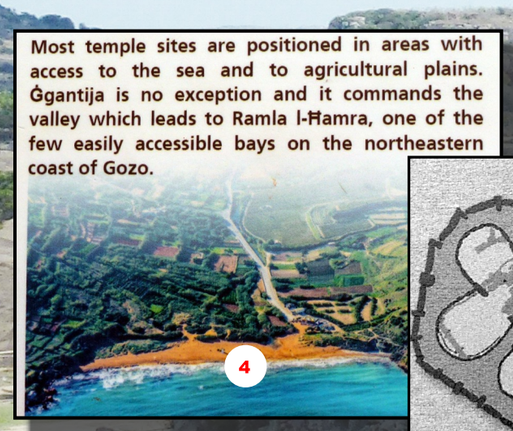
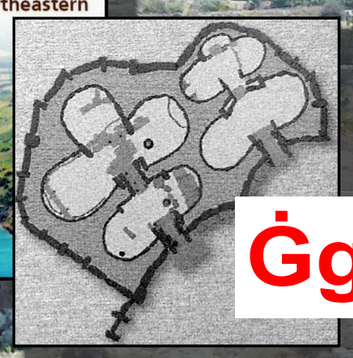
# MEGALITHIC SEAWAYS

**'*The calibration of radiocarbon dates … has liberated the central and western Mediterranean from a presumption of eastern priority*' Cyprian Broodbank** [1]

***'A maritime megalithic culture emerges in western Europe in the 5th millennium BC'* Barry Cunliffe** [2]

**In the 4th Malta and Orkney become *heterotopia* for seafarers. Connecting was the destination** [3]



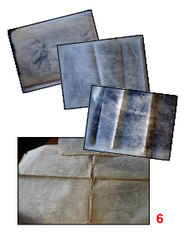



**Ġgantija**

## MALTESE SHIP IMAGES REVEALED

**Numerous contact rubbings of the Hal Tarxien graffiti made at the time of discovery have been located in the library of the Society of Antiquaries.** [5]

**After conservation they will enable the published drawings to be critically re-evaluated for the first time.**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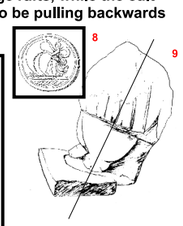
**INTERPRETATION: One group appear to be large rafts, while the cult statue facing them in the Third Temple seems to be pulling backwards on the uneven surface of a raft.**

**The carving is cruder than the other bas-relief panels. It may represent ends of reed bundles protruding between lashed rungs and compressed into uneven lentoid form.** [10]

*Plinth when excavated* [11]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**There is an intentional 15° tilt confirmed by vertical pleats.**



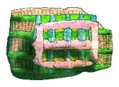
## 4TH MILLENNIUM BC FREIGHTER RAFT FROM MALTA

*'At least since the Neolithic migration voyages, platforms on rafts were needed for safer and more efficient sea transports of persons and goods… **freighter raft** refers to rafts used for all types of transports, of goods as well as persons.'* Gerhard Kapitan [29]

*'The Twins', Xagra Circle, Gozo. Limestone 18cm*


29

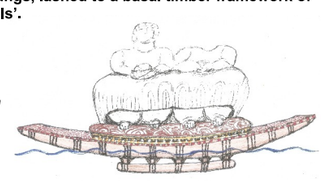
*Base from below, multi-layered and intricately carved with lashings incised. The construction was clearly as important to the sculptor as the figures above.*



A - green and brown
B - pink and blue
Pallet - lighter brown
Note that A is both shorter and narrower than B.

**INTERPRETATION. Two '*Matres*' and a baby sit on a patterned cushion supported on a pallet. The raft beneath is in 2 sections: [A], a tightly constructed platform continuously bound to 4 longitudinal parallel timbers carved with taper and rocker. It is lashed to [B], a smaller structure of 5 substantial rungs, lashed to a basal timber framework of 'keel' and curving 'side-keels'.**

***MINIMAL RECONSTRUCTION based on assumption that the sculptor compressed the length in order to fit the raft beneath the figures.***



**Shorter timbers placed beneath a 'normal' raft (see centre panel) improve buoyancy and manoeuvrability. Hornell cites parallels** [31]**. The *Matres* sit at right angles to the longitudinal timbers [A] and keel [B]**

*Bundle raft with elevated skirted figure: Ist dynasty seal impression from Ur* [32]

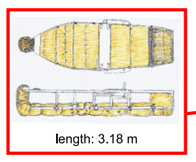


## STIFFENED REED RAFTS

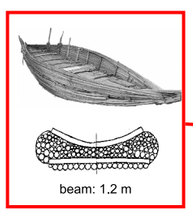
### SUITED TO RIVERS, LAKES AND WARM WATERS

**Plant stems utilised in Europe included *Cyperaceae; Phragmites australis; Scirpus lacustris; Schoenoplectus lacustris; Arundo donax* and *Ferula communis*. In the absence of large trees, species such as *Betulaceae, Salix* and *Cupressus sempervirens* provided the rods and small planks to stiffen and compress reed bundles.** [12]

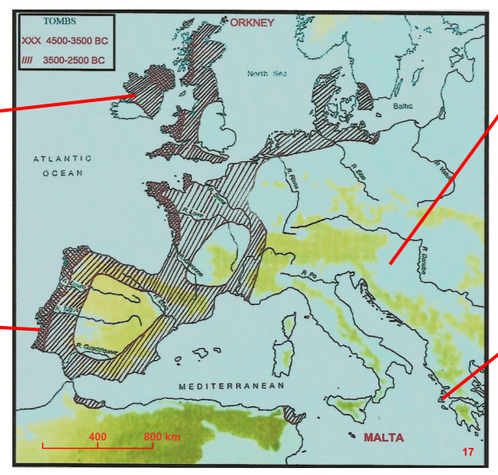
**Humble fishing craft survived into the last century and are clues to early forms of water transport.**


length: 3.18 m

*relict: Cliath thulca* [13]


beam: 1.2 m

*relicts: Jangadas* [15]



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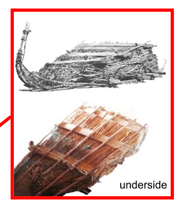
*relict: Schilffloss* [14]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*relicts: Papyrellai* [16]

The climate of southern Portugal linked the Atlantic and Mediterranean. [18]
Evidence makes a compelling case for the arrival there by sea of groups of Neolithic farmers about 5,500 BC.[19]

### NEOLITHIC STIFFENED RAFTS FROM HAL SAFLIENI

**Clay, 122 mm long.** [20] **The 'Sleeping Lady' reposes on a reed mat of dished and rockered form created by 4 parallel curved saplings echoing those of a Corfiot Papyrella (above right). It is more sophisticated than the simple bamboo raft on which a Japanese lady sleeps.** [21]

**Clay 90 mm long.** [22] **The 'Awake Person' is prone, raised on elbows and gripping the edge of the raft with (missing) head raised. In place of sapling stiffeners, there is a rectangular wooden frame – echoed by the Cliath thulca and Schilffloss.**

**INTERPRETATION The lack of any incised lashings on the roughly made bars (above) and feet (left) shows that they were added as supports for the bases of the models.**



## NEOLITHIC PLANK-BUILT SHIPS IN MALTA

*4th millennium BC graffito on a large jar.* [23]
*Kordin Temple III overlooking Grand Harbour.*

**INTERPRETATION: continuously curved hull with elevated structure amidships; stems are differentiated.**


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*'Protector Statue', skirt and calves with socket for torso. Hal Tarxien close to Grand Harbour. Limestone. Ht:18cm*


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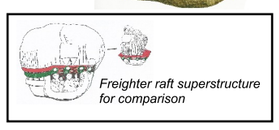


*Freighter raft superstructure for comparison*

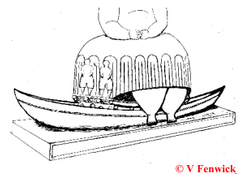
**The back (left) shows carved strakes, through-beams, a longitudinal beam and the ends of laths. On the front these details are indistinct, but an early photo (right) confirms that the side of the ship was visible behind the statue's legs.**


26

**INTERPRETATION: A seat in the form of ship. Four persons stand on a pallet supported by 4 curved longitudinal beams creating a deck amidships (cf. the Freighter Raft, layer A). Below, small figures occupy a curved underbody suggestive of a pirogue, extended by a strake and connected by 5 through-beams.**

**The extremities of the craft were missing – or were not represented.**

*Possible reconstructions* [27]





*Monolith of trough or boat shape. 4th millennium BC. Kordin Temple III. Limestone 2.75m long* [28]

**QUESTION: Was this once a votive ship?**

# Ness of Brodgar

**It is easy to imagine the sheltered expanse of Stenness in the 4th and 3rd millennia thronged with craft from outlying isles and distant lands. Each stone of the Ring of Brodgar has been brought from a different source.** [40]

**Did other structures also represent different but co-existing competitive communities?** [41]


39
TRENCH P

**QUESTION: Should we doubt that Neolithic craft also gathered in the vast natural harbour of Valletta, a festive coming together of people, co-existing but competitive, bringing raw materials and their labour to ancestral sacred spaces?**

## ATLANTIC CHALLENGE

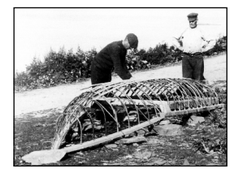
**Neolithic farmers migrating westwards confronted Atlantic tides, swells and cold waters — but encountered there boats suited to the conditions.**

**Their own rafts were weight-bearing and relatively stable, but water washed through and over, rendering them unsuitable for cold water voyages.**

**Climatic improvements after 4,000 BC may have drawn the migrants northwards to relatively underpopulated islands.** [33]

**Once widespread, skin boats enabled blue-water voyages.** [34] **They were portable, resilient, seaworthy, comparatively dry, easily built and easily repaired.**

*Pre-bending hazel rods to form the ribs of a Donegal curach. c.1910*



*Later, a boulder holds down the stem while it is built upside down*

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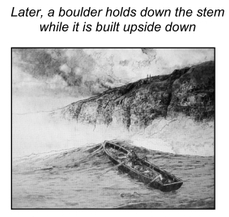
*Curachs carried ashore on Great Blasket Island c.1893*



*Donegal curach negotiating the surf of an unforgiving ocean*

***'Simple logboats…would have had insufficient stability and freeboard to be seagoing.'* Sean McGrail** [36]

**Hide-covered boats '*suggest a well-established indigenous tradition that may have had its origin in the Neolithic or even Mesolithic.*' Ibid.** [37]

**'Currachs daily prove themselves to be masters of the ocean.'** [38]



**The final question was prompted by the enduring model of Malta's insular isolation. The apparent lack of Maltese ship iconography has continued to lend it weight, despite incontrovertible evidence, both direct and indirect, of a tiny local labour force reliant on imported raw materials for ongoing megalithic constructions.**

**PRESENTATION BY VALERIE FENWICK © 2018.** Some rights reserved; contact: www.butley-research-group.org.uk or vhfsuffolk@gmail.com Unattributed illustrations and backgrounds by the author. The help of Chris Farmer and Richard Barker is gratefully acknowledged.

NOTES: 1. Broodbank, C., 2013, *The Making of the Middle Sea,* 41. 2. Cunliffe, B., 2001, *Facing the Ocean,*198. 3. ibid, 31 'Islands, particularly small remote islands, had a special quality.' *Heterotopia,* distant liminal places*:* Calado, M., 2002, Standing stones and natural outcrops, In C. Scarre (ed), *Monuments and Landscape in Atlantic Europe,* 17- 34. 4. Heritage Malta: Ġgantija site display. Grima, R., 2016, Water, geomythology and cosmology in late Neolithic Malta, *Accordia Research Papers* 14: 27-48. 5. Fenwick, V., 2016, Robert Newall's primary record of the prehistoric ship graffiti at Hal Tarxien, Malta. *IJNA* 46: 415-426. 6. Author: courtesy Society of Antiquaries of London. 7. Original statue photographed by the author. 8. Isis Pelagia stands on a raft holding aloft a sail; reverse of 4th cent AD coin: after Johnstone, P.,1980,*The Sea-craft of Prehistory,* fig. 6.2. 9. Sketch of original statue with its intentional backwards tilt. 10. Interpretation of raft construction: bundles between rungs compressed by lashings. Examples of rungs below rafts in Solomon Isles and Laccadives: Hornell, J., 1970, *Water Transport, 68,* 74-75. Lashing cross bars athwart the first or most primitive method, 176. 11. Zammit, T., 1916, The Hal Tarxien Neolithic Temple of Malta. *Archaeologia* LXVII: 127-144, fig.3. 12. Ancient introduction into Europe of *Arundo donax:* Hardion, L, Verlaque, R., Saltonstall, K., Leriche, A. and Vila, B., 2014, Origin of the invasive *Arundo donax* (Poaceae), *Annals of Botany* 114.3: 455-462; Junikka, L., Uotila, P. & Lahti, T., 2006, A phytogeographical comparison of the major Mediterranean islands on the basis of *Atlas Florae Europeae, Wildenowia* 36: 379-388; Sommier, S. and Caruana, A., 1915, *Flora Melitensis Nova.* 13. Cliath thulca , River Suk, County Roscommon. Plan & elevation redrawn by author after Mac Phílib, S., 2008, Bundle rafts in Ireland: 598-603, in Mac Carthaigh, C.,*Traditional Boats of Ireland.* 14. Schilffloss from Lake Balaton, Hungary, after Suder, H., 1930, *Von Einbaum und Floss zum Schiff:* pl 10. 4 (no scale); Hornell, J., 1970, ibid, 60. 15. Jangadas (top): Exeter Maritime Museum archive image; (below) cross-section: Filgueras, O. L., 1977, *A Jangada de S. Torpes. Un Problema de Arqueologia Naval.* Centro de Estudos de Marinha, fig. 1 Corte BB. 16. Plant species: Johnstone, P., 1973. Stern first in the Stone Age? *IJNA* 2.1:3-12; (top) c. 2. 5m long, Sordinas, A., 1970, Stone implements from N.W. Corfu, Greece. *Memphis State University Anthropological Research Center, Occ Paper* no. 4: 31-2, pl 1; Author's collection NSBR 2978. 17. Map after Cunliffe, B., 2008, *Europe Between the Oceans,* fig. 6.15. 18. Miles, D., 2016, *The Tale of the Axe,* 216; Cunliffe, B, ibid. 72. 19. Cunliffe, B., ibid. 122-123. 20. Image courtesy Daniel Cilia. 21. I am grateful to Richard Barker for this image. 22. Image courtesy Daniel Cilia. 23. graffito sketched after Velha, C., 2016, Monument connectivity in island isolation..., *J Island and Coastal Archaeol.* 10: fig. 7. 24. Four views of the fragment: courtesy Daniel Cilia. 25. Larger views of the fragment: courtesy Daniel Cilia. 26. Zammit, T., & Singer, C., 1924, Neolithic representations of the human form from the islands of Malta and Gozo. *J Royal Anthropological Inst.* LIV: no. 58, p. 99 'The stone … is covered with a muddy stalactitic slime which cannot be removed.' 27. Plinths based on the Tas-Silġ bas-relief, Gregory, I.V. & Cilia, D., 2005, *The Human Form in Neolithic Malta:* 122. 28. Basch, L., 1987, *Le musée imaginaire de la marine antique:* 395. 29. Kapitan, G.,1995, The origin of the early Mediterranean plank boats. Additions. *Tropis III. 3rd Int. Symposium on Ship Construction in Antiquity Proc:* 230, 234. 30. Both images, courtesy Daniel Cilia. 31. increasing buoyancy without reducing the original freeboard: McGrail, S., 2001, *Boats of the World,* 50. 32. Legrain, L., 1936, Archaic Seal-Impressions. *Ur Excavations, III:* no. 300. 33. Miles, D., 2016, ibid, 216. Climate change: Broodbank, C., 2015, ibid, 265; Cunliffe, B., 2008, ibid,137. 34. Crumlin-Pedersen, O., 2010, Aspects of the origin of Atlantic and Baltic Seafaring, in A. Anderson, J. H. Barrett & K. V. Boyle (eds), *The Global Origins of Seafaring,* 109-127; Cunliffe, B., 2010, Seafaring on the Atlantic seaboard, ibid, 265-274; historical references: 35. Images courtesy National Folklore Commission, University College, Dublin. 36. McGrail, S., 2010, The global origins of seagoing water transport, in A. Anderson, J. H. Barrett & K. V. Boyle (eds), *The Global Origins of Seafaring,* 95-108, p.100; Crumlin-Perdersn, O., ibid, 109-127, p.111. 37. McGrail, S., 2010, ibid, 100. 38. Cunliffe, B., 2008, *Europe between the Oceans,* 86. 39. Bayliss, A., Marshall, P., Richards, C. and Whittle, A., 2017, Islands of history: the Late Neolithic timescape of Orkney. *Antiquity* 91: 171-188. Cummings, V., 2017, *The Neolithic of Britain and Ireland:* 18, 20; The Ness of Brodgar: *CA, 2017: 333: 23, 27.* Volcanic glass travelled some 500km to Orkney from Arran, 300km to Malta from Lipari and 240km from Pantelleria: Ballin,T.B, 2015, Arran pitchstone ... *Lithic Studies ttp://journals.ed.ac.uk;* Trump, D & Cilia, D., 2002, *Malta Prehistory and Temples,* 66. 40. plan of Trench P: courtesy Nick Card, Ness of Brodgar Trust. 41. Co-existing competitive communities: Card, N., 2018, The Ness of Brodgar. CA 335: 20-28; Vella, C., 20016, Constructions of consensus: monument building and the fourth to first millennium in the central Mediterranean island. *J. Mediterranean Archaeol.* 29.2: 225-245. An idea of group labour: 'contributed to a great communal enterprise network of interaction, binding disparate people': Cunliffe, B., 2008, ibid, 26. 'We must question how isolated Malta really was': Robb, J., 2001, Island identities: ritual, travel and the creation of difference in Neolithic Malta. *European J Archaeol, 4.2: 175-202, p. 180.*