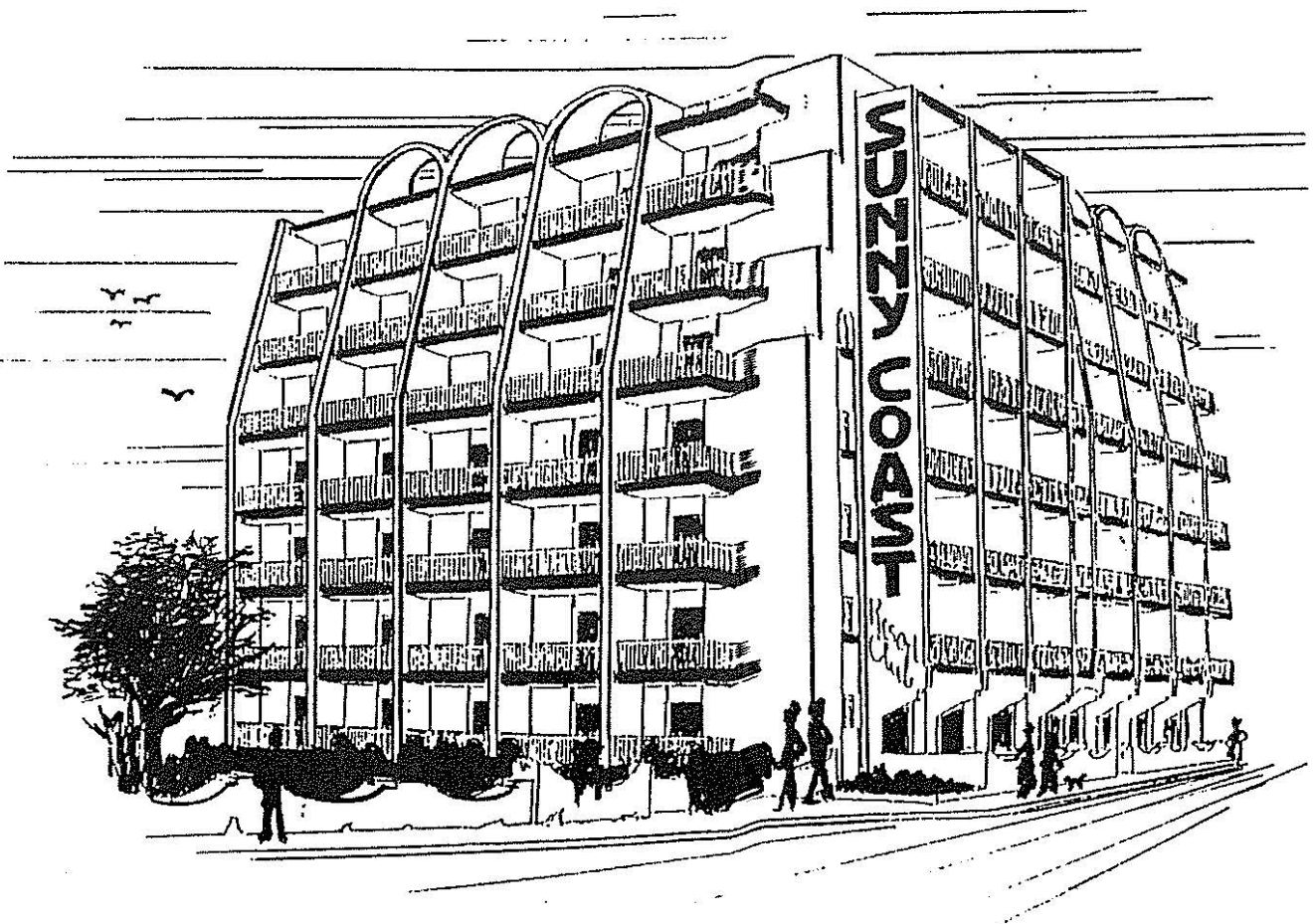


The  **SUNNY**
CLUB *Magazine*
Resort Club

FIRST ISSUE

May 1992



Dr Anthony Frendo started studying various languages and civilizations of the ancient Near East in Rome. Later on he obtained his Ph.D. in Syro-Palestinian archaeology from the Institute of Archaeology, University of London. He is currently lecturing in archaeology at the Faculty of Arts, University of Malta, and he hopes to make a series of investigations on various aspects of Maltese civilization during the Phoenician-Punic period.

THE CANAANITES IN MALTA 8TH-3RD CENTURY BC

The Maltese Islands are well known for their prehistoric remains, especially for the massive stone temples which can still be seen in various parts of the country. However, the visitor may not be aware that the Maltese islands have also yielded very interesting archaeological remains which date from the period that follows the prehistoric one. This period is commonly known as the Phoenician-Punic period, and it was during this time that writing first appeared in these islands. This is a very interesting phase of Malta's history, and it is a pity that in a sense it is quite unobtrusive, especially when we compare it with the preceding prehistoric period.

The so-called Phoenician-Punic period dates from circa the end of the eighth century BC up to 218BC, when the Maltese archipelago passed under Roman rule. The terms "Phoenician" and "Punic" are in fact identical. The Greek word "phoinix" (= purple dye) lies at the basis of both words: "Phoenician" clearly stems from "phoinix", whereas "Punic" comes from a Latin version of a word directly based on the same Greek term. Thus, it is the Greeks who are responsible for our calling the Phoenicians by this name, which clearly reflects the fact that in antiquity these people were famous for the manufacture of purple-dyed textiles.

The people whom the Greeks called Phoenicians were in fact a Semitic people, namely the Canaanites, who inhabited the coastal districts of Syria-Palestine and who circa 1200BC concentrated themselves on the coastal areas of today's Lebanon. Later on these Canaanites founded colonies in many parts of the Mediterranean such as Sicily, Malta, Sardinia and North Africa. Carthage was the leading Canaanite colony in North Africa, and from about the

sixth century BC onwards the Canaanites in the central and western Mediterranean looked upon her as their leader.

Canaanites from the Levant founded a colony in Malta towards the end of the eighth century BC and the island was under their political and economic control until the sixth century BC when it passed under the rule of the Canaanites in Carthage. This situation lasted until 218BC when the Romans took over the Maltese islands. It is important to underscore the fact that this state of affairs is valid from the political point of view and not from the cultural aspect. Indeed, when Malta was under the rule of the Canaanites in Carthage it still had strong links with the Canaanites from the motherland in the Levant, whereas during the period that it was under the rule of the latter it already exhibited cultural contacts with the Canaanites in Carthage. In view of the foregoing remarks, it is worth keeping in mind the following scheme: Phoenicians = Canaanites, whereas the term "Punic/Carthaginian" is used in a context that refers to the period when the Canaanites in Carthage played the leading role amongst the Canaanites in the central and western Mediterranean regions. Thus in reality, it was the Canaanites who administered the Maltese islands for about five hundred years, namely from circa the end of the eighth century BC up to 218BC.

Though the Canaanite remains in Malta are unimposing, they constitute an important set of archaeological data. The Canaanites left behind them a large amount of pottery amongst which there are egg-shaped jars, trefoil-mouth jugs, lamps, and funerary urns. Most of this pottery is coated in a bright red slip that has been burnished, thereby having a strong sheen. This pottery has been largely found in

Tombs which were cut into the rock and which were of a shaft and chamber type. Unfortunately, most of them have been built over; however, some (like those in the open area between Rabat and Mtarfa) are still visible. One interesting architectural remain of the Canaanites consists of a square tower built of ashlar masonry and having its cornice in an Egyptian style; the tower stands in the garden of the parish priest's house in Zurrieq.

The Canaanites in Malta also left behind them inscriptional remains, and the earliest evidence of writing in these islands stems from their time. Two important inscriptions have to be kept in mind: one was written in a papyrus which was folded in an amuletic container of bronze found in a tomb at Tal-Virtu, Rabat, and the other (probably found in the region of Marsaxlokk) was etched on stone. The former inscription is dated to the sixth century BC, and though written in Phoenician, which is a Canaanite dialect, it has strong literary connections with Egyptian literature. The latter inscription is of the second century BC, and being bilingual (it is written in Phoenician and in Greek) it provided the key for the

decipherment of the Phoenician alphabet in the eighteenth century of our era.

Although most of the Canaanite material in Malta comes from tombs, the site of Tas-Silg, overlooking the bay of Marsaxlokk, provides an interesting exception. Excavation showed that the site was a prehistoric sacred area which the Canaanites later used as a sanctuary dedicated to Astarte, their goddess of fertility. Although the site is now enclosed within a wall, one can still appreciate its extent and the nature of its location.

The Phoenician inscriptions mentioned above, as well as samples of the pottery types I pointed out, can be seen in the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta, where one can also appreciate the beauty of a clay anthropoid sarcophagus which had been retrieved from a Phoenician tomb in Rabat. The material remains of the Phoenician-Punic period in Malta may be unobtrusive. However, they certainly allow us to understand better the enterprising nature of the Canaanites in the field of human endeavour. ■

IT'S GOOD TO KNOW:

Island Area: 316 sq km – Population: app.350,000 – Capital: Valletta

Your Resort's position

The Sunny Coast Resort Club is situated approximately 8 kilometres from Luqa International Airport. Travel time by taxi is approximately 30 minutes. Taxis may be prebooked through the normal channels. (All facilities at the Airport which include a duty free shop, bar and restaurant are open on a twenty-four hour basis.)

Driving

Driving is on the left. A local bus service links most towns and villages via Valletta. Taxis depict red number plates and are bound by Government control metre charges. Car hire is available at the Hertz desk in the Resort.

Food and drink

Malta offers a very wide choice of restaurants and cafes. Local dishes are available in specialized restaurants. The Sunny Coast offers a variety of food and style varying from a snack by the pool side to a gourmet meal at the Coral Reef Restaurant. Maltese wine is widely available at both restaurants and shops.

Night life

There are plenty of discotheques and bars throughout the island. For a spot of excitement and fun one may visit the Dragonara Casino in St Julian's where Roulette, Black Jack, Baccarat and Boule are played.

What to buy

Malta specializes in Malta weave, pottery, glass, ceramics and copper and brass items, besides being renowned for its gold and silver filigree and lace.

Money movements

Money may be exchanged at banks or at the front desk. All major credit cards are accepted. Banks are open from 08.30h to 12.30h, Monday to Saturday.

Electricity

240 Volts AC. Adaptors are available at the front desk.

Telephone

Your apartment is equipped with a direct dial telephone enabling you to dial directly without delay. Local calls can also be made from phone boxes throughout the island.

Time

Greenwich + one.

Language

Maltese is the official language. However English is very widely spoken, followed by Italian, French and German. ■