

11. Hercules' unfinished labour: the management of Borġ in-Nadur and its landscape

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Abstract. A new paradigm for archaeological site management is established in Malta during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The history of how this paradigm is shaped by the British colonial context is traced. A series of key innovative measures in archaeological site management that take place from the 1880s onwards at and around Borġ in-Nadur are considered. Practices and attitudes that emerged in that seminal period have continued to pervade approaches to archaeological resource management down to the present. A paradigm shift may be required to achieve a more integrated, socially embedded and holistic stewardship of the archaeological landscape.

Keywords: Management, conservation, archaeological sites.

11.1. Introduction

The history of the management of Borġ in-Nadur and its surroundings encapsulates many of the successes as well as the failures of archaeological site management in Malta. On several occasions, archaeological remains in this area were among the first to receive attention when new policies and legal instruments were being introduced to better the stewardship of archaeological resources. The management of the archaeological landscape around Borġ in-Nadur is therefore inextricably tied with the historical

context in which it unfolded, and can only be understood and meaningfully discussed in that light.

11.2. Historical context

From the early modern period well into the nineteenth century, the management of archaeological resources in Malta, as in contemporary Europe, was often an arbitrary affair. The fate of archaeological sites depended largely on the level of interest and education of the landowner. The role of the state was generally limited to the issuing of permits for access and study¹ and for treasure-hunting². The plundering of archaeological sites appears to have been tolerated as a gentlemanly sport well into the nineteenth century. In Malta, the foundations of formal archaeological site management by the state were largely laid during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, which is taken as the starting point here.

The inseparability of archaeology from the political environment in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Malta has been explored in a seminal paper by Vella and Gilkes³. The present discussion revisits that period, to focus specifically on the emergence of the public management of archaeological monuments. This emergence was shaped by two important currents in the context of Malta as a British colony, which will be considered in turn.

11.2.1. Imperial weights and measures

The first current was the widening recognition in Britain, as in western Europe more generally, of the significance of archaeological monuments to the general public, and the consequent recognition of the responsibilities of the state to ensure this interest was safeguarded. In Britain itself, this recognition was embodied in the passing of the Ancient Monuments Protection Act in 1882, after a decade of campaigning spearheaded by the Liberal Member of Parliament and scholar Sir John Lubbock (later Lord

¹ Houel 1787: 92.

² Buhagiar 1983: 292.

³ Vella and Gilkes 2001.

Avebury), who had first moved a private member's bill for the preservation of national monuments in 1873⁴.

The emerging template for the treatment of archaeological monuments was rapidly projected onto the British colonial context, where administrations began to mirror many of the same concerns and measures in the treatment of archaeological sites. The response to these concerns may be witnessed at its most colossal scale in the Archaeological Survey of India, which not only came to represent the most extensive mobilization for the formal recording and management of archaeological sites by the state in a British colonial context, but also the earliest, which in many ways influenced the template for other parts of the British empire. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Survey went through a succession of setbacks and reforms that bears witness to a progressive recognition of the state's responsibility to record, study and manage archaeological monuments. During his term as viceroy of India (1899-1905), Lord Curzon promoted and consolidated the machinery of the Archaeological Survey. In an often quoted speech to the Asiatic Society, he epitomised the prevailing paradigm of public responsibility for archaeological sites:

It is... equally our duty to dig and discover, to classify, reproduce and describe, to copy and decipher, and to cherish and conserve [archaeological remains]⁵

In Burma meanwhile, an Archaeological Department was founded in 1899. Parallel developments were also witnessed in the colonies of other western powers such as France and the Netherlands around the same time⁶.

Malta was no exception to the broad trends that have been noted above, and the emerging recognition of the responsibility of government to ensure archaeological sites were adequately managed and protected closely followed trends elsewhere. In 1881, while the debate in Britain on a revised bill for the protection of ancient monuments moved nearer to enactment, a series of key

⁴ Delafons 1997: 23-25.

⁵ Anderson 1991: 179; Hancock 2008: 38-39.

⁶ Anderson 1991: 179-180.

developments took place in Malta. A Committee was set up by the Council of Government to supervise the archaeological excavations at Notabile (the site presently known as the Domus Romana) on 16 February 1881⁷. Only two weeks later, it grew into a Permanent Commission to Inspect Archaeological Monuments⁸.

Shortly after, on 8 April 1881 the need for better preservation of Malta's ancient monuments was raised in a question in the House of Commons. The Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, Montstuart Elphinstine Grant Duff, assured the House that the Colonial Office would communicate with the Governor in Malta to look into the matter⁹. On 18 April 1881, Lord Kimberley, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, duly wrote to the Governor, Sir Arthur Borton:

My attention having been drawn by Mr. Gregory M.P., who put a question in the House of Commons on the subject, to the alleged neglect of certain ancient monuments in Malta, and frequent communications having reached this office from some of the most eminent European Scholars as to the great importance alike of the Phoenician and of the Roman Antiquities in Malta and its dependencies, I shall be glad to have a report from you upon the state of the Phoenician and Roman remains in these islands, together with any suggestions which you may be able to offer for their better preservation¹⁰.

The request for such a report closely mirrors contemporary developments in other parts of the Empire, such as the commissioning of pioneer reports on antiquities in India in 1881, 1882 and 1885¹¹. In Malta, the colonial administration requested the recently appointed Librarian of the National Library, Annetto Antonio Caruana, to produce the required report on Malta's ancient monuments, which was completed and forwarded to the Colonial Office on 10 April 1882¹².

⁷ CoG 1880-1881: 160.

⁸ CoG 1880-1881: 207.

⁹ HC Deb 8 April 1881 vol 260: c1032.

¹⁰ NAM, GOV 2/1/78 - 219/1881.

¹¹ Hancock 2008: 39.

¹² NAM, GOV 1/3/16 - 47/1882.

The report provided a learned description and interpretation of the remains, as well as observations on their current state. Caruana indicated in the preface to his report that it also included '...the suggestions I am available to offer for their better preservation', as was expressly requested. However, it appears that this aspect of the report did not entirely meet expectations at the Colonial Office. On 25 April, while acknowledging receipt of the report, the Colonial Secretary wrote to the Governor requesting concrete suggestions for the preservation of the archaeological monuments referred to¹³. Practical measures for the better care of the monuments were evidently the foremost concern at the Colonial Office.

Meanwhile in Malta, on 29 April the Governor wrote to the Colonial Secretary seeking approval for funding for the report to be drawn up for publication¹⁴. Approval was soon forthcoming¹⁵. The requested suggestions for the preservation of archaeological monuments were drafted by Caruana and duly dispatched by the Governor on 9 August 1882¹⁶.

This much shorter report prepared by Caruana following the second, more explicit request from Whitehall is much more focused on practical measures, and allows a rare glimpse into the thinking behind the emerging approach to archaeological resource management, even as it was being invented. In just over 600 words it lays down priorities, recommends formal management and legal protection for archaeological monuments, sets an embryonic archaeological research agenda, defines conservation procedures, proposes measures for an integrated national museum, and even suggests an approach to the thorny questions which we would refer to today under the broad heading of repatriation and restitution. This report is an important foundation stone of modern archaeological resource management in Malta, and deserves to be reproduced in full. The following is the text of the three-page manuscript (Fig. 11.1) held at the National Archives in Malta¹⁷:

¹³ NAM, GOV 2/1/79 - 407/1882.

¹⁴ NAM, GOV 1/3/16 - 57/1882.

¹⁵ NAM, GOV 2/1/79 - 429/1882.

¹⁶ NAM, GOV 1/3/16 - 114/1882.

¹⁷ NAM, CSG01 - 11650/1882.

1st The rough Stone-monuments deserve the first consideration.

The respective internal arrangements they exhibited, when discovered, have been pulled down and in some cases have entirely disappeared. In order that their general decay, both considerable and rapid, may be prevented, they should be placed under responsible charge and the protection of the law.

This restoration of the interior arrangement, ^{if some} which I can trace, could be repaired. The preservation of their megalithic construction might be secured by re-bonding their exterior encircling with the smaller stones fallen from the intervals between the large blocks; by replacing the fallen monoliths on their former sites and securing those threatening to fall; and by reconstructing the apses and septa with the stones of which they were formed and that are still lying on the ground.

The greatest care is, however, desirable, in uncovering the rough Stone-monuments and to omit still hidden under rubbish, which are to be seen on several extensive heaths and barrow-wastes noticed in my report (p. 25), and every endeavour should be made to understand them, and their position, in reference to one another and to the whole; that, if possible, their primitive topographical arrangement round the old seats of habitation might be traced.

2nd An allowance, of say £ 70, might def

S. of S.
407/82.
Rough Stone
Monuments
Caruana's Report
Manxton
Munaidra
Muckhart
Cast. etc.

Figure 11.1. The first page of Caruana's report of May 1882 (NAM, CSG01 - 11650/1882). A list of five 'Rough Stone Monuments' is pencilled into the left margin.

[f.1r]

1st. The rough stone monuments deserve the first consideration.

The respective internal arrangements they exhibited, when discovered, have been pulled down and in some cases entirely disappeared. In order that their general decay, both considerable and rapid, may be prevented, they should be placed under responsible charge and the protection of the law.

The restoration of the interior arrangement of some, which I can trace, could be replaced. The preservation of their megalithic construction might be secured by re-bonding their exterior enceinte with the smaller stones fallen from the intervals between the large blocks; by re-placing the fallen monoliths on their former sites and securing those threatened to fall; and by re-constructing the apses and septa with the stones of which they were formed and that are still lying on the ground.

The greatest care is, however, desirable in uncovering the rough stone monuments and tombs still hidden under rubbish, which are to be seen on several extensive heaths and barren wastes noticed in my report (§23-25), and every endeavour should be made to understand them and their position, in reference to one another and to the whole, that, if possible, their primitive topographical arrangement round the old centres of habitation might be traced.

2nd. An allowance, of say £ 70, might suf. [f.1v] fice to employ two, or occasionally three workmen in the restoration of these monuments, and in the exploration of the sites where further excavations might be made for the discovery of other antiquities. It is unwise to employ many hands at once in works of this nature, as was practiced last year in clearing the ruins of Melcarte^[18] without taking notice of the circumstances of each discovery, as the obscure subject of these Cyclopean monuments may be expected to receive some light from particulars, however minute, observable in them. When the localities referred to in my report (§24, 25, 101-104) are explored, and the sites where excavations should be made are pointed out, an estimate of the expenditure required to clear them of the rubbish may be prepared and the work could proceed gradually.

¹⁸ A reference to Borġ in-Nadur. For a full account of the antiquarian tradition identifying Borġ in-Nadur as a temple dedicated to Melkart or Hercules, see Bugeja, this volume.

3d. The early Christian cemeteries are next in importance

The same gradual process described in No.2, should be followed in clearing their underground galleries and crypts from the accumulated earth and rubbish, so that they may be seen to advantage. The Catacombs of Malta are all cut in sand-stone rock; hence no other work is required beyond that of cleaning.

4th. In the Report on the Phoenician antiquities, amongst the photographs attached to class II, I illustrated the specimens of Phoenician earthenware existing in the Museum of the Public Library. These, [f.2r] however, are not the choicest specimens of Phoenician fictile art found in Malta. I think it very desirable to complete that collection which is special to these islands, with a view to the formation of a Museum for the exhibition of all local collections of interesting objects in one place, as stated in my report to Government dated 20th January 1881.

The principles laid down in that report may be summed up as follows:-

1st. To include all collections of antiquities, coins, medals, etc. and of Natural History, found in these islands;

2nd. To have accurate fac-similes of those objects of Antiquities found in Malta, and at present existing in foreign Museums, with short accounts of their discovery and migration abroad;

3d. To invite private collectors to send on loan their objects to be exhibited;

4th. To ask the Ecclesiastical Authorities to deposit in this Museum, also on loan, for the same purpose, some very precious vestments, at present never used in sacred functions, as well as other curious objects existing in the Churches of the late Order of St John in Malta.

17/5/82

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The Colonial Secretary's prompt reply, sent on 22 August, granted approval for an annual expenditure of 100 pounds sterling for the preservation and exploration of archaeological sites¹⁹. Even more significantly, in the same despatch the Colonial Secretary wrote to the Governor:

I approve of the recommendation that these monuments should be placed under the protection of the law, and you have my authority for the introduction into the Council of Government of an Ordinance for effecting that object.

The enactment of such an Ordinance was to languish until 1910. This delay notwithstanding, the resulting 'Preservation of Antiquities Ordinance' follows the more widespread pattern of enactment of comparable legislation throughout those parts of the world controlled by the western powers. In India, for instance, the enactment of the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act in 1904 formally added conservation of archaeological monuments to the responsibilities of the Archaeological Survey²⁰.

11.2.2. Nationalistic appropriations

And yet, in spite of these important commonalities that developments in Malta shared with the prevailing paradigms of colonial archaeology, there were also distinctive characteristics. In the specific context of Malta, the broad current that has been described collided with another, more homegrown current, and it is the interplay between the two that was to determine attitudes and practices to the preservation and management of archaeological sites in Malta. It is worth returning for a moment to the creation of the Permanent Commission for the Inspection of Archaeological Monuments in 1881. The wording used by Mr Cachia Zammit in the Council when moving the resolution to appoint the Commission presaged Curzon's better-known statement quoted earlier:

It is enough to say that these islands boast of such archaeological relics, remains and monuments, that they have for ages found the admiration of the most learned societies in Europe. It is therefore

¹⁹ NAM, GOV 2/1/79 - 483/1882.

²⁰ Hancock 2008: 39.

our bounden duty to adopt all means, at our disposal, to protect and preserve them²¹.

Cachia Zammit's words converge with Curzon's in the declaration of duty incumbent on the state, but they diverge in their motive. For Curzon, it is a mission of colonial appropriation by an Empire at its zenith. For Cachia Zammit, it is a matter of nationalist pride that Malta could boast such wealth, and find such admiration.

Practically at the same time as the Permanent Commission was being created, the controversial Keenan report on education in Malta was being finalised for adoption, and the matter of which languages would be taught and promoted, better known as the language question, had become a burning issue²². This coincidence between political contestation over the educational system and the investment of resources in the management of archaeological monuments is not unique to Malta, and has been noted in Dutch policy in the East Indies, French policy in Indochina, and British policy in Burma²³. In all these instances, colonial powers seeking to tighten their hold on empire through the shaping of minds and identities were becoming increasingly sensitive to the relevance of archaeological narratives as an integral part of the same project, which they could no longer afford to neglect.

What distinguishes the debate on archaeological monuments in Malta from that in many of the contemporary colonial contexts is their implications for national identity. A pattern that is found repeatedly in other colonial contexts is that the builders of archaeological monuments were presented as superior to the contemporary natives. In the Dutch East Indies, the idea was promoted that the builders were immigrants of a different race²⁴. In present-day Zimbabwe (colonial Rhodesia), an entire mythography was created around the monumental ruins of Great Zimbabwe, to instill the idea that they could not have been built by the native African population but were built instead by Phoenician immigrants²⁵. In Burma, the population of the colonial period was

²¹ CoG 1880-1881: 207.

²² Frendo 1991: 15-51.

²³ Anderson 1991: 180.

²⁴ Anderson 1991: 181.

²⁵ Hall 1995.

considered decadent and incapable of the monumental achievements of its supposed ancestors²⁶. The logical consequence of such arguments, as Anderson²⁷ has persuasively argued, is that such native populations were naturally and culturally disposed to be colonized and led by others more capable of greater achievements (read Europeans), hence creating a further argument to explain, justify and normalise the unequal relationships that nineteenth-century European colonialism created and rested upon.

The Maltese context presents a rather different scenario. The deeply rooted European culture and identity and the prevailing level of education and awareness of the past made it very difficult for the facile arguments of benign domination, which had worked so well in other colonies, to be used to disinherit the more educated strata of the native population of their archaeology. The evidence for Phoenician occupation also took on a different significance here. In Rhodesia, the myth that Great Zimbabwe could only have been produced by white settlers reinforced and perpetuated western preconceptions of Africa as a 'dark sea of barbarism', to provide a convenient precedent for the renewed presence of white settlers and colonists²⁸. In Malta, on the contrary, the Phoenician archaeological heritage (which in the nineteenth century, we must recall, was still believed to include the megalithic monuments) became an intrinsic element of modern Maltese identity, the material counterpart of the linguistic argument that Maltese was derived from Phoenician. A number of scholars of the day argued that modern Maltese had a greater affinity to 'Canaanite' or 'Phoenician' than to Arabic. This idea was already being linked to the archaeological evidence in the early nineteenth century²⁹. By the late nineteenth century, it had acquired the proportions of a full-blown polemic, about which entire volumes were written³⁰. For many of the more educated Maltese, their origin as a nation came to rest on their Phoenician ancestry, which gave them a primordial claim to civilization. This nationalistic

²⁶ Anderson 1991: 181.

²⁷ Anderson 1991.

²⁸ Hall 1995: 33.

²⁹ Smyth 1829: 295-296.

³⁰ Caruana 1896; Preca 1904.

appropriation of archaeology was summed up in 1884 by Dr Zacaria Roncali during a debate of the Council of Government:

We have been a civilized people since very ancient times, and we were already civilized when another people, who now pretend to have mastered civilization, were in savagery. We have a civilization of which any people may be jealous. Behold our historic temples not to be found anywhere else in Europe...³¹

The two currents of, on one hand, the British colonial government's mission to Cursonize Maltese archaeology as part of the imperial project, and on the other, the nationalistic evocations and references of the same archaeological heritage for the more educated components of the native population, collided in a unique encounter of contesting appropriations. On the one hand, the colonial government felt itself obliged to invest in the care and management of Maltese archaeological monuments, consistent with emerging policies at home and across the empire. On the other hand, these very same monuments were simultaneously becoming potent symbols of resistance, and their neglect or depredation another useful stick with which the native nationalist movement could beat the colonial authorities.

A surprisingly candid exchange, symptomatic of this climate, took place in the Council of Government on 11 May 1881, during a debate on the 8th supplementary estimates for that year. At one point, the discussion turned onto the archaeological remains at San Pawl Milqi, about which very little information was available at the time. When Mr Cachia Zammit asked if any relics had been found there, he was told by the Controller of Customs that none were found³². Then Mr De Cesare dropped his bombshell:

There is, however, a report circulating, that some relics were excavated and that they were carried away by the hon. and gallant member opposite (Major General Fielding). I am not informed whether the hon. and gallant member has contradicted that assertion.

³¹ As translated and quoted in Frendo 1991: 31. Quoted in Grima 1998, Vella and Gilkes 2001.

³² CoG 1880-1881: 590.

Fielding seems to have kept his composure, but his reply is all the more damning for it:

I thought it was hardly necessary on my part to contradict that statement, as I had never heard of the existence of the place when the unfounded statement was put forward. The only relics of the kind which I purchased were dug up in Ginien is-Sultan. I am sorry to say that the man I bought them from seems not to have been of the best sort, as I heard that he had been sent to the Corradino Prison soon after.

Regardless of the merits, the fact that such an exchange could take place at all between two fellow-members of the recently-appointed Permanent Commission to Inspect Archaeological Monuments speaks volumes about the tensions and contradictions that formed the backdrop to archaeological resource management. De Cesare's jibe was calculated to hoist Fielding with his own petard, by underlining the contradiction between the colonial government's newly discovered sense of public responsibility for archaeological resources, and the prevalent culture of plundering and collecting by military officers stationed in Malta. Fielding's reply serves only to confirm that the purchasing and collecting of antiquities was not only practised but condoned, even if it involved conniving with men '...not of the best sort...'.³³

The incident was by no means unique. The following January, the Governor himself came in the nationalists' sights over a cultural resource management issue, this time the accessibility of the Palace state rooms to the public, when De Cesare claimed during a sitting of the Council of Government that '...Lady Borton had given orders that those rooms be not shown any more to visitors'³³.

This melting pot of newly-discovered values and contradictory practices was to forge the new paradigm for archaeological site management by the state, still with us today. The same contradictions and diverging motives were to cause a lasting ambivalence in the significance of archaeological sites in the Maltese landscape, even as they were monumentalised.

³³ CoG 1881-1882: 212.

11.3. Managing the archaeological resource

The historical context that has just been outlined had a direct bearing on the treatment of archaeological remains in and around Borġ in-Nadur, which witnessed a flurry of intensive activity at the same time that Whitehall started taking an interest in Maltese archaeology. Sites at or near Borġ in-Nadur were in fact to become the focus of some of the earliest efforts of the colonial government in the exercise of its newly-discovered responsibilities for the tutelage of archaeological sites.

During the sitting of the Council of Government held on 11 May 1881, Mr Cachia Zammit, speaking for the Permanent Archaeological Commission, informed the Council of the following, shortly before it approved a vote of a further £50 for continuing the excavations he described:

...the excavations made near the Temple of Melcarte have, so far, proved most successful: and the Council may rest assured they will be continued without interruption, once the hon. members are, today, prepared to vote another sum for that purpose. I may as well inform the Council that something like a vestibulum, formed of monolites, 14 and 16 feet high, meets the eye on approaching the ruins of that Phoenician Temple; but the most wonderful of those wonderful Phoenician remains is a reservoir close by. It has been cleared of all the rubbish with which it was filled up, and it has assumed the appearance of a gigantic monument...³⁴

The reference to a structure built of monoliths ‘14 and 16 feet high’ seems to tally more closely with the prehistoric remains at Borġ in-Nadur (two decades later, Mayr recorded an upright stone ‘12ft 7ins. high’ at the Neolithic temple site there³⁵). The cistern referred to, on the other hand, is evidently the Roman cistern at Ta’ Kaċċatura. The way the two sites are referred to suggests that works at these two sites were being managed and directed as a single project. Each of these two sites was to witness significantly innovative interventions for their preservation, which were effectively being undertaken for the first time.

³⁴ CoG 1880-1881: 589-590.

³⁵ Mayr 1901; 1908: 64.

11.3.1. Restoration and consolidation

At Borg in-Nadur, extensive consolidation works appear to have taken place on the Bronze Age wall, which are significant because they may represent one of the earliest conservation interventions on an archaeological site in Malta. The records of the 1881 excavations around this Bronze Age wall are notoriously scanty, and those of any conservation works conducted at the same time even more so. However, the dating of this intervention may be pieced together from the surviving scraps of documentation. A photographic album dated 1868 and held at the National Library has preserved what may be the earliest surviving photograph of the Bronze Age wall³⁶. A copy of the same photograph is held in the NMA archives (Fig. 11.2). The wall is shown standing to the height that is familiar to us today³⁷. The principal difference that may be noted is that the consolidation of the wall with the insertion of stone wedges between the boulders had not yet taken place when the photograph was taken. Another (this time undated) photograph, conveniently showing the wall from the same viewpoint after consolidation, is held in the archives of the National Museum of Archaeology, and is shown here for comparison (Fig. 11.3).

To narrow down when exactly these consolidation works took place, we turn now to Mayr. Writing almost two decades after the 1881 interventions, he noted that '...the excavations begun in 1881 were soon suspended, without any reports concerning them having been published...' ³⁸ and that the buildings excavated in 1881 within the defensive wall '...have since been filled up again...' ³⁹. His description and his drawing of these remains relied heavily on '...a plan, drawn up by the then Superintendent of Public Works, E. L. Galizia. The author [Mayr] found it at a photographer's in Valletta, and used it partly as a basis for his sketch' ⁴⁰. A photographic print

³⁶ *Antichità Fenicie nelle Isole di Malta e Gozo 1868*: 19. I am indebted to Nicholas Vella for making me aware of the existence of this album.

³⁷ Corroborating Houel, who as Bugeja, this volume, has convincingly demonstrated, also recorded the wall in the late eighteenth century, standing to around the same height.

³⁸ Mayr 1901; 1908: 61.

³⁹ Mayr 1901; 1908: 63.

⁴⁰ Mayr 1901; 1908: 63, footnote.



Figure 11.2. View of Bronze Age wall circa 1868, before consolidation (source: NMA 11435, Heritage Malta).



Figure 11.3. Undated view of Bronze Age wall after consolidation (source: NMA 11434, Heritage Malta).



Figure 11.4. Photographic print of Galizia's 1881 plan of Borg in-Nadur, mounted in a copy of Caruana 1882 (source: courtesy of the University of Malta Library).

of the same plan is mounted in a version of Caruana's 1882 report⁴¹ (Fig. 11.4). It shows what appears to be an archaeological sondage within the D-shaped 'bastion' along the Bronze Age wall. The drawing suggests a sondage of considerable depth, because it shows what appear to be three, roughly concentric excavation extents, each one getting progressively narrower and deeper. The inner and outer upper edges of the 'bastion' wall are shown clean and continuous, suggesting that they were consolidated during or shortly after the excavation. Mayr repeatedly notes that parts of the inner walls of the D-shaped structure are of modern construction, even though they may include some ancient elements⁴². Even more informatively, he publishes a photograph (Fig. 11.5) of the external face of the D-shaped Bronze Age wall⁴³, which clearly shows the wall after consolidation, narrowing the date of the consolidation works to between 1868 and 1901 with complete certainty, and strongly suggesting that they place around 1881.

In Mayr's photograph, stone chips appear carefully wedged in between the boulders, while further west, a stretch of the wall is almost entirely built in modern dry-stone walling, with the occasional megalithic boulder protruding through it. This treatment recalls the methods Caruana put forward for the preservation of 'rude stone monuments' in his report of 17 May 1882, quoted earlier: 'The preservation of their megalithic construction might be secured by re-bonding their exterior enceinte with the smaller stones fallen from the intervals between the large blocks; by replacing the fallen monoliths on their former sites and securing those threatened to fall...' The consolidation of the Bronze Age wall appears to have taken place within months of those words being written, and may represent the first implementation in practice of the methods they describe.

⁴¹ A copy of this version with additional plans and illustrations is held in the UoM Melitensia Section, progressive no. 92597. It includes a number of photographic prints of plans and drawings that post-date the report itself, most of which are marked 'Fomosa Phot.' or 'G.L. Fomosa Phot.'. The photographic reproduction of the plan may well explain why Mayr found it, or a copy of it, 'at a photographer's in Valletta'. The present writer was unable to locate the original Galizia plan of the Borg in-Nadur Bronze Age wall.

⁴² Mayr 1901; 1908: 63, 66.

⁴³ Mayr 1901: plate 10, 1.



Figure 11.5. View of Bronze Age wall published by Mayr (1901: pl. 10. 1).

11.3.2 Expropriation and enclosure

At Ta' Kaċċatura, meanwhile, the work of clearing and recording the site was also proceeding apace. Here an innovation of a different kind took place – the acquisition of the site to help ensure its preservation. In 1881, at a time of unprecedented expenditure on works at the Domus Romana, as well as the excavations at Borġ in-Nadur and Ta' Kaċċatura itself, funding the purchase of the land from private hands would have posed a significant obstacle (we should recall that approval for a regular annual expenditure was only sought and granted the following year, as noted earlier). The alternative solution that was adopted was to give the owner, Lorenzo Mifsud, another plot of government-owned land, at 'Cutaf Gandolf', in exchange for the field 'ta' Ciapciap' on which the remains of the villa stood⁴⁴. The contract with Mr Mifsud was signed on 12

⁴⁴ CD 50K/1583, 50K/1584.

December 1881⁴⁵, making it one of the very earliest acquisitions of property in Malta expressly for archaeological purposes.

The acquisition of archaeological sites for their study and preservation was soon to become the norm. We may continue to follow this story at Ta' Kacçatura itself. The exchange of land hammered out in 1881 to acquire the villa at Ta' Kacçatura did not include the monumental cistern adjoining the site, as this belonged to a different owner. The date and manner of its acquisition remains unclear. By 1913, however, it appears to have come into Government ownership and was enclosed in a high wall that closely followed the perimeter of the cistern (Fig. 11.6). Here once again, we encounter a very early instance of a measure that followed as a natural corollary to the expropriation of archaeological sites, and which was to become equally paradigmatic.



Figure 11.6. Aerial view of Ta' Kacçatura showing boundary wall around cistern (top right); dated 1925. (source: NMA 11373, Heritage Malta).

⁴⁵ Extract from Acts of Notary Franco Camilleri, Contract No. 511 p. 2722 Vol. 138 in PW 1299/51.



Figure 11.7. Temi Zammit in the Ta' Kaċċatura cistern in 1924. The composition conveys the scale of the cistern (NMA 11376, Heritage Malta).

Interestingly, it is only the cistern that gets surrounded by a high wall, while the villa itself received no such treatment. This decision does not appear to have been driven by the archaeological value of the different parts of the site, because the unenclosed remains of the villa were at least as significant and as vulnerable as the cistern. To better understand the motivation for this intervention, it may be

useful to recall Cachia Zammit's description, quoted earlier; '...the most wonderful of those wonderful Phoenician remains is a reservoir close by ... cleared of all the rubbish ... it has assumed the appearance of a gigantic monument'. Was it perhaps the sheer scale of the cistern (Fig. 11.7), which lent itself to transformation into a 'wonderful' 'gigantic monument', that determined what should be preserved most assiduously?

An unintended, and unforeseen, result of expropriation was the dislocation of a site from its landscape context, and its disembedding from the networks of stewardship associated with indigenous ownership and tenancy⁴⁶. The main threat to archaeological sites forming part of agricultural land was damage through overzealous efforts to improve the productivity of the land. The expropriation of important archaeological monuments played a crucial role in arresting such damage, and securing their preservation. Expropriation was however open to other risks. It created a vacuum that often left archaeological sites in a no-man's-land that was still vulnerable to the threats of neglect and vandalism. The logical response was to fence in sites to protect them from unwanted intrusion, but unwittingly this further dislocated the archaeological remains from their setting, in physical as well as social terms.

The high dry-stone boundary wall around the cistern at Ta' Kaċċatura was a case in point. It completely isolates the cistern from the villa that it once served, with a wall almost as monumental as the cistern itself, and one that required even more care and maintenance. Notwithstanding the grand scale of this intrusion, it appears that the wall alone soon came to be considered inadequate to protect the site. On 26 September 1913, government entered into the following contract:

The Acting Receiver General & Director of Contracts does hereby grant permission to Tommaso Agius, labourer, son of Francesco, born at Ghaxaq, and residing at Zejtun, to cultivate the trees existing in the field called "Ta' Ciapciap" within the limits of San Giorgio, B'ga, indicated in the Government rent roll with No 879 and to gather such fruit of such trees for the period of one year from the date hereof, which permission may be renewed during the pleasure of the Government.

⁴⁶ Borg 2002: 64.

In return for the permission granted as above, the said Tommaso Agius does hereby bind himself for the period thereof and for any further period for which the permission may be renewed, to diligently and gratuitously guard the excavations of certain Phoenician Antiquities (Phoenician Water Reservoir) existing in the neighbouring lands called "ta' San Gorg" as shown on a plan hereto annexed for preservation to take care of such excavations and to keep with him the key of the gate thereof, as well as to punctually observe and carry out all orders and instructions which from time to time, he may receive from the Govt in connexion with the said lands and excavations and with the obligations hereby undertaken by him.

This deed (the import whereof has been duly explained etc)...⁴⁷

The wheel had turned full circle – from dispossessing the ignorant natives of archaeological treasures they could not comprehend or be entrusted it, through building walls to keep out said ignorant natives, to His Majesty's Government feeling compelled to enter into a contract with one such ignorant native, effectively entrusting him with the custody of the site. This cycle was to be repeated again and again.

In a 'Scheme for the development of the Museum Department' dated 19 October 1918, Temi Zammit identified three strategic objectives. His third objective was 'Acquisition by the Government of all sites of Antiquarian Interest'. 'Owing to the excessive population and the narrow limits of these Islands,' he wrote, 'our monuments are in danger of being destroyed by ignorant people'. He then went on to give a 'Preliminary list of Monuments of Archaeological and historical interest that should be expropriated'⁴⁸.

Zammit listed twenty-two sites included Borġ in-Nadur. In September 1922, he pursued the matter further in a letter to the Minister of Education:

Sir,

I beg leave to draw your attention to the megalithic ruins of Borġ in-Nadur at Birzebbuga. I have this year with the consent of the owner excavated the field at the back of the main group of ruins,

⁴⁷ Contract dated 26 / 9 / 1913 No 221 published by Notary to Government, in PW 1299/51.

⁴⁸ MAC 1915-1927: 50.

and I do not propose to cover again the remains, which proved to be of great archaeological interest.

I suggest that the Government should take over the fields adjoining the said ruins and I beg that the Public Works Department should take steps to value the site with a view to expropriation

I understand that the owner would accept another field in exchange, in which case the Government will not have to pay any cash...⁴⁹

The letter was quoted during a sitting of the Legislative Assembly on 26 November 1923, during discussion of a vote of £220 for the expropriation of three fields around the megalithic temple of Borg in-Nadur. The vote was approved⁵⁰, but the actual expropriations did not take place for more than a decade. The subsequent history of the expropriation of land to safeguard Borg in-Nadur has been meticulously researched by Borg⁵¹. The land including the Neolithic remains was finally acquired on 1 May 1935, and a strip of land to permit access to the site was acquired on 15 June 1935⁵². On the other hand, no record of the expropriation of the site of the Bronze Age wall has been traced⁵³.

As forceful expropriations of archaeological sites became increasingly the norm, they were to contribute to a progressive erosion of the identification of local communities with those same sites. The policy of expropriation was made possible largely because of the convergence of the two currents already noted, namely a colonial administration anxious to safeguard, and to be seen to be safeguarding, the archaeological prizes across its empire, and a nationalist movement urging on the preservation of sites in Malta for altogether different motives. In the end, the identification with archaeological relics as touchstones of Maltese identity, espoused by the educated elite leading the nationalist movement, never captured the masses⁵⁴. Instead, the growing number of

⁴⁹ Legislative Assembly, 6: 213.

⁵⁰ Legislative Assembly, 6: 216.

⁵¹ Borg 2002: 35-38.

⁵² CD 100B/129A, 129B, 129C, 129D.

⁵³ Borg 2002: 37.

⁵⁴ Sant Cassia 1993: 358-361; Grima 1998: 34-35; Vella and Gilkes 2001: 355; Borg 2002: 63-64.

expropriated, fenced, and often poorly interpreted sites came increasingly to be associated with the actions of a foreign and remote power.

In 1920, even while the prolonged saga of expropriation was unfolding at Borġ in-Nadur, a new threat suddenly appeared from an unexpected quarter. It was to be prove more destructive than any ignorant native. On 31 May, a meeting of the Antiquities Committee was convened by the Lieutenant Governor, who also chaired the Committee, to discuss the matter of the silo pits on the shoreline of St George's Bay, below Borġ in-Nadur. A new road that was being constructed was '...being cut through most of the pits existing on that shore...'⁵⁵. Faced with the inevitable, the committee resigned itself to recording the doomed pits as accurately as possible before they were destroyed, but not before the point had been made that the proposal to build the road in such a sensitive area should have been brought to the attention of the committee at a much earlier stage. The result was a plan (Fig. 11.8) completed a year later, with section drawings of the 32 pits destroyed by the road works, and 41 that were left intact⁵⁶.

The committee had resolved that 'such pits as were not destroyed should be preserved from further damages'. The widening of the same road half a century later was however to take a further toll of the surviving pits.

A rather more positive development took place on 9 November 1928, when the Antiquities Committee resolved that a substantial tract of Wied Dalam should be included in the list of sites protected by the Antiquities (Protection) Act 57. The Committee requested two of its members, Mr Giuseppe Despott and Architect Carmel Rizzo, to inspect the site and demarcate the area to be protected. On 15 January 1929, they duly reported back to the Committee that they had identified a stretch of the valley some 5,000 feet long as meriting protection⁵⁸, and that they had marked it out on the survey

⁵⁵ MAC 1915-1927: 53.

⁵⁶ CD 100A/62.

⁵⁷ MAC 1927-1945: 29.

⁵⁸ MAC 1927-1945: 31.

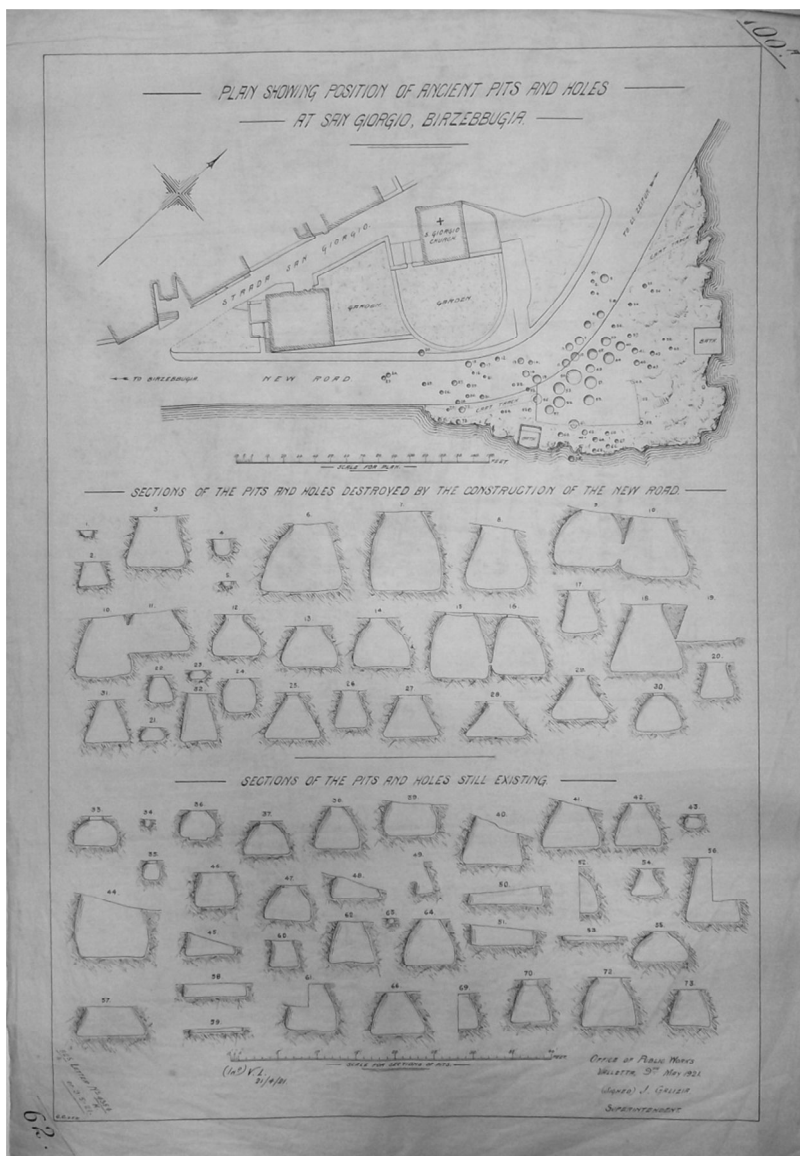


Figure 11.8. The record of the silo pits created prior the construction of a road between 1920 and 1921 (source: CD 100A/62).

sheet of the area⁵⁹ (Fig. 11.9). The following month, the protection of the valley was announced by Government Notice. The revised 'List of buildings, sites and remains having a geological, archaeological, antiquarian or artistic importance' published in the Malta Government Gazette in 1932 includes the following entry:

The portion of Uied Dalam extending for about 5000 feet between the Cala San Giorgio, Birzebbugia, and the district known as "Ta Haxun"⁶⁰

Although three years had gone by since the inclusion of Wied Dalam in the list, it was still unique, as the only attempt to include an extensive landscape feature, in what was otherwise a list of monuments or localized features.

The protection of Wied Dalam is significant for the history of cultural resource management in Malta for a second reason. Apart from its inclusion in the list of protected sites published in the Government Gazette, it appears that the process was set in motion to purchase the entire ravine in order to ensure its preservation. On 13 October 1930, the Antiquities Committee was informed that the Public Works Department had estimated the value of the protected length of the ravine at about 1,300 pounds⁶¹. At this point, the discussion appears to have taken a significant turn. The Committee noted, as recorded in the minutes, that expropriation should not be necessary because, as a site '...declared to have an antiquarian interest by a special government notice, the ravine is well protected against further interference which will cost nothing to the government'⁶². Plans for expropriation were dropped, and another important, albeit forgotten, milestone in the history of cultural resource management in Malta was passed. Here for the first time, the model of expropriation as the be-all and end-all measure for the protection of a site or monument was being questioned, even as the new possibilities of protection opened up by the recently enacted Antiquities (Protection) Act began to be brought to bear as a viable

⁵⁹ A copy of survey sheet 132 showing the area to be protected outlined in red is preserved in the Works Division records office as CD 100/114.

⁶⁰ MGG 1932: 1050.

⁶¹ MAC 1927-1945: 49.

⁶² MAC 1927-1945: 50.



Figure 11.9. Detail of plan CD 100/114, showing extent of protected length of Wied Dalam.

alternative. The fact that Wied Dalam was much more extensive than most sites that had been protected until then must have helped precipitate this shift in thinking. The listing of Wied Dalam was an early and important step closer to safeguarding a landscape rather merely a site. The shift in thinking from site to landscape was closely followed by an important corollary – that it is very difficult in practice to enforce protection on such a grand scale through expropriation, and more realistic to do so through legislation to regulate the stewardship of land and resources while leaving them in private ownership.

11.3.3. The post-colonial period: plus ça change ...

The management history of Borġ in-Nadur and its surroundings since the Second World War is largely repetitive of the developments we have reviewed so far. On 4 January 1964, F.S. Mallia, the Curator of Archaeology, submitted a written report to the Director of Museums, describing a serious case of vandalism on the Neolithic remains at Borġ in-Nadur. The actions he recommended in response will sound familiar: '...enclosing the area with iron posts...', '...two or three surprise patrols from the police station...', and '...an adult local resident to be offered a small remuneration to keep an eye on the remains until the boundary wall is put up...'⁶³ In the event, the fence was estimated to cost £350, but was never erected, in spite of funds being available⁶⁴. A Birżebbuġa resident, Mr Gianni Ellul, was engaged at the rate of 2 shillings a day to keep an eye on the site, in an arrangement reminiscent of the one noted earlier at Ta' Kaċċatura. The arrangement for Borġ in-Nadur appears to have lasted a little more than three months⁶⁵. The vandalism of the site with spray paint in February 1994⁶⁶ also echoes earlier incidents.

Efforts to regulate activity beyond the narrow confines of the land expropriated by government, in the same spirit as the Antiquities Committee when it decided, in 1930, that Wied Dalam could be protected without its expropriation, have also been witnessed in the latter part of the twentieth century. In January 1972, for instance, the Director of Museums withheld approval for an application to build an extension to an existing farm building on private land between the Neolithic temple and the Bronze Age wall at Borġ il-Nadur⁶⁷. The scheduling of the site by the Planning Authority in 1994, according it Grade A status and a 100 m buffer zone, proved instrumental in the regulation of the launching of petards from within the scheduled area during the local parish feast⁶⁸. Decades of under-resourcing and neglect, meanwhile,

⁶³ MUS 1/64: 1.

⁶⁴ MUS 1/64: 23.

⁶⁵ MUS 1/64: 14, 19, 20, 22.

⁶⁶ Grima 1998: 41.

⁶⁷ MUS 3/72.

⁶⁸ MUS 1/64: 32-36.

rendered the archaeological resources in this area even more remote and inaccessible⁶⁹.

Yet in all these actions, the fundamental underlying relationship between the archaeology, the state and the public inherited from the colonial period remained unaltered. The public's role continued to oscillate between apathy at best and a threat at worst. The state continued to play the role of beleaguered policeman, generally stepping in just in time, or almost, to rescue archaeological monuments from some new threat from the uneducated population. A curious development in the recent history of this site has unexpectedly shifted this stasis. A religious cult has emerged over the past five years, the followers of which believe that Borġ in-Nadur may be the site of supernatural apparitions⁷⁰. Regardless of its merits or otherwise, the cult has succeeded in drawing crowds of people from all walks of life to the site. An alternative footpath has been re-opened across Wied Dalam to cope with this flow. This movement has unwittingly put Borġ in-Nadur on the map for more people than ever before. A re-appropriation of sorts of the site by the community has started taking place.

11.4. Conclusion: towards a re-engagement of the public

The task of managing the archaeological landscape in the public interest, pioneered in the 1880s on some of the sites at and around Borġ in-Nadur, is far from complete. The fragmentation and dislocation caused by the expropriations, enclosures and practices of the colonial and post-colonial period continue to alienate popular attitudes towards these sites. The challenge today is to reverse this trend in order to permit audiences to encounter the archaeological resources at Borġ in-Nadur as integral components of a multi-period cultural landscape. The resumption of this unfinished task requires the same sense of novelty and innovation that was evident in the 1880s, if we are to succeed in creating a new paradigm of stewardship that is meaningful and relevant for our times. It will no doubt be a Herculean task, but that is no reason not to attempt it.

⁶⁹ Grima 1997.

⁷⁰ www.borgin-nadur.org/mt/lewweldehriet.php

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Abbreviations

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| CD | Chief Draughtsman's Office |
| CoG | Debates of the Council of Government |
| CSG | Chief Secretary to Government |
| HC | House of Commons |
| MAC | Minutes of the Antiquities Committee |
| MGG | Malta Government Gazette |
| MUS | Museum Department |
| NAM | National Archives, Malta |
| NMA | National Museum of Archaeology |
| PW | Public Works Department |

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