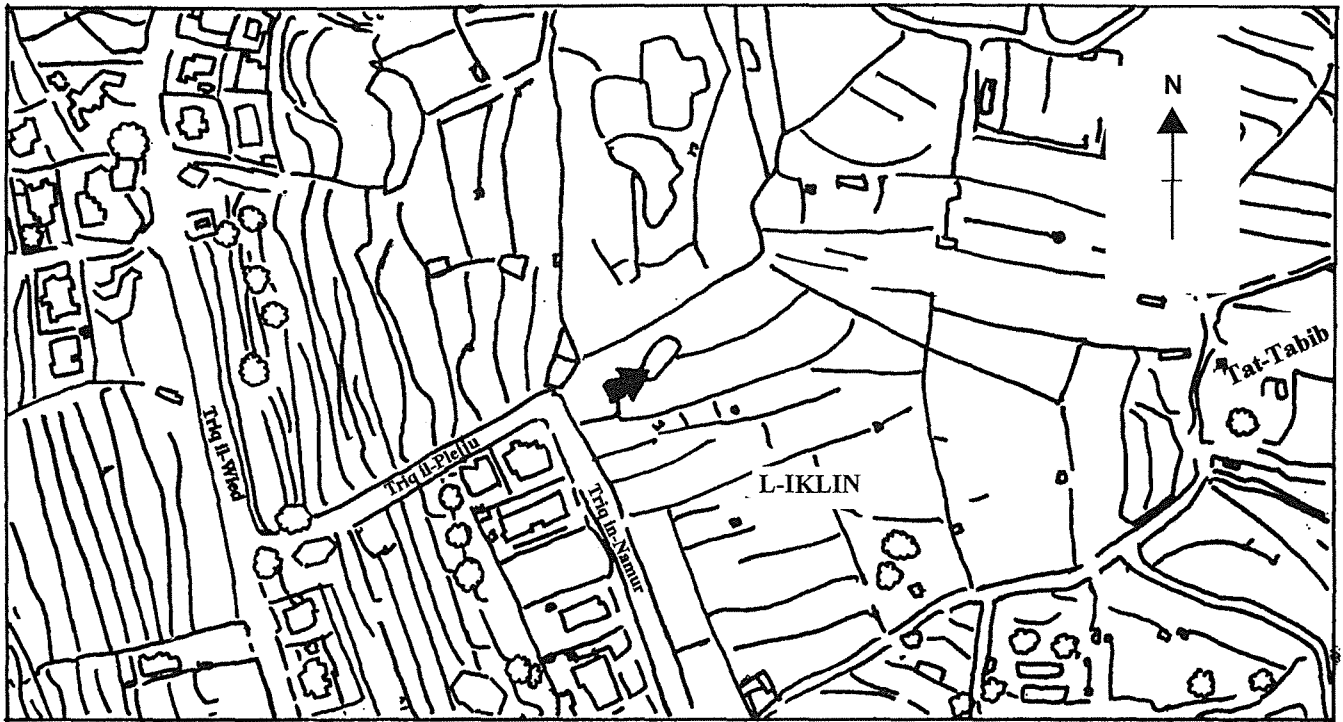


REDISCOVERING FORGOTTEN SITES

A Megalithic Site at L-Iklin



Detail from Survey Sheet 5074 (Scale 1:4100)

Even L-Iklin had its megalithic temple. This monument lies to the north and west of the fields known by the toponyms of l-Iklin and tat-Tabib respectively. The discovery of the site dates back to the late sixties, and was made by the teenagers of Din l-Art Helwa and two private schools (Anon., 1967). Despite initial coverage by the local newspapers, the remains were soon forgotten. No note of the find was made in the Museum Annual Reports and the site was not included in the survey carried out by Evans in the early seventies (Evans, 1971).

It was only after another decade that the area received its merited consideration when an examination of the remains was conducted by Professor Bonanno, who proceeded to describe and propose an explanation for the finds (Bonanno, 1983). A few prehistoric sherds and the remains of a statuette, surviving in part, were also found and documented from the area. Following this discovery it was hoped that one day the site would be scientifically excavated. This suggestion, however, was shelved indefinitely leaving the remains largely unknown to the academic world and particularly vulnerable in the process.

On the 14 th August 1998, Mr. Keith Buhagiar and the present author managed to relocate the temple just a few metres to the east of the junction between triq il-Pleju and triq in-Namur. Some difficulties were encountered during the search as the position and site location of the remains did not correspond to those indicated by the article. The megalithic remains corresponding to the only plan available of the site were in fact positively identified with an elliptical field (GR 508774) about 200m away from the site location (GR 510745) originally described.

The area surrounding the megaliths, especially the slope towards Iklin has changed considerably from that revealed in the survey sheets. Certainly it is surprising how building activity did not claim this site over the years, stopping only forty or so metres away from the temple remains. In the late nineties it was sheer luck once again that saved the monument. During ground levelling for the access road to the nearby television antenna the size of the megaliths probably discouraged their destruction. The path connecting the road to the antenna passed to the northern side of the field, leaving the megaliths unharmed. The next year it was the fields immediately to the south that were cleared, miraculously leaving the megaliths untouched once more.

Despite the humble nature of the remains, the site is one of considerable importance. The megaliths and the adjoining rubble wall still enclose about a metre of deposit, offering a unique opportunity for the study of the islands' prehistory. Due to its archaeological potential the remains at I-Iklin could easily follow those at Borg il-Gharib, Borg l-Imramma and l-Imrejsbiet in joining the list of Class A scheduled buildings.

Examination of the immediate area around the field, indicates that the remains probably extended to the north. Excavation here might reveal the true nature of these remains. Future studies at the site will confirm or refuse the identification of the remains as those of a temple. They may also shed new light on the anomalous 'orientation' of the remains and possibly provide new insights into the understanding of similar temple period structures.

The remains at L-Iklin are not the only prehistoric remains in the area. The exterior wall of a megalithic temple is still standing at Ta' Raddiena unnoticed by the hundreds of car drivers passing through the B'Kara bypass daily. The occurrence of two sites within a kilometre of each other is not coincidental.

Through the insights gained from excavations at the Xaghra Stone Circle, it is likely that the area around these structures was in use by a temple period community over 4500 years ago. The occurrence of these communities often reveals itself through clustering of megalithic sites. Temples like modern parish churches provided rival locations for ritual display, contrasting with burial monuments which provided unity within a community (Bonanno 1990; Trump 1998). This situation is best appreciated at Xaghra, where a number of megalithic remains (Ggantija, Ghar ta' Ghejzu and Santa Verna) are

found on the same plateau surrounding a single burial monument identified in the Gozo stone circle. Similarly the area around the grand harbour has the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum as the burial ground for a number of temples (five at Kordin and the Tarxien temples). This analogy continues at Xemxija where a single burial site is found in the proximity of a temple site.

The relevance to the remains at l-Iklin and Tar-Raddiena should immediately be apparent: if these megaliths are the last remains of prehistoric temples, than the surrounding area still hides an as yet undiscovered burial ground.

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Plate 1:- Megaliths at l-Iklin (Photo: A. Bugeja)