

**THE LATE PREHISTORY OF MALTA:
ESSAYS ON BORG IN-NADUR AND
OTHER SITES**

edited by

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Cover illustration: Borġ in-Nadur settlement, D-shaped bastion from north
Reproduced courtesy of Daniel Cilia.

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*For David and Bridget Trump
Tireless searchers for Malta's prehistoric past*

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INTRODUCTION

DAVIDE TANASI AND NICHOLAS C. VELLA

One defining episode of Malta's history is often thought to be that associated with its Temple Period, a millennium of cultural florescence that started about 3600 BC, best remembered for its megalithic buildings, burial complexes, and exceptional art. The tail end of that story remains largely unexplained with environmental factors thought to be as significant as social and symbolic aspects of insularity to explain what appears to be a collapse of the system. The next period in the archipelago's history – the Bronze Age – is no less dynamic even if it is less well known. Indeed, on the basis of the available archaeological evidence, it has been possible to identify a number of cycles of object/human/knowledge mobility that determined social development in the course of the late third/second millennium BC when the Mediterranean was characterized by marked trans-regional interaction (Broodbank 2013, ch. 8; Tanasi and Vella 2014). But much more remains to be done for a complete picture of the Maltese islands at this time.

Although Mediterranean island prehistory has been enriched by the staggering amount of archaeological data that has accumulated over the last decades (cf. Cherry and Leppard 2014, 20), it is surprising how little raw data have, in fact, been published in a comprehensive manner from Malta's later prehistoric sites over and above some landmark studies (Trump 1961; Evans 1971). This has been rectified over the last few years in a number of ways with the systematic publication of a number of closed contexts (e.g. Għar Mirdum: Tanasi 2014; In-Nuffara: Tanasi 2013; Tas-Silġ: Copat *et alii* 2013; Sagona forthcoming), in some cases combining empirical approaches and theoretically informed interpretations and perspectives to compare and contrast context-specific dynamics.

The site that has attracted much attention for Malta's Bronze Age remains that of Borġ in-Nadur (Figs 1 and 2). Located on the south-east coast of the island of Malta, it is a major multi-period site, with archaeological remains that span several thousand years. In the course of the Late Neolithic, the steep-sided ridge was occupied by a large megalithic temple complex that was re-occupied in the succeeding Bronze Age. In the course of the second millennium BC, the ridge was heavily fortified by a massive wall to protect a settlement. Excavations were carried out here in 1881 led by A. A. Caruana on behalf of an archaeological commission (see Bugeja 2011 and Grima 2011), and documented in part by Albert Mayr at the close of the century, and again in 1959 by Malta's curator of the museum of Archaeology, D. H. Trump (Trump 1961) (Fig. 3). This volume brings together a number of contributions that report on those excavations in a holistic manner for the first time. It forms a companion to another monograph which concentrated on the nearby temple remains excavated by Margaret Murray

at Borġ in-Nadur in the course of the 1920s (D. Tanasi and N. C. Vella (eds), *Site, artefacts and landscape: prehistoric Borġ in-Nadur, Malta*. Praehistorica Mediterranea 3. Monza: Polimetrica, 2011). Like the latter, this volume is being published thanks to a generous grant from the Shelby White – Leon Levy Foundation of Harvard University (Program for Archaeological Publications), received by one of us (DT) in 2012-2013. The preparation of the illustrations by the able Maxine Anastasi for one contribution (Vella) was sponsored by the University of Malta's Academic Work Resources Fund.

Like its companion volume, this book is divided into parts. The first part takes the form of an archaeological report and consists of eight chapters: chapter 1 (Vella) deals with the stratigraphy based on a reading of Trump's unpublished site notebook and publications; chapter 2 (Terranova) considers some of the structural remains uncovered by Caruana behind the large D-shaped fortification wall; chapter 3 (Tanasi) offers a comprehensive typology of the pottery from Trump's excavations and some surface pottery collected from the spoil heap opposite the large fortification wall in 1963; chapter 4 (Barone and co-authors) reports on the archaeometric characterization of a select group of Bronze Age sherds from Trump's excavations; chapter 5 (Baia Monte) consists of a brief note about the impression of a leaf left on the clay body of a vessel; chapter 6 (Bracchitta) looks at the stone artefacts recovered by Trump and those from the spoil heap; chapter 7 (Fenech and Schembri) presents the shells and the fossils recovered both from Trump's excavations of the settlement and those recovered by Murray in the temple area at the site; finally, chapter 8 (Messina and Tanasi) lists all the skeletal material known from the site. All cultural material considered here is found in the stores of the National Museum of Archaeology, Valletta (Malta). Indeed, we are grateful to Heritage Malta and in particular to Sharon Sultana (Senior Curator at the National Museum) and Vanessa Ciantar (Executive) who permitted the study in the first place, and facilitated access for the different researchers at different times in the course of 2013 and 2014.

The second part of the book consists of three additional studies that consider other sites in Malta and in neighbouring Sicily in an effort to throw light on the late prehistory of the south-central Mediterranean at a period when connections with regions near and far were increasing (Fig. 4). Chapter 9 (Cazzella and Recchia) is an exhaustive overview of the Early Bronze Age of Malta based on new evidence recovered by the Italian Archaeological Mission at Tas-Silġ (northern enclosure), and considers how material culture signatures from Malta fit with regional sequences for southern Italy, the Balkans and beyond. Chapter 10 (Cardona and Zammit) considers another important Bronze Age site, that of Il-Qlejġha tal-Bahrija in

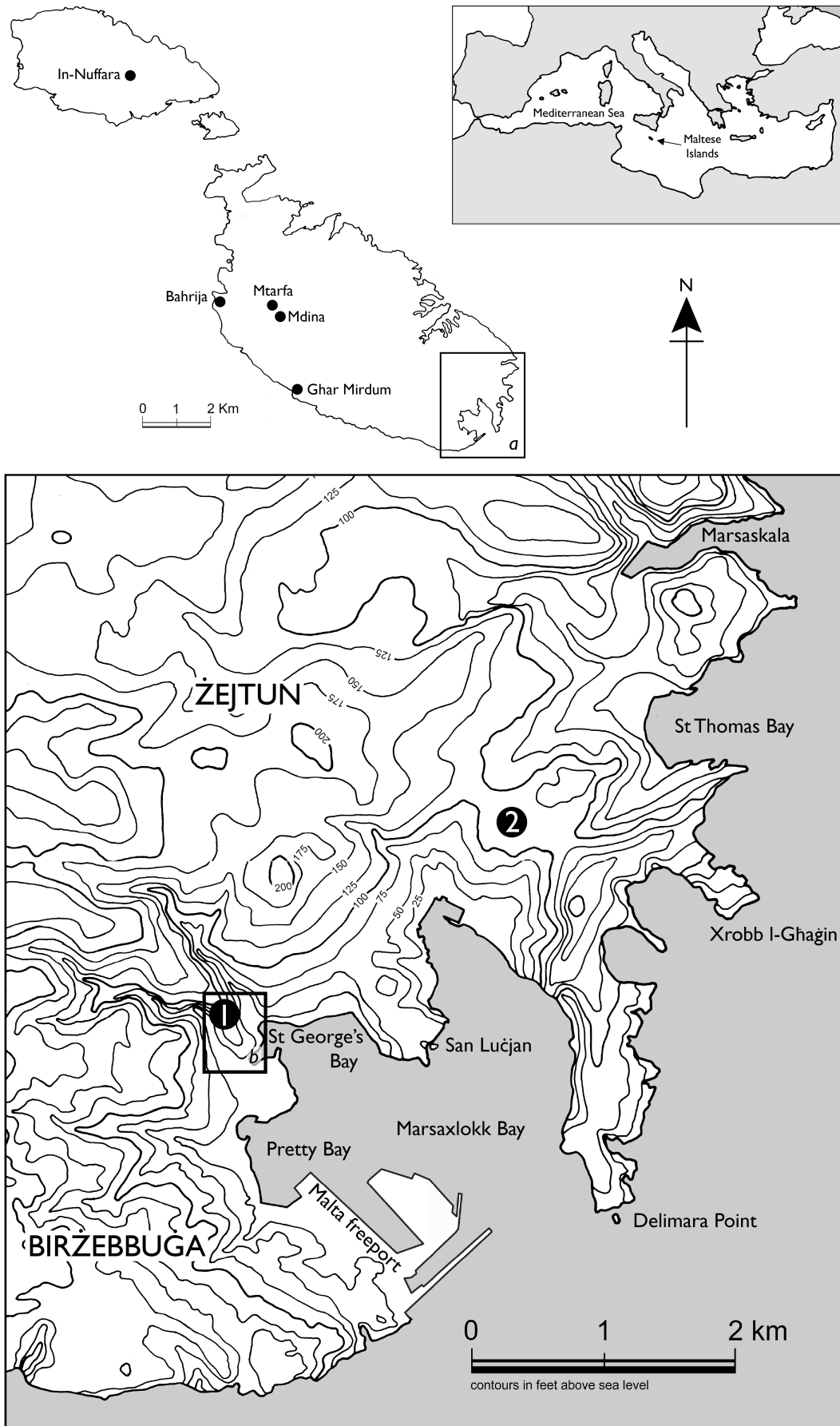


FIGURE 1. SITE LOCATION MAP FOR BORG IN-NADUR (1). PLACE-NAMES MENTIONED IN THE TEXT ARE MARKED, INCLUDING TAS-SILĠ (MARKED AS 2) (DRAWN BY MAXINE ANASTASI).

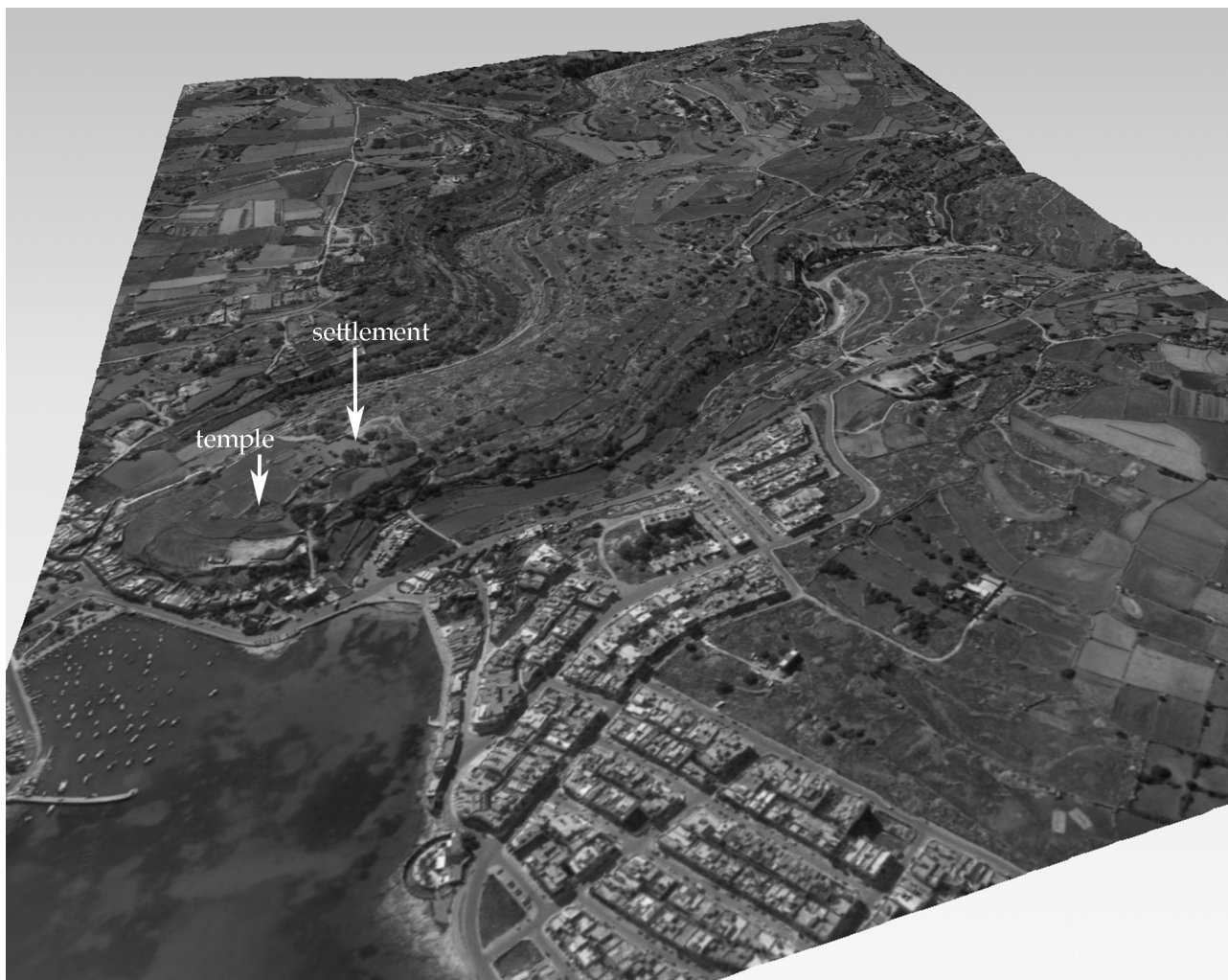


FIGURE 2. 3D VIEW OF THE BORG IN-NADUR SPUR AND VALLEYS FROM THE SOUTH BASED ON AN IMAGE CAPTURED FROM GOOGLE EARTH WRAPPED OVER A LiDAR-DERIVED DTM (MADE AVAILABLE COURTESY OF MALTA ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING AUTHORITY) PREPARED BY DR GIANMARCO ALBERTI.

A LINK THAT ALLOWS INTERACTION WITH THE IMAGE CAN BE FOUND AT:

[HTTPS://DL.DROPBOXUSERCONTENT.COM/U/82297408/BORGINADUR/BORGINADUR3D.HTML](https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/82297408/BORGINADUR/BORGINADUR3D.HTML)

north-west Malta, where T. E. Peet and D. H. Trump dug in 1908 and in 1959 respectively. In chapter 11, Tanasi returns to the vexed question of Borg in-Nadur pottery found in the necropoleis of Thapsos and Matrensa in south-east Sicily, considering its significance.

The book ends with a final chapter (Muscat) that considers the pressing issues of management that the site of Borg in-Nadur is facing from a number of interest groups. We feel that it is a fitting conclusion, or prologue, to the volume, bringing up issues that impinge directly and indirectly on the rich archaeological resource, in part still buried, at this singular site.

Recommendations for future work

We believe that this volume, and its companion published a few years ago (Tanasi and Vella 2011a), have brought together and reviewed most, if not all, the data that have been gathered from the site of Borg in-Nadur over the years. In part, we believe that we have taken up the challenge we set ourselves a few years ago,

when drawing up the conclusions to this volume's companion (Tanasi and Vella 2011b). To take research further we strongly recommend that limited and targeted excavations should take place at this site in order to clarify issues that have been raised and questions that remain, as described below – though not necessarily in the order given here.

1. The possibility that the area of the Bronze Age settlement at Borg in-Nadur had a longer history has been entertained in different chapters in this volume, in particular on account of the Tarxien Cemetery phase pottery that was found in layers butting the remains of a wall uncovered by Trump (Vella, this volume; Tanasi, chapter 3); one of these layers contained – rather oddly – two human bones (Messina and Tanasi, this volume). The suggestion that a towered fortification system existed prior to the building of the D-shaped bastion made indirectly by Mayr in 1901, and now by Terranova (chapter 2), demands further investigation. We hope that a geophysical survey of the entire area behind the D-shaped bastion is carried

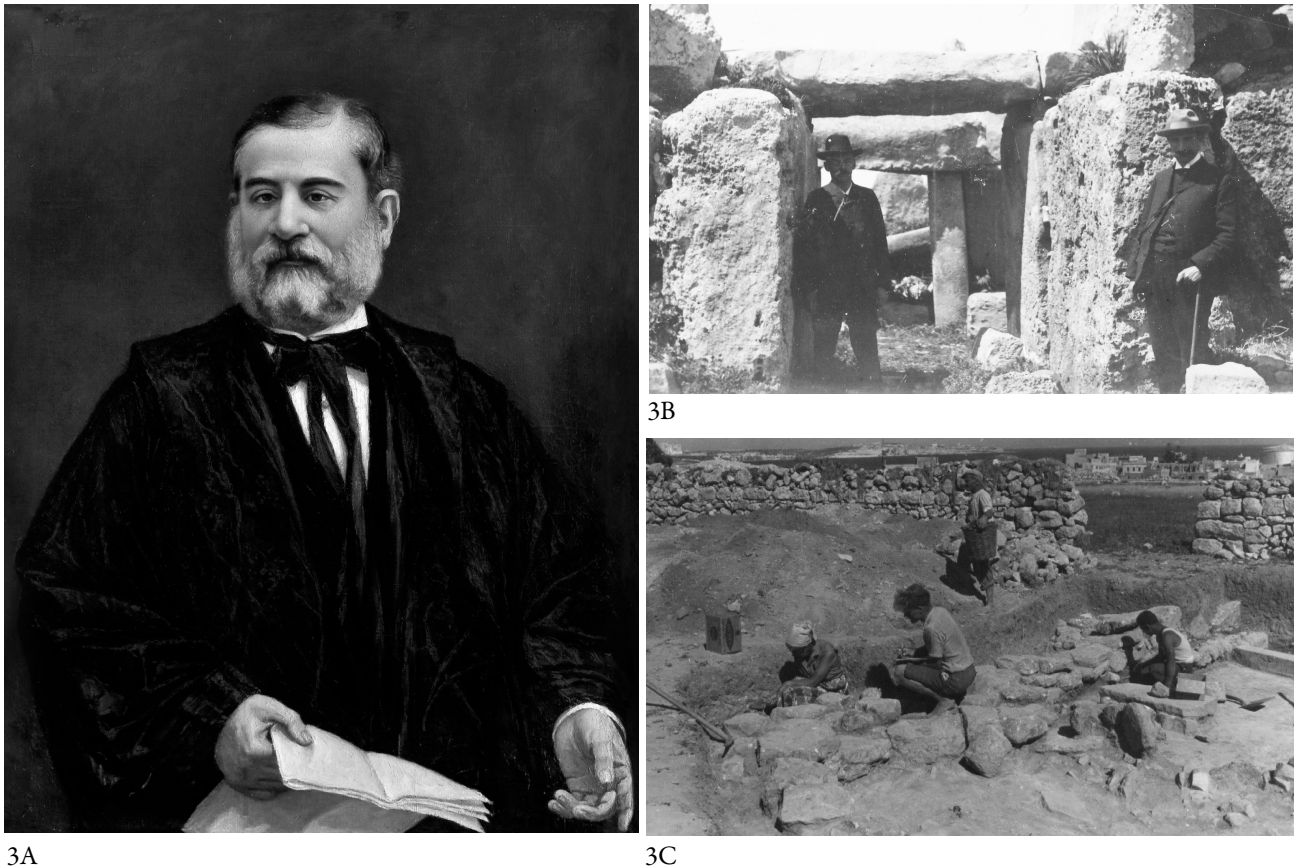


FIGURE 3. THE SEARCHERS AT BORĠ IN-NADUR: (A) A. A. CARAUNA (PAINTING HANGS IN THE RECTORATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MALTA AND IS BEING REPRODUCED COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MALTA/DANIEL CILIA); (B) ALBERT MAYR, HERE (LEFT) SHOWN AT THE MNAJDRA TEMPLES (PHOTOGRAPH IN A PRIVATE COLLECTION); (C) D. H. TRUMP (PHOTOGRAPH REPRODUCED BY COURTESY OF HERITAGE MALTA).

out with the intent of defining what may lie below the ground that has not been disturbed by the eucalyptus trees that were allowed to be grown in the area in the course of the 1980s and 1990s. Limited excavations can be defined on the basis of the results obtained, but should at least include the opening of the Trump trenches, and the extensions of the same.

2. An archaeological narrative is only as good as the chronological yardstick to which it is pegged. Needless to say, the handful of radiocarbon dates available for the whole of Malta's late prehistory (cf. *Cazzella et alii* 2007) is insufficient to ensure that the narrative obtained can stand without having to rely too much on regional cross-dating and stylistic comparisons, as is the case with some of the contributions to this volume (cf. also the views of Sagona 2011 and *Cazzella and Recchia* 2011). The well-argued case presented in one of the chapters (*Cazzella and Recchia*) for a Thermi Ware phase (c. 2300-2150 BC), between the end of the Temple Period (Tarxien phase) and the onset of the Bronze Age (Tarxien Cemetery phase), will certainly be embraced if radiocarbon determinations on material from secure stratified deposits at Tas-Silġ (northern enclosure) to back it up are available.
3. Scientific analyses of a select group of Middle Bronze Age pottery from Borġ in-Nadur has finally settled the

issue of fabric types, reducing these to two groups rather than those previously identified, with much difficulty, using macroscopic means alone. We can only hope that this exercise be extended to more samples obtained from pottery for which a secure context is available, emulating the results presented on some pottery from a tomb in Matrensa, Sicily (Tanasi, chapter 11). Translated into social practices, such results should tell us more about the nature of the interaction on either side of the Sicily-Malta channel and, indeed, more widely.

4. Patient recording of Bronze Age sites in Malta and Gozo, often consisting of little more than features exposed in rock outcrops, can be rewarding as the work presented in one chapter shows (*Cardona and Zammit*). There is much scope for extending such exercises and to consider sites in their wider landscape context. We are aware that the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage (Malta) has been involved in carrying out a survey of all known dolmenic structures on the islands and we hope that the results be published. The University of Malta has also completed a survey of the rock-cut silo pits and other features in the windswept promontory site of Wardija ta' San Ġorġ, explored in the late 1970s by the former Museums Department. A report will be published shortly. We are also happy to report that as part of the ERC-funded FRAGSUS project (led by Prof. Caroline Malone, Queen's University



FIGURE 4. SITES IN MALTA AND IN SOUTH-EAST SICILY MENTIONED IN THE TEXT (DRAWN BY MAXINE ANASTASI).

Belfast, UK – www.qub.ac.uk/sites/FRAGSUS/), two silo pits at the Bronze Age site of In-Nuffara, Gozo, have been explored (March 2015) revealing palaeobotanical remains that will hopefully throw light on the type of environment that existed at the time they were in use. In addition, as part of the same project, two deep cores taken in September 2013 through deposits that accumulated on the valley bottoms on either side of the Borg in-Nadur promontory, at Wied Żembaq and Wied Dalam respectively, should throw light on the development of the landscape in this area, in particular its coastline.

The need for further research in the field of Malta's late prehistory is a plea made by most of the authors in this volume, and something that we, as editors, champion. Very little of the work presented here would have been possible if no digging

and recording had been accomplished by David Trump at Borg in-Nadur more than fifty-five years ago. If we dedicate this volume to David and his wife, Bridget, it is because we see in them the perfect combination of a humble and passionate love for Malta and a tireless search for its prehistoric past – something that we all hope to emulate and encourage. With this volume, we salute them.

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Bionotes

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