Introduction
A. Bonanno, P. Militello

Island cultures tend to be insular but are rarely, if ever, isolated. Unique cultural manifestations, like the Maltese temple culture, stand a better chance of emerging and developing in an insular context, but that does not mean that they cannot emerge and reach their climax in a broader continental, or mainland, context. Witness the cultures that produced the rock art around Mont Bego in the French Maritime Alps and in Valcamonica, not to mention the Great Zimbabwe culture.

Against that background, recent research on the Mediterranean islands has shown that they have dynamic histories, some more than others. Recent works have highlighted the fact that island societies have often been able to structure and maintain distinctive identities, probably abetted by their insularity, without however, being really isolated.

At different times over several millennia, the proximity of Sicily and the Maltese Islands stimulated political, economic and cultural trajectories that defied geographical constraints of winds and sea currents, and anthropogenic trading and political patterns. Material culture, commercial and political interests, seafaring, cartography, and travelogues – all have shown to be components in the construction of island landscapes and seascapes. This K.A.S.A. seminar was designed to explore ways in which humans have perceived, defined and constructed the Maltese Islands over time, with reference to its close neighbour, the large island of Sicily.

The first five of the six papers published in this volume take up these common cultural trajectories across time from the earliest human presence on Malta, the Neolithic, through Classical and Byzantine times and down to the early Middle ages. The last paper reviews the interest among 17th-18th century travellers from the north who extended the Grand Tour to include the islands beyond the

southern extremities of the Italian peninsula.

Massimo **Cultraro** very appropriately opens the theme of the Siculo-Maltese cultural relations with a discussion of parallel developments on the two islands in the period which on the continent would correspond to the transition from the late Neolithic to the Eneolithic, or Copper Age (that is, from c. 4100 to c. 2500 BC), based on material culture, more precisely, pottery. He investigates new data found in Sicily and compares them with others from contemporary cultures of the south-western Balkans and north-western Greece. He focuses on the Zebbug pottery and related assemblages outside the Maltese islands. Cultraro identifies parallel developments and more intensive interaction between Malta and Sicily at this stage: the beginning of ritualisation in Malta which would escalate progressively into the temple culture, and changes in the economic and social structure in Sicily, perhaps related to growing competition, social tensions and insecurity.

With Pascal **Arnaud**'s paper we explore the network of sea trade routes in Classical times, from about the 4th century BC to the 4th century AD. It highlights the changing sea-faring patterns resulting from constraints imposed by changing thalassocracies and consequent trading patterns. It identifies the *longue durée* geographical set-up of the three individual islands (Malta, Pantelleria and Marettimo) and follows their separate changing roles with the changing geo-political scenarios. The conclusion is that there is no such thing as an islandscape that is common to the three islands. “Their evolution seems to be significantly more linked with their position along certain sea-routes rather than with them being islands.” Of these three, Malta and Pantelleria had their respective specialized items of export (linen from the former, Pantellerian Ware from the latter) encouraging transhipment, while Marettimo might have remained nothing more than a landmark or, at most, a mooring place along the routes.

Taking as her point of departure a statement by Sabatino Moscati during a 1976 conference on the state of research of Phoenician and Punic Malta, Rossana **De Simone** touches a number of issues relating to Punic archaeology in the western Mediterranean to test the ground as to how far things have changed since that statement in the light of the increased body of knowledge. Rightly enough, she asks about the role of women in the colonization process of the western Phoenician settlements. The number of first generation women must have been small. To them women of different ethnic origin were added in stages afterwards. Along the way she highlights the absence in Malta of stelai that are so prominent in Motya, Carthage and Sardinia in spite of the presence of the cult of the *molk* testified by the two inscriptions on *cippi* (CIS I 123 & 123a).

The world of the medical profession in Roman antiquity is opened up for us by Margherita **Cassia** who discusses a funerary inscription reputedly found in Gozo in the 18th century and commemorating Domestikos, an early Christian medical doctor. The fact that his name is Roman and the epitaph is in Greek suggests a bilingual culture in Malta in Late Antiquity. Besides referring to other occurrences of the name Domestikos the author brings up another ancient monument alluding to the medical profession, the grave stone with surgical instruments carved in relief from a tomb under the Rabat Secondary School. She discusses the list of medical doctors (four dated to the 1st century BC and twelve others in Imperial times) documented by Roman epigraphy in Sicily with which Malta had close administrative and (later) ecclesiastical connections. Since the two symbols on the seventh line of the inscription have been generally interpreted as surgical instruments, suggesting that Domestikos was a surgeon, Cassia discusses the fortune or reputation (good or bad) enjoyed by surgeons, as opposed to non-surgeon medics and the rehabilitation process in Late Antiquity resulting from the 'Christianisation' of the figure of the surgeon.

Maurici's paper starts off with a reality that might come as a surprise to many of us, namely, that the islands around Sicily, apart from Malta, Gozo, Lipari and Pantelleria, were virtually all inhabited (at least frequented) in Roman times whereas only the more important ones were so from Norman times to the 16th century. In some ways, this confirms Arnaud's observations referred to above on the historical vagaries of islandscapes. This depopulation occurred mostly during or immediately after the Muslim invasion which occurred at different dates.

The network of scholars, or men of letters, from northwest Europe in search of information from travellers to far away regions later to be incorporated within the Grand Tour, appears much thicker than previously apparent. This historical reality comes forth in Thomas **Freller**'s contribution to this publication. We thus find out that many writers were commissioning friends and acquaintances to obtain information through first-hand experiences of travellers.

Many of G.F. Abela's list of contemporary 17th century writers cited in his work become thus real people of flesh and blood with whom he came in contact, directly or through acquaintances, rather than mere names of authors of consulted books. The same is the case of his 18th century successor G.A. Ciantar who revised and augmented his scholarly work on Malta. But the personality that looms greatest in the list of travellers to this part of the Mediterranean world is by far Jean Hoüel who anticipates the encyclopaedic spirit of enlightenment of the aftermath of the French Revolution. Maltese archaeology and antiquarianism owes him a lot.

Thomas Freller has shown over the last twenty years or so how rich and fertile this field of research is, not only for shedding new light on these remotest destinations of the Grand Tour in the central Mediterranean but also for revealing the spirit of its times. His paper brings a whole cycle that started with prehistory to a close with the end of the 18th century which, in Malta's case, corresponds with the end of one era (the Knights period) and the start of another (the British period).