

**Roman architectural decoration in Malta**  
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Final report  
on the study of

## **Roman Architectural Decoration in Malta**

A study carried out in connection with

### **Work Package 2**

**'Censimento dei Monumenti di Eta' Preistorica, Romana e Medievale  
di Influenza Siciliana a Malta',**

part of the

**INTERREG IIIA K.A.S.A. Project**

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## 1.0 Introduction & Project Objectives

Late in the year 2006 the undersigned was given the opportunity to carry out a study which would study the fragments of Roman architectural decoration present in Malta and to trace, through the same fragments, any artistic or technical influences that they may have had from the neighbouring Island of Sicily. The connections and the exchange of influences between the two islands have for long been studied, however, these studies have always concentrated (with only very few exceptions) on cultural influences, influences of trade and influences on smaller cultural remains, the foremost of which being pottery shapes and decoration. For some reason or another, the architectural decoration and its artistic influences has escaped the attention and the detailed study of scholars and has normally only be granted a brief mention in Roman studies. Thus, this project provided a unique opportunity to conduct such a long awaited study and the undersigned was given an 8-month contract starting from the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January as one of the numerous research programs studying the cultural exchanges between Malta and Sicily, which were being conducted in connection with Work Package 2 of the Interreg IIIA K.A.S.A. project.

As stated in the contract, there are two main objectives for the project and according to which the undersigned is to:

- “identify and compile an inventory of the relevant cultural assets through written documentation as well as extant material remains, which assets shall include the architectural decoration of the peristyle of the Roman domus and the fragments of such decoration in the state collections and private collections in Malta.”<sup>1</sup>
- “compile and submit a report on the material which shall include the result of the archival research and fieldwork.”<sup>2</sup>

The compilation of the above mentioned inventory is essential for the fulfilment of the project. Since the setting up of the archaeological museum and the museum built over the

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<sup>1</sup> Point 3a in contract agreement

<sup>2</sup> Point 3b in contract agreement

Rabat domus in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these fragments have been stored rather than displayed in the two museums, and although they were placed in the same places, they have never been studied as a single branch of study. A catalogue or inventory of the surviving fragments (by studying texts and drawings from the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries one can get an idea of the numerous fragments that have now been lost) has thus never been compiled. It was thus deemed necessary that an essential part of the project should include the cataloguing of the items that were to be studied. This was not only intended to group the items together, but also provided the ground for the detailed study of the artefacts. The database provided a detailed description and photographic record of each and every artefact and this proved to be essential during the comparative process of the Maltese fragments with those in eastern Sicily.

### 1.1 Methodology & Problems

The project was divided into two main parts and, therefore, there are two different methodologies, and each presented its own problems and obstacles.

All the studied fragments have been catalogued in a database that has been constructed for this project on a program called File Maker Pro 5.5 by the undersigned. The three forms or divisions of the database have already been described in detail in the preliminary report of this project<sup>3</sup>, however a brief description of the forms is as follows:

- **General Description** will contain all the general information of the fragment, including the catalogue number, measurements, state of conservation and a very detailed description of the fragment and any decoration present on its surface. (fig. 1)
- **Related Documentation** will give the information of the provenance of the fragment, the date and notes on discovery, a bibliography of any previous documentation on the fragment or the site where it was found and previous pictures and drawings of the fragment. One must bear in mind that the provenance of most

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<sup>3</sup> Submitted 15/6/2007

of the fragments has not been recorded by the original finders and this information is subject to availability. (fig. 2)

- **Photos** will hold the photographic record of the fragment that has been taken by the undersigned for this project. One must mention a few photos that have been gently given to the undersigned by Mr. Daniel Cilia. The latter are appropriately marked on the filename. (fig. 3)

All the information given has been taken and inputted by the undersigned and great care was taken to make the information as accurate as possible. Measurements were taken by means of two Vermeer callipers of an opening span of 15cm and 124cm respectively (the latter has been brought over from America for the sole purpose of taking accurate measurements of large items, especially column shafts and their diameters). Great care was also taken to use the right terms for the given fragments and their decorative motifs. A glossary was thus created with terms taken from various architectural encyclopaedias and books related to the subject to support the undersigned in this regard. As already described in the methodology section of the preliminary report, the photographic record was almost entirely taken by the undersigned using as much equipment as possible to present the item as professionally as possible. As many pictures as 150 were sometimes taken for a single and from these were chosen the best photos necessary to present the fragment and its details in its entirety.

The compilation of such a database was no easy feat and a number of problems arose during the works, most of which could not be prevented or controlled by the undersigned. One of the main problems encountered was that of accessibility and logistics. The fragments are scattered in various places and locations and various permits had to be issued by different entities so that these fragments could be duly recorded. Such a problem was encountered for the fragments currently exhibited at the Cathedral Museum in Mdina. Permission was granted for the recording of the few fragments in the museum to the condition that the pictures had to be taken by their own photographer at the undersigned's expense. Although those terms were accepted, getting hold of the persons required to set a date for the fragments to be recorded seems almost impossible and to date, all attempt in contacting the necessary museum staff have been fruitless.

On the other hand, Heritage Malta has almost immediately granted permission to record all the fragments in its possession and on all the sites managed by it.<sup>4</sup> This allowed the undersigned to study the most important and most representative of the fragments in Malta. However a number of factors connected with the way the fragments are currently stored have created no little problems. Most of the important fragments and a large percentage of the national collection of Roman architectural decoration are currently in the reserved collection that is stored at the Maritime Museum in Vittoriosa. These are divided into two stores, one at the second floor that holds less than half of the fragments, and one in the ground floor. Although the upper store presented some problems with space and manageability, it is the ground floor store that presented the biggest problem. This because when the fragment have been transferred from their previous exhibition space at the Rabat domus to these stores, they had been placed on pallets and were placed closely together and some even piled on top of each other (fig. 4). Moreover, these fragments have been surrounded, and sometimes literally covered, over the years by numerous boats, wood and other material associated with the workshop present in the same store (fig. 5). Thus, some of the items could not be studied properly because they were either too heavy or just could not be moved by the undersigned due to other fragments being closely stored next to them. This drastically slowed the working progress because great care had to be taken not to damage the artefacts, while ensuring a proper and detailed documentation. Although work proceeded very slowly, it was decided that since most of the important fragments where stored there, works should proceed to properly document these fragments while other, less important fragments have been left for a future study.

However, together with these fragments were added those fragments that are currently displayed in the interior of the Rabat domus. Being one of the few fragments for which we have a secure provenance, the items of the domus were deemed too important to be left out. Again, the documentation of these artefacts presented some problems in that they are displayed in an open museum (fig. 6). The artefacts could thus not be moved and great attention was taken to use too much equipment which would disrupt the flow of visitors through the display. These problems were however dealt with and these fragments were duly recorded. The fragments currently at the back of the same site presented another

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<sup>4</sup> Great thanks here go to Mrs. Suzannah DePasquale and Mrs. Sharon Sultana who promptly sent their positive replies on the issue.

story. Being stored outdoors in a site which has apparently not been taken much care of in the past months has resulted in the fragments being literally covered over in vegetation. An attempt was made to remove the weeds around some of the artefacts but this was found to be too time consuming for the sake of this project and work was thus concentrated on the artefacts in the Maritime Museum.

As already stated in the preliminary report, a one visit to Catania was done by the undersigned between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of July with the principal aim of studying and gathering as much information on the architectural decoration of Roman buildings in the area. Most of the time was spent in the library of the archaeological institute within the *Universita' Degli Studi di Catania* and during this time, volumes were looked at to gather as much information, especially pictures, dating and all other forms of data which could throw light on any traces of artistic influences between the two. Unfortunately, the library has no accessible digital catalogue so all the research had to be done by going through the extensive card catalogue and selecting the books and articles that could be of any importance. This was of course time consuming and the opening hours of the library, which only on Tuesdays and Thursdays opens in the afternoon, did not help. The undersigned was luckily aided by Dr. F. Trapani who, having studied the architectural fragments herself, has provided the titles of the most important articles and books, although few. The number of books that could be studied became even fewer because some of them could either not be found or were not available in the library. Thus, the undersigned had to make whatever was possible with the limited information available there.

Apart from researching the library, time was also found to visit some sites of importance for this study. The first to be visited were the sites in Syracuse, which is about an hour drive south of Catania. The Regional Museum named after Paolo Orsi was the first to be visited. Numerous fragments were found lying in the gardens of the museum, however, these were all unlabelled and thus neither provenance, nor any dating could be given for them (fig. 7)q. Moreover, the section in the Museum about Syracuse was closed and the Roman section did not provide with any examples of architectural decoration. The Archaeological Park of Syracuse was also visited. Apart from the magnificent remains of the theatre and amphitheatre, only few fragments lay scattered around the entrance to the amphitheatre and again, these were not labelled. Unfortunately, the *Gymnasio* in Syracuse, although very



important because it holds numerous architectural fragments could not be visited due to refurbishing and cleaning works.

Once back in Catania, a visit was paid by the undersigned and Dr. Trapani to the museum at *Castell'Ursino*. Although numerous fragments were found grouped in one corner of the central courtyard, these were again unlabelled and can thus only be used for stylistic similarities but not for dating (fig. 8). The theatre and Odeon at Catania were also visited. Fragments are displayed in a small *antiquarium* attached to the small structures and in the theatre, however only a few pictures of the fragments lying outside could be taken since photographs are not permitted anywhere within the site (fig. 9). Another site that was visited was the cathedral of Catania. The rebuilding of this cathedral has employed numerous columns, bases and capitals from Roman sites, most of which possibly taken from the theatre (fig. 10). However, the height of the columns, lack of good lighting, and worshippers have somewhat prevented the careful studying of these fragments and only a few pictures could have been taken. The latter, having been taken in poor light have turned out to be of very poor quality.

## 2.0 **Progress & Results**

### 2.1 Database

The database contains the information and full catalogue of 93 fragments which, as already explained above, consist of the fragments stored at the Maritime Museum in Vittoriosa and those that are currently displayed at the Roman Domus. However, out of these 93 fragments, pieces have been identified from various sites around the Maltese Islands. These consist of:

- 3 fragments found at the tower of *Ta' Ġawhar*. (f88, f89, f90) (fig. 11)
- 6 fragments that have been certainly found at the Rabat Domus. (f43, f46, f47, f48, f49, f93) (fig. 12)
- 3 fragments from the field known as *Ġnien is-Sultan*. (f24, f25, f42) (fig. 13)
- 17 fragments which were probably found at the Rabat Domus but could not be told with certainty. (f11, f12, f13, f14, f15, f16, f19, f32, f33, f37, f38, f51, f52, f53, f54, f55, f56)

- 2 fragments which were possibly found during dredging works connected with the *Porto Nuovo* in Marsa. (f27, f70)

Unfortunately, the remaining 61 fragments are still without provenance, and will probably remain so unless some new discovery (material or literal) is found.

## 2.2 The Catania Research – Research Overview

The research in Catania can be divided into two: the research conducted in the library of the Department of Archaeology, and the visiting of sites to view the fragments within them.

As already explained above, some problems have been encountered during the research conducted in the Library in Via San Giuliano. The aim of the undersigned was to go to research this library to acquire as many articles, pictures and other related documentation on the Roman architectural decoration of Sicily. However, the articles that have been found on the subject amount to just three and all of them have been written by the Italian Patrizio Pensabene.

- The first of these articles<sup>5</sup> relates on the architectural decoration of the Roman villa at Piazza Armerina. This article lists the varieties of architectural decorations found in the villa, with special insistence on the capitals. The text is accompanied by 34 photographs, only 3 of which show fragments that are not capitals. The undersigned has through the official, thick book that serves as a report for the excavations of the same villa for further information on the fragments, however, very rarely do architectural fragments come at stake and no good illustrations are given.

- The second article is divided into three sections which deal on the architectural decoration, the use of marble and the importation of oriental artefacts in Rome, Italy and North Africa between the second and sixth centuries AD.<sup>6</sup> This article is considered as one of the most important for the study of architectural fragments in the central Mediterranean as it gives descriptions, lists and figures of artefacts. It also gives a detailed account of the

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<sup>5</sup> Ampolo, C., Carandini, A., Pucci, G., Pensabene, P., 1971: La Villa di Piazza Armerina, Appendice II; gli elementi decorative architettonici, in *Melanges De L'ecole Française de Rome Antique*, vol.83, 1, pp 207-233

<sup>6</sup> Pensabene, Patrizio, 1986; La Decorazione Architettonica, l'Impiego del Marmo e l'Importazione di manufatti orientali a Roma, in Italia e in Africa (II-IV DC), in Giardina, Andrea (ed.), *Società Romana e Impero Tardoantico*, vol. III; *le merci, gli insediamenti*, Editori Laterza, pp285- 429

architectural developments that occurred in the 4 centuries that this article deals with. However, this article deals primarily with architectural fragments that were imported or had direct influence from the eastern provinces. Thus, it rules out the indigenous styles of southern Italy and only gives account of the fragments of eastern origins. Another problem with this article is the fact that it only deals with capitals (both Corinthian and Composite) and marble sarcophagi. No mention is thus made of any decorated architectural elements. Lastly, the article only deals with the period between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD and therefore does not take into account the preceding centuries. However, the article was still deemed of great importance since it can help to trace any oriental origins that any capitals in Maltese connections could have.

- The last article is directly connected with the city of Catania in as it deals with the architectural decoration of the Roman Theatre of Catania<sup>7</sup>. Not having been able to take photographs of the architectural members on display in the theatre itself, this is one of the only sources that provide photographs of the said items, thus allowing direct comparisons to be made with Maltese fragments. This article studies the architectural fragments that were studied by Pensabene during his collaboration on restoration works conducted in the said site between 1970 and 1971. The study concentrates mostly on the architectural elements of the *scenae* and gives both a detailed description of the general decorative scheme as well as a short catalogue of the surviving fragments.

Among the various other articles and books are some which although not directly related to the subject or architectural decoration in Sicily, provide, mainly through their pictures and plates, valuable information about fragments found in Sicily. Among these is the book by RJA Wilson on Sicily during the Roman Empire.<sup>8</sup> This book provides a general insight on the various aspects of the Sicilian province during the Roman Empire, including a section on architecture. The latter is, however too general and provides very little information suitable for this project. On the other hand, the photographs of various fragments and sites presented in this book have proved to be quite useful.

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<sup>7</sup> Pensabene, Patrizio, 2005: La Decorazione Architettonica del Teatro di Catania, in Gigli, Rossella, *ΜΕΓΑΛΑΙ ΝΗΣΟΙ: studi dedicate a Giovanni Rizza per il suo ottantesimo compleanno*, vol.2, Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, I.B.A.M., Catania

<sup>8</sup> Wilson, RJA, *Sicily Under the Roman Empire: the archaeology of a Roman province*.

Also of some importance were specialised books on the various variations of Corinthian capitals in different areas of the Roman Empire. Unfortunately, all these books are written in German, a language that the undersigned does not understand. However, all these studies presented an extensive photographic record, from two of which could be sampled fragments from Sicily.<sup>9</sup> The book by Lauter Bufe is especially important in the fact that it also represents a capital now on display in the Rabat Domus (f45) (figs. 37 & 38).<sup>10</sup>

Other books and articles have been skimmed through in hope that they could have given some more information but all proved quite fruitless. The list of this literature is as follows:

- Becatti, Giovanni  
1962 *L'Arte Romana*, Garzanti, Italy
- \_\_\_\_\_,  
*L'Arte dell'Eta' Classica*, Sansoni Editore
- Bianchi Bandinelli, Ranuccio  
1984 *L'Arte Romana*, Editori Riuniti, Roma
- Bucci, Letizia  
1972 *Il Santuario di Apollo Temenite Press oil Teatro Antico di Siracusa*, unpublished dissertation
- Freyberger, Klaus S.  
1990 *Stadtromische Kapitelle aus der Zeit von Domitian bis Alexander Severus*, Verlag Phillip von Zabern, Germany
- Orsi, Paolo  
1929 scoperte Archeologiche in Sicilia, extracted from *Notizie Degli Scavi fascicoli 1,2 & 3*, Dott. Giovanni Bardi, Roma
- Pallottino, Massimo  
1940 *Civiltà' Romana: arte figurative e ornamentale*, Casa Editrice Carlo Colombo, Italy
- Schörner, Günther  
1995 *Römische Rankenfreise*, Verlag Phillip von Zabern, Germany
- Tenney, Frank

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<sup>9</sup> Lauter-Bufe, Heide, 1987: *Die Geschichte Des Sikeliotisch-Korinthischen Kapitells*, Philipp von Zabern, Germany and Kahler, H. 1939: *Die Romischen Kapitelle Des Rheingebietes*, verlag von Walter de Gruyter & Co., Berlin

<sup>10</sup> Lauter Bufe 1987: p24, n.34, taf. 17

1924 *Roman Buildings of the republic; an attempt to date them from their materials*, Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome vol. III, American Academy in Rome

- Wilson, RJA  
1996 *La Topografia della Catania Romana. Problemi e prospettive*, in Gentili, Bruno (ed.), *Catania Antica: atti del convegno della S.I.S.A.C. (Catania 23-24 Maggio 1992)*, Istituto Editoriale e Poligrafici Internazionali, Pisa and Rome

As already stated above, sites and Museums were also visited in order to get as much information as possible of the sites and the fragments or architectural decoration found or stored within them. The sites that were visited have already been listed above so they will not be repeated. What can be said in this section is that although numerous pictures were taken from the Cathedral of Catania, Castell' Ursino and the Paolo Orsi Museum, the visits were still somewhat disappointing in the fact that most of the fragments are lying around in the gardens and courtyards of the said sites with no labelling, provenance or dating available (figs. 7 & 8).

### **3.0 Evidence of Sicilian or South Italic influence on Maltese Architectural Fragments**

#### **3.1 General Considerations**

The undersigned has undergone this study with the main aim of tracing any influences that the architectural styles and decorations of Roman Sicily could have had on similar fragments in the Malta. However, one must keep in mind the fact that the two islands still remain distinct from each other and a development that occurs in one of the islands does not necessarily occur in the other.

In fact, one can see clear differences and developments in the use of materials and orders between the two islands. According to Dr. Francesca Trapani who, as already said above, made a similar study for Eastern and Southern Sicily for her *specializzazione*, has found out that with the integration of Sicily under Roman rule all architectural decoration was done almost solely in marble and precious stones. The marbles range from the cheap Proconnesian marble (used in the upper orders of the *scenae* in the theatre of Catania due to lack of monetary resources during the time of construction), to coloured *Breccia*, and

various shades of granite (figs. 14 & 15). The fragments in local limestone and volcanic rock can in fact be counted on a few fingers. There are in fact only one capital and base carved out of volcanic rock in the *Museo Civico* (Castell' Ursino) of Catania and both are of very poor quality (fig. 16). On the other hand, one Early Corinthian capital from Noto and now in the Paolo Orsi Museum is made of local Limestone (figs. 39 & 40). It also seems that once Sicily became to form part of Rome, the Doric order disappears almost immediately to be replaced by Corinthian, and in few cases by Composite.

This pattern does not reflect what was going on in the Maltese Islands. The evidence gathered from the Rabat Domus clearly shows that the elite of the Maltese islands did not easily stop using Globigerina Limestone for marble. Various fragments of architectural decoration in Globigerina Limestone have in fact survived to allow us to say that the unique properties of the Maltese Globigerina Limestone were fully exploited during the first couple of centuries of the Roman domination on Malta. The peristyle of the Rabat Domus and its Doric decoration, dated to the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, is the foremost example for the use of Globigerina Limestone (fig. 12). However one must not forget to mention the fragments of modillion cornice found at Ġnien is-Sultan by T. Żammit in 1909<sup>11</sup> (f24, f25 and f42) (figs. 13, 17 & 18), which are lavishly and crisply decorated in the same local Limestone, and which stylistic considerations and comparisons with a similar fragment from the theatre of Cherchel in Algeria (fig. 19) might place these fragments in the transitional period from Republic to Empire. One must also mention the elegantly carved fragment of a coffered ceiling found at Ta' Ġawhar<sup>12</sup> (f88, f89, f90) (figs. 11 & 20). If the dating given for this fragment in the Museum Annual Report proves to be correct, it could push the use of local stone (although possibly sporadic) all the way up to the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. It thus seems that although Marble started to be imported for architectural projects in the Maltese islands (only Proconnesian marble is attested for) with the beginning of the Empire, local stone was still used at times. Also to consider is the fact that, unlike the almost immediate disappearance of the Doric order in Sicily with the beginning of Roman rule, this Hellenistic order was used in the Maltese islands at least up to the start of the Empire.

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<sup>11</sup> MAR 1909-1910: E7

<sup>12</sup> MAR 1960

Another consideration which must be taken in place is the fact that certain features both in the decorative schemes and in the fragments in general do not always tally in date with those of another place. Regarding Malta and Sicily this is the case of a feature in the Corinthian capitals, this being the circular projection that makes up the top bedding surface onto which the architrave would thus rest. It appears that this feature is relatively early in date and disappears totally by the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD.<sup>13</sup> (fig. 23) However, when one considers the Corinthian capitals in the Maltese islands, they seem to always have the circular projection even though their decorative schemes (although not Sicilian in style) were dated by Dr. F. Trapani to not before the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD and later (figs. 21 & 22). Thus one has to be careful about the fact that dates obtained from comparisons, although being the only clear way of determining the dates of most fragments obtained from unscientific excavations, will only give a base date and that regional differentiation might, and most probably will, occur.

### 3.2 Stylistic Similarities and Differences

Much disappointingly, the research in Catania and Syracuse did not provide any fragments that could hint to any stylistic similarities with Maltese fragments. However, following is a list of the stylistic similarities that could be traced between Malta and these two areas of Sicily. These will be divided into the different members of the classical orders.

#### 3.2.1 Bases

The bases seen in both Malta and Sicily do not provide any great variety. The attic base, with an upper and lower *torus* divided by the concave *scotia* has been the preferred base for the said orders for almost all the time of their use. It varies very little in shape and although it could at times be lavishly decorated, it was most widely used in its plain variety. Since it has been used widely across all the Classical World it is no surprise that numerous examples of attic bases could be found in both the two Sicilian cities (figs. 7, 24 & 25) and Malta (figs. 26 & 27). As one can see, the shape, concavity and convexity of the different mouldings is very similar, as is the deep, sharp cut that clearly distinguishes the fillet above the *scotia* and just below the upper *torus*. However, this cannot be placed as one of the

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<sup>13</sup> Information given by Dr. F. Trapani

features influenced by Sicily as it was widely used in the provinces of Rome. The Maltese examples of bases recorded so far amount to 6 in number (f8, f9, f18, f65, f69 & f87) and, with a couple of exceptions, are all almost identical in shape and size. In Sicily, Attic bases could be seen both in Catania, especially in the Cathedral<sup>14</sup> (fig. 28) and in the Garden of the Museo Regionale Paolo Orsi of Syracuse.

### 3.2.2 Columns

The influence of column types is very difficult to determine since they are very similar to one another. What could be noticed is the fact that there seem to be no Doric columns dated to the period of Roman occupation in Syracuse and Catania. Neither are there any columns of local stone other than marble and breccia. There was only one exception to the latter and this refers to a small shaft of an octagonal column of Limestone now placed in the garden of the Museo Regionale Paolo Orsi (fig. 29), which is surprisingly similar to the octagonal column in the Maltese collection (f50) (figs. 30 & 31). Some reeded columns could also be seen in Catania's Castell' Ursino (fig. 32 & 33). However it is not clear whether the reeding continued along the entire length of the column or whether it stopped around 1/3 up the length as seem to be the case with the 3 fragments in the Maltese collection (f40, f75, and f76). Two of these columns also differ from their Sicilian counterparts in the fact that items f75 and f76 are respectively carved out of Globigerina and Coralline Limestone. (figs. 34, 35 & 36)

Another difference between Malta and the two Sicilian cities are the so-called cigar columns (columns with a pronounced *entasis* in the centre) of which numerous examples are known in Catania but seem to be totally missing in the Maltese context.

### 3.2.3 Capitals

It is among the fragments of this type of architectural member that two clear examples of influences from this area can be traced. These consist of two Corinthian capitals, the artistic influence of which is traced to a type of Sicilian capital dated to around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. The first of these fragments (f45) is in Globigerina and once topped a corner engaged column. It has two crowns of delicately carved 'lettuce-like' (as this type of foliage is known

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<sup>14</sup> Attic bases almost identical to the ones in Maltese collections are mainly seen below the reused columns. Other attic bases can be seen still in situ below the arches dividing the naves of the church. These are much larger in size and are the bases of the original Byzantine Cathedral.



among Italian scholars) acanthus leaves. It is heavily damaged but the stems of two round-sectioned helixes that must have turned sharply towards the centre can still be seen (figs. 37 & 38). It is these lettuce-like leaves and pronounce, straight, round-sectioned helixes that make it characteristically close to the Sicilian type of Corinthian Capital that some examples of which, according to RJA Wilson, could be pushed back to a 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC date<sup>15</sup> (figs. 39 & 40). The Maltese capital can thus be placed among the earliest manifestations of the Corinthian order in the Malta and, depending on whether a 3<sup>rd</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century date is given, could also be cotemporary to the early period of the Rabat Domus. One must also note that this fragment has been included in the study of Lauter Bufe on the Italic (or Sicilian) Corinthian capital).<sup>16</sup>

The second capital is somewhat problematic in that it is carved out of white marble (probably Proconnesian) and thus probably produced in Imperial times rather than during the Republic (f85)(fig. 41). It clearly imitates the Sicilian type of capital and although the foliage is highly damaged, the round-sectioned helixes converging slightly towards the centre are still very recognizable. Although it is plausible that this was a later imitation of an earlier capital, the hypothesis that this fragment could have been imported from Sicily or any other part of Southern Italy at an earlier stage cannot be entirely ruled out since both places made use of marble at much earlier dates than Malta.

Examples of this type of capital are very rare nowadays. The most important of such capitals is the one from Noto and now in the Museo Regionale Paolo Orsi of Syracuse<sup>17</sup> (figs. 39 & 40). The similar features carved in the Limestone out of which this fragment is made and the Maltese examples can be clearly. Another famous capital is the one found in Tindari, a site on the north coast of Sicily.<sup>18</sup> However this fragment is made of terracotta and lacks the characteristic helixes. (fig. 42)

Unfortunately, no other considerable artistic influences could be traced between the remaining Maltese Corinthian capitals and those in Catania and Syracuse. It seems that these followed Asiatic or North African artistic influences.

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<sup>15</sup> Wilson: 18, fig. 13a

<sup>16</sup> Lauter Bufe 1987: p24, n.34, taf. 17

<sup>17</sup> Wilson: 18, fig. 13a & Lauter Bufe1987: taf 16, n. 32

<sup>18</sup> Wilson: 18, fig. 13b & Lauter Bufe1987: taf 9 & 10, n. 27

### 3.2.4 Entablatures

Unfortunately, very few fragments from the different members of the entablature could be studied in Sicily, and even fewer are given representation in books and articles. It was thus very difficult to conduct the necessary stylistic comparisons and no similarities have been identified within the few fragments seen.

## 4.0 Conclusion

As seen above, the results of this study have been relatively disappointing in the fact that very few stylistic similarities could be traced between the fragments studied in Malta and the ones that could be studied in Catania and Syracuse. The two islands being so close to each other, and artistic influence being very pronounced in earlier and even later periods, one would have thought that Sicily could have had a major influence on the styles of architectural decoration in Malta. Even more so since Malta was part of the Sicilian Province and was politically under its direct supervision. However, the fact that so little could be traced from the studied fragments will mean that architectural decoration of Roman Malta owes its styles to some part of the Roman World that still has to be clearly identified. Studies seem to be pointing towards Asia Minor and North Africa but these will have to be confirmed with further studies outside this project.

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Various

1909-1910 and 1960 *Museum Annual Report*, Government Printing Press

## Figures

GENERAL DESCRIPTION		RELATED DOCUMENTATION		PHOTOS	
FORM NO.	2	GIVEN NAME	architrave / frieze		
ITEM NO.	2	ORDER	Corinthian / Composite		
<b>DIMENSIONS</b>			<b>TOP</b>	<b>BOTTOM</b>	
HEIGHT	66.7 CM.	WIDTH/DIAMETER	142		CM.
		THICKNESS	55.4	39	CM.
ARTISTIC INFLUENCE		MATERIAL	Proconnesian marble		
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	Unknown	MATERIAL PROVENANCE	Proconnesus		
TOOL MARKS	yes	<b>TOOL MARKS DESCRIPTION</b>			
PROBABLE PERIOD	Imperial - Post Hadrianic	There are various different tool marks on the surfaces. The bottom surface was worked relatively flat, with only a few scratches left on the surfaces. The top and both sides, on the other hand have anathyrosis bands. The bands of			
APP. DATE	117 onwards A.D.				
<b>STATE OF CONSERVATION</b>					
Complete fragment with only a few chippings, especially in the bottom fascia and rounding of edges.					
<b>DESCRIPTION</b>					
Large block of marble conserving all original surfaces (the back cannot be studied at this stage because the block is currently being stored resting on its back). The heavily decorated front represents the frieze and architrave of a Corinthian or Composite building. The decorative ensemble starting from the top of the fragment is as follows:					
<b>FRIEZE</b>					
- A plain fascia of a height of 5cm running along the top edge of the block. This must have					

**ARCHITECTURAL DECORATION**

Fig. 1  
The General Description sheet on the database

← ⏪ ⏩ →

NEW DELETE **FORM** LIST GLOSSARY

**GENERAL DESCRIPTION** **RELATED DOCUMENTATION** PHOTOS

FORM NO.


LOC. OF DISCOVERY  DATE OF DISCOVERY

CURRENT LOCATION

**NOTES ON DISCOVERY** The provenance of the fragment is unknown. However, Jean Houel has drawn a fragment that is almost identical than this stating that at the time the fragment was at Notabile.


**PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION** - La Sicilia di Jean Houel all'Ermitage, 1989: pp338-9 item number 240


**PREVIOUS DRAWINGS / PICTURES**



**NOTES ON DRAWING**


Sketch of a similar fragment from Abela, Lib2, Not. VI: p220






**NOTES ON DRAWING**


Picture found in T. Ashby, Roman Malta, 1915: p 44






**NOTES ON DRAWING**


Detail of drawing 428 by Houel. The fragment is here shown with item f58 placed on top of it





**NOTES ON DRAWING**

The fragment as shown in Bonanno, 1992, Roman Malta, plate 12 & no 158 no 12



**ARCHITECTURAL DECORATION**

Fig. 2  
The Related Documentation sheet on the database



FORM NO. 
 ITEM NO. 
 TAKEN BY

PHOTOS









	
FILE NAME <input type="text" value="f2.1"/>	FILE NAME <input type="text" value="f2.2"/>
	
FILE NAME <input type="text" value="f2.4"/>	FILE NAME <input type="text" value="f2.5"/>
	
FILE NAME <input type="text" value="f2.6"/>	FILE NAME <input type="text" value="f2.7"/>
	
FILE NAME <input type="text" value="f2.9"/>	FILE NAME <input type="text" value="f2.11"/>

Fig. 3  
The Photos sheet on the database



Fig. 4  
Three capitals closely packed together in the store of the Maritime Museum



Fig. 5  
One of the fragments at the Maritime Museum covered with wood and other objects



Fig. 6  
Part of the display at the Rabat Domus



Fig. 7  
Fragments lying around in the garden of the Museo Regionale Paolo Orsi in Syracuse





Fig. 8  
Stacked architectural fragments in the yard of the Museo Civico of Castell' Ursino in Catania



Fig. 9  
The Theatre of Catania



Fig. 10  
Two reused bases, columns and Corinthian capitals flanking one of the chapels in the Catania Cathedral

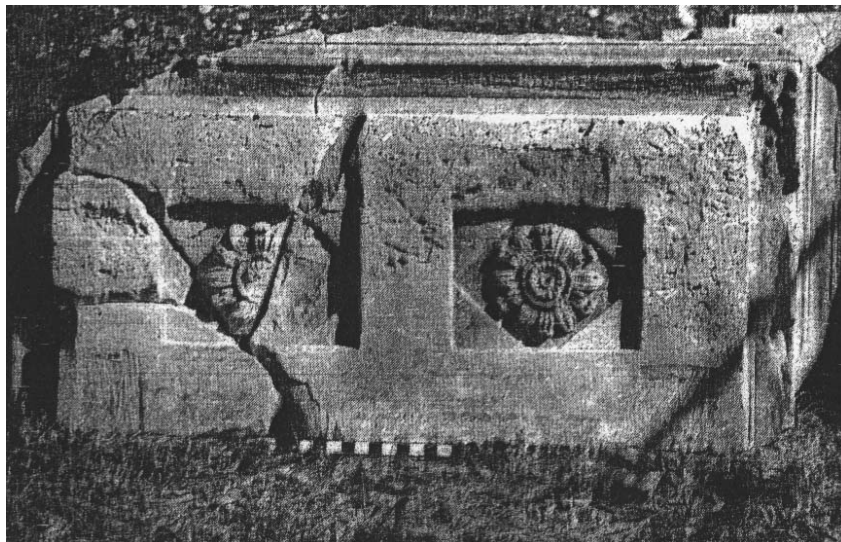


Fig. 11  
The fragment from Ta' Gawhar soon after discovery  
(MAR 1960)





Fig. 12  
The peristyle of the Rabat Domus with its reconstructed Doric order  
(Photo courtesy of Mr. Daniel Cilia)



Fig. 13  
One of the fragments discovered at G'nien is-Sultan, Rabat



Fig. 14  
A repaired column of *breccia* at the theatre of Catania





Fig. 15  
A column of granite at the theatre of Catania



Fig. 16  
The base and capital of volcanic rock at Castell' Ursino



Fig. 17  
Detail of the decoration of one of the fragments from Ġnien is-Sultan



Fig. 18  
Detail of another fragment from Ġnien is-Sultan



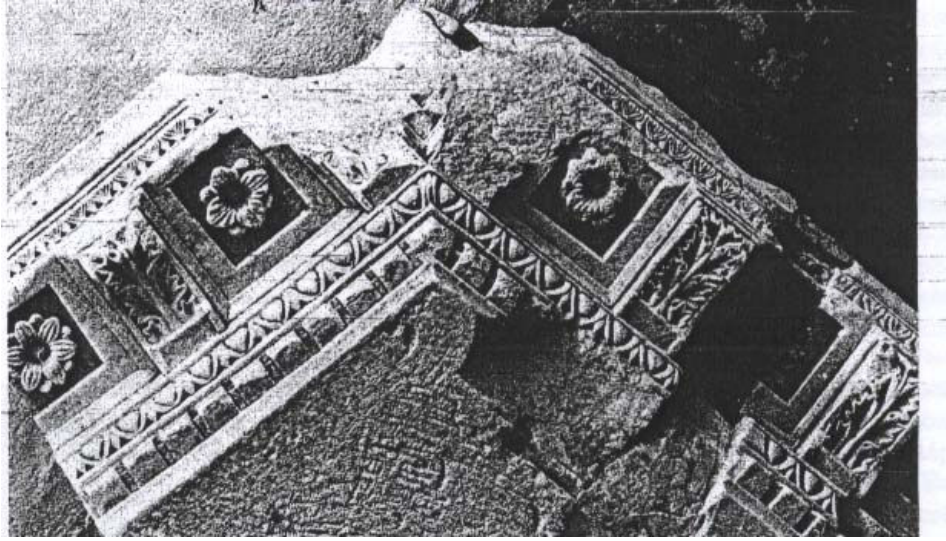


Fig. 19  
A fragment from the theatre of Cherchel, Algeria, very similar to those of Ġnien is-Sultan  
(Gros 2001: 493 fig. 604)



Fig. 20  
Detail of the decoration of the fragment from Ta' Ġawhar



Fig. 21  
Circular projection on the top bed of fragment f45



Fig. 22  
Circular projection on the top bed of item f72





Fig. 23  
Top bed of a Corinthian capital in Catania without circular projection



Fig. 24  
One of the reused attic bases in the cathedral of Catania



Fig. 25  
Attic base in the garden of the Museo Regionale Paolo Orsi, Syracuse



Fig. 26  
Example of an attic base from the collection of Heritage Malta (f9)



Fig. 27  
Example of an attic base from the collection of Heritage Malta (f18)



Fig. 28  
One of the Byzantine attic bases uncovered in the Cathedral of Catania





Fig. 29  
Octagonal column in Syracuse



Fig. 30  
Section of the octagonal column in the collection of Heritage Malta (f50)



Fig. 31  
Front view of the octagonal column in the collection of Heritage Malta (f50)



Fig. 32  
Fragment of a reeded column shaft at Castell' Ursino

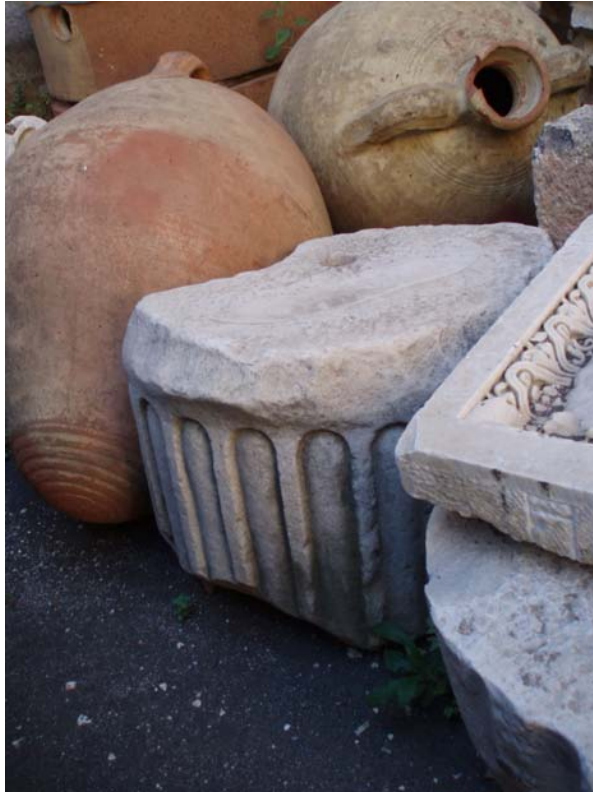


Fig. 33  
Fragment of a reeded column shaft at Castell' Ursino



Fig. 34  
Reeded column on display at the Rabat Domus



Fig. 35  
Fragment of a reeded column shaft of Globigerina Limestone



Fig. 36  
Fragment of a reeded column shaft of Coralline Limestone





Fig. 37  
The Corinthian capital of Sicilian influence on display at the Rabat Domus (f 45)



Fig. 38  
Detail of the foliage adorning the capital (f45)





Fig. 39  
The Corinthian capital of Sicilian type from Noto  
(Wilson: 18, fig. 13a)



Fig. 40  
The same capital from Noto  
(Lauter Bufe 1987: taf. 16, n. 32)



Fig. 41  
Marble Corinthian capital from Malta imitating those of Sicilian influence (f85)



Fig. 42  
Terracotta Capital from Tindari  
(Lauter Bufe 1987: taf 9, n. 27)