

TARXIEN, XAGHRA CIRCLE AND TAS-SILG. OCCUPATION AND RE-USE OF TEMPLE SITES IN THE EARLY BRONZE AGE

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Introduction

This paper was originally inspired by the apparent striking similarity in the stratigraphic sequence of two outstanding prehistoric archaeological sites discovered and excavated at an interval of almost eighty years: the Tarxien Temples, excavated by Themistocles Zammit in the years 1915-1919 (Zammit 1930), and the Xaghra Circle, investigated by an Anglo-Maltese research team on the sister island of Gozo between 1987 and 1994 (Bonanno *et al.* 1990; Stoddart *et al.* 1993; Malone *et al.* 1993). Interest in this parallelism was heightened by even more recent developments in the investigation of a sector of the site of Tas-Silg conducted by the Department of Classics and Archaeology of the University of Malta (Frendo & Bonanno 1997). The relationship between the two major horizons identified at Tarxien, representing two subsequent periods and cultures of Maltese prehistory, and its parallel occurrence at the Xaghra Circle (now emerging also at Tas-Silg), call for a re-examination of the chronological context of a handful of objects recovered from Tarxien. Their new dating is suggested in the light of the chronological upheavals and new patterns of cultural diffusion (or non-diffusion) in European and Mediterranean prehistory brought about by the radiocarbon and dendrochronology revolution (Renfrew 1972, 1973).

The Xaghra Circle

The Xaghra Circle is situated on the outskirts of the village of Xaghra in Gozo, the smaller of the two major islands of the Maltese archipelago. It lies approximately 300m to the west of the much better known Ggantija Temples. It is currently better known as the 'Brochtorff Circle,' because it figures in two of a series of watercolours painted by Charles de Brochtorff while the Ggantija Temples

were being 'excavated' in the early 1820s (Brochtorff 1849). One of these watercolours shows a circular wall of megaliths circumscribing a field with a huge gaping hole freshly dug up in its centre. Inside the hole stand huge trilithic structures typical of the Maltese Temple architecture, while a man is seen coming out from inside a cave carrying a human skull in his left hand. The as yet unexcavated Circle had already been depicted in one of the lithographs drawn by the French visitor Jean Houel to illustrate his monumental work, the *Voyage Pittoresque des Iles de Sicile, de Malte e de Lipari* (1787).

A comparison between the state of preservation of the prehistoric monument as it appeared in 1787 and 1827 and the present one, shows clearly that it has since then been stripped of all but three of the standing megaliths that originally formed an almost perfectly circular boundary wall. One of the megaliths has been incorporated in the wall of a farmhouse built at the edge of the site, while two others mark the circle on the opposite end. A modern dry stone field wall has replaced the original megaliths and the circular shape of the field stands out clearly from the predominantly rectilinear layout of the surrounding fields, both in the aerial photographs and in the 1:2500 Survey Maps. There was, therefore, very little doubt that this odd topographical feature was the same one illustrated by Houel and Brochtorff.

Attention to the site and to its probable identification with the circle illustrated in Houel and Brochtorff had already been attracted by Mr Joseph Attard Tabone of Xaghra, but it was in the aftermath of the conference on *Archaeology and Fertility Cult in the Ancient Mediterranean* held at the University of Malta in September 1985 that, mostly at the insistence of Mr Attard Tabone, a joint exploratory mission

was set up between the University of Cambridge, the University of Malta and the Museums Department of Malta, with the express purpose of investigating this site and possibly others. Scientific excavations have been undertaken regularly on the site every summer between 1987 and 1994, with very rewarding results. The identification of the field with the circle illustrated by Brochtorff was confirmed in a concrete way and the enormous hole dug in it in the early 1820s, now labelled 'Bayer Pit' after the lieutenant governor of Gozo who had ordered its 'excavation', was re-excavated and isolated from the remaining uncontaminated levels.

In direct contrast to the Ggantija temples a short distance away, but probably complementing them for the religious needs of their builders, the Circle had an exclusively funerary purpose. It consisted of a series of spacious natural underground caves and man-made rock-cut tombs, surrounded at some stage by a circle of upright megaliths with a monumental entrance facing the Ggantija temples to the east (Bonanno *et al.* 1990: 193-5). The roofs of most of the caves had collapsed in antiquity and had to be removed to permit proper and safe excavation of an extensive area of the underground cemetery; the rest of the caves were considered too fragile to warrant an extension of the excavation at this stage. A couple of smaller rock-cut tombs served by a common access shaft showed that the site was being used for collective burial already in the *Zebbug* phase (4000-3800 BC), the first phase of the Temple Period (4000-2500 BC) (Malone *et al.* 1995). A number of 'bone pits' were also investigated, containing deposits of human bones, many covered with red ochre, and belonging to the last phase of the Temple Period, namely *Tarxien* (3000- 2500 BC) (Stoddart *et al.* 1993).

What interests us for the purpose of the present discussion is the fact that this enclosed area was also made use of by the *Tarxien Cemetery* people of the following period (2500-1500 BC), thus providing an important parallel to a similar re-utilisation of the *Tarxien* Temples by the earliest Bronze Age inhabitants of Malta.

The major difference is that, whereas at *Tarxien* a ruined temple structure was turned into a cremation cemetery, thus protracting the sacrality of the structure, at the *Xaghra Circle* the collective inhumation cemetery of the Temple Period was turned into something completely different.

The *Tarxien Cemetery* presence at the *Xaghra Circle* consists mainly of an archaeological layer covering a good part of the whole area but mostly concentrated towards the east side and containing a reasonable amount of typical *Tarxien Cemetery* pottery, including three fragments of characteristic discoid figurines like the ones found at *Tarxien*, as well as a thick layer of dark grey, powdery material concentrated in a limited area in the north part of the Circle. In the first instance the layer seemed to fit with the description given by Zammit of the ashy *Tarxien Cemetery* layer he identified at *Tarxien* (1930); but, whereas at *Tarxien* that layer was characterised by scores of cinerary urns containing cremated human remains mixed with loose components of personal ornaments, like necklaces, and a few terracotta figurines, the corresponding layer at the *Xaghra Circle* contained only a few loose fragments of bone and a scatter of equally fragmentary *Tarxien Cemetery* pottery. The bone turned out to be animal, the result of domestic refuse since the grey layer, after a microscopic examination, has been identified to be a silty clay derived from the Blue Clay geological formation, possibly imported to the site as waterproofing material (*pers. comm.* Chris O. Hunt).

The Tas-Silg Sanctuary

Before 1963 *Tas-Silg* consisted of a number of small fields forming the crest of a prominent hill, separated by the *Zejtun-Delimara* road and overlooking the small church of Our Lady of the Snows (*Madonna Tas-Silg*) and the bay of *Marsaxlokk*. It was one of three sites selected for intensive, and extensive, excavation by the *Missione Italiana* from the University of Rome, which was mainly intended to explore the then still virgin territory of the Phoenician-Punic period of the Maltese islands. Excavation

campaigns were conducted annually from 1963 to 1970, followed punctually by detailed and lavishly illustrated preliminary reports (Missione 1964-73). One of the unexpected - but not ungratifying - discoveries of the very first excavation campaigns was the presence of the remains of a *Tarxien* phase megalithic temple which seems to have formed the first religious nucleus on which a Phoenician temple was modelled (Ciasca 1976-77) and which eventually expanded into a full-scale sanctuary in Hellenistic and Roman times (Missione 1964-73: *passim*).

The excavations at Tas-Silg revealed ample evidence for a late Bronze Age (that is, *Borg in-Nadur* and *Bahrija* phases) re-occupation of the site. What was not identified was the nature of this re-occupation, most importantly, whether it was a religious complex - which would have given confirmation to the perceived continuity of the religious function of the site - or whether it was merely a village settlement, for which the site has the ideal topographic features (Brusasco 1993: 14-5). What appeared to be the most important missing link for this hypothetical continuity, however, was an early Bronze Age presence, corresponding to the *Tarxien Cemetery* phase.¹ What had happened between the abandonment of the megalithic temple (c. 2500 BC) and its re-occupation by the *Borg in-Nadur* people (1500-700 BC)? This constitutes a remarkable hiatus of 1,000 years for which the excavators found absolutely no trace (Missione 1964-73: *passim*; Brusasco 1993: 18, note 13). The gap seemed to be so incomprehensible that a ghost *Tarxien Cemetery* presence was recently proposed, albeit without the supporting evidence (Frendo 1995: 115-8). This intuition has been proved correct by the most recent discoveries.

The Department of Classics and Archaeology of the University of Malta has been conducting short excavation campaigns at Tas-Silg every year since

¹ The most forceful rejection of the continuity of cult at Tas-Silg, and of the assimilation of the prehistoric deity worshipped therein with the goddess Astarte of the Phoenician-Punic temple, resulting from this long temporal hiatus, is made by Vidal Gonzales (1996: 100-101; 1998: 42).

the summer of 1996. These excavations are limited to the unexcavated areas in the section of the site to the south of the Zejtun-Delimara road, just outside the structures of the sanctuary itself. They are intended to supplement and complement the corpus of knowledge already acquired from the old excavations, by new data of a stratigraphic and scientific nature. Two finds have been made in the summer campaign of 1998 which finally break the silence and provide evidence for a *Tarxien Cemetery* phase, opening up new hopes for a better understanding of the unfolding of the history of this important site.²

The first is a fragment of a *Tarxien Cemetery* pot discovered in Stratigraphic Unit 220 in Area A. The latter consists of a trench which is currently in the process of being excavated on the west side of the artificial platform which was raised in order to support the sanctuary structure on the south side, overlooking the steep slope towards the Marsaxlokk Harbour. The fragment carries the unmistakable incised geometric decoration, consisting of alternating hatched and plain lozenges, highlighted with white paste, typical of the decorated *Tarxien Cemetery* ware. It probably belonged to a bowl, handleless beaker, or jug like the ones with similar incised decoration from *Tarxien Cemetery* (Evans 1971: plates 52,14; 53, 10 & 15). Although the fragment is residual, occurring in a much later stratigraphic context, characterised by predominantly late-Punic/Hellenistic pottery (3rd-1st centuries BC), its presence on the site is very significant in the light of the absence noted above. It also prompts the new excavators to keep their eyes wide-open for more evidence for an early Bronze Age occupation of the site.

The second pottery fragment comes from Stratigraphic Unit 2066³ in Area C which is a trench cut in the central part of the

² This is intended only as an initial notice of this discovery, in view of its compelling relevance to the subject of this paper. In preparation is a proper and fuller account, which is to be included in the official report of the last three campaigns of excavation.

³ Stratigraphic Unit 2066 is currently thought to be an extension towards the north of 2061, inside which the third fragment was found.

south section, on the semicircular spur of the same artificial platform. It is also part of the wall of a pot of the same shape and decoration scheme as the previous sherd but the incised decoration is slightly fainter and preserves much less of the white paste fill. Even this fragment is residual, coming from a stratigraphic context which is characterised by pottery datable to the Hellenistic age. No doubt, this second fragment strengthens the significance of the first fragment in favour of a *Tarxien Cemetery* presence on the site and against any argument of the odd, solitary and fortuitous find.

A third pottery fragment, coming from the same stratigraphic context,⁴ is somewhat less clearly *Tarxien Cemetery* and enters into the question of the break or continuity between *Tarxien* and *Tarxien Cemetery*, that is, between the Temple period and the following Early Bronze Age in Maltese prehistory (Bonanno 1993). It is a fragment of a tronco-conic bowl, or shallow cup on high foot, with thickened rim decorated both on the outside and on the inside with incised dot-filled triangles alternating with plain ones. Traces of white paste highlight the decoration. It belongs to a class of imported pottery currently known as "Grey Ware" or "Thermi Ware". Fragments of similar tronco-conic bowls were found both at *Tarxien* and *Skorba*, some in clearly *Tarxien* contexts (Trump 1966: 46; Evans 1971: 151-2). A complete footed bowl of the same ware was found in the soil behind the hollow altar facing the main entrance inside the westernmost temple at *Tarxien* (Evans 1971: 152). The main problem about this ware is that, whereas specimens of it were unearthed at Castelluccio, an Early Bronze Age settlement site near Syracuse which is largely contemporaneous with the *Tarxien Cemetery* phase in Malta, sherds of the same ware in Malta have been found both in *Tarxien* and *Tarxien Cemetery* contexts. This problem is discussed more fully in the second part of this paper.

The Tarxien Temples

Unlike the other contemporary megalithic temples (such as Hagar Qim, Mnajdra,

and Ggantija) the *Tarxien* temples were not visible above the ground before excavation, not even partially, and have thus escaped the attention of the perpetrators of the unscientific and improperly documented clearance operations of the better preserved temples in the 19th century. They were accidentally discovered in 1913 and regularly excavated between 1915 and 1919 by the Maltese archaeologist Themistocles Zammit to the highest scientific standards obtaining at the time (Zammit 1930).


The *Tarxien* site occupies a place of immense importance in Maltese archaeology not only for the rich quantity of stratified material it yielded, including specimens of prehistoric art of the finest quality, but also because, when it was discovered, it provided the first instance of a prehistoric site which was clearly used for different purposes by the peoples of two different ages. It was clear to Zammit, and eventually to all who worked in his footsteps on Maltese archaeology, that after the construction and use of the megalithic building as a place of worship for hundreds of years (c. 3000-2500 BC) - possibly combined with another role of a more secular nature, like that of a depot for the collection and redistribution of surplus produce (Bonanno 1996: 104) - with the collapse and disappearance of the Temple people the same buildings were abandoned, to be made use of again, this time for an incineration cemetery, by a successive people of foreign origin, the *Tarxien Cemetery* folk (2500-1500 BC).

Up to the time of Evans' publication of his account of Malta's prehistory in the late fifties (Evans 1959; Bernabò Brea 1960), there appeared to be little doubt that the efflorescence of the Maltese Temple culture was dependent on stimuli coming from the Bronze Age cultures of the Aegean, and that all the material finds from the *Tarxien* site could be explained in that chronological and diffusionistic framework. With the excavations of another as yet unexplored site, the *Skorba* complex, by David Trump in the early sixties, in particular as a result of the radiocarbon analysis of a series of carbon samples from well defined horizons in that site, the chronological parameters of


⁴ See note 3.


the Temple Period were moved back by several centuries, and they started to be designated as the Maltese 'Copper Age' (Trump 1966). The new chronology was accepted (not without some reservations) and reproduced by Evans in his monumental survey of Maltese prehistoric antiquities (Evans 1971). Soon after, with the application of the dendrochronology calibrations to the radiocarbon dates it became evident that there could be no dependence of the Temple culture on the Aegean Bronze Age ones (Renfrew 1972, 1973).

In the light of this crucial development in prehistoric studies, a few objects from the Tarxien site, which till then fitted more or less comfortably within the Temple Period and have since been exhibited along with the other remains of that period at the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta,⁵ now appear to fit more within the context of the first phase of the following age, namely the *Tarxien Cemetery* horizon. This is because they carry characteristics and attributes identical to ones belonging to the Bronze Age of the Mediterranean area, in particular the Sicilian and Aegean ones. A study of the stratigraphic context of the provenance of these objects has been undertaken in order to see whether they corroborate this view or not.

The first of these objects is an oval pebble pendant with a biconical hole drilled at the side near the apex (T/S.8: Evans 1959: plate 84; 1971: plate 47, 6). The peculiar feature of this object is a mark in the shape of a flat-topped M  engraved on one of the flat surfaces. Although assigned by Zammit to the 'Stone Age Layer' (Zammit 1930: 92-3, plate XXIII, 7) it was found in 1927 (that is, ten years after his excavation) "in the debris behind the niche in the Chamber E" (Zammit 1930: 92; Evans 1971: 145). In his report submitted to *Archaeologia* in 1917, however, he describes how he had found fragments of bone and horn-cores "packed near the bottom" in the fill between the niche and the rubble wall at the back of the west temple (Zammit 1917: 265; Evans 1971:

123-4), which means that this space had already been cleared in 1917. Although no further details are given of the stratigraphic context of the find I strongly suspect that it was not within a Temple Period one. Indeed, in his account of his activities at Tarxien in the Museum Report for 1927, Zammit describes in detail the object itself, while limiting the information on its find-spot to the "clearing of corners and patches covered with soil" (M.A.R. 1927-28: 4-5).

A similar symbol, but with all three vertical lines perpendicular to the horizontal one , is engraved on a sherd (T/P.315: Evans 1959: plate 85; 1971: plate 47.6). Although the sherd looks typical of the *Tarxien* fine ware the symbol, which was clearly scratched after firing, could well have been incised on the sherd (or on the pot of which it made part) at a later stage, namely during the *Tarxien Cemetery* stage.⁶ This, however, cannot be confirmed, as we are not given its precise stratigraphic context by Zammit.






The most curious object bearing the same type of engraved symbol  is a dark green cylindrical stone bead with a highly polished surface (H. 1.3cm; Diam. 1.5cm). The symbol is, again, slightly different since the vertical lines are positioned obliquely in relation to the horizontal line. The bead has other linear designs incised on its round surface,⁷ all of which being inlaid with gold. Three small gemstones, of which only one (red in colour) remains, were inserted in round holes at the centre of three of these designs (Evans 1959: pl.

⁶ One wonders whether this sherd will ever be found to qualify as a "token" like the ones which are currently being identified as forming a system of computation or memorisation which appears to be documented in central and eastern Mediterranean sites connected with the Mycenaean commercial routes (Marazzi 1996). Similar tokens have been traced in Malta which figure in their distribution map (Marazzi 1995: 169, fig. 12). None of the known ones carry signs like that on the Maltese sherd which, moreover, does not have a regular geometric shape as these "tokens" have. An almost identical sign to the one on this sherd is, on the other hand, incised on a circular ivory pendant "from the sixth city of Troy" (Saherwala *et al.* 1993: 127-8, fig. 29).

⁷ One of which has only two vertical lines positioned obliquely under the horizontal line, like a Greek pi (π).

⁵ Including the present set-up, which was put in place in 1998.

84; 1971: plate 51, 10). Again its assignment to the Tarxien section in the National Museum and to a *Tarxien* context in Evans' catalogue (Evans 1971: 145: no. T/S.53) appears to be somewhat arbitrary since the bead is reported to have been found in the "soil in the east field in 1918". Zammit's account of his excavation of the eastern temple and its surroundings suggests heavy disturbance and contamination in that area in post-Temple times (M.A.R. 1917-1918-1919; Evans 1971: 134-5). In fact, Evans (*ibid*: 134, note 1) concludes that an ashy layer, appearing in Zammit's field notebooks for the eastern field, covered most of the area and contained most of the archaeological material found there.

Of course, the significant feature in all three objects is the  sign which has very close parallels in both Linear A of Crete, as observed by Evans (1959: 164), and Linear B of Knossos and Pylos. Professor Celestina Milani, on being consulted for her views on the matter, identified close connections between the signs on the pebble and on the cylindrical bead, on the one hand, and the Linear A sign  (Brice 1961: IV 3 a 1) and that for *du* (Gordon 1966: plate VI), on the other; and between the sign on the sherd and the sign  of Linear A; she saw no connection, however, with signs of Linear B or Classical Cypriot script (*pers. comm.* Celestina Milani). The closest parallels I have been able to trace in the latter are the sign for the syllable 'di', written, however, with a vertical appendix beneath , and the sign for the syllable 'pu'  (Pugliese Carratelli 1964: 166-7, nos. 7 and 50; Chadwick *et al.* 1971: 470). Whereas spirals and other decoration patterns can easily appear in cultures separated from each other in space and time - with different or, possibly, similar symbolism - I feel that this sign is too encoded, too much of a cipher, to be explained in a similar way, and its origin in the Aegean area is more than likely.

The fourth object under study is a fragmentary bone plaque with bossed projections on the upper surface, which belongs to a well known and well documented class of Bronze Age funerary objects known as 'bone bossed plaques'

(*ossi a globuli*). At Tarxien the Maltese plaque was found in an "ashy layer at the entrance to [room] 30, 1918" (T/B.1: Zammit 1930: plate xxv. 2; Evans 1971: 148, fig. 50), the same ashy layer, in fact, referred to above (Evans 1971: 134, note 1).⁸ For this reason, it is difficult to understand why it has been consistently associated with the *Tarxien* layer rather than with the *Tarxien Cemetery* one.⁹ Even Sebastiano Tusa feels uncomfortable in proposing the Maltese bossed plaque as a proof of Maltese inspiration towards the formation of a still dubious Sicilian megalithism, admitting that the second millennium (the date of the plaques) is posterior to that of the flowering of the Maltese temples (Tusa 1991: 272-3).

Already at the beginning of the 20th century, the German scholar Albert Mayr had established the connection between the Tarxien plaque (which he mistakenly recognized as ivory)¹⁰ and several others found on such sites in Sicily as Castelluccio and Grotta Lazzaro (Mayr 1926: 367). Now, there seems to be little doubt that the bossed bone plaques, whose feminine symbolism was proposed by Evans (1956), were manufactured in Sicily, but their ultimate origin is likely to be in the Aegean area (Sluga Messina 1983: 156-60). As many as twenty specimens of different typology are of Sicilian provenance (Spigo 1984-85: 874-5; Procelli 1991: 254, note 7, with previous bibliography). Outside Sicily, besides the Maltese specimen, others have been found in Altamura (Puglia), Lerna and as many as four examples in Troy (bibliography in Procelli 1991: note 8). It is to be kept in mind that while western Sicily was, in the Bronze Age, more projected culturally towards Europe and the western Mediterranean through close contacts

⁸ In another place Zammit groups the "ivory object ... with five round bosses cut in relief" with "bone spatulae" which he had just mentioned as coming "from under a broken slab behind the statue" (M.A.R. 1917-1918-1919: 9). Since other bone objects from other contexts are grouped under the same heading, however, it cannot be argued that the bossed plaque came from this particular find spot.

⁹ See all previous references and, more recently, Castaldi 1996: 279.

¹⁰ Probably following the designation given by Zammit (M.A.R. 1917-1918-1919: 9).

Mediterranean through close contacts with Sardinia and Italy (the Bell Beaker culture), eastern Sicily remained attached to the eastern Mediterranean, embracing a culture which had its epicentre in the Aegean and western Anatolia.

The Sicilian monumental tombs of the Castelluccio culture, with pilasters (or pseudo-pilasters) or with stone constructed facades, as well as their spiral reliefs, have been connected on several occasions with the megalithic temple and collective burial traditions of Malta (Mayr 1926: 367; Bernabò Brea 1976-77: 87-90). The flow of ideas is taken to be from the "contemporary cultures of Malta", both the last phases of the Temple Period and the *Tarxien Cemetery* one, to that of Castelluccio in Sicily (Procelli 1991: 260). If this is the case, we are presented with a continuity, an overlap, between the two Maltese cultures (the Temple culture and the *Tarxien Cemetery* one) which does not appear to be at all evident in Malta itself, even though an attempt has been made to propose the possibility of such a continuity (Bonanno *et al.* 1990: 202-3), the present writer having expressed serious reservations on the matter (*ibid.*: 202; Bonanno 1993).

It would also be of interest to investigate and identify the role played by Sicily in the traffic of ideas between Malta and Sardinia, especially in the relationship between the latter two islands with respect to the close similarities in the megalithic architecture (Lilliu 1970) and in some iconographic forms (Atzeni 1978) as well as in pottery forms and decoration (Bray 1963), which I have already tried to explain as a result of a transfer of a *Tarxien* group of people to Sardinia following the collapse of the Temple culture in Malta (Bonanno 1986: 40-1). Any such connection between the Maltese Temple culture and the *Ozieri* culture in Sardinia, however, seems to have to be ruled out on the basis of recent radiocarbon datings for the two cultures (Trump 1997: 176).¹¹

¹¹ Trump suggests a possible link, however, with Sardinia through some thickened lip bowls found there in late Beaker contexts. On this kind of pottery, see *infra*.

Furthermore, a clay statuette found in the *Tarxien Cemetery* layer at Tarxien has the same burnished red surface, and the same type of triangular projections indicating arms, as in a number of similar statuettes of the Castelluccio culture from Monte San Giuliano (Caltanissetta) in Sicily which have been compared to similar figurines from the central and eastern Mediterranean (Orlandini 1968: 58). Besides, fragmentary disc-idols coming from Catania-Barriera and Manfria in Sicily have been described by Bernabò Brea as Sicilian reproductions of the disc-idols from the *Tarxien Cemetery* in Malta (Bernabò Brea 1976-7: 57-8, note 1). At least three fragments of similar disc-idols were retrieved from the *Tarxien Cemetery* layer at the Xaghra Circle, thus suggesting that they were not necessarily, certainly not exclusively, connected with funerary rituals.

The association of the pottery and other material found in the *Tarxien Cemetery* horizon with *Castelluccio* (Bernabò Brea 1976-7; Procelli 1991: 252, note 2; Tusa 1991: 273) seemed for a time to suggest that the calibrated radiocarbon date of 2500 BC for the end of the Temple period and the beginning of the *Tarxien Cemetery* phase might be too high and should, perhaps, be lowered to around 2200-2000 BC. Again, however, confirmation for this date has been derived from radiocarbon analyses of samples from the Xaghra Circle (Trump 1997: 176). Accordingly, numerous radiocarbon determinations from the *Castelluccio* occupation of La Muculufa and Monte Grande in Sicily have now placed this culture neatly parallel to *Tarxien Cemetery* (*ibid.*). Very remarkable is the difference in the burial rites between the two cultures: incineration in urns deposited in an ashy layer in the *Tarxien Cemetery*, and inhumation in rock-cut tombs in the *Castelluccio* culture which parallels much more closely the funerary rites of the Temple culture, even in their collective aspect, as exemplified in Zebbug, Xemxija, Hal Saflieni and now at the Xaghra Circle (Bonanno *et al.* 1990: 199-203; Malone *et al.* 1993). The exception, of course, is the burial under dolmens which occurs in a number of examples in Malta, precisely in the *Tarxien Cemetery* phase (Evans 1971:

193-8), as well as the dolmen-like structures in Sicily in the *Castelluccio* phase (Procelli 1991: 259, notes 60-61), not to mention the south Italian ones (Palumbo 1956; Cipolloni-Sampò 1990; d'Arragon 1994: 63-67) and the rectangular dolmen of Monte Longu in Sardinia (Ferrarese Cerruti 1980: 67-9, note 69; d'Arragon 1994: 60).

The so-called 'Thermi ware' or 'grey ware', with dot-filled incised decoration, presents a completely different story. As this pottery was quite distinct from any of the local wares of the Temple Period, Evans initially treated it as belonging to the *Tarxien Cemetery* phase (1953: 68); but in his *Survey* he later assigned it to the earlier, i.e. *Tarxien*, phase, particularly since a pedestalled specimen of the ware (T/P. 314) had been found intact in the soil in the thickness of the wall behind the spiral-decorated monumental altar of the first right apse of the southernmost temple at Tarxien when the altar was transferred to the National Museum in 1956 (Evans 1971: 122, 151-2). The presence of this ware in Sicily of the *Castelluccio* age - two sherds at Castelluccio itself (Orsi 1893: 45-6, plate V; Evans 1971: 223) - further suggests the overlap in the connection of the *Castelluccio* culture with first the *Tarxien* people and later the *Tarxien Cemetery* one. Other specimens in the central Mediterranean occur at Capo Graziano (Lipari) and Ognina (Sicily), but the ultimate origin of this ware is thought to be in the North Aegean of the Early Bronze Age, more precisely Thermi and Troy I (Lamb 1936: plates 15-6; Blegen 1963: 53-4, figs. 12-3, plate 16).

Conclusion

From the above re-examination of a selected number of items retrieved during the various excavation campaigns in the Tarxien complex, it is clear that the reading of the sequence of deposits is not easy and that the current interpretation of that sequence is far from satisfactory. One crucial question that can be resolved, at least in part, by its correct interpretation is that relating to the possibility, or otherwise, of some sort of continuity between the Temple civilisation and the Bronze Age cultures which

replaced it. The real stratigraphic context of the objects in question may contribute to the solution of the problem. There is no doubt that, short of the discovery and proper, scientific investigation of another site of the calibre of Tarxien, with the same type of sequence of deposits, the most recommended methodology at this stage is a thorough re-analysis of T. Zammit's published reports, supplemented by the information provided by his field notes, against the rich photographic documentation, which lies virtually dormant in the archives of the National Museum of Archaeology.

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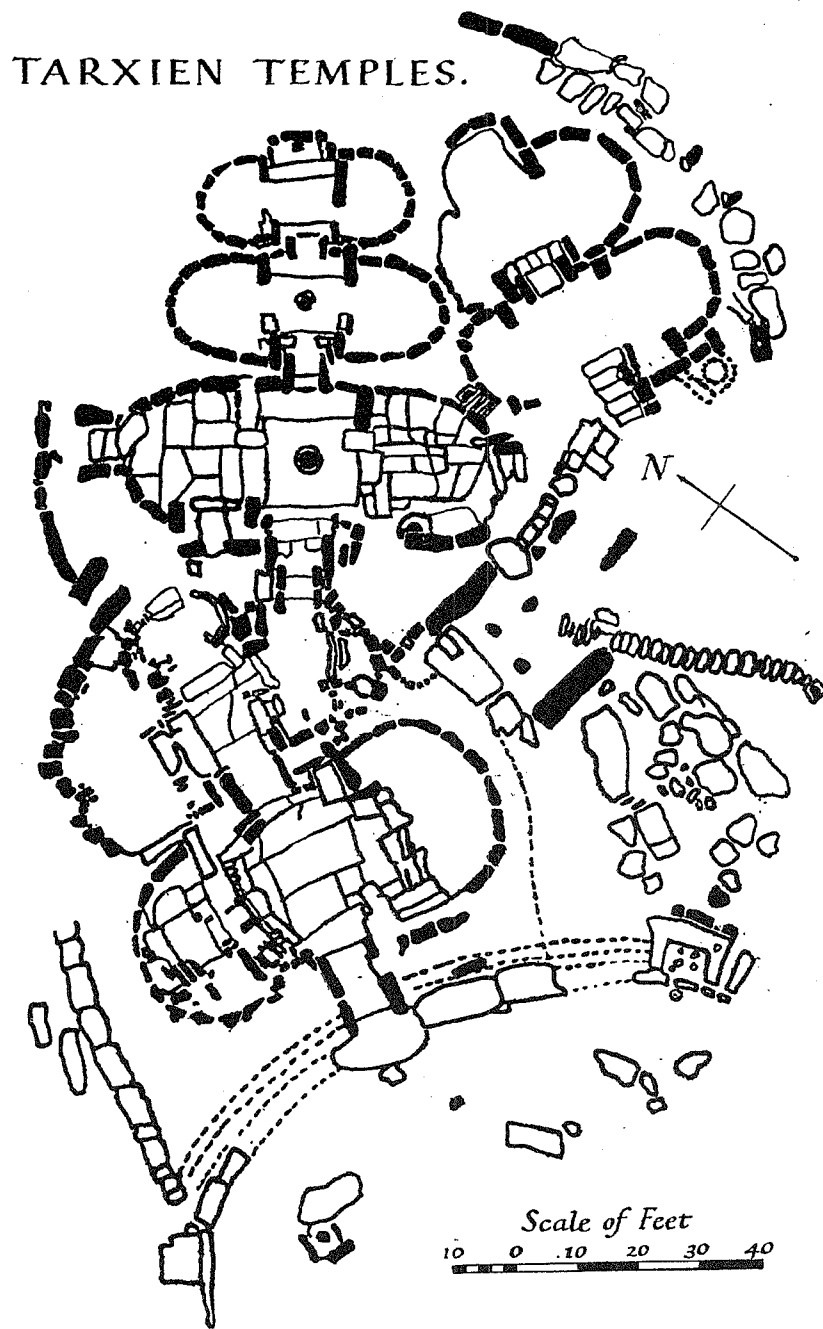
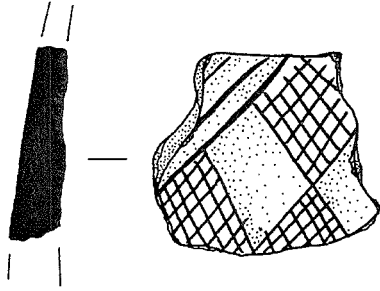
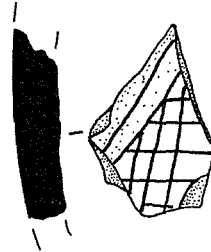


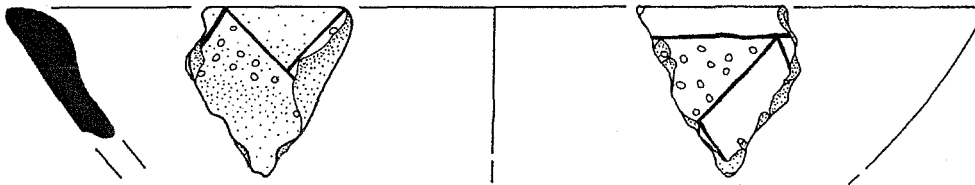
Figure 1: Plan of the Tarxien temple, after Zammit 1930



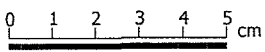
Tarxien Cemetery sherd from Stratigraphic Unit 220 in Area A



Tarxien Cemetery sherd from Stratigraphic Unit 2066 in Area C

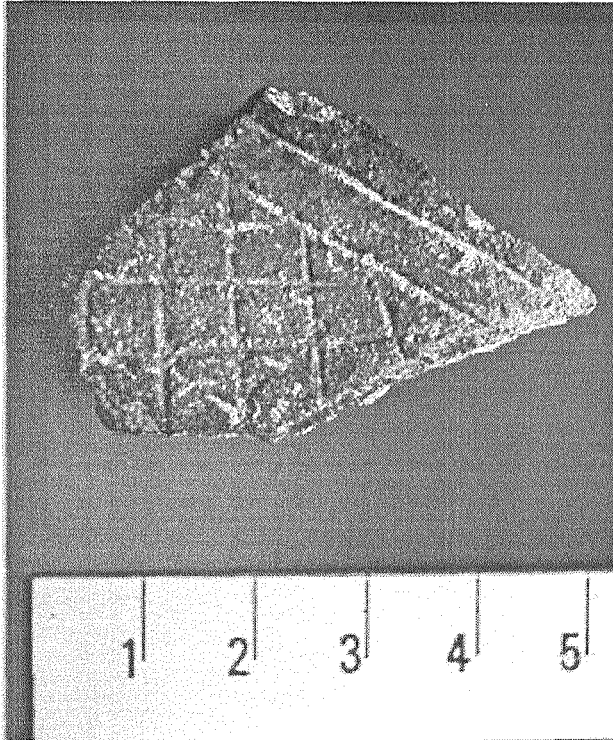


'Thermi Ware' sherd from Stratigraphic Unit 2066 in Area C

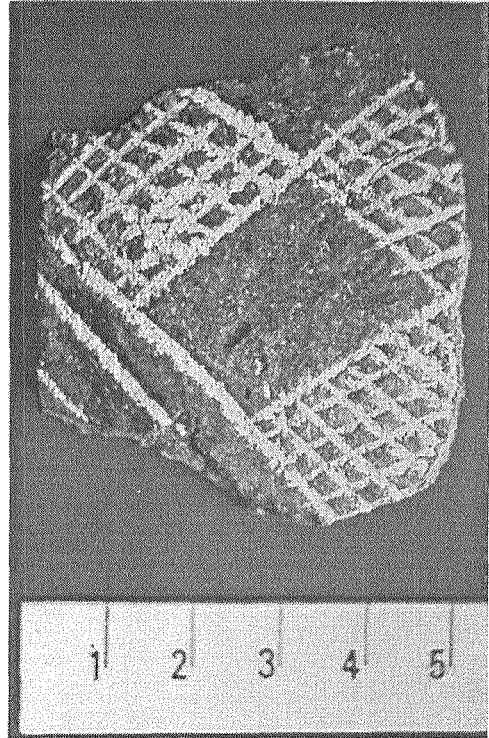


CG/JMB 1999

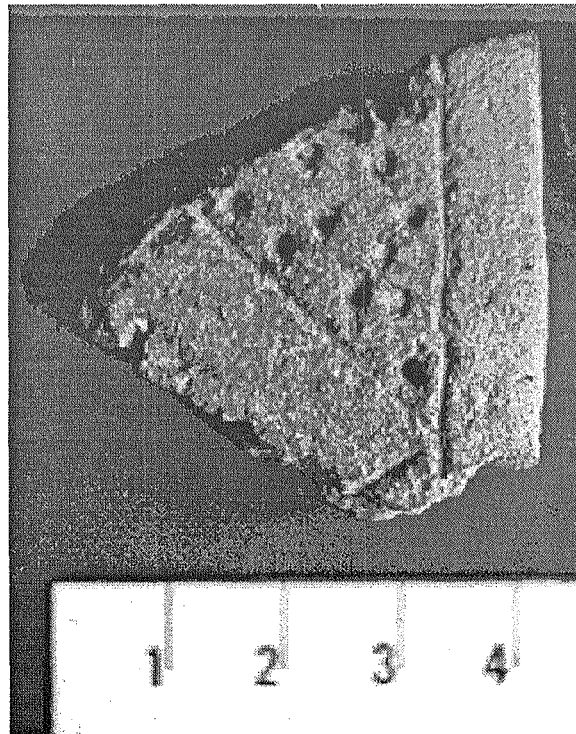
Figure 2: Scale drawings of three sherds from Tas-Silg (1996-98)



Tarxien Cemetery sherd from Stratigraphic Unit 220 in Area A

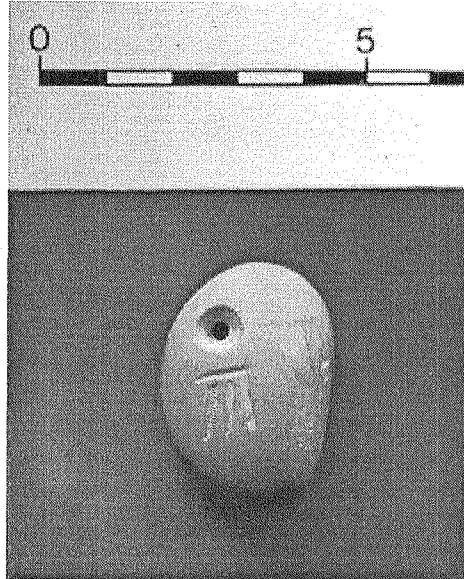


Tarxien Cemetery sherd from Stratigraphic Unit 2066 in Area C

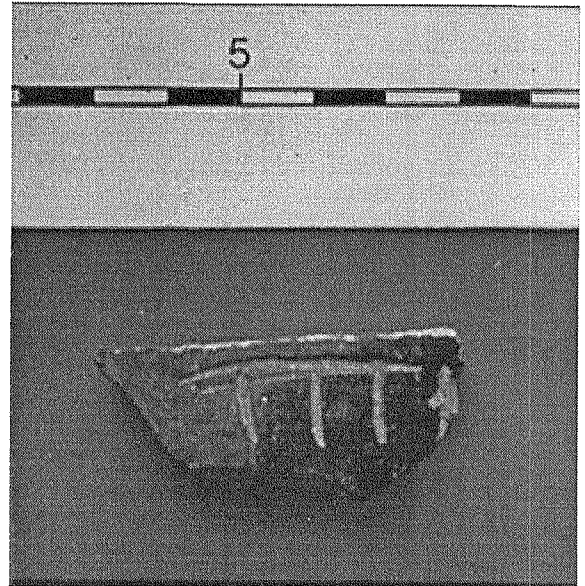


"Thermi Ware" sherd from Stratigraphic Unit 2066 in Area C

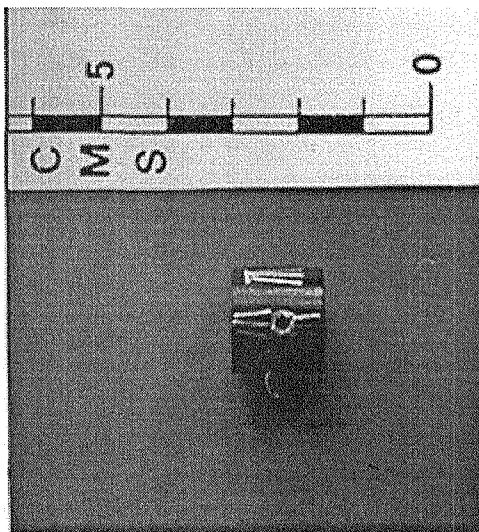
Plate 1: Three sherds from Tas-Silg (1996-98)



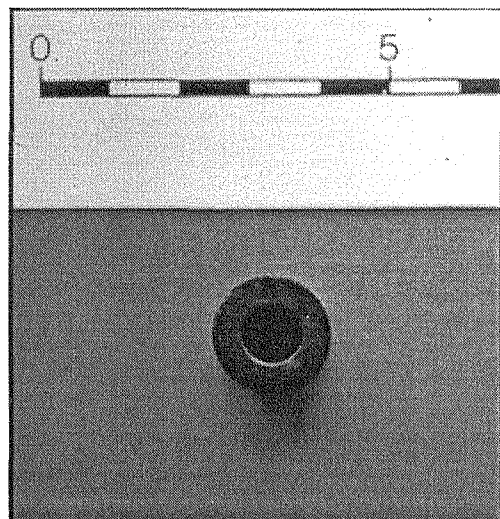
Pebble pendant



Inscribed sherd



Dark green cylindrical stone bead with gold inlay



*Plate 2: Three objects with incised symbols,
from the 1915-19 excavations of the Tarxien temples*

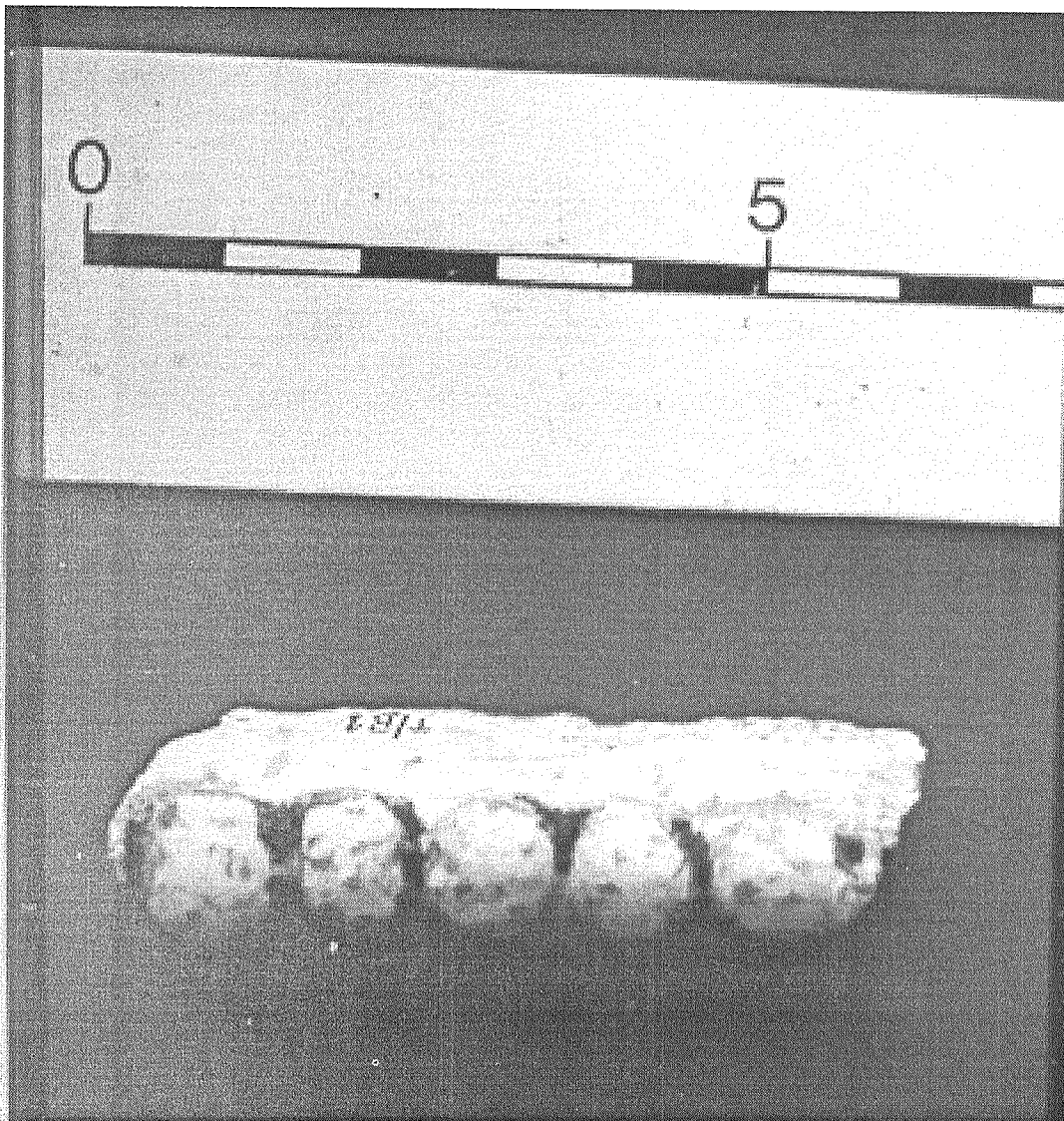


Plate 3: Banded bone plaque from the 1915-18 excavations of the Tarxien temples