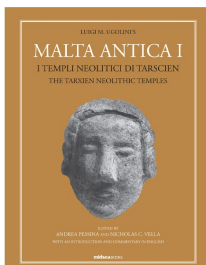
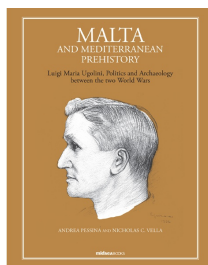
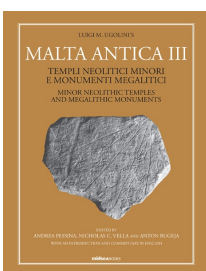
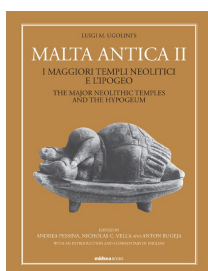


Review articles and reviews



A. Pessina and N.C. Vella (eds), 2021a. *Malta and Mediterranean Prehistory: Luigi Maria Ugolini, Politics and Archaeology between the two World Wars*. (508 pp.), illustrated. Malta: Midsea Books. ISBN 978-99932-7-758-3

A. Pessina and N.C. Vella (eds), 2021b. *Luigi Maria Ugolini's Malta Antica I: I templi neolitici di Tarsicien/The Tarxien Neolithic Temples*. (524 pp.), illustrated. Malta: Midsea Books. ISBN 978-99932-7-397-4



A. Pessina, N.C. Vella and A. Bugeja (eds), 2021c. *Luigi Maria Ugolini's Malta Antica II: I maggiori templi neolitici e l'ipogeo/The Major Neolithic Temples and the Hypogaeum*. (252 pp.), illustrated. Malta: Midsea Books. ISBN 978-99932-7-398-1

A. Pessina, N.C. Vella and A. Bugeja (eds), 2021d. *Luigi Maria Ugolini's Malta Antica III: Templi neolitici minori e monumenti megalitici/Minor Neolithic Temples and Megalithic Monuments*. (158 pp.), illustrated. Malta: Midsea Books. ISBN 978-99932-7-399-8 (hardback €335)

These volumes represent the culmination of many years' work by Andrea Pessina and Nicholas Vella. The first volume (508 pages) consists of a series of contributions which, as the authors (2021a, 1) summarise, “examines the relationship between archaeology and its socio-political milieu in the inter-war period in Malta and Italy from a historical perspective”. It does this in particular through an evaluation of the work of Italian archaeologist Luigi Ugolini (1895-1936). Then there are the three *Malta Antica* volumes (totalling 934 pages) which represent compilations of Ugolini's unpublished works, which have been brought together by Pessina and Vella and are published along with many photographs (most by Ugolini) and helpful introductions and footnotes. Following on from his 1934 book, *Malta, origini della civiltà mediterranea*, Ugolini had sketched out plans for the publication of five follow-on books, which would add scholarly detail to support his bold claims. His early death prevented this.

Ugolini has an ambiguous place in the history of research on Maltese prehistory. He spent much time in Malta in the 1920s and 30s, conducting archaeological research, yet he has largely been excluded from discussions of the topic. Evans (1971) often cites images from Ugolini's (1934) book, but barely mentions his ideas. In his introduction Evans, while reluctantly admitting that Ugolini's book was “the only general study” on Maltese prehistory in the inter-war years, claims “its value (was) much reduced by political and propagandist aims that were allowed to dictate the conclusions in defiance of the evidence” (1971, 4). Among the material brought to light by Pessina and Vella (2021a, 1), one can find expressions such as “fascist archaeological ineptitude”, written in a letter from John Ward-Perkins to Mortimer Wheeler.

By 1923 Ugolini was a member of the National Fascist Party, and his legacy is stained by this relationship. But was his work simply propaganda aimed at serving Italian expansionist

aims? To what extent did Ugolini's political perspectives relate to other factors, like personal ambition and advancement? The volumes put together by Pessina and Vella allow a balanced perspective on Ugolini and his research, in particular, and a variety of insights into the development of Maltese prehistoric research in general. The Italian Fascist state extended patronage to cultural endeavors, including archaeology, which it felt benefited its policies. Ugolini's main conclusion, based on studying the architectural and material culture of the Maltese 'Temple Period', was that Malta was the birthplace of 'civilization'. His *EX MEDIO LUX* stood in contrast to the dominant *EX ORIENTE LUX* of the age. The light of civilization developed not in the Aegean or Egypt, but in the central Mediterranean, he argued. The potential political misuse of this notion can be seen in the suggestion that there was an ancient and intimate connections between Malta and Italy, which ought to be restored in the present day, peacefully if possible, forcibly if necessary.

The first volume (2021a) offers an impressive contextualisation of Ugolini's work, as well as the period and the development of research more generally. Joining contributions by the editors are chapters from Anton Bugeja, Josef M. Briffa, Mario Cappozzo, Henry Frendo, and Oliver J. Gilkes.

The book is divided into six parts. The first part describes the archival material in Rome in detail.

The second part explores Ugolini's early years, such as his archaeological training and gradually developing political connections (meeting Mussolini several times, for instance).

Part three explores Ugolini's first major archaeological project, his research in Albania. Like his work on Malta, this has been controversial given the politically charged context.

Part four takes us to Ugolini's work in Malta. Centrally, Ugolini argued that the Maltese 'temples' showed a constellation of features, from the social to the architectural, which showed the attainment of 'civilization'. The intellectual background to this notion is explored

in detail. The critic might point out the rather vague meaning of the term 'civilization', as well as Ugolini's progressivism. While readers of this journal will surely share an appreciation of the Temple Period, the notion of it as a progenitor of European 'civilization' is not supported by modern scholarship. Ugolini was therefore arguably mistaken in his major conclusion – but, crucially, he was perhaps no more wrong than other researchers of his generation, and developed a huge amount of data on the way.

Part five dives into the debate on the conclusions of Ugolini, and their implications. The crucial context here is, of course, that Ugolini's ideas cannot be seen in isolation. They have to be seen in relation to other ideas of the era, such as Strickland's support for the idea that the megalithic temples of Malta had been built by Phoenicians, and that the British and Maltese had a shared ethnic (Phoenician) origin (2021a, 227-234). By 1933, political tensions came to such a head that the British declared a state of emergency and suspended the constitution. Meanwhile, Ugolini was writing to Italy complaining of the slow return of the proofs for his monograph. Finally, the proofs were corrected, Ugolini's demands for thicker paper to be used in the book agreed to, and Mussolini himself approved of the proofs! The book did come out in 1934. It is easy to focus on the grand narrative here, but other points should be emphasised, such as Ugolini's excellent use of photography, as vividly depicted in the many photos shown in this volume.

Finally, part six explores the debate triggered by Ugolini. Reaction to his book was diverse. While it received much acclaim, others thought it "audacious and put together in haste" (2021b, 317). Reaction in Italy was diverse, including negative reviews from those with more extreme fascist views.

Now to turn to the three *Malta Antica* volumes, assembled by Pessina and Vella (2021b-d) from Ugolini's documents. These flow from the discovery of archival material at the Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico "Luigi Pigorini" in Rome in the year 2000, consisting of documents, photographs, etc. by Ugolini. These

are in Italian, as the language Ugolini was of course writing in. This limits their accessibility for the linguistically challenged, like myself, yet with modern translation technology this does not present a fundamental obstacle. I think Pessina and Vella have struck a very sensible balance by retaining the original language, while adding extensive and useful introductions, footnotes, and figure captions in English. Plus, of course, the numerous figures (359 in volume 2021b alone) speak for themselves.

Malta Antica I (2021b) focuses on the Tarxien temples. This is the largest of the three volumes, and the one in which Ugolini's work was most complete. Tarxien is both a central site to Maltese prehistoric archaeology in general, but also to Ugolini's grand vision of regional prehistory. Ugolini describes the temples with precise detail, but also warmth. One cannot imagine someone like Evans talking of the remote age of the temples meaning they have a "charm that can be felt but not translated into words" as Ugolini (p. 11) put it. Over hundreds of pages Ugolini describes both the temples themselves and the numerous finds made within them, with masses of detail that will be crucial to those studying the site in the future.

Malta Antica II (2021c) addresses other major Late Neolithic sites, namely Ġgantija, Haġar Qim, Mnajdra, and the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum. It is once again richly visual. The introduction, with Pessina and Vella joined by Anton Bugeja, effectively weaves Ugolini into the historical context of research in Malta, and highlights how his previously unpublished observations offer considerable interest. Examples highlighted include debates on the sex/gender implied by figurines, and on the classification and character of different spaces and features within the megalithic sites. One gains important insights into Ugolini in these pages, for instance, upon seeing vandalism being done to Ġgantija, he declares (p. 6) "Quanto è ora scomparso! E in quale desolante abbandono è lasciato questo monumento! È inconcepibile che le autorità locali permettano questo scempio!", (which can approximately be translated as 'How much has now disappeared! And in what a desolate

abandonment this monument is left! It is inconceivable that the local authorities allow this havoc!').

Finally, *Malta Antica III* (2021d) is a shorter volume bringing together material from Ugolini's work on various other sites (over 30), based on much less complete work than the previous volumes. In the case of Borġ in-Nadur, he gives a description, but in some cases it is just a matter of some photographs of a site that were found in the archives. Notable examples of interest from this volume are firstly, his criticisms of Murray's work at Borġ in-Nadur (some of which may be reasonable, but one detects that considerable misogyny was also a strong motivating factor!). Secondly, his discussion of the famous small 'temple model' found at Ta' Haġrat, and often mentioned for its implications in terms of temple roofing.

To conclude, these volumes are essential reading for those interested in Maltese prehistory. Ugolini emerges as a complex character, about whom many questions remain. For instance, if he had not died so young, would he have signed the *Manifesto della Razza* of 1938, when Italian fascism took on a much more racist (and Nazi inspired) face? When it comes to the relationship between archaeology and politics, who is to decide what is 'beyond the pale'? Are Ugolini's ideas really too politically tainted to be considered reasonable and useful, in contrast to those on the pro-British side like Bradley (1912), who published page after page of what now look like crude racist attacks on the Maltese? What surely emerges from books like these is that people and processes are often contradictory. We therefore, for instance, read of anti-fascist Italian exiles in Malta such as Arnaldo Fabriani who were passionate about Italian culture (2021a, 312). This is surely a history which demands that we avoid oversimplification. These volumes allow us, for the first time, to evaluate Ugolini's research in a serious manner. Ultimately, Evans (1971) repeated a lot of what Ugolini had already done, but not published, however, many original ideas of Ugolini appear in these pages for the first time.

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