

STUDIES IN MALTESE ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY

I

FRANCIS S. MALLIA

A Phoenician-type portrait head in stone
Reviews
Recent Books and Articles
Maltese Supplement

MALTA

March 1969

© Francis S. Mallia 1969

Studies in Maltese archaeology and history will be published quarterly by the last days in March, June, September and December.

Articles, notes and readers' comments intended for publication should be typewritten and sent to the Editor, **Mr. Francis S. Mallia, 17 Millstone Street, Senglea, Malta**. Books and other printed work for review should be similarly addressed.

The Editor assumes no responsibility for opinions expressed by contributors and his decision in any matter relating to publication is final.

The Annual Subscription (including postage) is **thirteen shillings and six pence** sterling for Malta and **fifteen shillings** sterling for other countries. Single copies 3s. 4d. and 3s. 6d. respectively. These rates are payable in advance to the Editor at the above address.

A Phoenician-type portrait head in stone

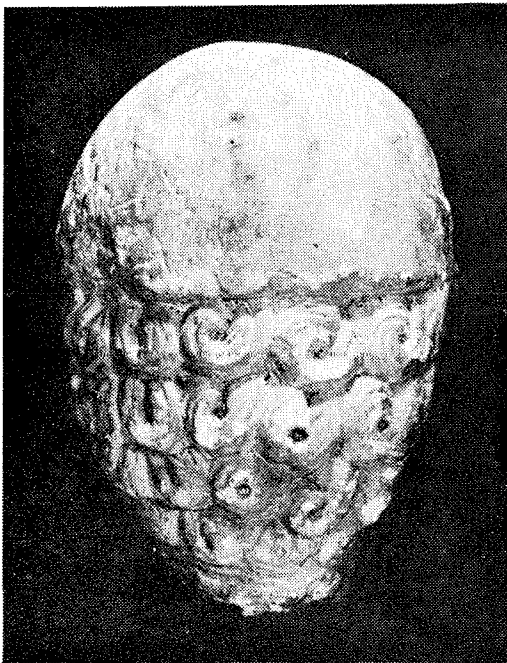
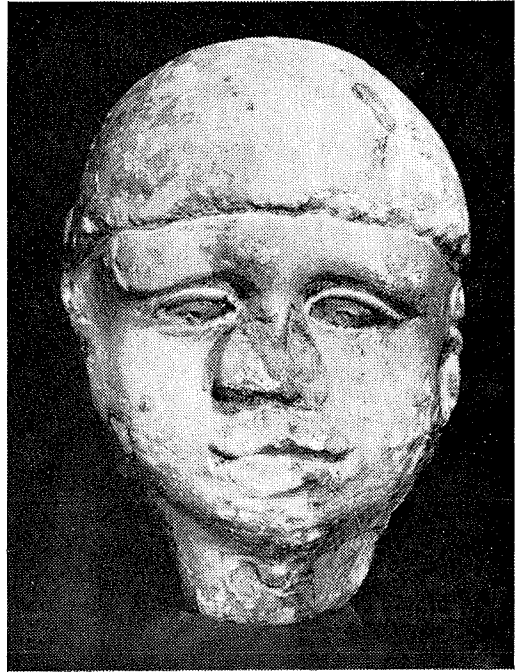
The stone head illustrated on Plates I and II (pp. 4, 5) is reputed to have been recovered from the sea about ten metres off the south promenade at St. George's Bay, Birżebbuġa, Malta, in the summer of 1966.^[1] It is carved on a compact limestone very similar to the native globigerina, stands 14.5 cm. high and measures 9.5 cm. over the ears. The head represents a young man wearing a plain hemispherical cap reaching halfway down the forehead; at the back, a good rendering of a curly hairstyle drops in four layers and covers the upper part of the nape. The ears, of which the right-hand one is broken off, are each surmounted by the small curl with which the uppermost layer terminates behind the temples.

The features of the face combine to give it a thoughtful yet mild expression, with the eyes fixed downwards at a very steep angle; this effect is produced by a progressive setting back of the eyelashes and the eyeballs in relation to the brows. The nose, although extensively damaged, can be seen to have been a typical flat one, and, judging by the preserved outline of the bridge, it could not have been unduly prominent in the profile of the complete head. Considerable damage also shows on the surface of the lips, but enough clues survive to point to their original pronounced thickness; the modelling of the region around the mouth clearly suggests a prognathous condition, imitated or intended.

Any attempt to assign the head to a locally documented period could begin by dealing very briefly with two improbabilities. Maltese prehistoric representations of the human head and face fall far short of that degree of realism which seems to emanate from the Birżebbuġa find.^[2] In Roman times, when a life-like resemblance was aimed at — and nearly always attained — one finds no local or, for that matter, other evidence for the combination of types of cap and hairstyle which it exemplifies.^[3]

On the positive side, the head can stand a few comparisons with evidence from the east Mediterranean seaboard and from Phoenician colonies in the central Mediterranean. The hairstyle of close-set curls seems not dissimilar to that on another stone head, probably a portrait of King Yarim-Lim, from the Level VII (18th century B.C.) temple at Atchana in Syria, then part of Canaanite territory.^[4] In this case, however, only a very distant inspiration can be adduced. For the same feature, more acceptable parallels are provided by the bearded male mask found in the shrine of the acropolis at Monte Sirai in Sardinia and ascribed to the 6th century or the beginning of the 5th century B.C.,^[5] and, rather strikingly, by the miniature masks in coloured glass paste from Carthage of the 6th to 4th century B.C.^[6]

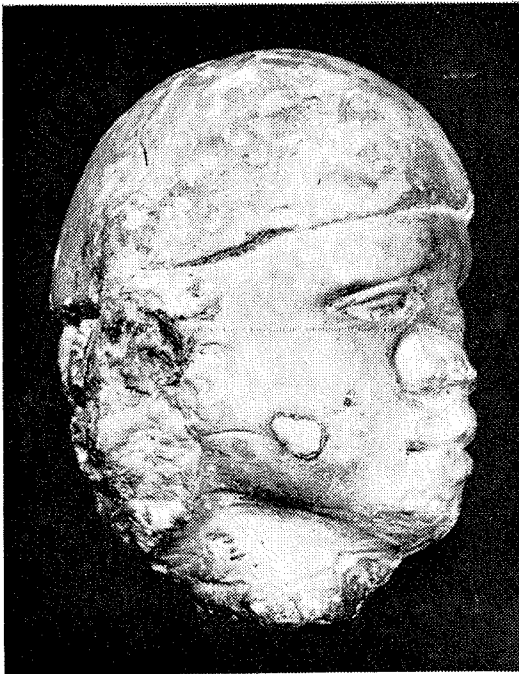
PLATE I



Birżebbuġa, Malta: front and
back views of stone head

[see pp. 3, 6]

PLATE II



Birżebbuġa, Malta: lateral views
of stone head

[see pp. 3, 6]

Due to the extreme simplicity of the cap, it is rather difficult to point to good comparative material among the available foreign evidence. The clearest example known to the writer comes from the excavations at the punic *tophet* of Motya (end of the 6th century B.C. onwards), and consists of a small terracotta male head on which a similar type of cap is indicated by a deep groove running across the lower forehead and the forward part of the temples; further along, the groove disappears as a result of the extensive wear at the sides and back of the head.^[7]

By virtue of its naturalistic style, the head also suggests a mixed racial type in unusually strong terms. Such a type, demonstrably constituted of a fusion of Mediterranean and negroid characteristics, could possibly have resulted from some early intermingling of the two races along the north African coast through much the same process as that which produced the Hamites of Ethiopia.^[8]

It is therefore not unlikely that the head from Birżebbuġa could well be the portrait of a person of north African, probably Carthaginian, descent who may have belonged to the authentic core of punic settlers inhabiting the Maltese islands. The apparent uniqueness of this work of art in the overall picture of Phoenician civilization would seem to imply that the subject enjoyed such high social or political standing amongst the local community as to have been singled out for perpetuation in stone, a fact in itself of major importance in view of the limited gallery of period portraits available to the historian.^[9]

Notes

- [1] I am indebted to Mr. M. J. Minuti of Birżebbuġa, father of the boy, Anthony, who found the head, for granting me every facility to study and record it. The photographs were taken by Mr. R. Muscat and are reproduced by courtesy of the Director, National Museum of Malta.
- [2] T. Zammit and C. Singer, *Neolithic representations of the human form from the islands of Malta and Gozo*, J.R.A.I., vol. LIV, 1924, 67-100.
- [3] T. Ashby, *Roman Malta*, J. of Roman Studies, 1915, 23-80.
J. M. C. Toynbee, *The Art of the Romans*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1965, ch. II.
- [4] J. Gray, *The Ganaanites*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1964, 167, 168, pl. 51.
- [5] F. Barreca, *Monte Sirai — II, Rapporto preliminare, ecc.*, Studi Semitici 14, Università di Roma, 1965, 54, pl. XXIV.
- [6] D. Harden, *The Phoenicians*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1962, 154, pls. 54, 55.
- [7] A. Ciasca, *Mozia — II, Rapporto preliminare, ecc.*, Studi Semitici 19, Università di Roma, 1966, pl. LIII, upper figure; the text makes no specific reference to the object.
- [8] A. S. Romer, *Man and the vertebrates*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1960, vol. II 267.
- [9] A few of the better known portraits are illustrated in G. et C. Charles-Picard, *La vie quotidienne à Carthage au temps d'Hannibal*, Librairie Hachette, Paris, 1958, pls. 2, 14, 21. Another stone head, portraying an adult male personage sporting a hairstyle of long curls to the back, is conserved at the National Archaeological Museum of Syracuse. It is thought to represent a Carthaginian leader and, according to tradition, was taken to Sicily as war booty, presumably by the Romans. Its facial characteristics bear close resemblances to those of the head from Birżebbuġa. I am grateful to Dr. D. B. Harden for drawing my attention to its existence, and to Monsieur Jean Mazel for favouring me with a copy of his *plaque-souvenir* entitled *Avec les Phéniciens* (the title also of a film and a book by him) wherein it is reproduced (p. 31).

Reviews

A.J. Agius: Guide Book, The Hal Saflieni Hypogeum, Paola, Malta. Published by the author 1967, 30 pp., 1 fig, 8 pls.

After two editions in English, followed by two others in German and Italian translations, this guide-book has reappeared in English in a garb vastly superior to that of its predecessors. The fine quality of the paper and the clear typography are in fact the first but, alas, the only features which might have a tendency to impress, although even in this the printers have not made the best possible use of the technical resources so obviously at their disposal.

As a vade-mecum for visitors to one of Malta's leading prehistoric monuments, the publication is a disappointment which no amount of colour and gloss seems able to allay. To begin with, the scheme of Maltese prehistory — reproduced without acknowledgment to the two sources from which it is derived — has been altered for reasons apparently reserved to the author. Saflieni, the phase, becomes Hypogeum, while a later phase, Tarxien Cemetery, is qualified by the introduction of the word Cremation, without as much as a whisper why this has been done.

The reader's tour of the Hypogeum through the pages of the booklet is introduced by a reference to the Glossary of Terms on the last page but one, only to find here, to his chagrin, a list of perfectly normal words and their supposed meanings. Indeed the whole of this page 29 constitutes a *pot-pourri* of etymological, grammatical and other mistakes which are bound to exasperate any reader of average intelligence, let alone a highly educated one.

When it comes to the descriptive and interpretative sections, matters show no sign of improvement. The author persistently uses the wrong word or phrase to convey his meanings, as, for example, 'weary' for 'worn', 'hunch' where 'hump' would have been infinitely better, 'discerned' for 'discernible', 'a hundred and one' for 'several hundred', 'loophole' for just 'hole', 'alignment' for 'outline', and, strangest of all, 'advent' for 'construction'. The rules of punctuation are treated as if they were of no consequence at all. Despite the prominence given to the prehistoric sequence at the beginning of the guide-book, the text disregards it completely and substitutes (wrongly) Neolithic or Stone Age for Copper Age in at least eighteen instances.

Under these conditions, it is inevitable that the attempts to explain the original purpose of every nook and corner of the Hypogeum fail miserably, and

the interpretations either do not come out at all or, when they do, several are patently incorrect. One final attempt is made, similarly to no avail, to rescue the situation by assigning sets of underground chambers to a three-part chronological sequence depending on depth below ground level and distance from the entrance, as if a platitude even of this calibre were not as futile as any other.

If the reader could not be spared the personal views of the author, he surely deserved better in the pictorial presentation of the material facts. But this, unfortunately, was not to be. The cover illustration, reproducing the prize find from the Hypogeum — the 'Sleeping Lady' — defeats its scope because what it shows is not the original but a near imitation in plaster about which no one could possibly care. In dealing with his very own 'new discoveries', the author has nothing better to offer (on p. 7) than two plates of risky light-effects and another from a heavily retouched negative.

P. Xuereb: The Roman Villa and Museum of Roman Antiquities. Published by the author 1967, 31 pp., 11 ills. in text.

P. Xuereb: Catacombs of Malta — St. Paul's at Rabat. Published by the author 1968, 26 pp., 12 ills. in text.

Frankly, the reviewer has not got the time and space, let alone the inclination, to tell the reader more about these booklets than that their contents are grossly inaccurate, misleading and eminently naïve.

Recent Books and Articles

This section gives notice of recently published books and articles of interest to the readers of S.M.A.H., adding a brief note on their contents. Any book or article in the list may be reviewed at a later date. The Editor welcomes readers' suggestions, enclosing detailed information, for inclusion in future lists.

Maschere Puniche by G. Garbini, in *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*, N.S. vol. XVIII (28), Naples 1968, pp. 319-330, pls. I-III. The author cites the face mask carved in a rock tomb discovered in 1918 at Qallilija, Rabat, Malta, in examining the mythological significance of punic masks in the context of Phoenician religion.

continued on p. 12

Ma niskużawx irwiehna la għax daħħalna din it-taqsimha bil-Malti u lanqas talli l-biċċa l-kbira tal-perjodiku huwa f'isilen internazzjonali. Ta' l-ewwel hija meħt'ega min-nuqqas ta' kitba xierqa b'islienna fuq il-grajja ta' l-imghoddi, waqt li tat-tieni jahtu għaliha l-universalità tax-xjenza u l-bidla ta' tagħrif li għandu jkun hemm bejn dawk li jaħdmu f'dan il qasam.

Nibdew f'din l-ewwel ħarġa ta' Studies in Maltese archaeology and history bil-kommentarju ta' programm li konna xandarna fuq il-Malta Television Service fil-15 ta' Diċembru, 1966.

Il-Gzejjer Maltin — l-ewwel 4,500 sena tal-grajja tagħhom

Sir Temi Zammit, li waqqaf il-Mużew Nazzjonali ta' Malta u kien l-ewwel direttur tiegħu għal ħafna snin, kien kiteb li l-ħamrija tal-gzejjer maltin hija miżgħuda bil-fatti tal-istorja mhux miktuba ta' pajjiżna. B'dawn il-ftit kliem huwa qiegħed f'ħolqa, biex ingħid hekk, sitwazzjoni li ma nafx insibuhex f'pajjiż ieħor fid-dinja, u din mhix biex inkabbarha għax ma naħsibx li nistgħu nsemmu limiti ta' parroċċa waħda f'Malta u f'Għawdex li qatt fihom ma nstab xejn ta' siwi arkeologiku. Jekk infittxu minn fejn gew il-fdalijiet tal-imghoddi li għandna fil-mużewijiet, insibu li l-inħawi kollha taw xi haġa biex ingħaraf il-wirt storiku u kulturali ta' artna.

Qabel xejn, ta' min jifhem sewwa li l-preistorja — iż-żmien li fih in-nies ma kienux jafu jiktbu — tagħmel sehem mill-istorja tagħna wkoll, anzi ngħid li hija l-qofol, għax il-bidu f'kull attività tal-bniedem, iktar u iktar fit-twaqqif ta' nazzjon f'art ġdida, huwa ta' mportanza kbira. Imiss lil min jistudja dak li jinstab mill-ħwejjeg materjali ta' dawn in-nies illetterati — imma li moħhom kien jaħdem bħal tagħna jekk mhux iżjed biex isolvi l-problemi tal-ħajja — li jobsor x'setgħa għadda minn għalihom u wara jikteb grajjiethom mill-aħjar li jista'.

Din l-għamla ta' studju ssir ukoll għal żmenijiet li minnhom waslilna xi haġa bil-miktub, bħal ngħidu aħna kliem minqux fuq il-ġebel jew biċċiet ta' flus. Kulħadd jaqbel li f'wejjeg bħal dawn qatt ma jistgħu jgħidulna dak kollu li

nkunu rridu nafu u għalhekk ikollna nistudjaw bir-reqqa l-fdalijiet taż-żmien li jkun, bħal ma nagħmlu fil-preistorja, biex nimlew in-nuqqas ta' tagħrif li jkollna.

Issa naraw x'inhi x-xhieda materjali tal-qedem li nsibu mxerrda ma' Malta u Għawdex, minn xi daqqiet tidher f'wiċċ l-art, imma ħafna drabi mirduma taħt it-trab u t-tiġrif taż-żmenijiet li ġew wara.

L-ewwel maltin kienu bdiewa li ġew għal ħabta tal-4,000 sena q.K. minn x'imkien fi Sqallija ta' l'vant. Għal bidu sabu kenn fl-għerien, sakemm bdew jibnu għarajjex bil-ġebel, tafal, zkuk tas-siġar u ħaxix niexef. Biex jgħixu kienu jżirgħu l-qamħ, irabbu l-bhejjem u jaqbd u annimali u tjur billi jużaw żbandola tal-ġild u ġebba daqs u għamla ta' bajda. Dawn in-nies ngħarfuhom mill-għamla tal-fuħħar li kienu jagħmlu u minn kif kienu jżejnuh. Mill-fuħħar naraw ukoll kif il-gosti kienu jinbidlu minn żmien għall-ieħor u b'hekk inkunu nistgħu nfasslu d-damma ta' grajjiet li nsejfulha kronologija relattiva, iġifieri skema li juri l-post fiż-żmien li nagħtu kull gabra ta' materjal li aktarx dejjem insibuh flimkien.

Madwar 600 sena wara l-bidu tal-istorja tagħna, fil-gzejjer maltin bdew jaslu influwenzi godda minn Sqallija u l-Italja t'isfel, fejn issa kien dahal sewwa l-użu tar-ramm li ħa post iż-żnied u ġebel iebes ieħor bħala *materia prima* għal xfafar u skieken. Il-kurżità hi li f'Malta dan il-metall ma jidherx fl-istess żmien; jista' jkun li s'issa ma kellniex ix-xorti li nsibuh waqt it-taħfir, jew inkella n-nies kienu tant fqar li ma kellhom xejn x'jagħtu bi bdil ħalli jiksuh. Kienet x'kienet ir-raġuni, fis-sna tal-fuħħar u x-xogħol tal-ġebba għall-bini u skultura, huma bdew tradizzjoni li wasslithom f'quċċata ta' ċiviltà wisq għola minn ta' dawk li kellhom għodod aħjar. X'aktarx, biex għamlu dan, huma ma riedux jew ma setgħux iħabbu rashom bil-progress li kien qed isir fil-pajjiżi tal-qrib, imma għażlu li jtejjbu u jipperfezzjonaw dak li kienu jafu.

Naraw l-ewwel imqades tagħhom bi tliet ikmamar mibnija fit-tond minn ġebel ta' daqs li llum anqas noħolmu li qatt ninħtiegħ. Dawn l-hekk imsejja tempji maż-żmien żdiedu fid-daqs u fin-numru ta' kmamar sakemm wasslu għal ġemgħat ta' bini li jgħagġeb bħal ma naraw f'Hal Tarxien, f'Haġar Qim u fil-Ġgantija t'Għawdex.

U mbagħad x'ingħidu għal monument uniku f'Malta u fid-dinja, li, flok inbena, bħall-oħrajn, ġie mħaffer fil-blat taħt l-art — sa fejn huwa magħruf b'għodda tal-ġebel biss — u jixbaħ, b'mod ġenerali kif ukoll partikolari, it-tempji l-oħra megalitiċi. L-Ipoġew (mill-grieg *ὑπόγειον* [kamra] taħt l-art) aktarx dam jintuża bħala maqdes għal madwar mitt sena; imma fl-aħħar, fil-waqt li t-tempji l-oħra kienu għadhom fl-aqwa tagħhom, spiċċa biex sar kannierja għall-għadam ta' qrib sebghat elef ruħ.

Waqt iċ-ċiviltà tat-tempji, li damet bejn wieħed u ieħor mit-3,000 sena sal-2,000 sena q.K., il-fuħħar u l-iskultura laħqu livell tekniku u, fuq kollox, artistiku li llum ħafna studjużi jqiesuh bħala parti sħiħa mill-iżvilupp estetiku tal-moħħ tal-bniedem. L-għamliet u t-tizjin tal-fuħħar gabra fihom kull ma kienu tgħallmu n-nies ta' Malta u Għawdex sa' dak iż-żmien.

Għan-nies tat-tempji preistoriċi, l-għageb tal-ħolqien kien fenomenu wisq aktar fil-qrib milli hu għalina, għax minnu biss kien jiddependi l-għixien tagħhom. Jagħtuna x'nifhmu li għalihom kienet teżisti x'imkien alla mara li ggedded u tkattar il-ħajja tagħhom, tal-annimali u tal-ħxejjex, u għalhekk l-imqades kien ikollhom xbiehat tagħha ta' kull daqs magħmula mill-gebel jew tafal ħalli jstgħu jqegħdu quddiemhom xi ħaġa mill-istess frott tal-qawwa taħga bħala saġrificju.

L-ikbar problema fil-preistorja ta' Malta huwa ilgħala, madwar l-2,000 sena q.K., din iċ-ċiviltà għolja sfat fix-xejn, it-tempji waqgħu u jista' jkun ukoll li f'Malta ma kienx hawn nies għal ftit żmien. Kien x'kien, post in-nies tat-tempji malajr ħaduh nies oħra b'ideat għal kollox differenti, l-iktar f'dak li kienu jemmnu. Dawn ukoll ġew minn pajjiżi fil-qrib bħal Sqallija u l-Italja t'isfel; flok jidfnu l-mejtin, kienu jaharquhom, ipogġu l-irmied fi bwieqi jew urni u jordmu lil dawn flimkien ma' ogġetti oħra li kienu jintużaw f'ħajjithom.

L-allat tagħhom illum nistgħu nobsrhom wisq inqas minn dawk tan-nies ta' qabilhom, għax ma nsibux ħlief diski tal-fuħħar li jixbħu lill-figura umana fis-saqajn biss. Fuq kollox, din ir-razza ta' nies daħħlet f'Malta għall-ewwel darba l-użu tal-bronż (taħlita ta' ramm u landa) li bih kienu jagħmlu skieken u mnanar għal kull ħtieġa, kemm fil-ħajja ta' kuljum kif ukoll biex jiddefendu rwieħhom.

Fi Żmien il-Bronż, il-kuntatt tal-gzejjer maltin mal-pajjiżi tal-Mediterran tan-nofs baqa' sejjer, u naraw li f'artna jibda jsir fuħħar jixbaħ ħafna lil dak li nsibu fl-għoljiet Appennini tal-Italja. Minn iktar 'il bogħod, waslu wkoll għamliet ta' dekorazzjoni li jidhru fil-Greċja madwar l-1,000 sena q.K.

Fil-fatt, mill-Mediterran tal-lvant kienu ġa ilhom ibaħħru għal ħafna żmien il-Feniċi ta' Tiru u Sidun u ma jgħaddix it-tmien seklu q.K. li ma nsibux xhieda tagħhom f'artna, minnbarra f'inħawi oħra ta' Sqallija u Tunes.

Kartaġni, l-ikbar kolonja Feniċja fl-Afrika ta' fuq, ġiet taħkem Malta biex tkun tista' tħares aħjar l-ibliet li kienet waqqfet bin-nies tagħha fi Sqallija tal-punent u f'Sardinja; iżda fl-istess ħin minn Malta għamliet ukoll ċentru ta' kultura li biss f'dawn l-aħħar snin beda ħiereġ mid-dlamijiet tas-suppożizzjoni. Il-Kartaġiniji bnew wieħed mit-tempji tagħhom lill-alla mara Axtart fuq l-għolja ta' Tas-Silġ ħdejn Marsaxlokk, u għanewh bl-isbaħ ħwejjeg li kellhom. L-oqbra tagħhom ikomplu jgħinuna biex nifhmu aħjar id-drawwiet li kellhom fil-ħajja u fil-mewt.

Ma damx ma ġara li l-qawwa ta' Kartaġni ġiet wiċċ imb'wiċċ ma' dik ta' Ruma meta din bdiet tqies li l-baħar fin-nofs tal-Mediterran kellu jithalla għaliha waħeda. It-tnejn bdew gwerra li damet ħafna snin u minnha Malta spiċċat f'idejn ir-Rumani fis-sena 218 q.K.

Is-sidien il-godda mhux biss komplew isaħħu f'artna iċ-ċiviltà tal-lvant miġjuba għall-ewwel darba mill-Feniċi u ispirata mill-Greċja, imma daħħluha sehem fil-kultura Ewropea li huma ħolqu u kabbru b'effetti li għadhom jinħassu sal-lum.

Fil-perijodu Ruman, Malta u Għawdex kellhom ibliet żgħar li fihom kont tiltaqa' ma' djar moghnija bi statwi tal-irham u tal-bronż, kmamar bl-art tal-mużajk u b'ħitan ippitturati, u kull ħtiega oħra biex il-ħajja tkun ħienja u siewja. Min kien tat-tajjeb kien ikollu wkoll dar fil-kampanja ħdejn xi għajn tal-ilma ġieri jew fejn kien ikollu ħaddiema fir-raba' tiegħu jiġbru l-uċuħ u jgħasru ż-żejt miż-żebbuġ. Il-bini reliġjuż kien jirrifletti l-kobor tal-monumenti ta' Ruma, il-belt kapitali tal-imperu, imma minn xi daqqiet l-allat kienu jissejħu bl-ismijiet griegi li kellhom qabel ma tawhom oħrajn ir-Rumani, bħal Hera flok Ġunone fit-tempju ta' Tas-Silġ.

Recent Books and Articles — continued from p. 8

Malta in antiquity by J. D. Evans, in *The Blue Guides: Malta* by S. Rossiter, E. Benn Ltd., London 1968, pp. 9-28. This specially commissioned essay is a handy and useful synthesis of present knowledge on the prehistory and early history of the Maltese islands, written by the Professor of Prehistoric European Archaeology at the London University Institute of Archaeology.

Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta. Rapporto preliminare della Campagna 1967 by C. Bozzi and others, Institute of Near Eastern Studies, University of Rome, 1968, 115 pp., 9 figs., 49 pls. The volume continues the series of annual reports on the excavations at Tas-Silġ and San Pawl Milqi in Malta and Ras il-Wardija in Gozo.

Malta by G. Lilliu, in *Frühe Randkulturen des Mittelmeerraumes. Kykladen — Zypern — Malta — Altsyrien* by J. Thimme, P. Aström, G. Lilliu and J. Wiesner, Holle Verlag, Baden-Baden 1968, pp. 89-139, 12 figs., map, 13 pls. in colour, 4 pls. b & w. A summary, in German translation from Italian, of Maltese prehistory as documented in publications up to the end of 1966.