

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF MALTA

The Maltese Archipelago is a unique barometer for understanding cultural change in the central Mediterranean. Prehistoric people helped to reshape the islands' economy, and when Mediterranean maritime highways were being established, the islands became a significant lure to Phoenician colonists venturing from their Levantine homeland. Punic Malta also sat at the frontline of regional hostilities until it fell to Rome. Preserved in this island setting are signs of people's endurance and adaptation to each new challenge. This book is the first systematic and up-to-date survey of the islands' archaeological evidence from the initial settlers to the archipelago's inclusion into the Roman world (ca. 5000 BC–400 AD). Claudia Sagona draws upon old and new discoveries, and her analysis covers well-known sites such as the megalithic structures, as well as less familiar locations and discoveries. She interprets the archaeological record to explain changing social and political structures, intriguing ritual practices and cultural contact through several millennia.

Claudia Sagona is a Senior Fellow in Archaeology at The University of Melbourne. She is the author of several books on Malta, including *Looking for Mithra in Malta* (2009), and the editor of several other books, including *Ceramics of the Phoenician-Punic World* (2011) and *Beyond the Homeland: Markers in Phoenician Chronology* (2008). Her articles have appeared in academic journals including *Anatolian Studies*, *Anatolia Antiqua*, *Ancient Near Eastern Studies*, *Mediterranean Archaeology* and *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*. In recognition of her contribution to Malta, she was made an honorary member of the National Order of Merit of Malta in 2007.

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Claudia Sagona

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For the People of Malta.

They know their islands are extraordinary,

and it has been a delight for me to find out why.

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PREFACE

On Monday, 7 January 2008, I paused from my work to look into the distance. Pottery was dancing in front of my eyes after hours spent at the University of Malta working on the finds from the site of Tas-Silġ. As I scanned the tangle of stone buildings and rooftops, it struck me that, yes, Malta is small geographically, especially from my perspective as an Australian, but in terms of the ancient experience, these landmasses were never insignificant. The tightly clustered Maltese islands invite first impressions, but an intriguing and complex history will be unmasked with even the most cursory of enquiries.

As is so often the case with families that have settled in distant places, there is a yearning to rediscover homelands. This strong link first brought my family and me to Malta. As with others familiar with Malta's ancient past, front and centre in our imagination was the Neolithic period, with its monumental constructions. But William Culican, my mentor at The University of Melbourne, had always spoken so highly of Malta and so passionately about the ancient Phoenicians who made the archipelago their home that I had set out to learn more. My aim was to write an article on the colonial interests of these 'merchant venturers' as he referred to them. Well, the work grew beyond an article, and I was firmly captured – hook, line and sinker – by an area of research that is, happily, still as enthralling today as it was two decades ago. As time has gone on, I have been steadily drawn to every aspect of the islands' ancient past.

So it is that I have undertaken this survey of the archaeology of Malta. Aside from books aimed at a general audience, we are in need of a detailed synthesis that brings together the data from the earliest human colonisation to the Roman period. This book is written to fill that gap. The reader may grapple with new landscapes and names that are often quite difficult, but every effort has been made to overcome such unfamiliar territory. This study will surely not be the last word on the topic. But if it is received in the spirit in which it is written – to encapsulate how people have lived in Malta throughout the

millennia and to trace clearly each step of their cultural development and adaptation – then it would have served its purpose. During my research on ancient Malta, I have endeavoured to go back to the original sources and to place the islands in the wider Mediterranean setting. From this approach, the evidence often presents other angles and aspects overlooked in the past, and I have not shied from presenting different interpretations.

I am greatly honoured by Norman Yoffee's invitation to write for the Cambridge World Archaeology series. As it happened, I had been contemplating a synthesis on Malta for some time, and this book is the sum of information gathered since I first visited the islands over twenty years ago. To that end, my efforts would be the poorer without the help of many scholars, colleagues and friends. In terms of all things archaeological, and in one way or another, they have kept me informed of new discoveries, facilitated site visits, provided me with research opportunities, given notice of new literature or of the islands' archives and kept me in touch with current trends. They put me back on the research track when I veered off course. In various ways and for their help, I am grateful to the following (note that workplace affiliations may have changed over the years): *Government departments*: Mr. P. Gauci and Mr. Albert Callus, Private Secretaries to the Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Justice and the Arts, in Malta; the Honourable Clemente C. Zammit (former Maltese Consul General in Melbourne). *Staff of the superintendence or museum departments in Malta*: Tancred Gouder,[†] Anthony Pace, Nathaniel Cutajar, Kenneth Gambin, Reuben Grima, Katya Stroud, Sharon Sultana, Suzannah De Pasquale, Theresa Vella and MariaElena Zammit. *Museums*: Gillian Varndell (Curator, Neolithic Collections, Neolithic of Britain and Europe, Department of Prehistory and Europe, British Museum), Marianne Eve and Marta Mroczek, British Museum, the trustees of the British Museum for their permission to reproduce some Maltese pottery (Figures 2.3, 2.5, 3.9, 3.11, 5.3, 5.11 and 6.2) and Sergei Kovalenko (Pushkin Museum). *Universities*: Anthony Bonanno, Mario Buhagiar, Anthony Frendo, Horatio Vella and Nicholas Vella (at the University of Malta); S. Baron (Register, Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra); the Italian Mission to Malta and Giulia Recchia (and for the photograph in Figure 6.3, no. 4; Università di Foggia), Maria Pia Rossignani[†] (Università Cattolica di Milano), David Trump (Cambridge), B. Rawson and E. Minchin (Classics Department, Australian National University), Piers Crocker and Gary Stone (formerly of the Australian Institute of Archaeology, Melbourne), Elizabeth Pemberton (formerly of The University of Melbourne) and Ken Sheedy and Clare Rowan (the Australian Centre for Ancient Numismatic Studies, Macquarie University). *Libraries*: Joseph Busuttill (former Chief Librarian, National Museum of Valletta), Joseph Caruana (Officer in Charge of the National Archives of Malta, Santo Spirito, Rabat), The University of Melbourne, particularly staff

of the university library and the inter-library loans department, who keep the window on the world of scholarship firmly open. *Maltese holdings in private museums*: Canon John Azzopardi (former Curator of the Cathedral Museum, Mdina, and St. Paul's Parish Museum, Wignacourt College, Rabat), Fr. Victor Camilleri (St Agatha's Museum, Missionary Society of St Paul, Rabat), the Maltese Dominican Province, Rabat, and Christiane Ramsay Pergola, Baroness of Tabria (Custodian of the Scicluna Collection in the Palazzo Parisio, Naxxar). *Custodians of other collections*: Joseph Attard Tabone, Joseph Sammut,[†] Mary Sammut, the Custodian of the 'Courtyard' Collection, Fr. Joseph Fsadni, Helen Mahr, Carmel Fsadni and Mario Fsadni (Custodians of the Chevalier Paul Catania Collection), Daniel Micallef and Pauline Micallef (Rabat) and Fr. F. Abdilla and the staff at the Qormi Parish Church. *Those who assisted me regarding past projects, friends and colleagues*: Maxine Anastasi, Kevin Borda, Joseph Calleja, Kristian Checuti Bonavita, Joseph Borg (Melbourne), Josef Briffa, SJ, Anton Bugeja, Keith Buhagiar (also for his photograph in Figure 8.5, no. 5), Michelle Buhagiar, Celine Farrugia, Rebecca Farrugia, Patrick Galea, Joseph Huber (Melbourne), Josric Mifsud, Francisco Núñez Calvo, James Sacco, George Said-Zammit, Hanna Stöger, Davide Tanasi, Ernest Vella, Prof. Vella Bonavita (Perth) and Isabelle Vella Gregory, among many others. I owe a debt of gratitude to the Maltese community in Melbourne, which has continued to support my interest in Malta and has helped my research in all sorts of ways. I think it only fitting to mention the Demanuele family and the staff at the Grand Harbour Hotel in Valletta, who have made my many visits to Malta all the more enjoyable.

I am very grateful to my colleague and friend Abby Robinson, who read the manuscript closely. The work is definitely better for her editing and for her valuable comments. Jarrad Paul's help in preparing the tables concerning radiocarbon dates is very much appreciated. Unless otherwise stated, illustrations are my own or adapted by me for this book. To my daughter Amadea, I love the way you keep me grounded in the present when I could so easily get lost in the past. And to Tony Sagona, my strongest supporter – we are still travelling the archaeological road together after forty years – thank you just does not seem enough. My sincere thanks go to all of the editorial staff at Cambridge University Press for their assistance and guidance in preparing this book for publication.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND SOME COMMON MALTESE TERMS

a.k.a.	also known as
asl	above sea level
<i>għajn</i>	spring
<i>għar</i>	cave, cavern
GIS	Geographic Information System
<i>għnien</i>	garden
<i>ħal</i>	village
<i>kbir</i>	large
l/o	limits of (on the outskirts of a region)
MAR	1904–2002 <i>Annual Report on the Working of the Museum Department</i> (title varies), compiled by the curators and/or museum directors. Malta: Government Printing Office. Superseded by Superintendence of Cultural Heritage's <i>Annual Reports</i> , from 2003 (available on-line).
MEPA	Malta Environment and Planning Authority. MEPA's website provides online pdf versions of government notices (prefixed: gn) appearing in the <i>Gazzetta tal-Gvern ta' Malta</i> regarding scheduled properties (many of archaeological interest) as well as access to land survey sheets.
NB	T. Zammit's <i>Archaeological Field Notes</i> , nos. 1–16 (1905–30), handwritten records largely concerning field work in Malta, held in the National Museum of Archaeology, Valletta.
<i>tal</i> or <i>ta'</i>	of the
<i>triq</i>	street, road
TSG96	prefix code for the site of Tas-Silġ (1996)
<i>wied</i>	valley
<i>xagħra</i>	rocky ground