

Catalogue of pre-temple period sherds from the Maltese Islands

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This catalogue was compiled in 2023. Data collection was carried out between 2018-2020 and 2023. The current or additional data on the sherds can be accessed by emailing Dr Ing J.C. Betts at john.betts@um.edu.mt

Author statement

This catalogue was compiled and written by E. Richard-Trémeau. Dr C Brogan carried out the phase identification and the selection of sherds to be analysed. The data about the sherds were collected by the principal researcher for the MaltaPot project, Dr C. Brogan, and completed later by E. Richard Trémeau (surface treatment, archaeological context, cross-referencing with FRAGSUS and any missing information) and Dr Ing. J.C. Betts. The photographs and micro-photographs were taken by Dr C. Brogan and edited by E. Richard-Trémeau.

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Introduction

This catalogue aims to provide additional information about fifteen sherds dating from the pre-temple Neolithic in the Maltese islands. Pottery sherds from these chronological phases are not widely published, and therefore, this catalogue aims to offer photos and descriptions of these sherds, providing comparative material for future research. The MaltaPot project (University of Malta, 2018), of which this catalogue is a part, seeks to enhance our understanding of the prehistoric societies that inhabited Malta during the Neolithic period. By examining the pottery fragments found on the island, the project aims to shed light on the technological, social, and economic developments during this time. The detailed study of these sherds is thus a crucial component of the MaltaPot project and is expected to contribute significantly to our knowledge of prehistoric Malta.

Methodology

The data in this catalogue include photographs, microphotographs, sherd macroscopic observations, and contextual information from archaeological sites. The latex scripts used for this catalogue can be found in Richard-Trémeau (2023).

Information and data on the archaeological contexts were collected from previous publications, particularly from the recent project FRAGSUS in the Maltese Islands (Malone et al., 2020a). Data was additionally provided by the National Museum of Archaeology, Malta (NMA) and is identified as such in-text.

The macroscopic observations (e.g. surface treatment, thickness) were recorded following Orton and Hughes (2013); and the colours using the Munsell Soil Color Chart (Munsell Color, 2012). The typology and the description of decoration follows Evans (1971, Figs.30-33), recently re-published in Malone et al. (2020b, pp.750–1), and Sagona (2015).

The photographs of each sherd's internal and external surfaces were taken using a copy-stand, a colour scale and a black background. The white balance was corrected digitally, and photographs were assembled on a black background digitally created. The microphotographs presented have a width of 15.8 mm and were taken with a binocular stereomicroscope (MEJI Techno RZ) and a camera (Microtec IS 1000).

G1005

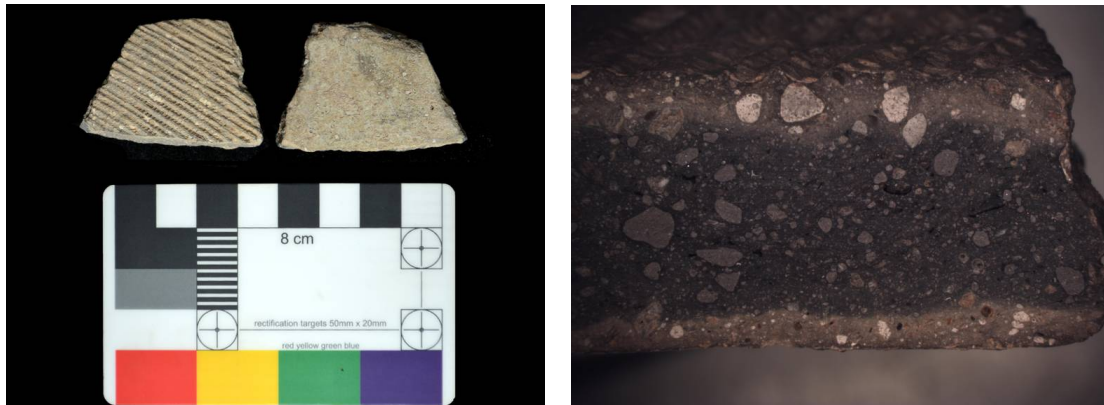


Figure 2: (a) Exterior and interior of G1005 (b) Microphotograph: G1005 ground edge

Other identifiers and previous publications GD1-3F-119-1 (MaltaPot)

Description

Sherd type	Body sherd
Macroscopic Ware classification	Transitional ware
Wall thickness	8.08 mm
Surface treatment	(Shell?)-impressed decorations with white paste filling
Surfaces Interior	10YR 7/2 light gray
Surfaces Exterior	10YR 6/3 pale brown
Core colour	10YR 3/1 very dark gray
Margin colour	2.5Y 5/1 gray

Table 1: Characteristics of G1005

Archaeological context This sherd was excavated from Santa Verna by the FRAG-SUS project in 2015 (McLaughlin et al., 2020a), in the Western extension of Trench D, situated to the North-West of the main temple structure. The stratigraphic unit (119) in which it was found is a layer beneath a Ġgantija beaten floor surface, surface 21, both represented in section in McLaughlin et al. (2020a, 141, Fig. 4.24). The layer (119) contained Ġħar Dalam pottery but also Skorba phase and Żebbuġ phase pottery.

The sherd has Ġħar Dalam diagnostic decoration and the white paste which have many comparative material in the Ġħar Dalam period (Malone et al., 2020, pp.325, 327).

G1023

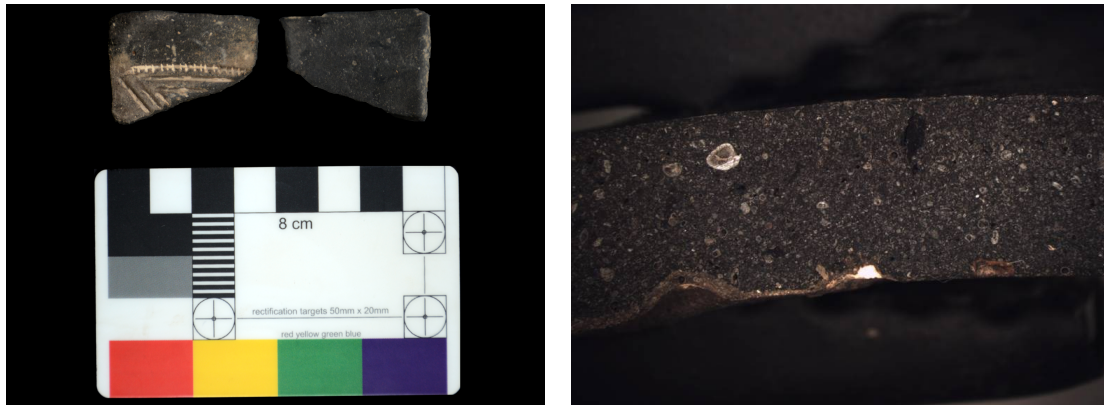


Figure 3: (a) Exterior and interior of G1023 (b) Microphotograph: G1023 ground edge

Other identifiers and previous publications GD1-3F-7-5 (MaltaPot); SV7-9 (FRAG-SUS project), see Malone et al. (2020, p.328) for drawing.

Description

Sherd type	Rim
Typology	Evans type 2 (Evans, 1971, Fig. 30:2)
Macroscopic Ware classification	Fine
Wall thickness	5.61 mm
Max diameter	10 cm
Surface treatment	Impressed patterns: diagonal lines (part of a chevron) and 'C' patterns (Malone et al., 2020, p.328). Sherd has a soft surface.
Surfaces Interior	2.5Y 3/1 very dark gray
Surfaces Exterior	2.5Y 3/1 very dark gray
Core colour	2.5Y 2.5/1 black

Table 2: Characteristics of G1023

Archaeological context This sherd was excavated as part of the FRAGSUS project excavation at the site of Santa Verna and is extracted from the stratigraphic context (7), trench B. This context is described in McLaughlin et al. (2020a, p.135). This unit had no *in-situ* features, but a scatter of Neolithic sherds, including Għar Dalam sherds, was found in the trench. Such scatters are the primary type of contexts for the Għar Dalam period.

This sherd has diagnostic Għar Dalam decorations, as illustrated in the comparative material in Malone et al. (2020, p.328).

G1027

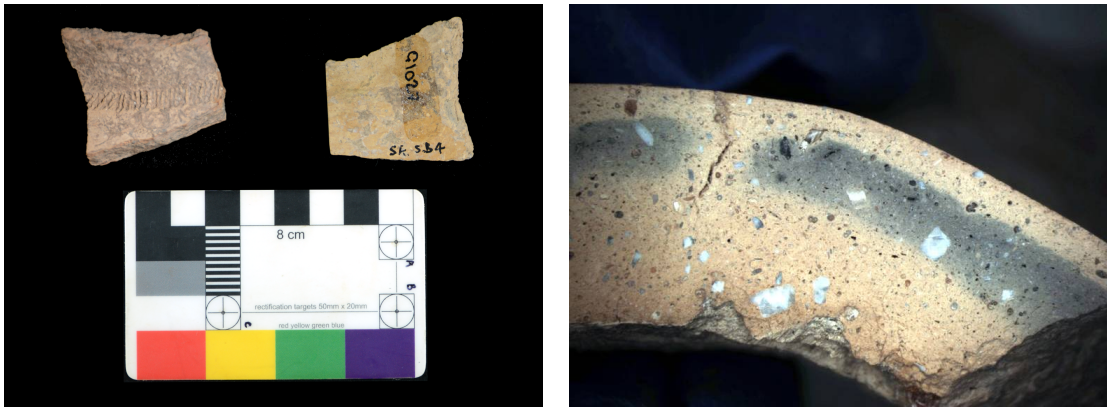


Figure 4: (a) Exterior and interior of G1027 (b) Microphotograph: G1027 ground edge

Other identifiers and previous publications SKSB4 (National Museum of Archaeology, Malta, inventory); GD1-4T-?-1 (MaltaPot).

Description

Sherd type	Body and shoulder
Typology	Evans Għar Dalam type 3 or 4
Macroscopic Ware classification	Fine (Evans, 1954) or Transitional
Wall thickness	7.24 mm
Surface treatment	Band of incised vertical/diagonal lines on the shoulder. Burnished inner surface.
Surfaces Interior	10YR 7/4 very pale brown
Surfaces Exterior	10YR 8/2 very pale brown
Core colour	7.5YR 7/4 pink AND 7.5YR 6/1 gray

Table 3: Characteristics of G1027

Archaeological context This sherd was found at the site of Skorba, during the campaigns of excavations by Trump (1966; 2015). Although there is no precise contextual information available, Trump classified his pottery through a thorough stratigraphic understanding of the site and was the first archaeologist to recognise the phases of pottery named Skorba, succeeding to the Għar Dalam phase pottery. The decorations of these sherds are typical of the Għar Dalam period, with short diagonal or vertical lines in the neck of the vessel. Examples of these decorations are illustrated in Malone et al. (2020, p.328), found at the site of Santa Verna, Gozo.

G2004



Figure 5: (a) Exterior and interior of G2004 (b) Microphotograph: G2004 ground edge

Other identifiers and previous publications GD2-3F-89-3 (MaltaPot)

Description

Sherd type	Body
Macroscopic Ware classification	Coarse Ware
Wall thickness	10.27 mm
Surface treatment	Burnished interior surface and three incised lines
Surfaces Interior	10YR 7/3 very pale brown
Surfaces Exterior	10YR 6/3 pale brown and 10YR 5/1 gray
Margin colour	10YR 5/1 gray and 7.5YR 5/4 brown

Table 4: Characteristics of G2004

Archaeological context This sherd was excavated from Santa Verna in 2015 by the FRAGSUS project (McLaughlin et al., 2020a), Trench E, context (89), in the vicinity of the temple structure (McLaughlin et al., 2020a, pp.137, 146). This rubble layer was deposited during the Temple period and eventually covered by the temple collapse (McLaughlin et al., 2020a, p.148). The Għar Dalam sherds are residual. A concentration of sherds from this phase was, however, noted in this context, among others (McLaughlin et al., 2020a, p.153). This suggests a disturbance of these Għar Dalam sherds during the Temple period.

This sherd is part of a Għar Dalam scatter and has decorations, either incisions or chevrons, with comparative material in Malone et al. (2020, p.328).

S3009

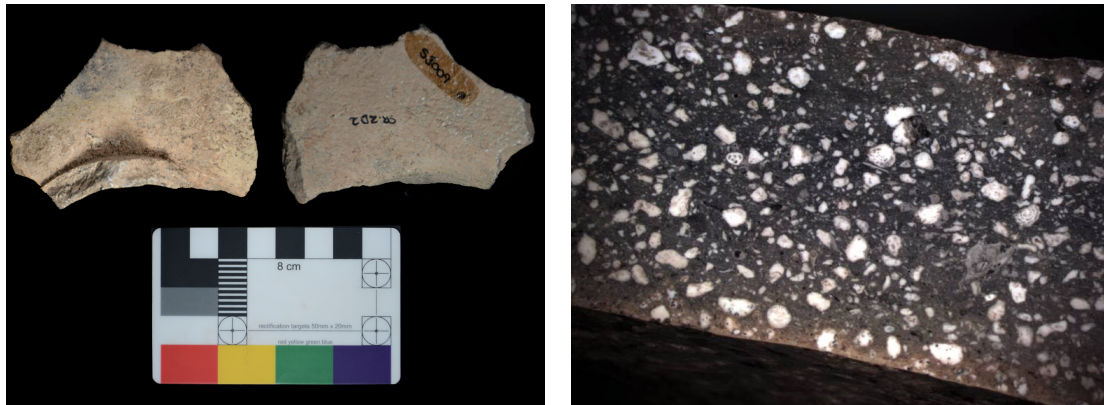


Figure 6: (a) Exterior and interior of S3009 (b) Microphotograph: S3009 ground edge

Other identifiers and previous publications 33468 (National Museum inventory); RS1-4T-?-3 (MaltaPot project)

Description

Sherd type	Body
Typology	Evans Grey Skorba type 2
Macroscopic Ware classification	Fine
Wall thickness	10.38 mm
Surface treatment	No surface treatment (surface inclusions visible), soft (nail-scratch)
Surfaces Interior	10YR 7/3 very pale brown
Surfaces Exterior	10YR 8/3 very pale brown
Core colour	2.5YR 5/1 reddish gray

Table 5: Characteristics of S3009

NMA description inputted by Sandra Pirani "1 very thick rim sherd with light pink rubbed surfaces." The sherd was since identified as a body sherd from the pedestal base of Evans Grey Skorba type 2.

Archaeological context This sherd comes from the site of Skorba in Mgarr, Malta, and was excavated in the 1960s by Trump (1966). It was extracted from the NMA collection, Box 74. This sherd was excavated from trench ZD layer 2, part of the Eastern sector (Trump, 1966, p.12) close to what was interpreted by Trump as a Neolithic "village" and a Skorba "shrine" (Trump, 2015, p.31). Layer 2 is described as "Hard brown" and is under topsoil (Trump, 1963, p.7). Skorba phase pottery was found in this trench, both Red and Grey Skorba, as well as chert and bone, and no other sherds were reported (Trump, 1963, 25 l.).

S6012

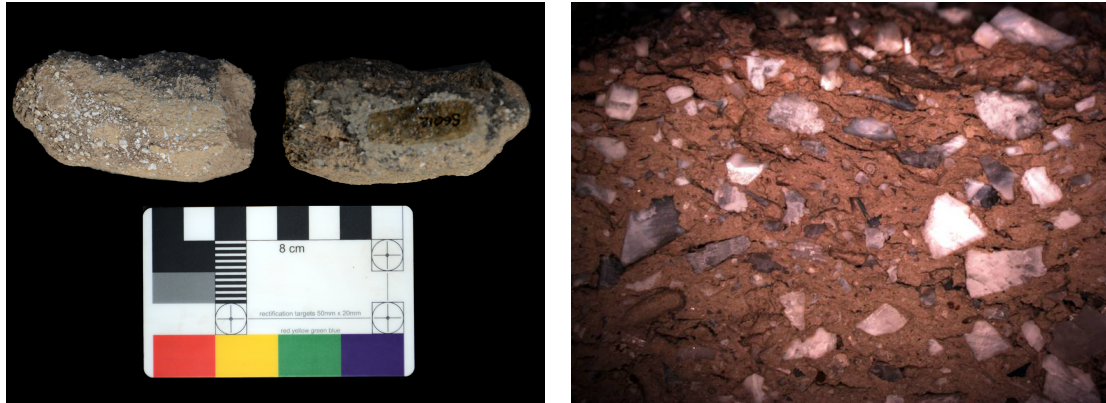


Figure 7: (a) Exterior and interior of S6012 (b) Microphotograph: S6012 ground edge

Other identifiers and previous publications N/A

Description

Sherd type	Body
Macroscopic Ware classification	Coarse Ware
Wall thickness	26.91 mm
Surface treatment	Surface inclusions visible
Surfaces Interior	10YR 6/1 gray
Surfaces Exterior	10YR 7/3 very pale brown
Core colour	10YR 5/1 gray
Margin colour	10YR 7/3 very pale brown and 2.5Y 4/1 dark gray

Table 6: Characteristics of S6012

Archaeological context This sherd was excavated from Santa Verna by the FRAG-SUS project (McLaughlin et al., 2020a), Trench D Northern extension, stratigraphic unit (113). This context was deposited during the Skorba phase and yielded radio-carbon dates of 5325-5075 cal. BC (McLaughlin et al., 2020b, p.144). This context was part of a series of layers above Skorba floor levels, including *torba* floors (McLaughlin et al., 2020b, p.154). Some residual Għar Dalam sherds were found as well as intrusive sherds from later periods, suggesting disturbance during the Żebbug phase.

Z1008



Figure 8: (a) Exterior and interior of Z1008 (b) Microphotograph: Z1008 ground edge

Other identifiers and previous publications ZB1-3F-32-2 (MaltaPot)

Description

Sherd type	Rim
Typology	Żebbuġ Evans 5
Macroscopic Ware classification	<i>Trefontane</i> Ware but different fabric from Z1010
Wall thickness	7.76 mm
Surface treatment	Fine lines incised, <i>Trefontane</i> style decoration with grid-like pattern in a triangle (outer surface). Burnished surfaces.
Surfaces Interior	7.5YR 4/1 dark gray and 7.5YR 5/3 brown
Surfaces Exterior	7.5YR 4/1 dark gray and 7.5YR 5/3 brown
Core colour	2.5YR 4/1 dark reddish gray
Margin colour	7.5YR 5/4 brown

Table 7: Characteristics of Z1008

Archaeological context This sherd was excavated from Santa Verna by the FRAG-SUS project (McLaughlin et al., 2020a), Trench C, stratigraphic unit (32). Trench C was opened following ground-penetrating radar (GPR) results (McLaughlin et al., 2020a, p.135). No structures were identified during the excavation. This layer contained Żebbuġ pottery and intrusive sherds from the later Ġgantija period. This has diagnostic Żebbuġ phase decorations, similar to those described in Malone et al. (2020, p. 343, Fig. 10.12).

Z1010



Figure 9: (a) Exterior and interior of Z1010 (b) Microphotograph: Z1010 ground edge

Other identifiers and previous publications ZB1-3F-32-1 (MaltaPot)

Description

Sherd type	Rim
Typology	Evans type 5, bowl (everted rim), 24 cm diameter
Macroscopic Ware classification	Trefontane fine ware
Wall thickness	9.36 mm
Surface treatment	Burnished surfaces; two rows of scallop patterns and below wavy lines.
Surfaces Interior	10YR 4/1 dark gray
Surfaces Exterior	10YR 2/1 black AND 10YR 5/2 grayish brown
Core colour	2.5Y 5/1 gray

Table 8: Characteristics of Z1010

Archaeological context This sherd was excavated as part of the FRAGSUS project excavation at the site of Santa Verna and is extracted from the stratigraphic context (32), Trench C. This context is described in entry Z1008. This sherd has typical Trefontane decorations, see Malone et al. (2020, p.343) for other examples from Santa Verna.

Z1017

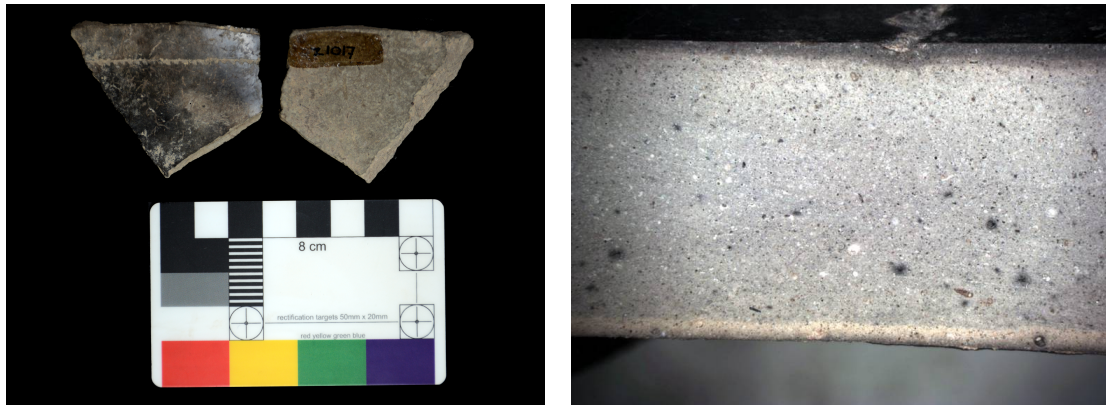


Figure 10: (a) Exterior and interior of Z1017 (b) Microphotograph: Z1017 ground edge

Other identifiers and previous publications ZB1-3F-32-7 (MaltaPot)

Description

Sherd type	Body
Macroscopic Ware classification	Fine Ware, Trefontane
Wall thickness	8.79 mm
Surface treatment	Burnished on the outer surface and lightly burnished on inner surface. Decorated with a feathered line.
Surfaces Interior	7.5YR 6/1 gray
Surfaces Exterior	10YR 2/1 black AND 10YR 5/1 gray
Core colour	10YR 6/1 gray

Table 9: Characteristics of Z1017

Archaeological context This sherd was excavated in the context of the FRAGSUS project excavation at Santa Verna (32). This layer was described in entry Z1008. The decorations of this sherd is less typical of the *Trefontane* style, however, the fabric description corresponds to this fine grey fabric described by Trump (1966).

Z3025

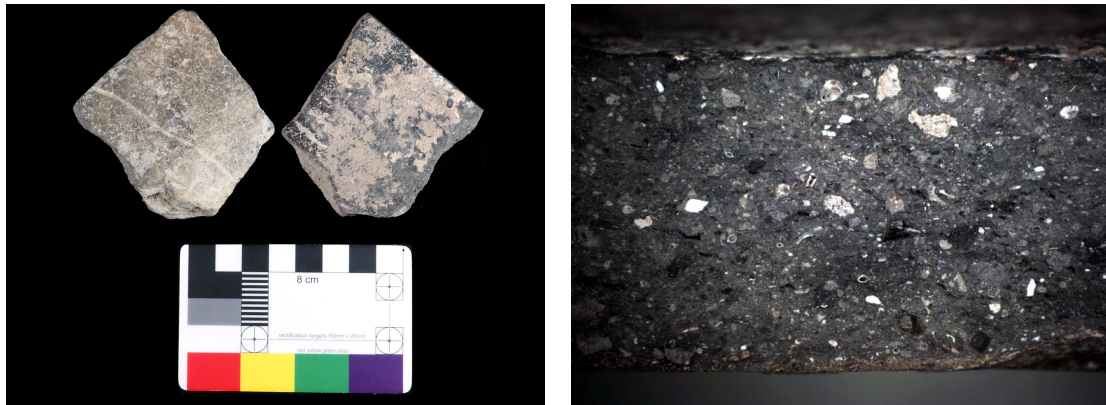


Figure 11: (a) Exterior and interior of Z3025 (b) Microphotograph: Z3025 ground edge

Other identifiers and previous publications 11399 (NMA); MGP699 (NMA)

Description

Sherd type	Body and beginning of a base
Typology	Shape with a flat base: Evans types 12-16
Macroscopic Ware classification	Fine Ware
Wall thickness	20.43 mm
Surface treatment	Burnished but unlikely slipped. Incision made post-firing.
Surfaces Interior	GLEY 1 4/N dark gray
Surfaces Exterior	10YR 5/2 grayish brown
Core colour	GLEY 1 4/N dark gray

Table 10: Characteristics of Z3025

NMA description inputted by Daniel Borg and Kurt Balzan Sherd scratched/decorated with a root ? Burnished grey to dark grey slip on exterior and burnished black slip on interior. Well fired black ware.

Archaeological context This sherd comes from the excavations at Ta'Haġrat temples, but the exact context is unknown. Excavators and researchers catalogued it as Żebbuġ in the NMA collection. The site was mainly excavated in the 1920s, with a few trenches opened in later decades (Evans, 1971, p.29).

Z4004

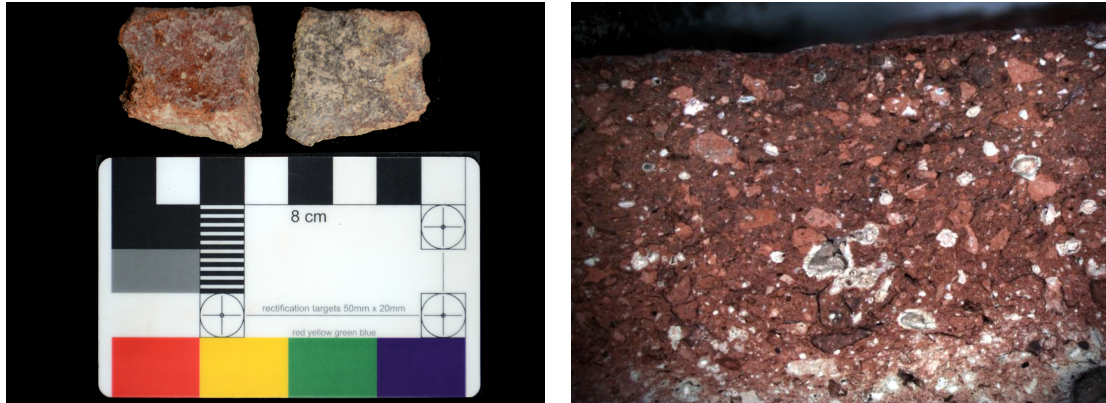


Figure 12: (a) Exterior and interior of Z4004 (b) Microphotograph: Z4004 ground edge

Other identifiers and previous publications ZB4-4F-3-1 (MaltaPot)

Description

Sherd type	Body
Macroscopic Ware classification	Pellegrin Ware
Wall thickness	12.72 mm
Surface treatment	Coarse surface, untreated
Surfaces Interior	2.5YR 4/4 reddish brown
Surfaces Exterior	7.5YR 4/2 brown
Core colour	2.5YR 4/8 red
Margin colour	10YR 7/2 light gray and 7.5YR 8/4 pink

Table 11: Characteristics of Z6023

Archaeological context This shed was excavated from the site of Skorba by the FRAGSUS project, context (3). This context is described in Brogan et al. (2020, p.233) as a mixed rubble context with mixed phases represented in the layer.

Z5034

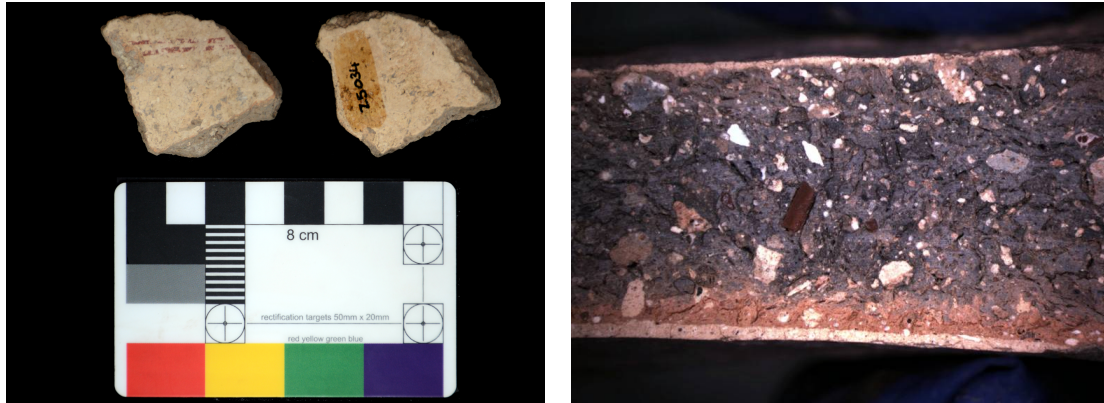


Figure 13: (a) Exterior and interior of Z5034 (b) Microphotograph: Z5034 ground edge

Other identifiers and previous publications ZB5-7-87-1 (MaltaPot)

Description

Sherd type	Body
Macroscopic Ware classification	Coarse Ware, painted.
Wall thickness	9.58 mm
Surface treatment	Whitened surface, likely cream-slipped and burnished. Two red painted bands on the exterior surface.
Surfaces Interior	10YR 8/4 very pale brown
Surfaces Exterior	10YR 8/3 very pale brown
Core colour	10YR 5/1 gray
Margin colour	5YR 5/6 yellowish red and 10YR 5/1 gray

Table 12: Characteristics of Z5034

Archaeological context This sherd was excavated at the site of Taċ-Ċawla by the FRAGSUS project, context (87) (Malone et al., 2020c, p.75). This layer, like many at the site, was disturbed by ploughing and agricultural activity during the Roman period.

Z6023



Figure 14: (a) Exterior and interior of Z6023 (b) Microphotograph: Z6023 ground edge

Other identifiers and previous publications ZB6-8-662-12 (MaltaPot)

Description

Sherd type	Body
Macroscopic Ware classification	Coarse Ware, painted or incised
Wall thickness	7.39 mm
Surface treatment	Traces of a stick figure made post-firing
Surfaces Interior	2.5YR 6/1 reddish gray
Surfaces Exterior	2.5YR 6/1 reddish gray
Core colour	2.5YR 5/1 reddish gray

Table 13: Characteristics of Z6023

Archaeological context This sherd was excavated at the Xagħra circle, excavated in the 90s, context (662) (Stoddart et al., 2009, 182, 177 Fig. 8.73 in plan). This layer was rich in pottery, with examples of the different pottery phases at the site. This layer had collapse material from the roof of the underground structure.

This sherd has diagnostic decorations associated with the "stick" figures from the Żebbuġ phase, first identified at the site of Ta' Trapna (Baldacchino and Evans, 1954, p.9).

Z6048

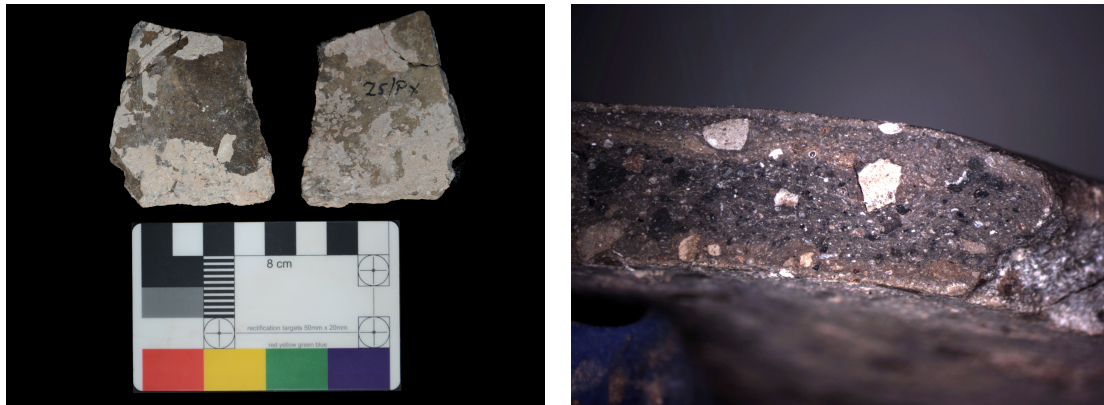


Figure 15: (a) Exterior and interior of Z6048 (b) Microphotograph: Z6048 ground edge

Other identifiers and previous publications 100531 (NMA); Z5/PX (NMA)

Description

Sherd type	Body sherd
Macroscopic Ware classification	Fine ware, funerary
Wall thickness	5.49-6 mm
Surface treatment	Lightly burnished surfaces, incisions visible. Pinkish post-depositional encrustations.
Surfaces Interior	10YR 5/2 grayish brown
Surfaces Exterior	10YR 3/1 very dark gray AND 10YR 4/2 Dark grayish brown
Core colour	GLE 1 5/N gray
Margin colour	2.5Y 4/2 dark grayish brown (both)

Table 14: Characteristics of Z6048

NMA description, inputted by Tamsin Cauchi Body sherd, grey ware, poorly-fired with a dark brown exterior surface and light brown interior surface, both encrusted with earth. Two curved, parallel bands of incised decoration towards the corner of the sherd in "narrow Mgar" style.

Archaeological context This sherd was excavated at Ta'Trapna, Tomb 5, Period Ia2, published in Baldacchino and Evans (1954) and Evans (1971, p.168). These tombs are Żebbuġ phase tombs and were excavated after being disturbed by modern trenches while excavating for construction. These tombs are the site-type for the Żebbuġ phase.

Z7020



Figure 16: (a) Exterior and interior of Z7020 (b) Microphotograph: Z7020 ground edge

Other identifiers and previous publications ZB7-5-?-6 (MaltaPot); 11805 (NMA), MGP135 (NMA)

Description

Sherd type	Rim
Typology	Evans type 14
Macroscopic Ware classification	Fine Ware, yellow incised
Wall thickness	7.79-100 mm
Surface treatment	Burnished. Below rim: band made of two parallel horizontal lines incised and small (around 1 cm) diagonal lines within. Five diagonal lines on the lower part of the sherd.
Surfaces Interior	10YR 7/4 very pale brown
Surfaces Exterior	10YR 7/6 yellow
Core colour	7.5YR 7/4 pink AND 7.5YR 6/1 gray

Table 15: Characteristics of Z7020

NMA description, inputted by Daniel Borg; Kurt Balzan. Shape 14-15 (as per Evans Cat No: Mg/P135). Rim sherd of small ovoid jars with an upturned thickened lip scratch decorated with a cross hatched band going round the rim with traces of white inlay and a number of scratched arcs also with traces of white inlay below. Buff burnished slip on exterior and interior. Well fired pinkish grey ware. Max diameter 12cm.

Archaeological context This sherd comes from the excavations at Ta'Hagrat temples. The exact location and stratigraphy are unknown, but Evans (1954) classified it

as Żebbuġ in the catalogue collection. This site has both Żebbuġ and Mġarr layers, disturbed during the construction of the megalithic structure (Evans, 1954, pp.34–35).

This sherd has a diagnostic shape and diagnostic decorations. Comparative patterns can be found in Evans (1971, Fig. 29) and Sagona (2015, Fig. 3.1).

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