PARLAMENT TA' MALTA

IT-TNAX-IL LEĠIŻLATURA

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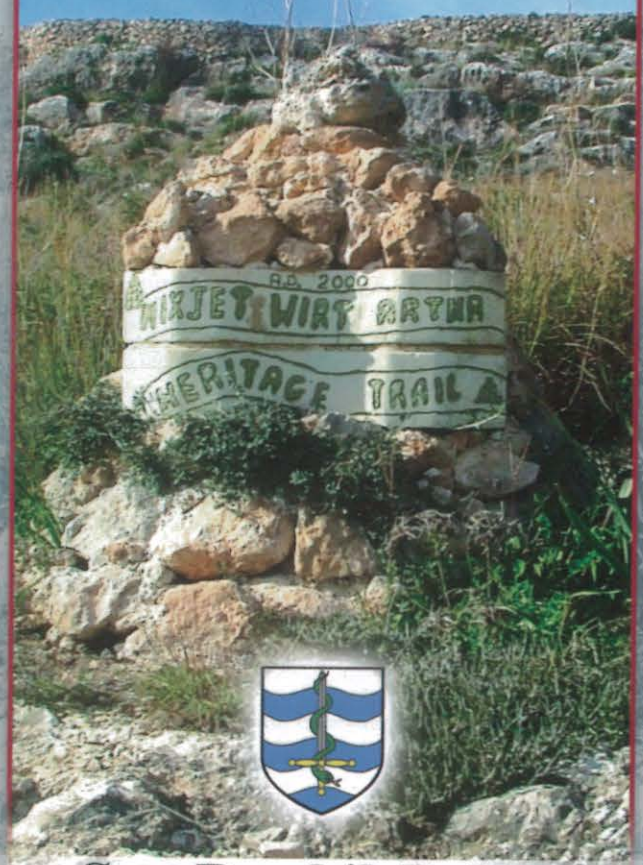
Raymond Scicluna
Skrivan tal-Kamra

Xemxija

Heritage Trail



San Pawl il-Baħar

Preamble

Welcome to the Xemxija Heritage Trail which, consists of 20 sites of archaeological importance. You will travel through the corridors of history over a period of time covering approximately 6000 years! It is a long journey indeed but one you will definitely enjoy and appreciate while breathing the fresh air against a magnificent background of breathtaking views. Please follow the map inserted in the centre in order not to miss anything.

May this trail be only a taste of what the Maltese Islands have to offer as a heritage for all mankind. It takes approximately 2 hours to cover the whole trail.

1. ROMAN ROAD (Pilgrims' Way)

Of great interest and as part of our heritage is the Punic-Roman road that is still preserved for a considerable length and which is unique in Malta. One can clearly observe the limestone kerbing whose function is to hold up the road surface. These stones are still in good condition despite their age (over 2000 years old!) Like all Roman roads the engineering is first class. Channels were cut along the road at the most opportune points where water would naturally collect. Thus an ingenious way of directing the water from one side of the road to the other was devised by digging a channel in the rock across the road. On one side a deep channel runs along the road for the collection of water.

This road is one of a network, which connected the settlements and served to transport farm produce as well as salt.

Besides, this road is also known as the Pilgrims' Way an old road taken by pilgrims on their way to our Lady's Sanctuary in Mellieħa, in fulfilment of a vow, some of them carrying chains.

Notice crosses etched in the rock at the top of the road by the pilgrims while having a breather after struggling up the hill! †††

2. DRY STONE / RUBBLE WALLS (Tas-sejjieħ)

A long stretch of the rubble walls has been repaired and rebuilt in places. These walls are an integral part of our heritage and are a characteristic of the Maltese Countryside.

The functional purpose of these walls is three fold:

1 That of retaining the soil in place especially in sloping areas and terraced fields.

2 That of acting as a limit and extent of a property or field demarcation lines dividing properties.

3 That of serving as a windbreak for the protection of trees & plants; an important feature in these windswept islands.

An interesting feature of these walls is the lack of a bonding agent such as lime, cement, etc., but this should not give the impression that they are built haphazardly. There was an art, a technique that alas is being lost with the passing of time. Furthermore, these walls house a variety of flora and fauna such as snails, geckos, lizards, snakes and other creatures, as well as plants and flowers like the sorrel (qarsu) which provide these walls with a contrast of green and yellow on a greyish background.

These walls also serve as a connecting link between the ancient temples, the girna and farmhouses and forms such a harmonious ensemble with their own simplicity and rustic appearance, projecting themselves also as a link between the past and the present. Cherished and irreplaceable, we should protect them from the destructive forces of carelessness and vandalism under the guise of sustainable development.

3. MENHIR

A few metres up the Roman road lies a large vertical rock known as a megalith, monolith, standing stone or as commonly known: a menħir. This is of a prehistoric origin connected with the ancient temple builders of Ħaġar Qim, Mnajdra, Ġgantija and others. Menħirs are distinguishable from Dolmens by the fact that they are

usually single stones. The menhir as an architectural feature is of unknown origin, but archaeologists seem to associate it with the Neolithic period, since pottery sherds collected from different sites usually date to that period. This single menhir is placed only a few metres in front of a whole line of Neolithic and Bronze Age tombs.

4. CAVE OF THE GALLEY

This is one of the many caves that abound in the area, which were used for human habitation in the not too distant past. Originally it must have been a prehistoric tomb during the Neolithic, possibly up to the Roman period.

One admires the well- structured entrance constructed from large stones which adorns the cave with a sense of awe and dignity, reminiscent of the temple buildings. What is particularly interesting is the presence of an etching or graffiti of a war galley on the left-hand jamb of the doorway. How or why it found its place here is open to anyone's guess. These graffiti are usually found on prehistoric temple walls, churches, chapels and bastions dating from the 17 to the 18th century. Because of its uniqueness in the area, it gave the cave its name. Notice also the cross etched distinctly on the stone; possibly a pilgrims' cross. Who, why and when were these ships engraved on the walls? When a sailor, a traveller were saved, through the intercession of the Madonna or a saint, from pirates, shipwreck or other disasters, on their safe return, the wealthy survivors would commission a painting depicting the capture or storm as a thanksgiving. In turn these paintings were donated to the church which honoured that particular saint. These paintings were called "Ex Voto". These etchings have the same roots as the paintings. Those who could not afford a painting humbly etched the image of the ship involved.

5. The Apiaries

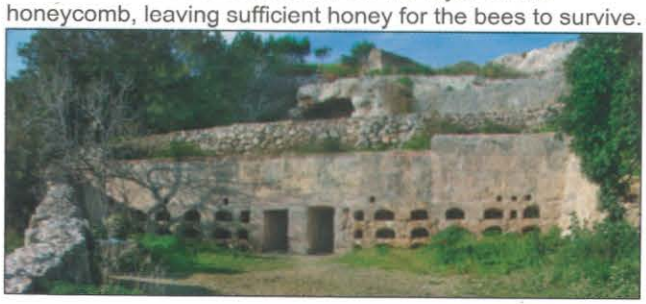
Apiaries are buildings / caves where bees are kept for the production of honey. Malta has always been known for its first-class honey; some even sustain that the name MELITA (Latin for Malta) is formed from the word MEL, which in Latin means honey. There is the case of the Roman Governor of Malta Caius Verres who in 72 BC was accused of stealing 400 jars of honey from the temple of Juno!

Most apiaries were built facing south - an orientation beekeepers chose for maximum light and warmth needed by bees.

Following the Roman road, just before one arrives at the top of the hill, is a cluster of 4 apiaries, one of which was completely destroyed when the cave housing an apiary collapsed. This cave has been cleared and one can at least see parts of the restored cave. Another apiary is in a bad state of repairs, while the other two have recently been restored to their former glory. The first one is strikingly beautiful; it is the only one of its kind in Malta, in the sense that it is very artistically constructed with arches and large stones worked to perfection. From the size and workmanship of these stones, the building must date back to Punic - Roman times. Could it have been originally a Columbarium a place to hold funerary urns? By crouching through the right hand door one enters into a corridor, which is part cave and part, built.

One is struck by the rustic beauty of the interior which contrasts sharply with the exterior. The apiary is sectioned into alcoves each containing two stone shelves, with a terracotta beehive (qolla) behind each hole. The hives are lying on their sides with the neck right behind the outside hole. If the swarm was too large for the hive, an extension (żieda) was added.

The hives were blocked by pieces of wood which the bees sealed from inside with wax. To harvest the honey, the farmer removed the board and cut the layer off the honeycomb, leaving sufficient honey for the bees to survive.



Another interesting feature is the roof, which has been restored; this is covered with a mortar consisting of 50% lime and 50% pottery fragments, battered into place to form an impervious surface.

A few metres away at a diagonal with this apiary, behind an old carob tree, lie another apiary, which contrasts with the first. Here we have a cave that was converted into a bee-keeping habitat. Its rustic appearance blends extremely well with the surrounding rocks. It must have been the work of a farmer, who used locally found rough stones for its construction. On entering, one is yet again struck by the arch, which, with its simplicity and technique used, leaves one amazed at the skill of our forefathers. Various other apiaries can be found across the Kalkara Valley, between Xemxija and Mellieħa.

Practically all the caves in the area all the way up to Manikata conserve traces of human habitation; some of them were still lived in until the not too distant past. These include the apiaries, which also show signs of having been used for burial purposes. Notice the arcosolia (apses) dug in the rock. Possibly the sequence of use was the following:

i. For burial purposes.
ii. For human habitation.
iii. For the production of honey.

6. OLD CAROB TREE (Ceratonia Siliqua)

Right at the corner, at an angle from the Roman apiary lies what is known to be the oldest carob tree in these islands about 1,000 years old. Being 7.25m in circumference, its roots are embedded in rocks, and presents as a sturdy, durable tree. The carob is one of our indigenous trees, which can be found growing mostly in areas like this where the soil is very shallow and rocky surfaces predominate. This evergreen long-living tree, once very common in our rural landscape, has been utilised since biblical times.

Its well known coloured pod-shaped fruit know in northern countries as Johannesbrot, (St. John's Bread), harvested in mid-August, was the main source of fodder for goats, sheep, cattle, equines and even rabbits. Man extracted sugar solutions from it in the past and still does today. Yielding a sweet extract when the fruit is boiled, it is allowed

to set and then served as blocks of sweet, (karamelli), when the liquid solidifies. Traditionally this sweet is very popular on Good Friday, as one can have a sweet without breaking the fast. Home made syrup (ġulepp) prepared from this fruit for soothing a cough is still very popular. In very rough times during World War II, many people satisfied their hunger by eating the fleshy part of the fruit. Although in the Mediterranean the pulp of the carob fruit is used extensively as an important ingredient for fodder, a number of medicines also make use of certain extract of the pulp. Besides, one of the most economic propositions this tree offers is actually the seed itself. An extract of its seed, known commercially as the Long Bean Gum (LBG), is used in many food preparations, for its solidifying qualities. Ice cream does not melt because of the LBG factor; the same with tinned food like corned beef or pet food. It is used as taste substitutes, texture modifiers, colourants or stabilisers. In the local context the carob also yielded firewood and rough bedding of farm animals in the past when hay was in short supply. This evergreen tree is very prolific in its leaf production and it sheds quite a large amount of leaves which in due time will break up to form a good bedding material. This rich litter used to be mixed with soil for potting plants because it contains a high level of organic matter. Not so many years ago, rosary beads were in great demand. The carob seed used to be collected, boiled and strung into rosary beads with a large seed marking the glory. It is said that the word carat used for weighing gold is derived from an Arabic word qirat, which is the carob seed used as weight.

Moreover this tree provides food for the bees that thrive on its flowers. Honey produced by the bees from this flower tends to be very dark in colour. No wonder then that this tree was and still is so important in our countryside with its evergreen leaves providing a canopy of green and shade with its widespread branches. And no wonder that Frans Scerri, in March 1999 burst out into a poem mystified by its beauty:

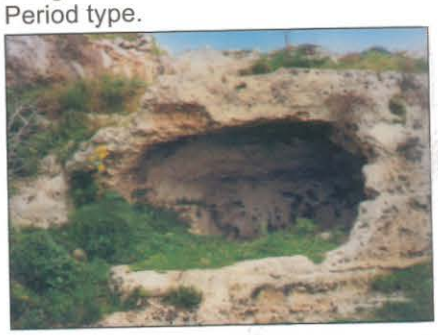
TO THE OLD CAROB TREE

Oh dear old carob tree
So gnarled and so dishevelled
Who knows how many events
Throughout your life
You had to witness
For our forefathers you
Were worth your weight in gold
And till this day
You steal our hearts
Reigning in beauty.

7. THE CAVE OF BURIALS

Near the top of the ridge, immediately next to the quarry wall that forms the main road, a wide and open cave reveals the presence of a troglodyte habitation. This cave, which at present is completely exposed to the road, was once hidden from view behind a rocky screen that has since collapsed. The only entrance was through a number of rock-hewn steps, on top of the ridge. These steps reveal that in its origin the hewn cave was used as a place of burial, possibly beginning from prehistoric times. It was enlarged to house a single floor burial, possibly in late Bronze Age or Iron Age (Phoenician). Eventually it was enlarged to house loculi and arcosolia of the late Roman Period type.

The overzealous hewing of the rock interior caused the outer rock surface to collapse aeons ago, as the dark and integrated colouring of the rock would show.



8. NEOLITHIC TEMPLE

Situated on the hilltop in Xemxija, surrounded by trees of various types and sizes, lie the remains of a Neolithic temple. Luckily the foundations of this temple made of solid blocks of stone have withstood the ravages of time and the vandalism of man; but it is crying out for some type of

restoration that will inject a new life and some degree of respectability.

The importance of this temple is enhanced by the fact that it forms part of a vast ensemble of archaeological sites that cover most of the hilltop and the adjacent valleys: prehistoric and Punic tombs, fortified village, cart ruts, troglodyte caves, ancient apiaries, a menħir and a Roman road.

The temple itself, which is one of about 30 known temples in the archipelago, dates back to c. 2,800 B.C. Compared to the other temples say of Ħaġar Qim, Mnajdra, Ġgantija, surprisingly enough there are no signs of the megalith structure that these other temples present. Instead, one notices stones of a much smaller size.

Most of the temples were constructed on the basic plan of three chambers in a trefoil pattern grouped around a central forecourt. Although no definite evidence has been discovered, it is possible that the temples were used as tombs at first. The amount of debris found close to some temples seems to imply that the whole building was at one time covered with earth so as to form a large conical mound, which kept the various parts of the building together. The cult of the dead and its associated rituals must have certainly prompted a requirement for surface temples to be erected and thus satisfy the growing need to celebrate more properly the religious rites of the day.

Soon, all the later surface temples were built as shrines for that purpose. While the dead continued to be buried in the underground tombs and caves, the new surface temples gradually acquired a significant role in the religion of the living, particularly with religious cult and rituals of the fertility goddess but also linked to ancestral worship.

These temples represent one of the earliest major monuments of stone built by man. Considering the small size of these

islands, archaeologists wonder why so many temples, at least 30, were built here. As yet no satisfactory explanation has been advanced as to why the inhabitants of these islands were able to develop the facility for building what are technically very refined temples. From the evidence available to us today, it appears that Maltese megalithic architecture is older than anything similar that is known in the western Mediterranean, and it has been suggested that Malta was the centre from which the style emanated.

The society, which erected these temples, left no written records; nor did it leave any cities. As testimony to its singular achievements, it left only its giant monuments. The fact that there are so many of them in a relatively small area, would suggest that this society was capable of harnessing the existing labour resources to achieve its objectives. This would have demanded a high level of organisation, engineering and specialisation in various skills.

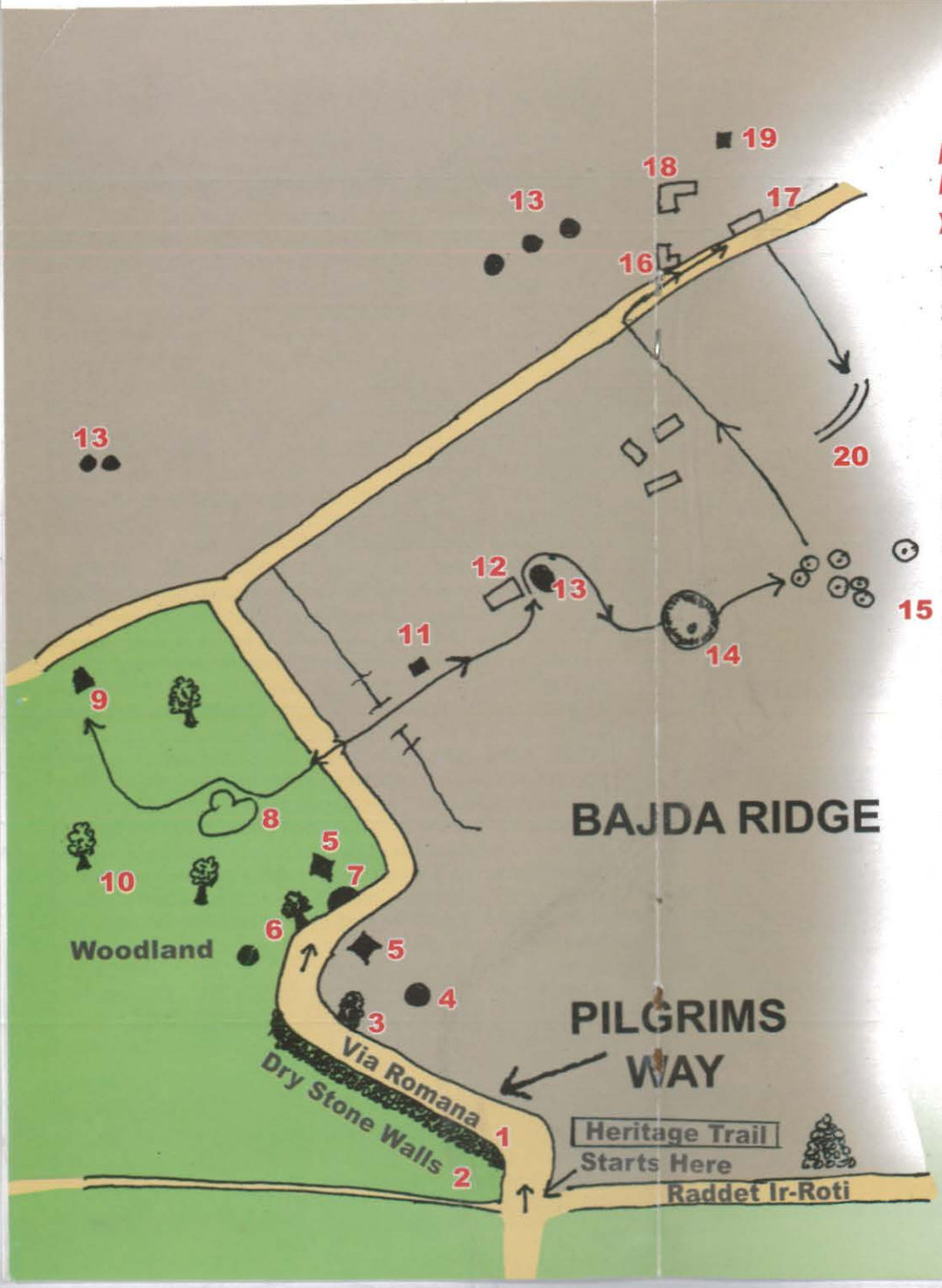
9. CORBELLED HUT (Girna)

Scattered in the northern and western part of the island, one notices these stone huts which are such an outstanding feature of the countryside. The greatest concentration of giren is found in Xemxija, Mistra, ix-Xagħra l-Ħamra near Manikata, l-Imġiebaħ, Għajn Ħadid near Selmun, Wied Musa close to l-Aħrax tal-Mellieħa, iċ-Ċirkewwa and Baħrija. It is hard to explain why there are so many in this locality whereas there is only a handful in the other parts of the country; in Gożo there are hardly any. One of the practical reasons could be because in that expanse of land there is a great quantity of loose, mainly coralline limestone and rocks. Another plausible reason could be that the northern part of Malta has always been sparsely populated due to pirate incursions, but the fertility of the arable land could not be easily dismissed, attracting farmers from faraway villages. The giren were not thought to have been built for habitation,

but to serve the personal needs of farmers and goatherds or for rearing of livestock.

They provided welcome shelter from the hot summer sun or the occasional rainstorm. They were used to keep their food and any young children they had to carry with them; in a few instances a cradle used to be fixed to the wall. The giren also came in useful for keeping tools overnight, storing produce such as potatoes and onions. They also served for keeping a watchful eye over the crops. It could be that our forefathers used these giren as habitation. Quintinus attested in 1536 that they used to live in huts and Mikiel Anton Vassalli in his dictionary (1796) describes the girna as a poorly built house. Up to the second half of the 20-century, a number of people in Mellieħa and around Dingli still lived in them for many years. From a distance the girna resembles a heap of stones; on approaching it one can however, observe the simple and primitive architectural skills involved in its construction. The girna could be built at no cost, since the stones used for their construction could be found in the fields around. No tools, no beams and no flat slabs to roof them over were necessary. The girna has a dry double wall and its strength and stability depended upon the builder's ability to find closely fitting stones and place them upon one another. This fastened the entire structure together and imparted a surprising degree of structural integrity and mechanical strength. Skill was required to proceed upwards in the shape of a dome. The most challenging feature is the ceiling , and many marvel at the way the builder was able to cap the girna without using cement, lime or other material, just placing the edge of one stone on another, locking them together, leaving as small a space as possible, which was then closed by a large flat rock and any remaining cracks filled with smaller stones. The most common shape of the girna is round, although there are square and rectangular ones, and even rare oval constructions. It has only one door which normally faces the rising sun, is bereft of any decorations except for a couple of small windows and alcoves usually used to hold oil lamps, tools or bunk. Some have a dry stone wall erected around them, others have steps or a ramp leading to their roofs, while others have a ċagħqija which was used to place a turtle dove decoy on top. There are two cases when a girna was actually built over another girna.

The origins of these interesting dwellings lie in the mist of antiquity, possibly as far back as Neolithic times. Whatever and whenever their origin, the Maltese girna is an integral part of our culture, a reminder of our hard-working forefathers who spent long hours working the land and attending to livestock to provide for their families.



AREA OF ARCHAELOGICAL IMPORTANCE XEMXIJA, SAN PAWL IL-BAHAR

1) ROMAN ROAD (PILGRIMS' WAY)
2) DRY STONE / RUBBLE WALLS (TAS-SEJJIEH)
3) MENHIR
4) CAVE OF THE GALLEY
5) The Apiaries
6) OLD CAROB TREE (CERATONIA SILIQUA)
7) THE CAVE OF BURIALS
8) NEOLITHIC TEMPLE
9) CORBELLED HUT (GIRNA)
10 WOODLAND
11) PUNIC TOMB
12) FARMER'S HUT (GORBOĠ)
13) CAVE DWELLINGS
14) GRANARY (SILO) / WELL
15) NEOLITHIC TOMBS
16) WORLD WAR II DEFENCE POST (PILL BOX)
17) ROMAN BATHS
18) THE FARMHOUSE (RAZZETT)
19) MISTRA GATE
20)CART RUTS (RADDET IR-ROTI)

10. WOODLAND

On Bajda Ridge an afforestation project was initiated in 1967 68 by the Agriculture Ministry in an effort to increase the number of trees on the island. The ridge was a rocky expanse without any trees. Pits had to be blasted with explosives and filled with soil. The idea was to create an olive grove, but because of the exposure to the elements, other trees like pines and acacias had to be planted to act as windbreakers, and although the olives survived, the other trees took over. Other trees were also planted like the cypress and carob.

Another objective for creating the woodland was to recharge the water table so that more water could be pumped from the aquifer. It is a known fact that trees arrest the downward rush of runoff rain water down ridges and slopes, thus allowing it to percolate through the cracks in the rocks till it is stopped by the layer of clay.

Thirty years later Bajda Ridge became green and has become one of the most frequented groves in the island,

11. PUNIC TOMB

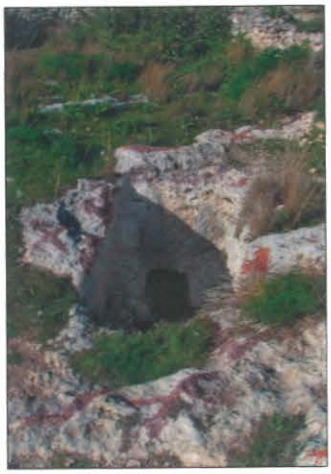
This is the only Punic tomb found in the Xemxija area, a plausible reason being that the Phoenicians and Carthaginians made use of the prehistoric and cave tombs for burial purposes before starting digging their own. It is in excellent condition with a very deep 2.20 m rectangular shaft leading to a burial chamber with a rectangular entrance. The workmanship of this chamber, I would say, is unique for its precision creating a sense of awe and mystique as one looks inside. A very unusual feature is the two apses, one on the left and the other on the right of the entrance hole. It is almost semi-elliptical in shape, 2 m at its widest with a flat ceiling 1 m high and a smooth floor.

Punic tombs in the Maltese Islands are found to be of four basic types:

i. The shaft and chamber tombs, which were the most common, consisted of a circular or rectangular shaft leading into the burial chamber which in turn was oval or rectangular in shape.

ii. The shaft tombs, which were not so common consisting of a circular or rectangular open shaft. Archaeological evidence points to these tombs being roofed with slabs after a burial.

iii. The chamber tombs consisting of an oval shaped burial chamber of 0.9 m in height hewn in the vertical face of the rock, preferably being cut in places of upper coralline limestone.



iv. The grave-pit, which was either dug in the rock or else in the soil. Most of these were used several times and because of the demand some had two or three chambers. The majority of the interments were cremation burials.

12. FARMER'S HUT (Gorboġ)

Right opposite the Troglodyte cave, a farmer's hut has been faithfully reconstructed using the same old stones.

This was an old rustic building, which could have served as an extension of the cave.

Notice the rough stones that were used and the total lack of mortar. The outside stone-bench (xriek), is a characteristic of the Maltese farmhouse together with the miżieb (water duct), the ħawt (water trough), the alcove, the oil-lamp niche and the outside staircase.

13. CAVE DWELLINGS

On top of Xemxija hill, a few metres from the prehistoric tombs, one encounters a hardly visible wide cave, which until recent times was one of the many caves abounding in the area that was used for human habitation. The caves were usually divided into sections by means of rubble walls: one for the parents, one for the children and one for the animals, very much part of the family, was also squeezed in. Certain individuals, who lived in these caves, say that they were cool in the summer and warm in the winter. They were lived in at least until the 1930's. It is interesting to note how the rubble walls completely encompass these cave dwellings hiding the entrance from any intruder that ventured near them. An interesting feature is the channel dug in the rock running along the top edge of the cave to prevent rainwater dripping into it. But what is more interesting is the creation of an ingenious device whereby the water from one end (possibly both ends) of the channel is directed into the cave via a duct in the ground leading to a large depression acting as a well. In very ancient times, this cave, like many others, was used for burial purposes. Notice the arcosolia (apses) dug in the rock and the recesses on the wall to hold the oil lamps supplied to accompany the dead and later to provide light for the cave dwellers. Certainly the abundance of many natural caves in Malta and Gozo must have been of great benefit to our early ancestors. These caves offered ready-made, secure and well-protected dwellings for early man and his animals, cattle, sheep, goats and pigs. They also served for the storage of hay, clover and field produce.

Early man cultivated the fertile fields, especially those in the vicinity of the caves. It is likely that they grew club wheat, barley and possibly even lentils. Besides making pottery, they chipped stone implements and axes, and they were able to erect simple huts and group them into tiny primitive villages.

In wartime, these caves served as shelters during enemy air raids.

14. GRANARY (Silo) / WELL

Located only a short distance away from the all important Prehistoric tombs, hidden by the high ridge that divides the sites, and on top of the Troglodyte cave, one comes across a deeply dug silo. This silo that dates back to the Prehistoric Period would have been used to store grain and other cereals. During the Roman Period, the ground next to it was levelled to create an ample threshing area. The whole silo would have been capped over with a large, possibly circular, wooden cover.

Moreover the whole area must have been covered by some kind of building. The remains of a roman villa in the vicinity makes this clear. Cut into the rock surface are a number of features that reveal the presence of massive beams that supported the silo cover. Considering that the evidence is clear enough for the existence of a prehistoric settlement / fortified village on the hilltop,

The Temple, the Tombs, the Cart Ruts, the Caves and the Old Wall a granary of this size would have been a necessity. There are clear signs that it was later converted into a water holding cistern. A small circular depression at the very bottom collected the last dregs of this precious water.

15. NEOLITHIC TOMBS

In his book Malta: An Archaeological Guide (1972), the British archaeologist David H. Trump refers to the Xemxija hilltop as one of the most interesting corners of the Islands. He refers especially to the shaft and chamber tombs found on the flat surface. There are six tombs excavated by Evans in 1956, which belong to the Ġgantija phase dated around 3600B.C. Trump is of the view that there must have been some sort of prehistoric settlement in the area. The abundance of pottery of various consistencies and firing, the cart ruts, the temple, the tombs, the caves etc., all point in that direction. The people of the Temple culture developed these elaborate kidney-shaped rock cut tombs, which

occupied a central place in their religion based upon fertility cults and ancestor worship. From the beginning, in religious architecture, there was an efflorescence, which produced a most remarkable series of temples and tombs. It has been suggested that when the Maltese of the day started to build temples, they attempted to reproduce above the ground the essential forms of their religious architecture, which had been developed in the subterranean tombs. Below ground, lobed tomb structures had probably developed naturally and the early temples are in fact of a similar form.

These tombs lie in an area of c. 1875 square metres and were dug into the soft upper coralline limestone. Basically they are of the same type consisting of a circular shaft 85 cm deep from which opens a kidney shaped domed chamber roughly 3.8 m long and 1.2 m high. However they differ in size and internal details, with tombs 1 and 2 having interconnected chambers. Some of the tombs have lobed extensions from the main chamber, the purpose being to provide more room without endangering the collapse of the roof, the sides acting like pilasters. It is the lobed type that may have inspired the shape to the temple builders. The dead were buried in a crouched position on one side with the knees drawn up to the chest - symbolic of the child in the mother's womb returning to the womb of mother earth. Earthenware jars full of grain and water were placed beside the corpse for the spirit to survive.

The excavations yielded a deposit of compact, clayey soil damp and dark in colour, but the bottom layer was rather different consisting of a white lime substance and with red ochre. The red ochre occurred in many burial deposits in the Maltese Islands. It could have been a normal funerary custom in prehistoric times. This red ochre adhered to the pottery and bones. The finds consisted of human and animal bones mixed with fragments of prehistoric material including decorated pottery and amulets of hard greenstone.

The first interments were made about 2800 BC with the majority during the Ġgantija phase about 2400 BC. There was a falling off in quantity towards the end of the temple period. However some fragments testify to continued sporadic use to medieval times.

16. WORLD WAR II DEFENCE POST (Pill Box)

It was in the 1930s that the British authorities were compelled to fortify the island against any possible invasion especially the northern part that was too vulnerable with its many-exposed landing bays. Being easy and quick to construct, there were over 200 pillboxes built between 1938 and 1942. They formed part of the concept of a more fluid form of defence, which allowed greater mobility between the regular forces and the defended strong points.

The Pill Box was a concrete machine gun emplacement nicknamed Pill because the first British machine gun emplacements were circular like pill boxes, which provided impenetrable field defences due to the protective qualities of the concrete coupled with the awesome fire-power of the machine guns.

The defensive qualities of reinforced concrete or ferroconcrete, were its resistance to shell penetration and its ability to absorb the stresses caused by explosion. It was the grid of steel reinforcement near the outer surface of the concrete which had the effect of checking the penetration of shell, while the reinforcement near the inner surfaces of the walls and roof provided the tensile strength that held the concrete together when struck by exploding shells.

The first type of pill-boxes erected were those which are distinguished by their camouflage of rubble stone cladding which was very effective as it blended in excellently with the surrounding field walls. However the threat of war and invasion, created a sense of urgency and the need for rapid construction. As a result, by 1939, a new type of pillbox, more box like in shape, began to appear. They were more difficult to conceal, the most common type being the painted camouflage with patterns to disguise them as harmless rural building by emphasising the coursed stone work or adding large domestic features as false doorways and windows. Despite the variety of designs, the pillboxes had a number of common features. Nearly all were fitted with a rectangular observation turret with all round vision slits. The majority were provided with a searchlight. The entrances to the pillboxes, consisting of small armoured hatches, were generally located in the rear or sheltered side. These pillboxes

became a form of static armour, intended primarily to engage and destroy the enemy and not to shelter the defenders. No more soldiers than could use their weapons effectively were to be deployed inside them, generally around six men under the command of an N.C.O. Over 20 are known to have been constructed in the St. Paul's Bay locality a number of which still stand. Some were demolished as part of the eyesore clearance project of the 1960s or to make room for development. Others were destroyed when planes crashed on them during the war. Two soldiers who were outside the one at San Pawl tat-Tarġa were killed by a bomb which landed by the pillbox showering shrapnel. The shrapnel marks are still visible.

17. ROMAN BATHS

Discovered during maintenance and cleaning activities during May June 2000, the site was identified as a Roman Period Bath Complex by Prof. A. Bonanno. This site proves to be the best preserved Roman baths on the Islands. The baths with their pools, cold and hot rooms were cut into the rocks, in a steep cliff overlooking Mistra Valley. In the 17 Century a beautiful wall and arched doorway were constructed, turning the baths into a dwelling place.

On entering the doorway lies a large hall which served as a tepidarium. Two medium-sized pools would have served for cold dips. The stucco lining of the pool and part of the deep red coloured stuccos that covered the walls can still be traced.

A narrow corridor separates the tepidarium from the caldarium, which is well preserved. Of rectangular shape, it possesses an apse with a rock-hewn niche possibly containing the statue of Hercules. What would have been a boiler room, was accessible from the top of the cliff, but is now buried under tons of debris. Water would have come from a natural spring. It is not known whether the pools were roofed over but traces of rebates up the cliff face point to at least partial roofing. Unfortunately the baths had to be abandoned due to subsidence and crevices in the rocks. It looks as if the site was converted into a burial place with artistically cut tombs. In later years it was turned into a troglodyte habitation.

18. THE FARMHOUSE (Razzett)

(View from the terrace opposite Roman Baths)

Without doubt the traditional farm buildings that are scattered in the countryside are an important part of our heritage. It is indeed a pity that a number of them are badly neglected and falling to ruins giving way to more modern buildings that are completely out of character with the surrounding fields and dry stone walls (tas-sejjieħ). It is only in recent years that people are realising that our architectural heritage does not only consist of temples, bastions, churches, etc., but also of clusters of lesser-known buildings in our villages in their natural settings. The planning and layout of the typical farmhouse is the outcome of the sum total of the needs of the farmer, his family and farm animals, his tools and the storage of his crops. It was generally planned round a central courtyard with practically all rooms looking into it, an architectural arrangement that is particularly suited for the local climate with its abundant sunshine, blustery winds and generally mild winters.

The razzett is usually protected by a high perimeter wall both for privacy and protection from marauders raids, which were common in the 16th and 17th century. External windows were small and mostly in the upper floor. Some rooms have narrow slits with tapering sides, known as amberżuni, that the farmer could use as spy-holes and through which, he could insert a shotgun for the defence of his family and his crops. The arch was widely used in the courtyard loggias.

Staircases were built on the outside and were in many cases supported by the rampart arch, whose curvature followed the rising gradient of the open stairs. Rooms for the animals were provided with fodder and water troughs, wall recesses for farm implements and with tie-holes. The living rooms were paved with flagstones. Some large farmhouses had a mill-room with a stone-wheel grain grinder that could be turned slowly by a mule or donkey. Roofs were always flat and inclined in the direction of crude earthenware down pipes, which led the precious rainwater into wells dug in the farmhouse yard. These wells had the opening guarded by a ħerża, or well-head,

that was wide enough for a man to pass through from time to time to descend in order to repair and or clean out the well. The wellheads had normally two square stone pillars spanned by a lintel with an attachment for a hardwood or metal pulley for the rope and bucket. Attached to the main building, most farms had a sheltered room where the farmer kept his cart; some of these were beautifully arched.

19. MISTRA GATE

On the way to Mistra Bay, the eye is struck by a beautiful gate, which was the entrance to a noble person's estate. The gate has four coat-of-arms sculptured in stone. On top is the coat-of-arms of Grand Master Pinto, who ruled from 1741 to 1773. Underneath, there is another one that has the letter "R" and below it 3 loaves. The letter "R" and the loaves portray that this estate was a Foundation of the Monte della Redenzione, (that is why the letter R) degli Schiavi (for the redemption of slaves) founded by Caterina Vitale and Grand Master Wignacourt. The land was rented to farmers and the income went to ransom the slaves.

20. CART RUTS (Raddet Ir-Roti)

Like various other locations in Malta, on the hilltop in Xemxija, near the Fire Engine Depot, in San Martin and other places, there is the existence of what are known as Cart Ruts. Basically they look like cart tracks consisting of parallel groves between 1.32 and 1.47 m wide cut into bare rock. In certain places their width varies continuously over a length of 275 m their width changes 15 times. Their depth also varies up to 61 cm or more. They are shaped in the form of a V with the lower part rounded about 2 cm from the bottom. They sometimes cover long distances following various routes along hilly ridges, between valleys and sometimes leading into shallow waters along the coast. Some of them end abruptly at cliff edges. At some points, they intersect each other. Near the wooded area of Buskett, many of them converge and cross each other. This intersection is commonly referred to as "Clapham Junction", (a reference to an intricate railway junction in Clapham UK). While the experts agree that these ruts on some of the rocky plateaux are of prehistoric origin, they are not all agreed on

the particular period of prehistory from which they date. Nor are they agreed on how precisely these track were made. Sir Themistocles Zammit in his "Malta: The Islands and Their History" was of the idea that these cartways were started by human labour, which idea was enhanced by the fact that in many cases, a system of shunting is arranged so that two carts coming along from the opposite direction on the same track, may continue their course. He holds that this very neat arrangement could not be the result of a mere accident. Professor J.D. Evans in his book, "Ancient Peoples and Places" in 1959 states that various studies lead to the conclusion that they were made by slide-cars (a belief fortified by experiments) and that they evidently formed an elaborate communications system and to judge by their numbers, probably served a fairly large population. Probably they were used to transport many different kinds of goods from settlement to settlement. Drought animals towed these slide cars. Basically the car would consist of two shafts attached to the animal at the front, held together by a framework in the middle and resting on the ground in the rear. The rear ends of the shafts were probably shod with stone in some way. This framework would be strong enough to carry goods or a passenger or both. As to what exact purpose they were used for, there is no evidence to go on. Could they have been used to carry the large stones for the Temples? Many theories abound, from the carrying of seaweed to fertilise the arable land to the transportation of soil to the more barren areas, for the hill top settlements of the Bronze Age people; from carrying loads from the sea to the transportation of fresh water from springs to the settlements. The patterns developed by these tracks are not all susceptible to logical explanation. All we can say is that the incredible number and distribution of the tracks, especially the ones at Clapham Junction indicate that they were used very frequently for a large number of tasks, probably including industry, arable farming, herding, quarrying and warfare. With regards to their age, there are very few clues apart from the fact that in several places Punic tombs are found cut in the ruts, an indication that the tracks were in existence at the time when the tombs were excavated. Thus the tracks are prehistoric. They are noticeably absent around the temple sites but they do exist around the Bronze Age village sites. Thus there is

a case for assuming the tracks are Bronze Age. Understandably these ruts have fired the imagination and intrigued the minds of local and foreign archaeologists, scholars and laymen alike. Van Daniken fantasised that extra terrestrials used the network of ruts, especially the ones at Clapham Junction, as runways for their spacecraft! A very recent theory proposed by Dr. Louis Vella (November 1999) suggests that these furrows (not cart ruts) represent the still visible remains (many more are under fields, buildings roads) of a system of prehistoric surface quarrying practised on a large scale all over the Maltese Islands. But since no expert has confirmed this or that theory beyond argument, one may care to contemplate the ruts and let the imagination go coursing down the vast corridors of time. A personal comment: if ever an answer is found to our queries, it would only fulfill our curiosity; but would, at the same time, remove all the mystique of this intriguing phenomenon!

CLOSING COMMENT

We hope you enjoyed your visit. This is only a small area of archaeological importance in this Locality. For further information consult the San Pawl il-Bahar Archaeological Guide on sale at Book Sellers, Hotels and other outlets.

BIRTH OF THE PROJECT

The members of the San Pawl il-Bahar Heritage Group started the Heritage Trail in 1993 on a voluntary basis after establishing that there was a buried treasure of archaeological importance requiring repairs and a thorough clean up.

As soon as the San Pawl il-Bahar Local Council was set up, the Group called its attention to the state of these sites and of their importance. Thus originated a co-operation between the Group and the Council, which showed a keen interest in the project and supported the Group with encouragement and financial assistance.

The Heritage Trail has created an opportunity for the appreciation of all that is beautiful and prestigious in these islands.

Group Tours can be organised via the Local Council.

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