

Ta' Sannat

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Geography and Topography

Located in the southern region of Gozo, Ta' Sannat is a terraced village spread over an area spanning from the nearby village of Munxar to the small secluded bay of Mġarr ix-Xini. Coastal cliffs stretching from Ras in-Newwiela to Tal-Bardan form the southernmost limit not only of the village itself but also of the island of Gozo.

Mġarr ix-Xini and Sabbara valleys to the east of the village are host to a number of cultivable terraced fields. But more fields occupy areas previously exploited for their good globigerina stone, for which the Ta' Sannat quarries were much renowned before this activity shifted elsewhere. Until not so distant times, in fact, the Ta' Sannat globigerina stone provided the livelihood for the majority of the locals who toiled not only in quarries but also in lime-kilns which were also to be found in a relatively great number in the village.

Earliest Inhabitants

It appears that, already in prehistoric times, the location looked attractive and suitable for settlement purposes to the extent that a prehistoric community established itself at Ta' Ċenċ where it also set up its own cultic centre in the heart of the plateau. Structural remains datable to the Mġarr phase



Coastal cliffs stretching from Ras in-Newwiela to Tal-Bardan form the southernmost limit not only of Sannat but also of the island of Gozo.

[Image courtesy of: www.visitgozo.com Accessed November 2014]

(3800-3600 B.C.) and known as Ta' l-Imramma still survive to this day as if to bear witness to these people's religious beliefs and their worship practices.

It appears that the same plateau remained in occupation throughout subsequent prehistoric phases as well. During the earliest stages of the Bronze Age (2400-700 B.C.) – precisely, during the Tarxien Cemetery phase (2400-1500 B.C.) – the Ta' Ċenċ plateau hosted what may have been burials under the form of what we know as 'dolmens'. Other forms of activity, whether during prehistoric times or in later periods, are evident by way of cart-ruts which can be seen scattered all over the plateau.



In Phoenician, Punic, and Roman times, agricultural activity around nearby Mġarr ix-Xini Valley thrived. Agricultural products, such as olives and grapes, were processed into commodities like

Mġarr ix-Xini lies to the east of Ta' Sannat. [Image courtesy of: <http://www.visitgozo.com/> Accessed November 2014]



Wied Sabbara.

[Image courtesy of Stanley Borg. Available at: <http://mt.worldmapz.com/> Accessed November 2014]

oil and wine which were then, much in demand, while any surplus may have possibly been exported too. The peasants or labourers tilling the terraced fields are likely to have lived in the same area where, to satisfy their religious needs, they also erected a small shrine at Għar ix-Xiħ overlooking Mġarr ix-Xini Bay, then serving also as a small harbour from where they could export their surplus products.

In recent years, this agricultural landscape and the associated shrine at Għar ix-Xiħ have been subjected to a detailed archaeological survey and study, involving excavations, which are already yielding interesting results, dating back human activity there as early as the 6th century B.C. This survey, excavations, and study form part of Mġarr ix-Xini Valley Regional Park Project undertaken as a joint initiative by the Ta' Sannat and Xewkija local councils.

Ta' Sannat Parish Church of St Margaret.
[Image courtesy of: gozodiocese.org
Accessed November 2014]



Other areas of the village of Ta' Sannat may have been likewise devoted to agricultural activity but quarrying might have constituted a stronger focus. Quarrying activity in Ta' Sannat, in fact, occurred in ancient times too and this particular activity or industry survived until relatively recent times (mid-20th century) when, due to modern developments in this sector, the quarries at Ta' Sannat could not accommodate these same developments and consequently had to close down.

On the Way to Becoming a Parish

Not much is known about human occupation and activity in the area in later times. The village community is likely to have been relatively small while its occupations would be expected to have remained primarily agricultural and pastoral. To safeguard their agricultural produce, they erected purposely-built structures, two of which might have been the surviving towers Tal-Hofra near the village main square and Ta' Ġjammajr overlooking Tal-Gruwa. A few chapels characterised this typically Gozitan rural landscape and one of them – dedicated to St Margaret of Antioch (an early 4th century A.D. martyr) – enjoyed enough devotion that it was to become the parish church when this locality was established as a parish on 28th April 1688, along with four other new parishes.

Having been elevated to the status of parish, the village had its own parish priest who initially resided in a fine town-house in one of the streets behind the church until he moved residence to the current one adjacent to the present church.



Panoramic view of Sannat.

[Image courtesy of: [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sannat_\(Gozo\)](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sannat_(Gozo)) November 2014]

Until it reached its present form, the church underwent several structural alterations. The chapel of St Margaret was already in existence in 1615 but soon after it became a parish in 1688, it was considered to be too small and unsuitable to serve the spiritual needs of its increasing parish population. The chapel was consequently enlarged in 1718 and consecrated on 19th October 1755. Structural alterations were to be undertaken for a second time during the second half of the 19th century, bringing the church much into its present form. These alterations were concluded with the building of the dome in 1910.

Life and Fate of the Villagers

Throughout the course of time, the inhabitants of Ta' Sannat shared, more or less, the same fate as the rest of the Gozitans. They suffered hardship in times of famine or shortage of employment opportunities and were not spared any plagues which hit the island from time to time such as the cholera epidemic of 1837 or that of 1865. Wars left their mark too. The village was in fact, to suffer most during World War II when it had the largest number of casualties in Gozo, particularly during a very severe attack it was subjected to on the 10th October 1942.

In post-war times, many of the village's younger generation villagers were compelled to seek job opportunities abroad, particularly in Australia, America and Canada in order to sustain their families whom they often left behind. Many of them prospered and were able to return back and re-settle here.

In recent decades the economic scenario has changed drastically. The previous quarrying industry in Ta' Sannat shifted elsewhere on the island while few relied any longer on agriculture for their living. New job opportunities had to be sought beyond the confines of the village.

Today, the village has its own local council with a mayor and four councilors elected from among the village population every three years. The council undertakes a good number of initiatives for the benefit of the village community. Recently, the council inaugurated new premises from where it could function and better carry out its administration and work at the service of the village community.

Philip Vella is the Mayor of Sannat.