

ABSTRACTS MAR 11

Tradition, time and narrative: rethinking the Late Neolithic of the Maltese Islands -

Isabelle Vella Gregory

This paper reconsiders the Late Neolithic of the Maltese Islands from a broader perspective. It argues that the prevailing narrative centred on passively inherited cultural baggage obscures the dynamic narrative created by the ancient inhabitants. It is argued that a fuller understanding of the period requires an engagement with concepts of time and tradition, which are seen here on multiple scales. This enables a fuller reading of the period, particularly in terms of how people created and redefined time.

A farewell to Neo-Punic: Taċ-Ċaġħqi revisited - Abigail Zammit and Robert M. Kerr

The alleged inscriptions in the south-east hypogeum of Taċ-Ċaġħqi (within the premises of St Nicholas College in Rabat, Malta) were discussed in depth by Mons. Benedetto Rocco in 1972. Rocco interpreted the glyphs as Neo-Punic, with a long 'inscription' supposedly consisting of a prayer to appease the deceased through the offering of a gift, and an alleged minor 'inscription' addressing the dead to 'rise'. These readings were discussed against the notion of possible libation rites that may have been a custom within the hypogeum, as suggested by the tomb furniture in situ. Rocco based his readings of the script and types of letters on his previous study of further alleged Punic and Neo-Punic inscriptions within cave sites in Palermo and Favignana (Sicily), in combination with semantic analysis of Biblical Hebrew. Nevertheless, the supposed Taċ-Ċaġħqi inscriptions come across as ambiguous sets of glyphs that are illegible, and actually cannot be deemed Punic or Neo-Punic script.

Religious identity and perceptions of afterlife gleaned from a funerary monument to a young girl from (late) Roman Melite - George Azzopardi

Possibly late during the Roman occupation of Malta, a young deceased girl had a funerary monument set up in her memory by her loving mother. Analysis of both epigraphic content and iconographic elements on this monument would show that the mother, at least, is likely to have been originally a public slave but later achieved manumission, a status which remained to be enjoyed by herself and by her daughter. Moreover, they seem to have adhered to the then commonly held beliefs regarding the nature of death and afterlife. Yet, identifying their beliefs on the nature of death and afterlife did not prove sufficient to determine their religious identity as such beliefs were evidently shared by different religious groups.

A functional analysis of glass from an officers' mess, Malta - Russell Palmer

The nineteenth century witnessed an explosion in the use of glass as a material from which containers and tableware were made. No longer confined to the packaging and consuming of liquids, a wealth of products were packaged in branded and patented containers. This article presents an initial analysis of glass recovered from archaeological investigations at the Inquisitor's Palace, Vittoriosa, which in the second half of the nineteenth century was an army mess house and officers' quarters. Focusing on function, key groups of glass finds are described. Where possible, brands and manufacturers are contextualised through

complementary documentary sources, providing a broader focus and relevance to the material. From baby food jars to hard liquor bottles, the glass finds present a picture of daily life that stretches beyond typical views of military life and highlights the importance of glass finds to understanding post-medieval contexts.

Archaeology and archaeological discourse in pre-Independence Malta - Anna Maria Rossi

This paper argues that the institution of the *Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta* in 1963 is the offspring of the archaeological policies endorsed by the Nationalist Party (PN) that guided Malta to Independence. By looking at the archaeological debate in 1950s – early 1960s Malta this paper suggests that the revival of post-prehistoric studies by the Italians suited the cultural aspirations of the PN government and provided an effective answer to the colonial control of the discipline set out earlier by the British with the Malta Ancient Monuments Survey.

Deciding what to exhibit in museums: does it really matter? - Veronica Barbara

Of all the abundant papers focusing on museum environments, few dismantle the decision-making process which characterizes the planning of displays and site presentations, going beyond space restrictions and physical needs of ancient artefacts. Such an approach is essential to understand why these decisions matter. A natural question which is seldom asked is, why display to the public in the first place? The present paper will start with this question, discussing briefly the two main theoretical stances in current western discourse on the subject. Two local case-studies will follow, supplemented by examples of projects which revolve around archaeology and communities. In the conclusion, theory and case-studies will be brought together in order to explain the link between archaeologists and non-archaeologists vis-à-vis archaeological heritage presentation.

A stratigraphic study of the *giren* at ix-Xaghra l-Hamra, limits of Mellieha, Malta

The history of the Maltese corbelled hut, known as *il-girna* (pl. *giren*), dispersed in the karstic plains of the Maltese islands has been quite elusive. Little is known about these dry-stone buildings. Queries related to the origins and role of the present *giren* in the development of the historical rural Maltese landscape remain partially unanswered. This article will present a synthesis of an archaeological approach to the study of architectural structures such as the *girna*. Such an exercise had as its principal objective the understanding of the reasons for construction the Maltese hut and its dating. The methodology of study proposed is based on the principles of archaeological stratification combined with Landscape Archaeology and Historical Archaeology, starting with the premise that any structure needs to be understood as a cultural unit within its landscape. Thus farmhouses, corbelled huts, rubble walls, apiaries and so forth, as well as artificial spaces including fields, surface-quarries, roads and pathways, are perceived as cultural units within the landscape. At this point, landscape is not seen as a mere backdrop but recognised as a palimpsest, preserving traces of past use, similar to stratified layers in an archaeological excavation. Hence the *girna* is understood as a unit within a stratigraphic sequence that can be represented through a matrix. Additionally, historical documents are utilized to obtain a

chronological base for the structures built in the rural landscape. Consequently, the stratigraphic sequence is pegged to the dates obtained from the historical documents, making it possible to date particular units within it such as the *girna*. This method shows that it is possible to study the archaeological stratification of cultural units in rocky terrain where archaeological excavation is not possible because the terrain lacks discernible archaeological deposit.

Documenting the last surviving traditional boats on the Maltese Islands: a case study on the *firilla* - Stephanie Said

This research focuses on the collection of *firilli* boats found at the Maritime Museum in Vittoriosa, Malta. The objectives were to document and record this boat type, by collecting knowledge from oral traditions and literature, paintings and photographs, tools and materials and ideologies. An environmental and historical background is outlined at the beginning of this study, providing the context for the *firilla* boat. Following this, previous literature dealing with documentation of traditional craft is presented. The methodology applied to document the primary sources is explained, along with a brief description of the secondary data collection. The subsequent section describes the results of the boat documentation, leading to a discussion of the most prominent differences.