divinities' names inscribed on the anchor stock from Salina Bay might have, therefore, indicated the name of the sea vessel to which the anchor stock belonged. It seems that, in seeking the divine guardianship of Isis and Sarapis and ensuring their protection, the seafarers (who were not necessarily Maltese) dedicated their ship to these two deities by giving it the names of these two same deities which they inscribed on the respective arms of its anchor stock, perhaps also to ensure the deities' protection when the anchor was dropped during a storm (example in Brody 1998: 19. Also Xlendi anchor stock with astragals, 5.7 below).

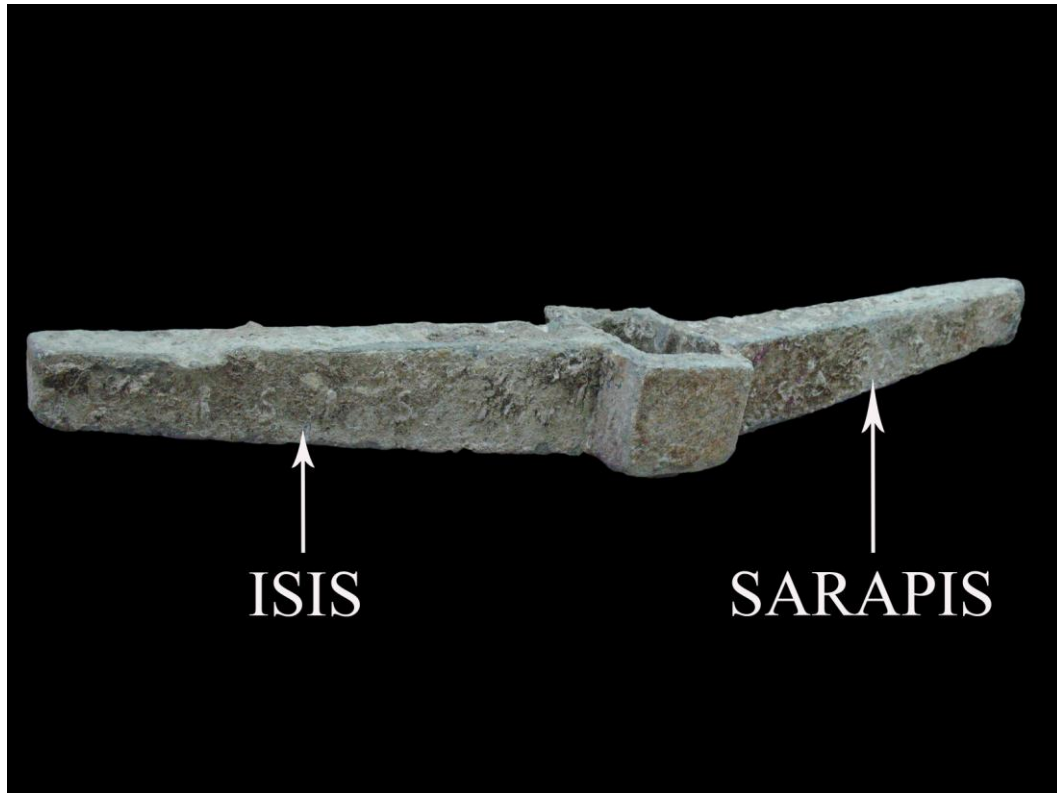


Figure 65

The 2.20m long anchor stock found off Salina Bay in Malta. It bears the names of Isis and Sarapis, possibly indicating whom the ship (to which this anchor stock belonged) might have been dedicated to and under whose protection it was, thus, entrusted. Presently, kept at the National Maritime Museum in Birgu, Malta. (Photo: the author; graphics: Max Xuereb).

Worshipped as a deity of flowering or blossoming plants, mainly cereals, the goddess Flora might have shared the domain of Demeter / Ceres. In fact, flowers in general also played an important role in the cult of Demeter / Ceres, generally in connection with the myth of her daughter Persephone's / Proserpina's gathering of flowers (Spaeth 1994: 71; 1996: 128-9). Whether or not it was in the context of the Demeter / Ceres cult, the goddess Flora seems to have been worshipped at least in Gozo. A white alabaster statuette of fine workmanship representing this goddess with what is described as a *puttino* on her right is reported by Agius (de Soldanis) to have been found in 1720 in an underground cave in Żebbuġ, Gozo (Agius (de Soldanis) [1746]: 206. Elsewhere (1750: 26) Agius de Soldanis gives 1725 as the date of the statuette's discovery). Its present whereabouts are unknown. The cave in

which it was found might have been the place where this cultic image was enshrined and received worship (3.11 for significance of caves as sacred places).

In view of cultic associations – and, sometimes, even syncretism – between Demeter (or her Roman counterpart Ceres) and Aphrodite (or her Roman counterpart Venus) (Spaeth 1994: 77; 1996: 133), a cult of the latter appears to have been also concerned with agriculture and animal husbandry. This could be evidenced, for example, in the Campanian region in Southern Italy. Excavations carried out in July 2004 under the temple of Venus Siliana at Pompeii brought to light another temple dating to the third and second centuries B.C., at a time when the city was inhabited by the Samnites who were primarily agriculturalists and cattle breeders. This temple would have been the focus for the worship of Mefites, the Samnite counterpart of Aphrodite / Venus and a chthonic deity who protected cattle and springs (Jones 2004: 5). On the largely agricultural island of Gozo, a white marble headless and bare female torso (9cm by 8cm), possibly part of an Aphrodite / Venus statuette (Figure 72), came to light at It-Tokk in Victoria on 3rd January 1962 (as per information written on the statuette's back). Evidently, it was unearthed from the 3.50m (approx.) deep trench that had just been dug at It-Tokk by the end of December 1961 (*MAR* 1961: 5). Incidentally, other material from the same trench included black-slipped Campanian ware datable to the fourth – first centuries B.C. Both the torso and the Campanian ware are kept at the Gozo Archaeology Museum. In Roman Egypt, Isis (who as shown above was also identified with Demeter / Ceres by the Greeks) was evidently identified with Aphrodite / Venus too. This identification is based on terracotta statuettes of the standard Aphrodite / Venus type dressed in an Isis-type costume of the Roman period (Ashton 2004: 9(Fig.5), 11; Eiland 2005: 12). Isis' assimilation with Aphrodite / Venus is also attested at Perinthos and Delos (Gwyn Griffiths 1973: 248).

5.5 - Other benevolent deities: Artemis, Apollo, and Mercury

There seem to have been other cults which might have been deemed beneficial to a largely agricultural community such as that on the Maltese islands. Like fishing, hunting often supplemented agriculture and animal husbandry especially in seasons when the last two gave poor yields (as in Osborne 1987: 18-20). It is not at all astonishing, therefore, that a cult to a goddess like Artemis whose domain included hunting would find its way into the pantheon of such communities. An Artemis cult would even fit better in view of her additional attribute, namely the protection she afforded to young animals and, in fact, she was also regarded as a goddess of the flocks. Being a hunting goddess, she was also associated with marginal places, including junctions of land and water like those found in coastal areas. It might be a combination of these elements which explains the presence of an Artemis cult in Malta as evidenced by a small headless marble statue shown in a running pose (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 119).

As shown above in connection with the Artemis cult, protection of flocks was an important concern for communities whose economy relied not only on agriculture but also on animal husbandry. Among his various attributes and functions, the god Apollo was also seen as a protector of flocks and cattle. At least one temple was dedicated to Apollo in Malta (Figure 66 below). It is recorded in an inscription (*CIL*, X, 7495) of the second century A.D. (Appendix VI). Found around 1747 near the Benedictine monastery at Mdina in Malta (Bres 1816: 310; Caruana 1882: 144; 1899b: 295; Ciantar 1772: 130-1), the inscription commemorates the building and dedication of a temple in honour of Apollo by the *Primus* of the Maltese *Municipium*. It also includes a brief description of the temple. The temple might have stood where the inscription itself was found. Another inscription (*CIL*, X, 8318) of the second or third century A.D. records the building and consecration of a temple by ---- Claudius Iustus (*praenomen* missing), patron of the Maltese *Municipium* (Appendix VII). No deity is mentioned. However, as the inscription was also found near the Benedictine monastery at Mdina but in 1868 (Caruana

1882: 145; 1899b: 297), it might be commemorating the re-building and re-dedication or re-consecration of the same temple of Apollo recorded in the previous inscription.

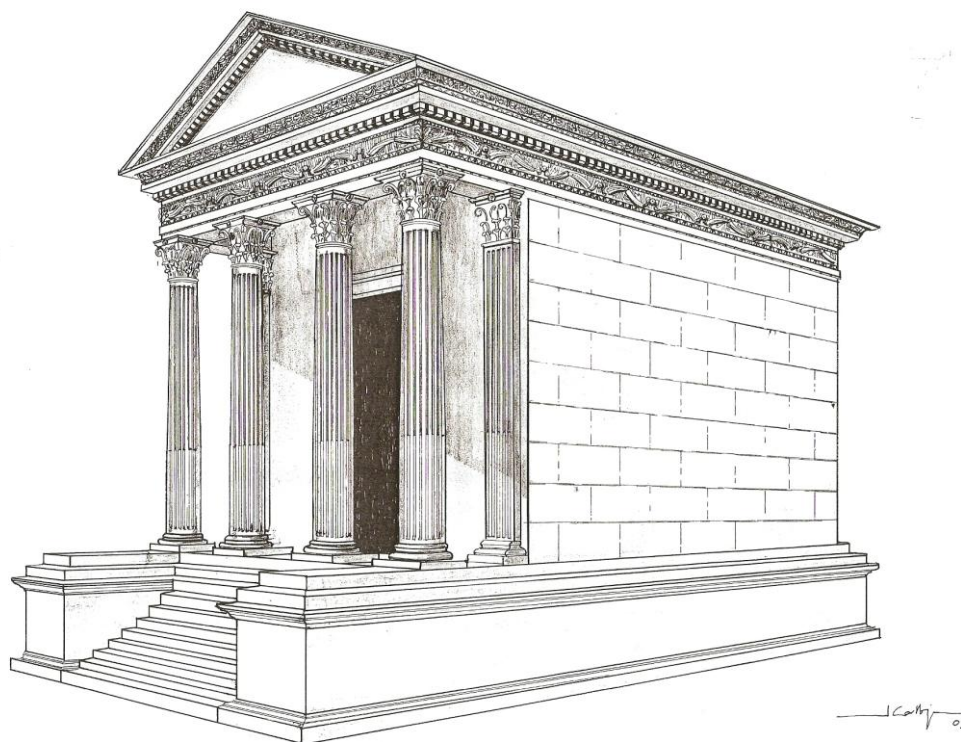


Figure 66

The temple of Apollo in the town of Melite (today's Rabat and Mdina, in Malta). This hypothetically reconstructed 3-D elevation is based upon the description of the same temple in *CIL*, X, 7495 which mentions the four columns and flanking pilasters of the temple's portico and the platform. The frieze, cornice, and column styles are based on similar architectural specimens of the same period and found at Mdina where *CIL*, X, 7495 was discovered and where Apollo's temple itself might have probably stood (Abela 1647: 218, 220; Lewis 1977: 99-101). (Drawing: Joseph Calleja).

A bronze statue of Apollo, on the other hand, is reported by Agius (de Soldanis) (in whose possession it was) to have been found in 1746 in Nadur, Gozo. He does not give any details regarding the precise location and nature of its findspot in Nadur but, by way of a brief description, he confirms that the statue was of very fine

craftsmanship while adding that it represented the god as an archer with the head of a fish in his left hand (Agius (de Soldanis) [1746]: 206).

If agricultural production was indispensable for the economy of agricultural communities, so was the distribution and movement of the same agricultural goods. In Classical religion and mythology, merchandise, its transportation, and all those involved (be they merchants or shopkeepers) were placed under the protection of the messenger god Mercury. Commercial activity related to agricultural production in Malta might lie behind a cult to this divinity. A small metal statue of Mercury (Figure 67 below) with a winged helmet on his head, a caduceus in his right hand, and a bag in his left one formed part of Abela's collection of antiquities after having been found along with a Maltese coin in the village of Żurrieq in Malta (Abela 1647: 193).

Depictions of these last three deities – as well as of any of the earlier mentioned ones – do make their appearance on coins (other than the ones mentioned above) too. But as the coin issues (on which they appear) circulated – as they did in the rest of the Punic, Greek, and Roman world – but were not struck in the Maltese islands, they are not being considered for the purpose of this study as they do not necessarily reflect cults practised locally.

5.6 - Cults known from their priesthoods

The cult of Magna Mater – the Romanised name of the Asiatic goddess Cybele and which means 'Great Mother' – was widespread in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) and in the entire Greek world, including Sicily. Her priests were known as *galli*. The *galli* were self-castrated eunuch priests who, to complement their effeminate looks, used to wear brightly coloured clothing like that donned by women. Initially prohibited for Roman citizens to become *galli*, this ban was later lifted during the

reign of emperor Claudius (A.D. 41-54) (Beard *et al.* 1998b: 44, 210-1; Tripolitis 2002: 33-4; Warrior 2006: 82-5).



Figure 67

**The small metal statue of the god
Mercury found at Żurrieq, Malta.**

Its present whereabouts are unknown.

(Source: Abela 1647: 193).

One such *gallus* is apparently known from an inscription (*CIL*, X, 7506) of the second half of the second century A.D. from Gozo (Figure 68 below and Appendix VIII). The inscription is a dedicatory one addressed by a certain Marcius Marcianus to his best and dearest friend ---- Cestius Gallus (*praenomen* missing) and to Varenianus Lutatius Natalis Aemilianus, the patron of the Gozo *Municipium*. It is inscribed on what could have been a cippus, a libation altar, or an ossuary possibly serving also as an altar set up to honour the spirits of the deceased ---- Cestius Gallus and Varenianus Lutatius Natalis Aemilianus. In this case, it would also

provide evidence for a cult of the dead. But the *gallus* indicated in this inscription through the *cognomen* of ---- Cestius seems also to suggest a priesthood – and, therefore, a cult – of Magna Mater / Cybele in Gozo (Azzopardi 2008b: 21-4, 30).



Figure 68

Inscription *CIL*, X, 7506. It is carved on what might have been a cippus or altar of the second half of the second century A.D. Carved in local Lower Coralline Limestone and measuring approximately 41cm by 36cm by 36cm, it was set up by Marcius Marcianus to honour his best and dearest friend ---- Cestius Gallus and Varenianus Lutatius Natalis Aemilianus, the patron of the *Gozo Municipium*. (Photo: the author).

Another cult widespread throughout the Roman world was the imperial cult, the object of which was either the emperor himself or members of the imperial family. Imperial cult is also evidenced in the Maltese islands largely through priesthoods attached to it. Two inscriptions provide evidence of a cult attached to an emperor while a third one attests a cult attached to an emperor's wife.

A Greek inscription (*IG*, XIV, 601) of the first century A.D. was found on a Greek tomb near Mdina in Malta (Abela 1647: 185; Caruana 1882: 133-4). This inscription refers to Lucius Castricius Prudens, a Roman knight and *Protos* and patron of the Maltese, apparently offering prayers to the deified Augustus (Appendix IX). Another inscription (*CIL*, X, 7507) of the second half of the second century A.D. and carved in local Lower Coralline Limestone was set up by the people of Gozo to honour Caius Vallius Postumus who, amongst various public offices, including that of patron of the Gozo *Municipium*, was also priest of the deified emperor Hadrian (Appendix X). The inscription came from Tal-Grazzja Valley, presumably from the area of a chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Victory once situated where the Capuchins' convent in Victoria (Gozo) now stands, on the way to Marsalforn (Abela 1647: 214; Agius (de Soldanis) [1746]: 98; Caruana 1882: 140). The other inscription (*CIL*, X, 7501) is also from Gozo and has already been mentioned (5.4 above). It refers to the consecration of the statue of Iulia Augusta by her priestess Lutatia and her five children. Moreover, the same inscription mentions Lutatia's husband Marcus Livius Optatus as priest of Gozo (Figure 64 above and Appendix III). Although his priesthood is not specifically mentioned, it is presumed that, like his wife, he was attached to the imperial cult.

5.7 - Superstition: desires of favours and fears of evil

Desires and fears are part of human nature but they do find their way in religious practices which are popular rather than orthodox and, thus, pertain to the personal and private sphere rather than to institutional religion. As shown by various amulets described below, gods and goddesses were sometimes dragged in into humanity's search to attain favours or to ward off evil. It might have been in this vein that, among his various attributes, the god Apollo was also seen as one who could provide help and had the power to ward off evil. As already shown, there was at least one temple dedicated to him in what is now Mdina and part of the old town of

Melite, while a statue of the same god was found in Nadur, Gozo (5.5 and Figure 66 above and Appendix VI).

Objects to which were attributed special powers comprised mainly amulets or charms. The value and importance attributed to these was a deeply rooted superstitious belief that maladies, harm, and hazards were caused by malevolent spirits who permeated the universe, the world, and people's lives. It was believed that these spirits could be exorcised by the magical power attributed to amulets or to incantations or spells written on small strips of papyrus. Amulets (and incantations or spells), therefore, were perceived as having the power to alter the course of events and bring benevolence to their owners (Gouder 1978: 311).

Amulets could assume the form of a deity or a symbol associated with a deity. They were generally hung around one's neck not only to bring good luck or invoke divine protection but also to ward off evil. In our case, the surviving contexts in which amulets are found are frequently Phoenician burials. In terms of style, these amulets often betray a strong Egyptian influence. But few of them might be of genuine Egyptian origin. Though betraying an Egyptianising style, the majority were probably manufactured in Phoenician craft centres (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 51. Also: Demetriou 2012: 8).

A number of faience or glass paste Egyptianised amulets mostly in the form of the Egyptian dwarf-god Bes (Figure 73 below) or an 'udjat' eye (Figure 69 below), but also other Egyptian deities or cult motifs like the crook of Osiris, are known to have been found in 1951 at Tal-Ħorob, limits of Xewkija in Gozo (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 11, 55, 58; Gouder 1978: 312, 314). Currently, they form part of the permanent display at the Gozo Archaeology Museum. Whilst without providing their sources Bonanno & Cilia (2005: 58) and Gouder (1978: 312, 314) claim a Phoenician / Punic funerary context for them, these amulets might have rather come from what could have been a domestic context of the Roman period represented by structural remains and Roman pottery sherds documented at Tal-Ħorob in 1951

(MAR 1950-1: XVIII). Although no amulet finds are reported here, this is the only documented context we have so far from this area (Tal-Horob) and as burials are not expected to have shared a domestic context, the Tal-Horob provenance of these amulets can be assumed to point towards this documented domestic context of the Roman period. Thus, if these amulets are taken to have originated from this presumed Roman domestic context at Tal-Horob, they might have been kept to ward off evil or malign spirits from the property concerned or to protect the individuals who owned them. Whatever their underlying significance, Egyptian religious elements (including representations of deities) do make their appearance in parts of the Roman world where they seem to have enjoyed popularity and in contexts that are not always funerary (Assmann and Frankfurter 2007: 161; Gwyn Griffiths 1973: 248-9; Turcan 1996: 81-5). In his *Naturalis Historia* (XXXIII, 41), the first century A.D. Roman writer Pliny the Elder (Gaius Plinius Secundus) also speaks of contemporary men wearing signet rings carrying figures of Egyptian deities.



Figure 69

A faience amulet in the form of an ‘udjat’ eye. Length: 2.3cm. One of five such amulets, it was found at Tal-Horob, limits of Xewkija in Gozo. (Photo: Max Xuereb).

For reasons of much-needed protection, such amulets accompanied their owners throughout their life, protecting their own bodies, their homes, and their property. But as amulets are also frequently found accompanying the deceased in their tombs,

their protective function (now, in respect of the deceased) seems to have extended even to life after death.

One of the Late Bronze Age silo-pits found on Mtarfa hill, near Rabat and Mdina (Malta), in 1939 was re-used for burial in later times. This re-use appears to have taken place sometime in the seventh or sixth century B.C. as suggested by the purely Phoenician material it contained. Most importantly, this material included two small Egyptian amulets made of glass paste (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 31-2, 58; *MAR* 1938-9: XII; Sagona 2002: 890, Fig.60(9-10)). But one remarkable Egyptian amulet made of gold is the seventh-sixth century B.C. example found in 1906 in a tomb at Ghajn Klieb, limits of Rabat (Malta). It depicts the Egyptian falcon-headed god Horus and the jackal-headed god Anubis standing back-to-back (Figure 70 below). Their heads are joined by a small ring through which a chain could be attached and the amulet could be hung around one's neck (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 50, 63-5, 290-3; Gouder 1978: 311, 313; *MAR* 1906-7: 3). The above-mentioned papyrus fragment from a tomb at Tal-Virtu', Rabat (Malta) bearing an Isis image and accompanying text (5.4 above and Appendix V) was found contained inside a hollow bronze amulet with the head of the Egyptian solar divinity Horus. It also appears to have been intended to be worn as a pendant. Another amulet represents an Egyptian ibis (a sacred bird associated with the Egyptian divinity Thoth) and comes from a rock-cut tomb at Ta' l-Ibraġ in the limits of Victoria, Gozo (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 55; *MAR* 1926-7: IV).

The 'udjat' eye symbol was connected with the mystical solar eye of Horus. In the Phoenician-Punic world, its magical functions enjoyed widespread popularity (Gouder 1978: 312-3). Apart from 'udjat' eyes, various faience 'eye' beads, probably intended to ward off evil, might have been worn as necklaces. Examples are known from Punic rock-cut tombs in the limits of Victoria, Gozo, while the above-mentioned Late Bronze Age silo-pit on Mtarfa hill that yielded two small Egyptian amulets also yielded a number of small glass beads some of which bore



Figure 70

A gold double-figurine or amulet (Height: 3.3cm) of the Egyptian gods Horus and Anubis.

Found in a tomb at Ghajjn Klieb, limits of Rabat, Malta. It was through inter-religious mediation between Phoenicians and Egyptians that a number of Egyptian deities gained popularity on the Maltese islands (as they did elsewhere in the Mediterranean) where a number of their representations were found in Phoenician or Punic funerary contexts like the one at Ghajjn Klieb. (Source: Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 64).

‘eye’ decorations (*MAR* 1938-9: XII; Sagona 2002: 890, Fig.61(7-26)). This might further demonstrate that Egyptian magic enjoyed great popularity though it might have remained on an essentially popular and personal or private level (as opposed to that of the official and public religion) as happened, for instance, in Carthage itself (Moscati 1973: 182).

But the concern for the deceased’s well-being in the afterlife is also manifested by certain funerary practices like the placing of a coin in the deceased person’s mouth to pay the mythical ferryman Charon for carrying him / her across the river Styx to the underworld: a belief and practice commonly encountered in the Mediterranean

region from the sixth century B.C. onwards (Rush 1941: 6, 50-4, 93-4; Toynbee 1996: 44, 49). This practice is evidenced in a tomb (tomb no 17) forming part of a necropolis discovered in September 1907 on the east of Taċ-Ċaġħqi hill, on the outskirts of Rabat, Malta. The coin that was found on the deceased's jawbone carried a veiled female head on the obverse and the Greek legend *MEAITAIQN* around a tripod on the reverse (*MAR* 1907-8: E4-5). On the basis of its description, the coin was (depending on size and weight, which were not given in the cited report) either an *as* or a *quincunx* of c.40 B.C. (Azzopardi 1993: 41). There might have been more similar instances of this practice the evidence of which may have been lost.

Generally, the sea provided many people with their livelihood and supplied food to a wider clientele. It provided easier transport routes in regions where overland transport was more difficult. Yet, it was also dreaded for it often threatened human lives (Bradley 2000: 27). In view of this, the lead anchor stock with its astragal arrangement retrieved from Xlendi Bay, in Gozo, was believed to bring good luck to mariners and sea travelers and ensure their safety (4.2.5 above and Figure 71 below). Three more unprovenanced anchor stocks provide similar examples. Two of these – currently on display at the National Maritime Museum in Birgu (Malta) – exhibit what appear to be four letters or astragals on one of their arms. One of these two carries also a shell on each of its arms. The third stock – forming part of the reserve collection at the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta (Malta) – also exhibits four astragals on one of its arms. What may be a shell also makes its appearance on one of the arms of a stock recovered from Ramla Bay in Gozo but kept on display at the National Maritime Museum in Birgu (Azzopardi and Gambin forthcoming). Thus, fears of perils at sea also forced people to resort to objects and symbols to which they attributed special protective powers; even if sometimes these may have failed to give proof of their power!

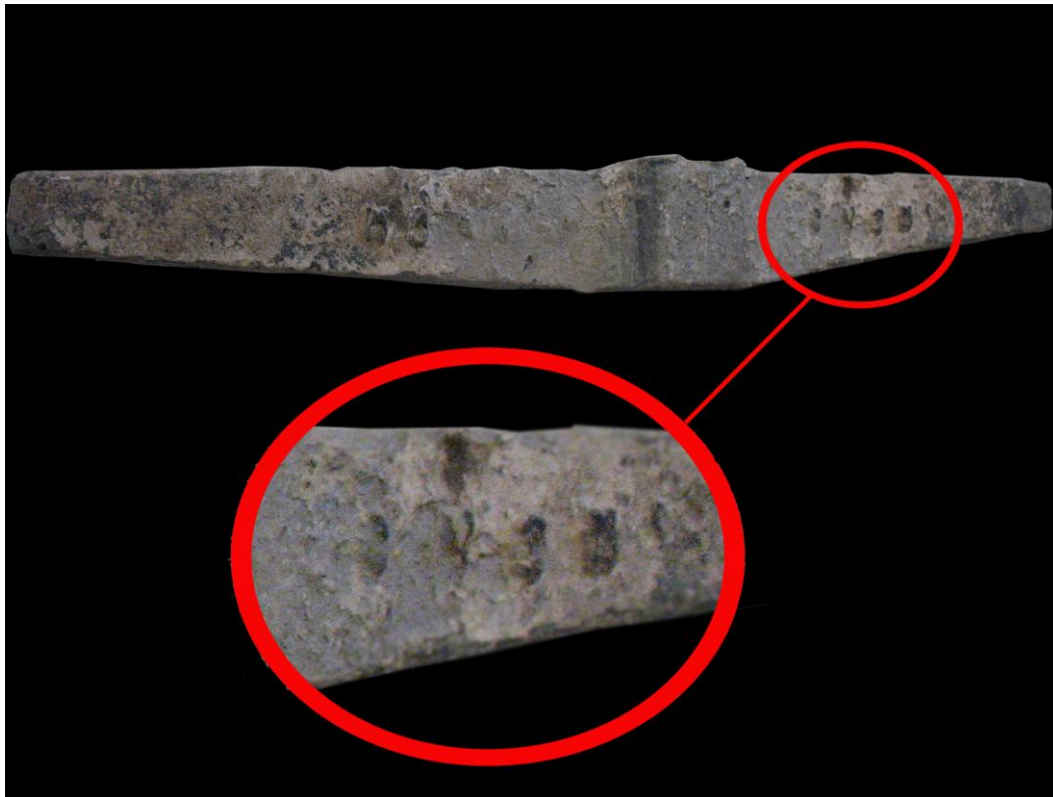


Figure 71

A lead anchor stock with astragals from the shipwreck at the mouth of Xlendi Bay in Gozo. It measures 1.17m in length. On each of its arms, this anchor stock carries a set of four astragals believed to ward off perils at sea and ensure safety to those on board. The set on the right-hand side is enlarged inset. Presently, the anchor stock is kept in the Gozo Archaeology Museum. (Photo: the author; graphics: Max Xuereb).

5.8 - The Maltese religious mindset and attitudes. An analysis and critique

Different landscapes generally demand different subsistence practices and these practices, in turn, would have different social, political, and religious implications. In the case of agricultural communities, the countryside and its natural environment would shape not only the political and social but even the religious structure of their society (Osborne 1987: 16, 21, 26). For these people who are closely attached to land and nature, religion is a mechanism by which land, nature, and their creative forces are deified. Such people devote themselves to these not only in formal rituals but also in their daily attitudes towards them. Thus, communities amongst whom

land, nature, and their products are essential for their economy and their very livelihood recognise the importance of a nature deity (Stanislawski 1975: 433, 442).

The limited but nonetheless natural resources of the Maltese islands rendered the Maltese and Gozitan communities heavily reliant on nature since their earliest known settlements back in prehistoric times. This reliance also brought them in close contact with nature and its elements, mainly earth and water or sea. This contact, in turn, shaped their experience of their material world and, as a consequence, was to influence not only their daily life with its related activities but, perhaps more significantly, their religious behaviour and expression.

It is, thus, not at all unexpected that cults of fertility deities like Astarte had been long deep-rooted among the largely agricultural community or communities of the Maltese islands. Cults of female deities in Malta and Gozo are no less than those of male deities whereas, in nearby Sicily and South Italy, cults of female deities even outnumber those of male deities. In both cases, this phenomenon might testify to the continuing loyalty of the local population to an earlier and long-established cult: perhaps that of a prehistoric Earth Mother goddess. It is also quite understandable that established cults are not easily rejected in the wake of new ones. The latter are likely to face initial instinctive fear and resistance. The farthest established cults could go is getting transformed into or assimilated to a cult of a similar nature and antiquity, like a cult of Astarte being transformed into or assimilated to that of Demeter / Ceres; and this would entail a long and gradual process too (as in Jost 1994: 222, 226; Stanislawski 1975: 427, 440). For instance, at Carthage, Demeter / Ceres (whose cult was imported there from Syracuse in the fourth century B.C.) seems to have been assimilated to the local and earlier goddess Tanit, the Carthaginian counterpart of the Phoenician Astarte and, like Demeter / Ceres, a goddess of fertility (Spaeth 1994: 96-7, 99-100).

Fertility cults drew heavily on the natural, cultivated, and productive landscape. This might be confirmed by the epithets frequently attached to the names of the gods and goddesses worshipped amongst agricultural societies. Through their epithets in particular, the gods or goddesses make their connections with agricultural production and cultivation all the more clear (Osborne 1987: 168-9).

A deity most closely associated with agriculture and its fertility was the Greek Demeter (Mother Earth) and her Roman counterpart Ceres. Her role as guarantor of fertility was, in various ways, exploited by the imperial class in political symbolism and propaganda. One of the ways was her identification with female members of the imperial family. Such an identification of these imperial ladies – most of whom were mothers of heirs to the imperial throne – would have projected them as those who, through their fertility and motherhood, assured the continuity of the empire and the well-being of the people and, thus, were also considered as ‘mothers’ of the people of the empire. Such an assurance was of great significance in an empire whose economy relied heavily on agriculture (and its fertility). Demeter / Ceres guaranteed agricultural fertility and, thus, protected the economy of the empire and the livelihood of the people. Through the identification of their role with that of Demeter / Ceres, these imperial ladies guaranteed the continuity of the empire and the people’s well-being. This underlying religious ideology left its impact on the people precisely by exploiting the power exerted by the symbolism of Demeter / Ceres on their daily life. Such an identification could also find its manifestation in works of art (Spaeth 1996: 47, 101, 103, 119-23) and the dedication in Gozo of a statue representing Iulia Augusta identified with Ceres by her priestess was one such example (5.4, 6 above). One can imagine how viewers might have experienced the imposing view of such a statue and, as an intended result, the impression it left on their minds and the sense of veneration and allegiance it instilled in them towards the imperial personage. Possibly, it may have also encouraged them to embark on similar dedications.

Already since the First Punic War, the Lutatii were dedicating temples, generally vowed in times of war. But more importantly, the building of these temples would help promote the visibility and accomplishments of the *gens* Lutatia which, in turn, could enhance their political ambitions and those of their future family members (Becker 2009: 92). The dedication of a statue to Iulia Augusta (identified with Ceres) by Lutatia may, perhaps, be viewed in the light of this tradition of religious dedications within her family – a family seemingly dedicated to religious pursuits – apart from promoting her political ambitions or those of her children who are dedicating alongside her. Her marriage to a priest – Marcus Livius Optatus – may have also been intended to maintain her family tradition of dedication to religious pursuits. Furthermore, whether it was intentional or not, the same Marcus Livius Optatus to whom Lutatia was married belonged to the *gens* Livia, the same *gens* which Livia / Iulia Augusta belonged to.

But, as the continuity of humankind demanded that the fertility of the land be not divorced from the fertility of the human inhabitants, the cult of Demeter / Ceres had both rural and urban aspects (Guettel Cole 1994: 201; Osborne 1987: 169; Spaeth 1994: 73-5, 89; 1996: 41-7). To this effect, her cult may have made no distinction between town and countryside. Thus, the dedication of a statue of Ceres (or of an imperial family member deified as Ceres) on an inscribed plinth by her priestess in Gozo would not have been out of place in an urban setting like that of the ancient town of Gaulos (today's Victoria and its citadel in Gozo) from where the statue and the inscription probably came. Moreover, the participation of the priestess' children in the dedication might have borne a great significance in terms of the (human) fertility they represented (5.4, 6 above).

The officiating priestess might also fit well within the female nature of the priesthood of the Ceres cult as this goddess and her daughter Proserpina were always served by priestesses who were, moreover, upper-class women of noble birth and character (Spaeth 1996: 104-5). If Lutatia also formed part of Ceres' priesthood, this might, then, give us an indication of the social status of Lutatia too

as she might, thus, appear to have been a *matrona*, a term generally referring to an upper-class married woman (Spaeth 1996: 107 and Appendix III below wherein mention is made of Lutatia's husband).

In a similar vein, the cult of Ceres' daughter Proserpina might have also linked town and countryside. Mediterranean religion, in fact, did not draw any schematic separation between town and countryside, urban and rural. Making little distinction between settlement types, the religious geography of the Mediterranean rather reinforced an impression of a continuum between town and countryside. It is in the light of such a continuum that certain intermediary settlements or sites could be understood as bridging the borders of or cementing the relations between town and country and between their respective communities (Horden and Purcell 2000: 435). Thus, temples or sanctuaries situated in marginal locations or along borders often played such an intermediary role in creating bridges or cementing relations between town and countryside and in defining the inherent relationship between an urban community and the god/s (Morgan 1994: 105). Situated on Mtarfa hill on the outskirts of the old town of Melite (5.4 above), Proserpina's suburban or peripheral temple too might have bridged or cemented relations between the town of Melite and its immediate countryside or productive terrain and between the respective urban and rural communities. From its location, therefore, it might have linked town and country, but also the human and the divine.

Agricultural landscapes were variously peopled landscapes but, nonetheless, the peasants and labourers comprised the largest portion of the population. As cultivation of the fields was easier when the labourers resided close to the fields they cultivated, the majority of the peasants and labourers resided in rural settlements (Osborne 1987: 24, 26, 44). These were largely poor and dispossessed people amongst whom ancient cults of fertility – and, therefore, plenty – enjoyed great popularity (Stanislawski 1975: 435). The contrasts between dispersed and nucleated settlements, rural and urban areas (which also provided different environments for cult activity) and their respective inhabitants were expressed also

by the different divinities the respective inhabitants venerated (Bradley 2000: 34). In fact, it is also within the context of a stratified society that one may find different divinities and their respective cults associated with different social strata. For example, one would find the cult of Apollo – the god of the ‘best’ people (amongst his various other attributes) – enjoying pride of place amongst the upper classes residing in the urban centres while the cult of Dionysos – associated more with land and nature – is attached to the mass of the people, especially the countryfolk occupying the rural areas where they are clung to the earth, fertility, and growth (Stanislawski 1975: 436-7, 442). In Rome, for instance, the cult of Liber (the equivalent of Dionysos and Bacchus) formed part of the triadic cult of Ceres, Liber, and Libera which was linked to the lower social and economic class of the *plebs* (Spaeth 1996: xiv-vi, 4, 6-11, 15, 19, 22, 28-9). It is perhaps in such a context of social stratification that one may also consider the presence of a temple dedicated to Apollo in the ancient town of Melite (today’s Rabat and Mdina) and, on the other hand, cultic activities possibly related to Dionysos at rural places like Ras il-Wardija and Mgarr ix-Xini valley in Gozo.

But Dionysos was also a bridging god. He bridged the gap between earth gods and sky gods and was associated with both male and female deities. For those societies with a mixture of both patriarchal and matriarchal traits, he was seen as an ideal intermediary and, thus, was acceptable to all (Stanislawski 1975: 442). As it grew and spread along with the increase in and expansion of commercial viticulture (with which it was particularly associated), the cult of Dionysos became important for both religion and trade. His cult was, therefore, both mystical and practical and, through it, religion and trade stimulated each other. Through the spread of viticulture and the export of wine, the cult of Dionysos appears to have assumed a proselytising role and found itself established amongst various societies whose demand for the vine’s product, in turn, grew ever stronger (Stanislawski 1975: 428, 443-4). It is not at all unexpected, therefore, that introduction of a cult of Dionysos in the Maltese islands might have taken place as early as the introduction (of unknown date), in the same islands, of the vine (and wine) itself.

As shown, these gods and goddesses protected the land, the countryside, the animals, and, thus, ensured the survival of the inhabitants, their life, and their safety. In most cases, therefore, peasants, shepherds, hunters, and the like would have paid their homage to these protector-deities in the same environment in which they lived and worked, that is the countryside, impregnating it with the sacred (Jost 1994: 222, 229; Wilson 1999: 302).

But for these people – as for the rest of the population – there was another widespread cult which was no less popular and attractive than the other local cults, be they urban or rural. This was the cult of the ruler which was central to ancient religious life. It even brought economic, social, and political advantages. While other cults (especially local ones) were, in their majority, suited – if not tailor-made – to satisfy the needs of a specific society or social group, the cult of the ruler appealed to all social classes and groups and involved practically everyone. Not less than the other divine beings, the ruler and the divine power attributed to him or her were seen as guarantors of the society's well-being and, thus, the ruler was entitled to homage and worship by his or her subjects (Alföldy 1996: 255-6).

Without ignoring any syncretised elements amongst them, the largely agricultural community (or communities) of the Maltese islands are not deemed to have been an exception to this scenario. To secure imperial benevolence, they also paid their religious dues to the Roman emperors and to members of the imperial family and had instituted priesthoods for this purpose (5.6 above). Therefore, this imperial cult might perhaps be seen as a supplement to the other cults in a society – perhaps, an opportunist one – which relied heavily on all supernatural powers it might cling to in order to satisfy its needs and ensure its survival and well-being.

But, in their private lives and on an individual level, people seem to have also resorted to practices which, viewed upon as excessive and dangerous, would have been unacceptable from the official point of view of orthodox and traditional

religion. Such practices were often perceived as motivated by ‘improper’ and ‘irregular’ desires for earthly favours (Beard *et al.* 1998a: 215-7, 225). The superstitious behaviour of the Maltese and Gozitan communities is, thus, more gleaned from private and personal objects – usually in the form of amulets – which often also accompanied them to their grave, perhaps to continue to provide them with protection in the afterlife too (5.7 above).

Upon arrival of new political powers or introduction of new religious traditions, local traditional cults are not immediately or necessarily wiped out but often tend to survive, particularly among remote rural or peripheral communities (Jost 1994: 222, 226). Nonetheless, they might be viewed by the new political establishment as subordinate and inferior to their religion/s and, to a certain extent, might even be relegated to the realm of superstition (Beard *et al.* 1998a: 221-2). This may have happened upon the political annexation of the Maltese islands to Rome. But, notwithstanding their subordinate and inferior status, the surviving traditional cults may have merged – perhaps, conveniently too – with the newly-introduced religious traditions and, through a process of syncretism, formed a hybridised kind of religion.

5.9 – Summary

Religious culture marked people’s everyday life irrespective of the varying contexts, whether urban or rural. Although this thesis seeks to give more weight to people’s religious life and activity in rural environments, demonstrating how they got to grips with changing religious scenarios, this chapter has shown that people in urban centres experienced similar concerns but reacted in their own way. The latter were, perhaps, less autonomous in their selection, absorption, and reworking of ‘new’ religious ideas and practices, perhaps adhering more readily with globalised trends as shown, for example, by the names of the deities they worshipped.

CHAPTER 6:

THE MALTESE ISLANDS IN A MEDITERRANEAN SETTING: A SYNTHETIC DISCUSSION OF THEIR HYBRID RELIGIOUS FORMS, ESPECIALLY IN RURAL CONTEXTS

6.1 - Introduction

On the basis of the evidence provided in the previous chapters, this chapter will show that there are sufficient criteria to enable us to speak of distinctive Maltese religious forms. To help our contextualisation of ‘religion’ as a structured and articulated relationship between gods and humans, this chapter sets the religious forms and trends of the Maltese islands within the wider context of the Classical Mediterranean world with its religious landscapes, ideologies, and behaviour. This approach provides us with a picture of religious forms that are specific to Malta but informed by similarities and differences from wider Mediterranean religious trends and phenomena.

While, as a phenomenon, idiosyncratic religious forms do not constitute something specific to the Maltese but can be detected amongst several other Mediterranean communities too, the religious forms that emerge as a result of the formation processes discussed in this chapter are peculiar to the Maltese and are, perhaps, nowhere more evident than amongst their rural communities. In fact, Maltese religious forms and behaviour are here studied with particular reference to Maltese rural contexts while bringing out comparisons or contrasts with religious forms and behaviour in urban centres. This is done against the background of urbanism’s distinctive appearance (alongside Maltese rural and coastal communities) beginning around the eighth century B.C.

The overall aim of this chapter is, therefore, to put the Maltese islands and their religious forms, landscapes, and behaviour in a wider perspective and assess their variability through time and space.

6.2 - Maltese religious trends: the wider Mediterranean context

The Mediterranean region provided the setting where similar polytheistic religious systems that were easily compatible and translatable among the different groups encouraged extensive contact and exchange and pushed forward modes of interaction between these same groups. Religious ideas and values were, thus, shared through a multi-directional process of borrowing, accommodation, and restructuring, creating a middle ground wherein different religious groups could co-exist, integrate, and interact and, ultimately, create a new hybrid religious identity (Demetriou 2012: 5-7).

Throughout their history, the Maltese appear to have participated to varying degrees in such processes of religious co-existence, interaction, and integration. Their islands – and, particularly, their ‘*emporia*’ sanctuaries (6.4 below) – also provided a middle ground wherein they co-existed, integrated, and interacted with other Mediterranean religious groups. During the period under review, we find groups of Phoenicians, Carthaginians, and Romans on the Maltese islands, at times, co-existing and interacting with each other. Due to this multiethnicity, both cultural and religious boundaries – if one may speak of any such boundaries – were ambiguous. Indeed, one might say that the resultant hybridisation blurred any clearly distinguishing elements. This replicated the same scenario encountered in other Mediterranean contexts where the definition of ‘self’ and ‘other’ changed as links were formed, new identities were created out of negotiation between self-definition and the way outsiders defined a group, and as individual groups started to see themselves as part of a broader entity (Demetriou 2012: 23).

Religious restructuring processes depended also and in no small measure on various factors such as political circumstances (or convenience), regional considerations, civic

status of the population, and the governing establishment. One can mention, as an example, the minimum intervention policy applied by Rome in the religious affairs of the Italic and other peoples outside Roman territory (Hingley 2011: 749; Stek 2009: 18, 33, 214) which, as a consequence, contributed towards the shaping of these peoples' religious culture. Such minimal intervention would have also encouraged a convenient co-existence of different religious forms and traditions perhaps best understood in the context of a hybrid religious culture.

In the Maltese islands, a similar process is perhaps most evident during the early years of Roman political (and military) occupation and presence there, starting at around 218 B.C. and it seems to have been not until later, in imperial times and largely in urban centres, that the Maltese experienced a gradually increasing familiarity with Roman cults. These cults were, nonetheless, reworked and reorganized (perhaps to varying degrees in rural and urban centres respectively) to fit within a compatible religious framework comprising also earlier and likewise reorganized cults betraying a kind of shared Mediterranean religious trends. Cults could, therefore, be maintained and perpetuated even if under reworked and newly-adopted religious forms.

Although most evident in the Roman period, this phenomenon is not restricted to the period of Roman political occupation but can also be detected in earlier and later periods as well. The best documented site is the Tas-Silġ sanctuary where 'new' cults were introduced under the guise of existing, equivalent deities. These combined cult forms often necessitated not only the reorganisation of the cults themselves but also that of the associated cultic structures (4.1.11, 4.1.13-5, 4.1.19-21, 4.1.25). The reorganisation of existing cults provided a means by which they could be accommodated into a broader religious system.

Like those of other communities, the already existing cults – particularly, the rural ones – of the Maltese were largely maintained and perpetuated perhaps as *municipalia sacra*, i.e. those cults which the Maltese were already practising before attaining Roman citizenship and the practice of which the Roman authorities might have not, in any way, hindered.

Like other communities, however, the Maltese may have also (in certain cases) adopted elements from Roman religious traditions or integrated Roman gods into their own pantheon out of their own free will or as a matter of convenience. So, even on a religious level and to a certain degree, they could have also willingly or conveniently adapted themselves to Roman traditions; or, perhaps, adopted a dual or hybrid identity that could be aptly termed as ‘Romano-Maltese’ (as in Clack 2011: 231; De Cazanove 2000: 73; Hingley 2011: 749-50; Raven 1993: 149; Smith 2007: 273; Stek 2009: 18-9, 167, 170; Webster 1997: 331).



Figure 72

A white marble torso of a female statuette possibly representing Aphrodite / Venus. Found at It-Tokk Square in Victoria, Gozo, during trenching operations in late 1961 and early 1962. Evidently sharing similar concerns with certain existing deities, Aphrodite / Venus appears to have been one of those integrated and appropriated deities, particularly in urban centres like Gaulos, today’s Victoria, in Gozo. (Photo: the author).

This is perhaps best exemplified where, besides existing cults (Figure 2, p.14), other – perhaps rather typically Roman – cults made their appearance particularly in the existing

urbanised centres. Typical examples are provided by the following: the cult of Apollo and a possible Heracles cult in the town of Melite, the cult of Aphrodite / Venus, that of Ceres, another possible Heracles cult, and a presumed cult of Magna Mater in the town of Gaulos, and the imperial cult in both towns of Melite and Gaulos (5.2-8).

But the survival of Maltese – albeit hybridised – cults often depended also on the extent to which they managed to integrate into the new politico-religious structures. As the Roman municipal system focused attention on urban centres, these cults needed not only to reorganise themselves but also to integrate themselves into the framework of the growing urban centres for them to survive. As rural cults might be more associated with traditional patterns of settlement, they might be more seen as ‘conservative’ with regards to reorganisation and integration, creating a dichotomy of a popular rural culture in contrast to a ‘high’ city-based culture. But, while Roman religious ideology may have been more readily embraced in the urban centres of Melite and Gaulos, certain rural religious traditions may have remained more autonomous and adopted a more selective and self-defining approach in reorganising themselves (as in Bendlin 2000: 134-5; Mattingly 1995: 167-8; Raven 1993: 146-8; Stek 2009: 32-4, 51-2, 214; Van Dommelen 1997: 318).

6.3 - Similar concerns, shared cults: examining Maltese rituals

Environmental constraints, human shortcomings, daily concerns, and fears are common elements in human experience and so are, often, human responses to them. Such responses, however, may vary in their expression. These responses may be reflected in both the sphere of private religious expressions where they usually assume the form of superstitious beliefs and acts as well as in the sphere of public religious expressions usually under the form of established cults and associated rituals. It is not, therefore, surprising that the experiences the Maltese had in common with other Mediterranean peoples triggered similar responses in the form of similar cults.

This often meant a selective resorting to compatible deities and cults from a repertoire that was made available to them, for example when the Maltese islands became increasingly immersed in the Roman world. It was a process of an interactive religious engagement whereby deities and cults were reworked in a syncretistic manner most evident amongst the Maltese rural communities.

As vehicles for multidirectional mobility of people, goods, and ideas (Demetriou 2012: 23), maritime trade networks in which the Maltese islands were immersed also opened up a world of religious ideologies, a wider pantheon of deities, and a diversity of ritual practices. Under such circumstances, Maltese religious culture evidently participated in this scenario, even if to varying degrees in rural and urban contexts and as necessitated by prevailing concerns. Cults appear to have been shared amongst Maltese and other Mediterranean communities, but seem to have employed distinctive expressions – particularly, in Maltese rural contexts – thus, further contributing to a hybridised kind of Maltese religious culture.

The agricultural community (or communities) attached to Mgarr ix-Xini Valley may have sought to appease a form of a ‘wine-god’ with certain characteristics they adopted from Dionysiac cults known in the wider Mediterranean and other characteristics they created and attached to him; ultimately, creating what might be termed as a ‘hybrid deity’. The rituals attached to this wine-god’s cult might have been also of a hybrid nature with both elements carried forward from rituals they were already familiar with as well as elements brought from other sources they came in contact with.

Participating in trends evidenced through Egyptian material culture that circulated widely throughout the Mediterranean (Demetriou 2012: 8), the Maltese and Gozitans continued to attach preferential treatment, particularly in their private lives, to deities from the Egyptian pantheon. Such a trend is already strongly evident (mostly by way of Egyptian divine representations in burials) prior to the political annexation of the Maltese islands to Rome (5.4,7) but continued even afterwards and in contexts other than funerary as shown by the finds from Tal-Ħorob (limits of Xewkija) in Gozo (5.7). This would

confirm the strong appeal Egyptian cults continued to exert and the interaction they stimulated throughout the Mediterranean even if they were largely maintained within the confines of private life. Thus, Egyptian cults were part of a common Mediterranean religious culture in which the Maltese and Gozitan communities participated (5.7). Whether they were the Egyptianised cult objects themselves or their knowledge that was imported and, then, ‘translated’ into locally-manufactured (Egyptianised) cult objects (5.7 above), this imported knowledge would still amount to interaction with the rest of the Mediterranean world (as in Broodbank 1993: 323-4, 326-7; 2000: 258-62, 283-7).



Figure 73

Amulet in the form of the Egyptian dwarf-god Bes. It is shown here wearing a feathered headdress. Total height: 2.2cm. One of three ‘Bes’ amulets found at Tal-Horob, limits of Xewkija in Gozo (5.3, 7). (Photo: Max Xuereb).

The phenomenon of shared common concerns facilitated accommodation of related deities in response to this same phenomenon. For instance, concerns for agricultural fertility fell

within the domain of both Carthaginian Tanit and Roman Ceres. For this reason, but perhaps also as a matter of political convenience, the Maltese maintained the female image of one of their mid-second century B.C. coins – a *semis* of c.160 B.C. – on a later issue (c.125 B.C.) of the same coin but changed the image's accompanying symbol (on the same side of the coin), thereby changing also the deity's representation (borne by the interchangeable image) from that of the Carthaginian Tanit to that of the Hellenistic Demeter or, rather, her Roman counterpart Ceres. Although the typically Egyptian head-dress adopted by the similar images shown on these two coin issues might recall the Egyptian goddess Isis, the latter might have been assimilated with both Tanit and Demeter / Ceres. In fact, like those of Tanit and Demeter / Ceres, Isis worship is also evidenced in Malta. Like them, she was associated with fertility (particularly, human fertility) and, thus, assimilation with both of them might have been quite natural and must not have hindered the change in their representation from one to the other (5.2,4. Also Azzopardi 1993: 39-40 and Azzopardi(b) forthcoming).

The change in divine representation on the above-mentioned coin may have reflected a refashioning of Maltese identity to bring it into conformity with the new political reality, now that the Maltese were under Roman rule. It may have also been a 'political' move involving shifting of political allegiances now that Rome had defeated and destroyed Carthage in 146 B.C., at the end of the Third Punic War. At the same time, from the religious point of view, the Maltese still secured the heavenly favours they needed from the divine protectress of agricultural fertility.

In view of the above, adopted cults were often an expression of religious negotiations of opportunities on the one hand and benefits on the other. They might be also manipulated to foster provincial loyalty on the one hand and personal gain on the other. In fact, this might have been one of the main motives of a Gozitan priestess behind her dedication of a statue in Gozo to Iulia Augusta in identification with Ceres, the Roman goddess of agriculture and of agricultural fertility (5.4). The circumstances surrounding this



Figure 74

Two ‘Romano-Maltese’ coins of around the mid-second century B.C. On their respective obverse sides, they show what appears to be a similar but interchangeable image suggestive of an assimilation between Tanit and Demeter / Ceres whose respective symbols – the triangular Tanit sign and the ear of grain – accompany the image on the two respective coins. (Source: Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 37, 105).

evidence seem to suggest a propagandistic exploitation of the popular Ceres cult by a member of the islands’ elite (i.e. a priestess). In other words, this seems to reflect an attempt to appeal to the sympathies of the masses and securing their support precisely by exploiting towards this end the popularity that Ceres’ cult enjoyed amongst them. While coinage was often the medium employed (Spaeth 1996: 97), in our case, this was done through the dedication of a statue as it was also done in several instances elsewhere in the Mediterranean (5.4) where other communities shared the same concerns or were seeking similar favours or benefits for which they appear to have employed the same propagandistic tools.

Further examples can be provided by cult spaces or sacred structures (in the Maltese islands) but these are dealt with in the next section. These and the examples given above

provide us with a scenario of tailor-made responses to satisfy specific political or religious situations often in combination with daily concerns experienced by the Maltese and Gozitan communities.

6.4 - Mediating points between humans and the supernatural: the nature of Maltese cult spaces

Sacred spaces were to be found in different geographical environments and different architectural set-ups reflecting communities with different cultural, social, economic, and religious backgrounds and different concerns. These would find expression in ‘tailor-made’ rituals enacted in cult centres suited for them. Thus, one would find terraced sanctuaries like Ras il-Wardija, monumental ones like Tas-Silġ, and even humble shrines like Għar ix-Xiħ.

The formation of a sacred space as a place reserved for the divine and where mediation could take place between humans and the supernatural was a basic concept commonly shared amongst Mediterranean communities. Such spaces allowed divine presence to be felt both on land and at sea, depending on whether it was to be found in the hinterland or on the coast. In the latter case, where the cult space or structure could be seen from the sea, the divine presence was extended to the sea or to the world beyond. The surviving cult places on the Maltese islands are all related, in one way or another, to the sea. Ras il-Wardija and Ras ir-Raħeb are headland sanctuaries while Tas-Silġ and Għar ix-Xiħ are respectively related to nearby harbours.

But epigraphic evidence shows that, besides coastal sanctuaries or temples whose deities (with the exception of those at Tas-Silġ) remain largely unknown, there were also urban temples which no longer survive but whose deities are known. Apart from a few exceptions like Astarte in Gozo (though it is not known whether her sanctuary there was urban or rural / coastal), the known urban temples were all dedicated to Roman gods like

Apollo and Proserpina. On the other hand, the deities in the rural and coastal sanctuaries might have been more hybridised deities carrying names with both Maltese and external elements, like those with names carrying epithets as if to have them distinguished from others with similar names and, thus, further highlight the distinct identity of the associated community. Examples of the latter are, in fact, to be found at Tas-Silġ where the Astarte worshipped there carried the epithet ‘of Malta’ as if to attach it more closely to the island and distinguish it from other Astartes worshipped elsewhere.

Like other Mediterranean communities, those on the Maltese islands must have experienced the sea as a constantly changing dynamic medium. For them, the sea was also a giver and a taker of life and, thus, it is likely to have been perceived by them as imbued with spiritual essences, energies, or forces that form its dynamic character. Maltese (and Gozitan) coastal sanctuaries, and the headland ones in particular, were liminal zones where the land meets the sea. As such, they were ideal places for human spiritual relationships and engagements with the sea or with its spiritual forces. As the sea (or its spiritual forces) is to be tamed and dominated in order to facilitate sea travel and exploitation of marine resources, the ritual performance the Maltese (and Gozitan) communities enacted at these specifically-located sanctuaries allowed spiritual management and control of the sea, of the seascapes, and of their spiritual forces more effectively. These rituals further inscribed the seascapes with prescribed liminal zones where the spiritual could be experienced through bodily or sensual engagement. The rituals may have included offerings aimed at placating the sea’s spiritual forces and ensure safe travel (McNiven 2003: 329-44 for comparisons).

The above would show that, for the Maltese and Gozitans, the significance of seascapes is likely to have gone beyond that of mere subsistence strategies or technological manipulation. Seascapes attained a religious significance highlighted with the establishment of liminal zones marked by the establishment of coastal sanctuaries. Located on the edge of coastal cliffs where the land meets the sea, the Ras il-Wardija and Ras ir-Raheb are good examples of liminal sanctuaries. Apart from carrying out the above-mentioned functions through which they created horizontal links between land

(including people) and sea, they also created (as with the remaining cult places) vertical links between sky and earth, between deities and communities.

Creating such vertical links in response to the religious demands of a multiethnic population, the Maltese and Gozitan coastal sanctuaries may have also assumed the nature of *emporía*. Apart from purely spiritual needs, such *emporía*-sanctuaries could also serve as focal points in exchange networks, social meeting points, boundary markers and, in certain cases and owing to their often strategic location, may even provide protection and security via cults associated with defence or with warlike activities (Mather 2003: 23, 34; Morgan 1994: 140; Zifferero 2002: 246-7, 250, 260-3).

Besides facilitating cross-cultural trade, the encounters between people of various cultural and religious backgrounds making use of and contributing towards the same cult places (or *emporía*-sanctuaries) led to the articulation of collective identities. This was the case, for instance, with the temples at Pyrgi (Italy) and pan-Hellenic sanctuaries like Delphi (Greece) that were frequented by Greeks and non-Greeks alike (Demetriou 2012: 7, 15, 20). This same phenomenon is evident at Tas-Silġ and Għar ix-Xiħ where cross-cultural interactions were further facilitated by the respective nearby harbours. Here, the multiethnic nature of the population making use of these cult sites is reflected by the different languages – Phoenician / Punic, Greek, and Latin – used in inscriptions and dedications (at Tas-Silġ), by the variety of pottery from various parts of the Mediterranean, and by the varying character of the votive items deposited, especially at Tas-Silġ.

In view of the above, the dynamic religious activity witnessed in the Maltese cult places – particularly, the coastal ones – is expected to have been marked by a number of syncretistic elements which the Maltese communities exchanged and negotiated with other people. This view is supported largely by the votive repertoire which, as said above, is provided by the surviving Maltese cult sites. On a smaller scale, architectural elements or characteristics that can be seen on the same sites would further lend support to the



Figure 75

The Tas-Silġ multi-period sanctuary site seen from the air. Located on a small shallow hill overlooking Marsaxlokk bay on the south-eastern coast of Malta, this sanctuary site remained active and enjoyed external contacts over many centuries. This may have been aided also by the proximity of the nearby harbour and the maritime connections the latter provided. (Source: Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 220).

same view. The resulting picture seems to be that of a hybrid nature characterising the Maltese cultic places and, not least, the religious activity undertaken at these sites.

6.5 - Networking religious ideologies: defining Maltese religious culture

Processes of negotiations and interactions involve reception of certain religious elements and rejection of others, reworking and adaptations, usually following criteria of acceptability, convenience, and compatibility. They are best evidenced in religious contexts of rural areas but, perhaps, nowhere better than the coastal ‘*emporia*’, particularly Tas-Silġ (Figure 75). Here, where people with different religious ideologies and backgrounds met, religious behaviour and practices may have been of a more cosmopolitan nature. Multi-ethnic elements mixing with Maltese ones contributed towards the hybrid religious scenario of the Maltese epitomised at Tas-Silġ.

In this respect, assimilation of deities might have provided one of the best means to facilitate co-existence of different communities. A good example seems to be provided by the images and related symbols appearing on a *c.*40 B.C. *quincunx* from Gozo (Azzopardi 1993: 43 and 5.2-3). These images and related symbols might have referred equally to Phoenician Astarte, Carthaginian Tanit, and Roman Juno who, having been thus assimilated, facilitated an acceptable and convenient *modus vivendi* for both Gozitans (and more broadly the Maltese) and Romans in a context of cultural and religious transition during the early political occupation of the Maltese islands by the Romans. The three goddesses also shared similar concerns. This coin seems to have conveniently maintained equal representation of all three deities which both Maltese and Romans could feel comfortable with. Such an assimilation process, therefore, might also consign the relative deity – be it Astarte, Tanit, or Juno – to the realm of hybridity wherein the deity is no longer purely or exclusively Phoenician / Punic or Roman but rather a hybrid one. For this reason, the coin itself may also qualify as a ‘hybrid’ coin, further reflecting the ‘hybrid’ character of Gozitan (and Maltese) religious culture during the same period (Azzopardi(a) forthcoming).



Figure 76

The Gozo *quincunx* of the second half of the first century B.C. It shows a helmeted female head above a crescent moon on the obverse side and a full-size female figure in the guise of a warrior on the reverse side. (Source: Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 159).

One of the underlying motives explaining this assimilation of deities could be a reworking of the Gozitan (and Maltese) identity to conform to the new political reality, now that the Gozitans (and the Maltese) were under Roman rule. But at the same time, through the minting of this coin and particularly through its legend *ΓΑΥΑΙΤΩΝ* (meaning

‘of the Gozitans’), the Gozitans might have also intended to assert their civic identity precisely by highlighting their ‘ownership’ of the coin: ‘of the Gozitans’, especially if this coin circulated also beyond Gozitan shores. As far as it is known, no examples of this coin have yet been found elsewhere in the Mediterranean but if, in spite of this, the coin did circulate also amongst other Mediterranean communities, assertion of the Gozitan identity might have been more prioritised.

Alternatively, the Gozitans might have felt the need to assert their civic identity by highlighting their ‘ownership’ of this coin in view of its local circulation alongside other foreign coins that also circulated locally (examples in Azzopardi 1993: 26-34, 47-8); perhaps as if to distinguish it from them too.

Either of the above situations is rendered likely not only by the use of the Greek language (that was a *lingua franca* or an ‘international’ language) in the legend it carries but also by the fact that the coin bore a standard Roman denomination (*quincunx*) that was legal tender elsewhere in the Roman world. At the same time, it carried locally selected iconographic features and legend, having been minted by the local administrative body of Gozo. The closest example can, perhaps, be provided by today’s euro coins which, though carrying different iconographic features reflecting the individual (European) countries respectively responsible for their minting, are legal tender in all European countries forming part of the eurozone. Following from this same example, our coin might have circulated alongside foreign coins both locally and abroad where it was likewise legal tender.

The Gozitans might have had no reason to assert their identity had there been none of the above situations. In either situation and through the *ΓΑΥΑΙΤΩΝ* legend it bore, this coin might have been competing with other foreign coins to assert the civic identity of the Gozitans. All that has been said above with respect to the Gozitan coin applies also to Maltese coins of the same early Roman occupation period bearing the *ΜΕΛΙΤΑΙΩΝ* (meaning ‘of the Maltese’) legend.

On the other hand, the retaining of Punic deities or of images (or symbols) equally representing Punic deities and Roman ones as on this coin may also be explained in terms of another means of assertion of identity – now, the religious identity – of the Gozitans whilst maintaining peaceful co-existence with the Roman elite.

The above example would confirm that religious assimilations imply a process of complex negotiations and interactions between religious ideologies, religious practices (and cults), and sometimes also differing political agendas. As shown by the same example, such a process of negotiations, interactions, and relationships is likely to bring up both similarities and differences along the way (as in Di Vita *et al.* 1999: 32; Haeussler 2007: 82, 91; Mattingly 1995: 38, 167-8; Raven 1993: 144-7; Stek 2009: 17-8; Webster 1997: 327-45). The same can be said with respect to other coins minted in the Maltese islands during the same period (i.e. the first centuries of the Roman political occupation of the same islands) through their similar adoption of a ‘hybrid character’.

The resultant phenomenon would be reworked religious forms which are best suited to the Maltese and Gozitan communities (particularly those in rural areas), reflecting their needs, concerns, and aspirations. Almost inevitably, these reworked religious forms would betray both conventional and, more conveniently, political and popular elements. The latter would less frequently surface in the archaeological record but we seem to have a glimpse of them from the popularity Egyptian cults appear to have enjoyed amongst the Maltese in their private lives (6.3 above).

6.6 - Circa A.D. 60: a new religious phenomenon and transition to a new religious ideology?

Like other Mediterranean communities, the Maltese and Gozitans had long been familiar with a varied pantheon of deities. But the first century A.D. seems to have witnessed the introduction in the Maltese islands of a nascent religious movement: Christianity.

Attributed to the apostle Paul, this took place around A.D. 60 (*Acts XXVII*, 39-44,

XXVIII, 1-11). Apart from a very brief reference to Paul's stay in Malta in the first and fifth (unnumbered) paragraphs of the fourth century A.D. apocryphal *Acts of Peter and Paul*, the Biblical Acts' narrative is the sole evidence we have for the beginnings of Christianity in the Maltese islands. As shown below, it is not corroborated by any secure material evidence.

The Acts' narrative gives us the impression that the apostle and the religious ideology he brought along with him were first embraced by the local *barbaroi* (people extraneous to Greek and Roman culture) while the local elite are likely to have remained attached for a long while to their own pagan religious traditions (Azzopardi 2007: 24. Also below). It was not unusual for the newly-spreading religious ideology (i.e. Christianity) to be first embraced by people of low social standing (in both rural and urban contexts) amongst whom it seems to have enjoyed popularity due to the favourable treatment it accorded to them (Azzopardi 2007: 24).

An interesting detail given by the Acts' author is the instance when, seeing no harm done to the apostle by the viper, the local *barbaroi* (presumably, countrymen hailing from the coastal surroundings of the beach where the apostle's vessel was wrecked) perceived him as a god (*Acts XXVIII, 6*). They must have done so even more when they saw him healing their sick (*Acts XXVIII, 8-9*). One is tempted to guess that they might have identified him with the Punic healing god Eshmun (or his Roman counterpart, Aesculapius) with whom they must have been familiar. The apostle Paul had, in fact, undergone a similar experience at Lystra, in Lycaonia, where he was identified by the gathered crowds with the messenger-god Hermes upon seeing him preaching and curing a crippled man (*Acts XIV, 6-18*).

At this stage, therefore, it seems that one can think of a hybridised cult centred on the figure of the apostle (rather than Christianity itself) presumably identified with one of their gods whom, for a while, they continued to worship. Having been familiar with polytheistic religious traditions, it might not have been difficult for them to include the

apostle Paul in their pantheon of gods. Certain syncretised Christian elements, however, might have not been altogether excluded from this new hybridised cult.



Figure 77

St Paul shipwrecked on the island of Malta. Seventeenth or eighteenth century copper plate engraving. The medal (probably one of those made of *terra sigillata* from St Paul's Grotto in Rabat, Malta) represented below on the left shows the apostle with the viper twisted round his raised sword and the legend: *TERRA:D.GROTTA D S PAVL* / Dust from the Grotto of St Paul. Incidentally, while local popular tradition attributed healing properties to dust extracted from St Paul's Grotto in Rabat, Malta (Freller 2010: 103, quoting the seventeenth century French chronicler Francois Deseine), the viper twisted round his raised sword seems to recall the snake-entwined staff of the healing god Eshmun / Aesculapius. It seems that, in Maltese popular culture, not only certain places linked to him but even the apostle himself may have remained associated with healing. (Photo: the author).

Nonetheless, the filtering process through which the balance tipped more in favour of Christianity appears to have been slow and gradual as evidenced by the presence of imperial and pagan cults until late imperial times (4.1.16, 4.2.8, 4.3.6, 4.4.11, 5.5-8). External elements (perhaps in the form of missionary activity or Christian immigrants fleeing persecution) might have contributed towards this process. Such elements might have been of North-African origin as suggested by the North-African style basilica church and baptismal font at Tas-Silġ (4.1.16) and by the North-African style Christian inscription in a family catacomb near St Thomas tower in Marsaskala, Malta (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 267, 334; *MAR* 1907-8: E9).

The Tas-Silġ basilica church and baptismal font and the catacomb with its inscription at Marsaskala are datable to the fourth – sixth centuries A.D. To the same period are, likewise, datable a number of catacombs with distinctly Christian symbols, iconography, and epigraphy, and even architectural elements like *agape* tables (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 266-7; also Figure 78). Some of these catacombs (as well as certain individual burials of the same period) also yielded red-ware oil-lamps of the fourth – sixth centuries A.D., some of which bore distinctly Biblical or Christian symbols. Similar oil-lamps (largely in fragments) were found also at the Tas-Silġ sanctuary, mostly in the upper levels in Area 2 (location of the North-African style basilica church) (Figure 22, p.125). These mould-made oil-lamps were usually mass-produced in North-African workshops from where they were exported to the entire Mediterranean world, including the Maltese islands where imported examples may have also served as archetypes to create local copies as was done in Sicily (Azzopardi 1994: 16-9, 105-30, 143-6, Plates 65-84, 91-2; Azzopardi 2008a: 44-5; Bailey 1963: 20-1, 32(Plate D); *MISSIONE* 1964: Plate 17(4); 1965: 47-8, Plates 24(3-4), 49(1,4); 1966: 35, Plate 15(2); 1967: 35, Plate 25(4-6)). Though not all of them bore Biblical or Christian symbols and iconography, these oil-lamps would, nonetheless, continue to highlight the distinctive North-African link in the Christianisation process of the Maltese islands during the late Roman period. Once again, North-Africa seems to be a source of religious influence as it had already been earlier through its Punic cults.



Figure 78

Tal-Mintna catacombs, near Mqabba, in Malta. Late Roman period. Picture above shows an *agape* table within a *triclinium* set-up (later, mutilated) for communal funerary meals in one of the funerary chambers. (Source: Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 266).

During the interval between the arrival of the apostle Paul in the first century A.D. and the earliest appearance, in late imperial times, of material evidence for Christianity in the Maltese islands, traditional cults were evidently not uprooted. But, at the same time, syncretised Christian elements perhaps under the guise of a new hybridised cult centred on the figure of the apostle Paul identified with one of the traditional gods might have more likely been absorbed (at least, initially) by certain (not necessarily all) rural communities (above). In this case, they seem to have been mainly the political establishment and elite who constituted the conservative element that kept safeguarding the traditional and long-established cults.

In all likelihood, the 'new' cult was (initially, at least) subordinate and inferior to the long-established traditional ones to the extent that it left no material record of its initial stages. This seems to have been further aided by the unofficial nature of the cult itself and the small number of its initial adherents (Azzopardi 2007: 24).

Eventually, the traditional pagan cults were slowly and gradually 'Christianised' in a process that also followed on from previous religious developments. Initially, this syncretised religious phenomenon was not only unofficial but was also selective whereby the Maltese (particularly, the rural communities) retained previous elements and adopted others in a complex process motivated by what related to the Maltese communities, to their needs, or to their aspirations. It was a continuous process marked by an ability to absorb new cults into existing structures. Therefore, the initial Christianity – or, rather, Pauline cult – of the Maltese was also of a hybrid character until it took on a more distinctively Christian look in a progressive manner.

In summary, the tradition of early Christianity in Malta is quite possibly a later re-interpretation of its true origins. In all likelihood, it originated as a hybrid cult (including pagan religious elements) centred on the figure of Paul (i.e. a Pauline cult) rather than actual Christianity but was, then, integrated into Christianity through a long-term process of syncretism.

6.7 - Conclusion: A hybridised Maltese religious culture

The mobility, co-presence, assimilations, and adaptations which urban and rural communities living on the Maltese islands experienced in their contacts with the rest of the Mediterranean did not wipe out completely all of their religious elements. Maintaining a number of these, they reworked and reorganised them within the framework of new religious forms which they accepted and appropriated in a hybridised way of their own.

This hybridisation might also be perceived as stemming from a religious pluralism which the communities living on the Maltese islands might have experienced. The interreligious encounter or contact and mutual influence which these communities experienced with other peoples appear to have created a reflexive mixture and a dynamic interchange of religious forms, symbols, and practices which might have eventually led to a characteristically 'Maltese' religious culture. The latter might have benefited from the input of all contributing elements while, at the same time, maintained a number of existing characteristics, be it for reasons of identity, convenience, or otherwise. In view of this, this hybridisation might have been a conscious process whereby selection, adaptation, reworking, interchange and the newly-attached or rearticulated meanings might have been deliberate. It might have worked like this concurrently on all sides: all participating elements being reflexively contributors and receivers.

Urban communities might be more prone to standardisation and adapt more to the mainstream 'globalised' religious forms and new gods then in vogue not least for motives of their own and, perhaps, also to distinguish themselves from the rural 'peasants'. In contrast to urban communities, rural (and coastal) communities tend to be more autonomous and, thus, selective and create their own syncretised or hybridised religious forms. In doing this, these communities might have created their own version of the more general Mediterranean religious forms and may have perceived this as a means to distinguish themselves (from their urban cousins) and, thus, it was crucial to not only their own religious identity but also their broader social identity. Viewed in such terms, this type of relationship with the wider Mediterranean religious world might have not only sustained new social categories but also generated for them new experiences and a new sense of place.

The selective (and creative) approach of the rural (and coastal) communities manifests itself again in their syncretised adoption of Christianity and, thus, in contrast to the conservative approach now adopted by the urban elite who, despite their apparent openness towards the mainstream religious trends, show reluctance in the face of the new

religious phenomenon (i.e. Christianity) and rather favour – perhaps, even conveniently – the established religious traditions.

Nonetheless, the final ‘religious’ product over a centuries-long development process finds expression in a hybridised religious culture that seems to have been relevant to the communities present on the Maltese islands and, particularly, to those in rural (and coastal) contexts where religious hybridisation is more evident. It might have been a form of religious culture that, while recognisable to anyone, was also hybrid in nature. It might have stemmed from the need of a common platform for diverse religious traditions to be able to communicate and co-exist and hybridisation might have provided this needed platform.

CHAPTER 7:

CONCLUSION

7.1 - General outcome of thesis

In this thesis, I have sought to address the question of religion – along with its material manifestations, beliefs, and practices – in the Maltese islands, particularly in their rural contexts. Rural religion has, until recently, not been given enough attention in Mediterranean archaeology and even less in Maltese archaeology. The relative paucity of evidence in the archaeological record makes its study even more difficult. However, in the case of the Maltese islands, new opportunities have emerged with the recent investigations carried out at the Għar ix-Xiħ rural and coastal shrine (Għar ix-Xiħ case study) and those carried out at Tal-Knisja and Tal-Loġġa (in Mgarr ix-Xini valley) which revealed evidence of possible religious festivals and other forms of religious activity performed by the peasantry (Tal-Knisja and Tal-Loġġa case study). These investigations are still awaiting publication but, as I was actively involved in these projects, I have been able to access the data and develop my own interpretations.

Archaeological fieldwork and research have recently focused more on prehistoric religion in the Maltese islands, largely at the expense of the religious phenomenon in later periods. To rectify this situation, this thesis has addressed precisely the latter. Through this work, I have tried to contribute to studies of religion in Malta in Classical antiquity by broadening their remit and extending them from urban contexts to include rural ones, and from orthodox religious practices to include also some others from the sphere of private life. Hopefully, this study will stimulate

similar studies of themes concerning rural religion in other parts of the Mediterranean.

I have also considered some similarities (and differences) between urban and rural religion. For instance, most cults from both urban and rural contexts appear to have been a continuation of earlier ones, addressing (more or less) the same human concerns but adopting varying degrees of reception and expression. Both have contributed towards the formation of the people's identity and shared a hybrid nature.

7.2 - An overview of sacred spaces and ritual activities in the Maltese islands

Immersed within a Mediterranean context, the landscape of the Maltese islands – whether urban, rural, or maritime – provided the physical and conceptual setting for various sacred spaces and religious experiences over different time periods.

In laying out sanctuaries and sacred spaces, special attention seems to have been afforded to the landscape incorporating the sanctuary or sacred space in question. This could be observed, in particular, where sacred spaces are harmonised with their surrounding landscape either by replicating it as the terraced Ras il-Wardija sanctuary and Għar ix-Xiħ shrine do or by exploiting any potential it offers to enhance the religious experience related to the sanctuary or sacred space in question. The latter can be shown by the shallow yet dominant position of the Tas-Silġ hill hosting a sanctuary: a dominant position that, ultimately, is afforded to the sanctuary itself.

Low hilltops like the one at Tas-Silġ, coastal headlands like Ras il-Wardija and Ras ir-Raheb, and sheltered harbours or landing-places like Mġarr ix-Xini were well qualified as suitable to host the places where humans could communicate with the divine and perform their rituals in seeking divine assistance, giving thanks, or

fulfilling their vows. The religious significance of these places – especially, the sanctuary at Tas-Silġ – was such that, despite any changes, it kept attracting worshippers for many centuries.

But, although it is indicative, the suitability of such places for religious practices is not, on its own, a sufficient criterion for them to qualify as sacred spaces. However, the multidisciplinary approach adopted in this regard enabled the search for supplementary criteria like site finds which helped in the identification of such sites as sacred ones. The criteria themselves for the selected sites are individually dealt with in the respective case studies in Chapter 4. In a number of instances, it was ultimately a combination of elements (like landscape setting, architectural features, and site finds) that, supplementing each other, led towards the definite identification of the sites examined in the case studies as sacred places where some sort of ritual activities were held. For example, were it not for the finds that were unearthed at Għar ix-Xiħ, one could hardly conclude that it was a shrine on the basis of its landscape setting or rock-cut features alone.

Likewise, it was as a result of this same approach that other less conspicuous places, such as Mġarr ix-Xini valley, are known to have hosted religious festivals perhaps associated with occupations and concerns of a more common nature like the harvesting of agricultural produce. In contrast to Tas-Silġ, Mġarr ix-Xini valley lacked any monumentalisation, any defined sacred space, or any specialised priesthood. But certain finds and the circumstances or context in which they were found pointed towards some sort of ritual behaviour or activity as elaborated in the respective case study in Chapter 4. In fact, the sites in Mġarr ix-Xini valley could relate to rituals performed in the open countryside, perhaps conducted by the same people who tilled the land and harvested the agricultural produce that was being celebrated.

But religious concerns were shared not only by the people in the countryside or in coastal areas but even by those in the urban centres of Melite and Gaulos. The

rituals these practised, the deities they worshipped, and the sacred places / sanctuaries they frequented are known to us largely by way of epigraphy. Like the rural cults, most of the urban cults might have easily been a continuation of earlier cults under different but corresponding deities' names or divine attributes. They were also cults which one would already find in the contemporary Mediterranean world.

7.3 - Religious transformations and their implications

This brings us to the issue of religious transformations. The phenomenon of religious transformations was a relative one. Similarities and dissimilarities, continuities and discontinuities could have been mainly the result of a process of religious syncretism whereby different peoples amongst the Maltese and Gozitan communities adopted, assimilated, or reworked certain religious elements from each other while they rejected others. This process may have facilitated co-existence of peoples with different religious backgrounds. It may have also enabled the continuation of certain religious traditions even if in different contexts and under modified forms.

While dissimilarities and discontinuities can be detected in certain elements of religious worship, like deities' names, as exemplified at Tas-Silġ, similarities and continuities can be detected in other elements, like the human concerns they sought to address and which are likely to endure beyond both temporal and spatial boundaries. Thus, this may have mirrored a more or less similar situation in other religious contexts not only on the Maltese islands themselves but also in other places across the Mediterranean.

7.4 - Role and relevance of religion

As in other traditional societies in antiquity, religion may have penetrated several – if not nearly all – aspects of life in Maltese society. This may have ranged from the formal ritual practices people enacted in specifically defined sacred spaces to their private superstitious beliefs and actions which they may have expressed and performed perhaps more spontaneously. The former are best and most clearly exemplified by the sacred sites and related cults dealt with in the case studies or those known from epigraphy while the latter can be exemplified, for instance, by the way sailors resorted to superstitious practices or invoked their divine protectors whose marks or names they left on their sea-borne equipment (like anchors) as an expression of their reaction to their fears at sea.

In urban contexts, religion might have borne a specific relevance among the elite. Evidently, they maneuvered and manipulated religion as well as certain religious elements that enjoyed popularity amongst the populace to their own benefits, like personal advancement. This seems to have been the motivation behind the priestess Lutatia's dedication of a statue of Iulia Augusta identified with the goddess Ceres in Gozo. On the other hand, we find also generous donations to temples: Chrestion, the *procurator* of the Maltese islands, renovating the temple of Proserpina, the *Primus Melitensium* building a temple to Apollo, and ---- Claudius Iustus, patron of the *Municipium* of the Maltese, building – or, possibly, rebuilding – the same temple of Apollo. However, these feats might have been undertaken in fulfillment of moral obligations that stemmed from the individuals' status as public officials (Lintott 1993: 149). But, in doing so, they are most likely to have always projected themselves as benefactors of the community.

Furthermore, religion may have also lent its part in the creation or preservation of social (and religious) hierarchies. This can be best evidenced in the tiered arrangements at Ras il-Wardija sanctuary that were, perhaps, intended to keep spectators and procession participants distinct and also in the structural layout (the

colonnade surrounding the internal courtyard) at Tas-Silġ sanctuary which, again, might have been intended to keep a separate space for the viewers who might have been denied access to the sacrificial area or to the inner – and most sacred – spaces of the sanctuary.

7.5 - Religion's contribution to people's identity

We can perhaps safely assume that the Maltese people were never areligious but they always maintained religious ideologies and cults (and even superstitions) of some sort with elements that they opted to keep or replace, depending not only on religious but also on political and social circumstances. This process of 'reworking' their religion was a continuous one and, likewise, was continuously reshaping their identity to the effect that one could say that the Maltese were never purely or always Phoenician, Carthaginian, Roman, or Maltese; unless by the latter (i.e. Maltese) one understands an ethnic group of a hybrid nature.

Regionality and insularity are two important factors that contributed heavily towards the shaping of the Maltese identity and, in particular, their religious identity. Insularity, in particular, might be perceived as a boundary isolating the Maltese community but, evidently, the surrounding sea opened up great opportunities of communication with the rest of the Mediterranean world. This communication, in fact, is well attested by artefacts reflecting Mediterranean cultural influences in Maltese contexts. Perhaps one may also view this communication as a main driving force behind the reworking processes of their religious culture, ultimately resulting in a hybridised religious culture.

The overall impression one gets of the Maltese and Gozitan communities in Classical antiquity is that of a people situated at the cultural cross-roads of the Mediterranean. As a result of this, they seem to have interacted with different peoples and, consequently, with different cultures. This dynamic and complex

interaction process extended beyond geographical and temporal boundaries as it involved people from different directions in the Mediterranean (Phoenicians from the east, Carthaginians from North Africa, 'Romans' from Sicily and mainland Italy) and across different time periods. Due to its complex nature, the resultant image of the Maltese communities and of their religious culture in particular might have been somewhat blurred but, nonetheless, original in its own right as it reflected the religious culture of a particular people in a particular situation and under particular circumstances.

7.6 - Maltese religious culture in the wider Mediterranean world

The Maltese active participation in exchange processes taking place around the Mediterranean as highlighted above is particularly reflected in the sphere of their religious culture. Their sacred spaces, religious beliefs and concerns, and cults are typically Mediterranean in essence but take on an individual and a rather hybrid expression like that demonstrated, for example, on coinage.

This happened because elements from the wider religious world of the Mediterranean were selectively borrowed but conveniently reorganised and reworked to create a religious identity that was unique in its own right but, at the same time, reflected the wider religious context.

Therefore, religious beliefs, concerns, and their expressions on the Maltese islands were Mediterranean in so far as they reflected the wider religious scenario of this region but, at the same time, were characteristically Maltese in the way they were uniquely reworked to reflect Maltese circumstances, tastes, and concerns. This is, perhaps, most evident in rural contexts where communities seem to have been more autonomous and selective in creating their own syncretised or hybridised religious forms that were, ultimately, localised versions of the more general Mediterranean ones.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

CIS, I, 132

3rd century B.C. Punic inscription commemorating the construction and renovation
of sanctuaries by the people of Gozo

Transliterated text (Heltzer 1993: 202):

p^vl whds^v c^vm gwl w^vyt sls^v[...w^vyt]
mqds^v bt s^vdmb^vl w^vyt m[qds^v bt (name of deity) w^vyt]
mqds^v bt c^vstrt w^vyt mqd[s^v bt (name of deity)]
b^v t r^v dr^v rkt^v r^vs bn y^vl [...bn...w^vyt]
s^vpt bn zybqm bn b^vd s^vmn bn y^v [l...w...]
zbh b^v lslk bn hn^v bn b^vd s^vm[n...w...]
bl^v bn klm bn y^vzr smr m^všb y^vl bn...]
c^vm gwl

Translation (Heltzer 1993: 202):

‘The people of Gaulos constructed and renovated three [... and]
the sanctuary – the temple of *šdmb^vl* and the sa[nctuary – temple of (name of deity)
and the]
sanctuary – temple of *c^vAstart* and the sanctu[ary – temple of (name of deity)]
At the pe(riod) of the r(ab)ship of the esteemed senators *w^vArish*, son of *Y^vl* [... son
of ... and]

^v*Sapput*, son of *Zybm*, son of ^v*Abdesmoun*, son of *Y* [*l* ... and the (kind of offering)]

offered *Ba*^v*alsillek*, son of *Hanno*, son of ^v*Abdesmoun* [And the (name of function) was]

Bl, son of *Klm*, son of *Ya*^v*ezer*. The inspector of the quarry (was) *Y* [*l* ... son of ...]

The people of Gaulos.

APPENDIX II

Bilingual inscription in Punic and Greek on each of two twin marble candelabra of the 2nd century B.C. commemorating a votive offering to Melqart

Translation (Bonanno & Cilia 2005: 153):

Punic inscription:

To our lord Melqart, lord of Tyre, offering by your servant
Abdosir and his brother Osirxamar, sons of Osirxamar, son
Of Abdosir, for hearing their voice; let him bless them.

Greek version:

Dionysios and Sarapion, sons of Sarapion, to Tyrian
Herakles, lord of that city.

APPENDIX III

CIL, X, 7501

1st century A.D. Latin inscription commemorating a dedication by the priestess
Lutatia to Livia identified with the goddess Ceres

Text:

1. CERERI IVLIAE AVGVSTAE
2. DIVI AVGVSTI MATRI
3. TI(BERII) CAESARIS AVGVSTI
4. LVTATIA C(AII) F(ILIA) SACERDOS AVGVSTAE
5. IMP(ERATORIS) PERPET(VI) VXOR
6. M(ARCI) LIVI M(ARCI) F(ILII) QVI(RINA TRIBV) OPTATI
FLAMINIS G[AVLI]
7. IVLIAE AVG[V]STI IMP(ERATORIS) PERPET(VI) CVM V
8. LIBERIS S(ACRA) C(OGNOSCENS) CONSACRAVIT

Translation:

To Ceres Iulia Augusta (wife) of the divine Augustus and mother of Tiberius Caesar Augustus; Lutatia, daughter of Caius, priestess of Augusta (wife) of the *imperator perpetuus*, and wife of Marcus Livius Optatus of the Quirine tribe, son of Marcus and priest of Gozo, consecrated, together with her five children, while observing the sacred rites, (this statue / inscription) to Iulia (wife) of Augustus, the *imperator perpetuus*.

APPENDIX IV

CIL, X, 7494

Inscription of the late 1st century B.C. or early 1st century A.D. commemorating the renovation of a temple of Proserpina by the *procurator* Chrestion

Text:

1. CHRE]STION AVG(VSTI) L(I)B(ERTVS)] PROC(VRATOR)
2. INSV[LARVM MELIT(AE) ET] GAVL(I)
3. COLVMNA[S CVM] FASTI[GIIS
4. ET PA]RIETI[BVS TEM]PLI [DEAE
5. PROSERPINAE VETVSTATE
6. RVINAM INMINEN]TI[BVS
7. RES]TITVI[T] SI[MVL ET PILA]M
8. [INAVRAVIT]

Translation:

Chrestion, freedman of Augustus and *procurator* of the islands of Malta and Gozo, repaired the columns together with the roof pediments and walls of the temple of the goddess Proserpina which were about time to collapse because of their old age, and at the same time he gilded the pillar.

APPENDIX V

6th century B.C. papyrus fragment containing a spell presumably uttered by Isis
whose image accompanies the Phoenician text

Translation (Gouder 1978: 313):

Laugh at your enemy O valiant ones,
scorn, assail and crush your adversary.
... disdain (him), trample (him) on the waters;
... moreover prostrate (him)
... on the sea, bind (him), hang (him)!

APPENDIX VI

CIL, X, 7495

2nd century A.D. inscription commemorating the building and dedication of a temple to Apollo by the *Primus* of the Maltese *Municipium*

Text:

1. [MVNIC]IPI(I) MEL(ITENSIVM) PRIMVS OMN[IVM
2. FEC]IT ITEM AEDEM MARMO[REAM
3. APO]LLINIS CONSACRAVIT ITEM P[OSVIT
4. IN P]RONAO COLVMNAS IIII ET PARA[STATAS]
5. ET PODIVM ET PAVIMENTV[M
6. COLLO]CAVIT IN QVOD OPVS VNIVER[SVM
7. LIBERA]LITATE SVA HS C̄X̄D̄CCXCII S(OLVIT) Q(VE)
8. [OB ME]LITENSIVM DESIDERIVM O[MNIVM
9. EX AE]RIS CONLATIONE D(ECRETO) D(ECVRIONVM)

Translation:

The *Primus* of the *Municipium* of all the Maltese built this temple in marble and dedicated it to Apollo. He also set up the four columns and flanking pilasters of the portico and laid the platform and the pavement. Towards all this work, he generously spent 110,792 sesterces. On account of the desire of all the Maltese and by decree of the decurions, (this inscription / monument was set up in his honour) by public subscription.

APPENDIX VII

CIL, X, 8318

2nd or 3rd century A.D. inscription commemorating the building and dedication of a temple by the Patron of the Maltese *Municipium*, ---- Claudius Iustus

Text:

1. [.(----) CL]AVDIVS IVSTVS I[---- PATRO]
2. NVS MVNICIP[II] ME[LITENSIVM]
3. MARMOREVM CVM SIMV[LACRO]
4. ET [O]MNI SVO ORN[A]TV PR[----]
5. DECVRI[ON]ATVS [----] AV[----]
6. SECVNDVM POLLICITA[TIONEM]
7. EXSTRVXIT CONSECRA[VITQVE]
8. QVOD OPVS AMPLIVS QVA[M PROMISERAT]
9. EROG[AVIT ----]

Translation:

---- Claudius Iustus, Patron of the *Municipium* of the Maltese, built and consecrated, in accordance with his promise, a marble (temple?) with the cult image and all its ornament (during the time?) of (his?) decurionship, for which work he spent more than he had promised.

APPENDIX VIII

CIL, X, 7506

Inscription of the 2nd half of the 2nd century A.D. commemorating a dedication by
Marcius Marcianus to honour his friend ---- Cestius Gallus and the Patron of the
Municipium, Varenianus Lutatius Natalis Aemilianus

Text:

1. [.(----)] CESTIO L(VCII) F(ILIO) POMPT(INA TRIBV)
GALLO VA
2. RENIANO LVTATIO NATALI AEM[I]
3. LIANO PATRONO MVNICIPI(I)
4. MARCIVS MARCIANVS AMICO OPTIM[O]
5. E]T KARISSIMO SIBI HONORIS CAVSA S(VA) P(ECVNIA)

Translation:

Marcus Marcianus (set up this inscription / altar) at his own expense in
honour of his own best and dearest friend ---- Cestius Gallus of the Pomptine
tribe and son of Lucius and in honour of Varenianus Lutatius Natalis
Aemilianus, Patron of the *Municipium*.

APPENDIX IX

IG, XIV, 601

1st century A.D. Greek inscription commemorating an offering by Lucius Castricius Prudens, *Protos* and Patron of the Maltese, to the deified Augustus

Text (Busuttill 1972: 167):

Λ. ΚΑ ΚΙΟΣ. ΚΥΡ. ΠΡΟΥΔΗΝΣ. ΙΠΠΕΥΣ. ΠΩΜ. ΠΡΩΤΟΣ.
ΜΕΛΙΤΑΙΩΝ. ΚΑΙ. ΠΑΤΡΩΝ. ΑΡΞΑΣ. ΚΑΙ. ΑΜΦΙΠΟΛΕΥΣΑΣ.
ΘΕΩ. ΑΥΓΟΥΣΤΩ . . . ΕΣΧ . . . Ν . . . Ε. ΙΝΕ.

Translation (Busuttill 1972: 167):

Lucius Castricius Prudens of the Quirine tribe, a Roman knight, *Protos* of the Maltese and their Patron, having been an *archon* and an *amphipolos* offered (?) prayers(?) to the god Augustus . . .

APPENDIX X

CIL, X, 7507

Inscription of the 2nd half of the 2nd century A.D. set up by the people of Gozo to honour Caius Vallius Postumus

Text:

1. [C(AIO) VALLIO .(----) F(ILIO)] Q[V]IR(INA TRIBV)
POSTV[MO PATRONO MVN]ICIPII
2. [FL(AMINI) DIVI H]ADRIANI PERPET[VI EX]
QVINQ(VENNALIBVS) DECVR(IONIBVS) IVDI(CIBVS)
3. [INTER] QVADRINGENARIOS ADLECTO A DIVO
ANTO(NINO)
4. [AV]G(VSTO) PIO OMNIB(VS) HONORIB(VS) CIVITATIS
SVAE HO
5. [NEST]E FVNCTO ITEM LEGATIONE GRATVITA APVD
6. [H]ADRIANVM ET APVD AMPLISSIMVM ORDINEM DE
7. [----]A LIB(ERTIS) REDHIBENDIS PLEPS GAVLITANA EX
AERE CON(LATO)
8. [O]B PLVRA MERITA EIVS D(ECRETO) D(ECVRIONVM)

Translation:

On account of his many merits and by decree of the decurions, the people of Gozo (set up this inscription / monument) by public subscription in honour of Caius Vallius Postumus of the Quirine tribe and son of ----, Patron of the

Municipium, flamen perpetuus of the divine Hadrian, one of the quinquennial judges and decurions, raised to the rank of *quadringenarius* by the divine Antoninus Pius Augustus, having honourably held every public office of his own town as well as having gratuitously served as a legate both at the court of Hadrian and to the most distinguished class of freedmen(?).

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Abbreviated titles

<i>Acts</i>	<i>Acts of the Apostles.</i>
<i>BAR</i>	<i>British Archaeological Reports.</i>
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> (Berlin, 1863-).
<i>CIS</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum</i> (Paris, 1881-).
<i>IG</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i> (Berlin, 1895-).
<i>JRA</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology.</i>
<i>LIMC</i>	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> (Zurich and Munich, 1986).
<i>MISSIONE</i>	<i>Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta. Rapporto Preliminare della Campagna 1963-70</i> (Roma, 1964-73).
<i>MAR</i>	<i>Museum Annual Reports</i> (Malta, 1905-2002).
<i>Report 1961 & 1970</i>	<i>Report by Imperial College Archaeological Expedition on the Roman Wrecks at Xlendi Gozo. 1961 & 1970</i> (unpublished typescript, National Museum of Archaeology (Malta) Library, DAG·16·9, TS(115)).

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Map sources

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