THE PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF EARLY-CHRISTIAN HERITAGE IN MALTA:
PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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by

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis draws on a core component of Maltese cultural heritage, namely the islands' late Roman and Byzantine catacombs, and explores the methods of their interpretation and presentation via a transdisciplinary approach. The preliminary hypothesis which shapes the arguments in this study acknowledges the important archaeological research conducted on these sites since the early 19th century but questions the approach and core interpretations of many scholars, which has come to hinder our understanding of these catacombs scientifically and through heritage interpretation. To shed light on this hypothesis, this doctoral research investigates how catacombs – which comprise the earliest evidence of early Christianity in Malta – have been presented, interpreted, managed and restored from their (re)discovery to modern times. This thesis considers four sectors, namely *Tourism*, *Heritage Operations*, *Education* and *Academia,* as the main pillars upon which heritage interpretation should be developed. Therefore, the core arguments offered centre on the evaluation of these four sectors *vis-a-vis* the main principles of heritage interpretation that are considered key to achieve best practices in this field. The methods of evaluation are based on qualitative and quantitative research (or mixed-method approach); these are employed to cater for the non-homogenous sectors under study. Therefore, semi-structured questionnaires were administered to individuals visiting maltese catacombs as well as to professional and semi-professional personnel, including: Primary Teachers who accompany school children at these sites, Curators who manage early Christian hypogea, Gallery Site Officers who run the day to day operations of the catacombs and Tourist Guides. The data obtained for these surveys was enriched by non-directive interviews carried out with other key participants, namely, university students reading Archaeology. Primary research questions consist of: to whom and in what ways is the Maltese early Christian archaeological heritage being presented? What can be done to improve the cultural heritage experience sought by different audiences who visit catacombs for touristic,

educational, recreational and academic purposes? It is argued that it is essential to understand the perception of both 'recipients' and 'providers' of heritage interpretation because both are 'stakeholders' in this past. From such a multidisciplinary and holistic approach we can more effectively evaluate the present state and quality of Malta's heritage and offer ways forward for a possible self-sustaining early Christian archaeological heritage.

Preface

Why Maltese catacombs and why heritage interpretation as the foci of this research? In many ways it has evolved through the happy combination of employment, field and personal interests, where – as is often the case – I felt the 'past' was not being used and understood properly.

I would, however, admit that as an undergraduate student reading Archaeology at the University of Malta, the field of early Christian archaeology was never within my parameters of research interest. It was not until an employment opportunity to work as an assistant curator in one of Malta's largest catacombs presented itself that I became engaged in this subject. I started working at the Saint Agatha's catacomb in Rabat in October of 2009 where I was responsible for assisting the overall running of the complex. My tasks ranged from supervising and assisting more than 15,000 individuals who visited one of the major catacombs in Rabat every year, conducting guided tours at least three times a day and managing the museum collections which were exhibited in rooms once part of a convent. During my tenure of office I met the late Victor Camilleri, the cleric who had been entrusted with the 'excavation' of the Saint Agatha catacombs back in the 1950s. Camilleri was also the founder of the site museum. This was a great opportunity for me to learn, from first-hand accounts, about the ways archaeology of Maltese catacombs was carried out and presented to the public. I was able to document numerous stories on the way that early Christian heritage was perceived and interpreted and on the persons entrusted with such important tasks - some of these stories are being published for the first time in this thesis. But it was my direct contact with tourists and tour guides who visited the Saint Agatha catacombs that formed the essential culmination of my decision to delve deeper into the topic of heritage interpretation. The hours spent underground observing licensed tourist guides and hearing the quality (or otherwise) of the information provided to visitors and the engagement of different audiences with catacombs was an eye-opener to me in exploring the mechanisms of the provision of heritage information systematically.

In 2011 I was fortunate enough to gain the position of project curator with the Maltese government agency responsible for the operations of cultural heritage: Heritage Malta. My role was to manage a heritage EU project entitled Archaeotur aimed at rehabilitating two Maltese catacombs and eight Sicilian catacombs which, until then, had not been accessible to the public. I was able to capitalise on my previous experience at the Saint Agatha catacombs and address some of the issues which I had been previously noticed on a daily basis, particularly with regard to the presentation and interpretation of catacombs. The archives documenting the daily work carried out on the Archaeotur project activities, which included archaeological excavations, 3D documentation of the

catacombs, the setting up of new interpretation material and the development of educational programmes, were vital resources for this research, providing me with primary data which could be utilised as key case studies so as to reach the main objectives of this thesis and answer the core research question in the best ways possible.

Therefore, the idea behind this study derives mainly from my experience in working at Rabat in the curatorial profession at early Christian heritage sites for at least seven years. Furthermore, the topic discussed here was seen as an opportunity to revive the interest on Maltese catacombs at a more academic level. In particular, it is very much hoped that this thesis will serve as a possible kick-start for upcoming postgraduate archaeology students and early career scholar who aspire to carry out innovative research on similar cultural heritage topics.

Acknowledgements

most efficient and effective way, and to my co-supervisor Dr Jo Appleby. I hope that the professional relationships and friendships built over the previous four years continues to grow and serves as a platform for future collaboration and contribution to the field of archaeology and heritage.

I owe special thanks to government officials and private institutions responsible for Malta's heritage, particularly Heritage Malta, the Missionary Society of Saint Paul and the Secretariat for Catholic Education, who have supported me throughout my doctoral research by granting permissions to carry out surveys with visitors. I am also very grateful to the heritage employees, primary school teachers, and tour guides registered with the Malta Tourism Authority who took part in this research. I am particularly grateful to my friend and colleague at the University of Malta, Professor Carmel Cassar, who has continuously shared his knowledge and provided me with unique opportunities to develop my academic skills.

I owe a great debt, of course, to my family: to my father Ray, who ignited my passion for archaeology with many interesting stories of his travel adventures in Egypt and Libya; to my mother Maria Theresa, who kept my morale up all the time and for their financial support particularly during the first year of my doctoral studies; to my elder sister Roberta, my role model in education; and to my late grandfather Henry who always believed in me.

Finally, but not least, I would like to dedicate this work to my soul-mate, confidant, and inspiration, my wife Marouska, who supported me in all the ways one could ever possibly imagine – for those cup of teas and cakes she brought to my study while I wrote this thesis, for staying at home with me instead of enjoying the Maltese sun on weekends and for providing useful advice as an experienced primary school and History teacher. To God who granted me health to complete my PhD. For all this, I am grateful.

CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction: Questions and Sources

Plenty of ink has been spread by scholars on the methods that archaeologists and curators employ to engage people in cultural heritage (e.g. Merriman 1991; Ballantyne 1995; Timothy 1997; Skeates 2000; Garrod and Fyall 2001; Harvey 2001; Corsaen 2005; Smith 2006; Giaccardi 2012; Holtorf and Fairclough 2013; Brown and Hay-Edie 2014; Waterton and Watson 2015; Thomas and Langlitz 2016). This approach, which sees the community as the primary stakeholder in cultural heritage, is the result of a change in the ways by which scholars viewed this sector, i.e. from a field where the main focus was ancient finds/objects and their conservation, documentation and storage, to one which looks at the ways by which cultural heritage is 'consumed and expressed as notions of culture, identity and politics' (Waterton and Watson 2015:1). Considerable improvements were made from the archaeological and heritage sector in the public presentation of heritage, however, there seem to be other important targets, such as the assessment of the quality of the heritage product, the evaluation and monitoring of those operating the cultural heritage, the constant analysis of consumers' perception of cultural heritage, and the degree of collaboration between different heritage stakeholders such as the Tourism and Education sectors, which are still not within the current parameters of this field of study.

This thesis is primarily concerned with the interpretation and presentation of a core component of Maltese archaeology. With a fast-growing tourism industry, which is generating valuable economic growth (NSO, Departing Tourists 2013), and a strong archaeological heritage, Malta can be considered for its potential in developing its archaeological tourism. This statement may sound promising for the sustainability of Maltese cultural heritage sector, however, beneath this statement lies much responsibility, especially in terms of community archaeology. This doctoral thesis will employ a multi-disciplinary and holistic approach in order to explore and to increase

knowledge on various Maltese archaeological sites, especially the Early Christian catacombs. In particular I will explore how these sites have been interpreted in the past and present and what methods were employed. The data obtained here will be utilised for a comparative analysis aimed at tracing the developments in the public presentation and interpretation of Maltese heritage and how its quality can be regularly assessed in light of (i) international academic standards, (ii) the requirements of primary school children who are the future administrators of the nations' cultural heritage, (iii) the Tourism industry and (iv) endeavours to secure the sustainability of a nation's cultural heritage.

Late Roman and Byzantine burial sites in Malta have long attracted attention as points of early visitation and commemoration, as sites robbed for their contents, and then as features considered for their antiquity and as monuments that tell the story of Malta's religious past (Buhagiar 1986). The research conducted so far on the islands' catacombs has been focused mainly on their physical and morphological characteristics. As a consequence, the information that is available for public presentation is based mainly on typologies. Without discrediting the valuable research work conducted by various Maltese and foreign archaeologists[1] on the subject, which definitely kick-started the era of public presentation of Malta's many and rich archaeological assets during the 1920s, it has to be admitted that this type of research has been exhausted resulting in drastically diminished interest in the subject among young/new researchers.[2] As a result, it was felt that a different approach had to be taken in this study in order to re-establish research interest in these sites and at the same time contribute to the cultural heritage interpretation sector.

The validity of undertaking this research has to be seen in the light of various problems that afflict the Maltese cultural heritage sector nowadays, such as the lack of social consciousness and involvement amongst the Maltese community in the sector. These factors have surely impacted upon the interpretation and presentation of the islands' cultural heritage. Even though the situation seems to have changed in the last decade

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[1] Maltese archaeologists like A.A Caruana, and Mario Buħagiar and foreign scholars like Eric Becker, PF Bellanti, P Ferrua, were amongst the first archaeologists who surveyed various catacombs on Malta. They were mainly interested in dimensions, type, and decoration and the work they produced was mostly descriptive.
[2] According to the University of Malta Library, no University students have submitted theses related to this subject since 2003.

with regard to interpretation and participation in cultural heritage activities, there is still a long way to go to improve various aspects. The continuous decrease in the national cultural heritage budget vote is notably affecting the ways in which cultural heritage professionals are conducting their work, leaving them with little to do unless they search for other sources of funding, such as from the EU (e.g. European Commission, Culture and the Structural Funds 2013).

This thesis will seek to provide suggestions as to how the key stakeholders in the cultural heritage sector can apply best practice in heritage interpretation and Management in order to (i) convey the correct information to different audiences, (ii) preserve the archaeology of the Late Roman and Byzantine periods, (iii) promote further heritage research, and (iv) help to contribute to a sustainable management plan.
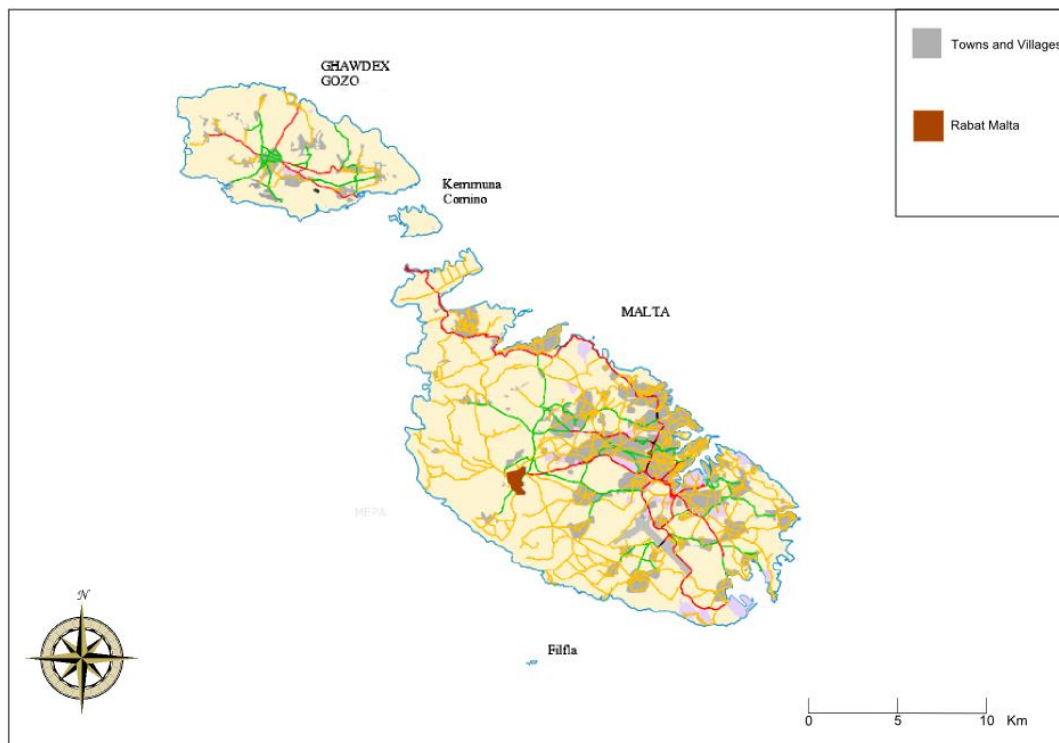
Figure 1.1 - Map of the Maltese Islands (Source – Malta Environmental and Planning Authority)

1.2   Area of Study

This research focuses on early Christian archaeological sites – from catacombs to other burial settings – as a primary type-site of heritage display and communication. The related remains are fairly numerous but I will examine a series of specific case studies. One main focus is the village of Rabat, which is located on the western side of Malta and

whose fuller history goes back thousands of years. This place lay just outside the ancient Roman city of Melite (nowadays Mdina) and was primarily used for burial purposes from the 4th century BC to the 8th century AD. During the 15th and 16th centuries AD, Rabat was occupied by fields and a couple of farmhouses, however, as evidenced by the account of Jean Quintin d'Autun (1536), who was the Chaplain of the chivalric Order of St. John between AD 1500 and 1561, Rabat was one of the most visited locations on the Island by locals and foreign visitors due to its religious history. In fact, oral tradition holds that St. Paul the Apostle was kept in a prison in Roman Rabat after he was shipwrecked in Malta. A church was constructed in 1571 on top of what was thought to be the Roman prison. This grotto gave a boost to the Pauline cult in Malta, which has been the focus of several publications, some of which (e.g. Cornuke 2003) are controversial since they questioned the authenticity of the story.

Figure 1.2 - Map of Malta as illustrated by Quintin in Insulae Melitae Descriptio 1536

The key sites in Rabat to be considered include three important catacombs. The first is the Saint Augustine's Catacombs, which have recently undergone archaeological excavation and conservation interventions. Saint Paul's Catacombs is the second underground hypogeum to be considered. This catacomb has unique characteristics and

was the first to be made accessible to the general public. Lastly, I will discuss Saint Agatha's Catacombs, which is the second largest complex in Malta and is visited by hundreds of tourists from around the world, as well as by Maltese school children, university students, and others and includes an archaeological museum established during the late 1970s. Although these three sites are similar from the point of view of their archaeological characteristics, each site has been used or disused in different ways in the last decades. As such, these catacombs and their setting will contribute both to a comparative analysis and to the development of a cultural heritage model that will help reach the desired outputs of this thesis.

Apart from Rabat, I will research another area with known sites and archaeological potential, Mosta, a town located five kilometres to the north-east of Rabat. Although the concentration of Late Roman and Byzantine funerary architecture in Rabat is important, this site is worthy of research, especially because one of my objectives is to broaden archaeological interest in different places in order to enhance recognition of the early Christian heritage while encouraging visits to other sites.
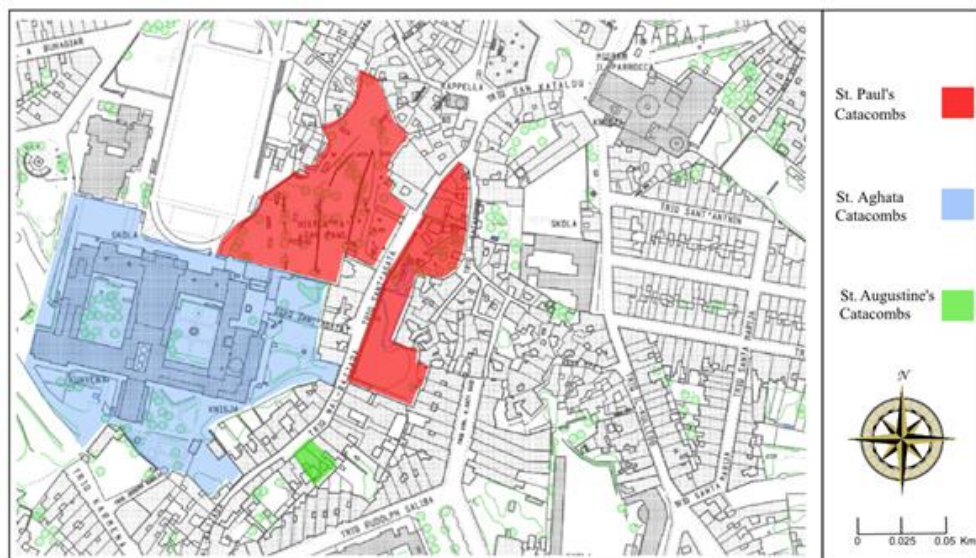
Figure 1.3 - Illustration of the catacomb area in Rabat, Malta[3]

1.3   The Research Questions

The questions that this research addresses come naturally when a subject or topic in archaeology has somehow been left on the shelf for years, as is the case with the study and presentation of the Maltese catacombs and early Christian archaeology in Malta. The reason for such disinterest may vary from a standstill in archaeological research, to lack of enthusiasm about research activities among archaeology students, to lack of heritage interpretation. These factors will be identified and discussed later in this thesis. Therefore, in order to evaluate the current situation regarding the study of Maltese catacombs, this thesis will address the following core question:

To what extent are the current structures of Malta's Heritage Interpretation and Presentation sector influencing and affecting the visitors' perception and knowledge of Malta's early Christian heritage?

The subject of heritage interpretation and presentation in Malta, particularly in light of early Christian site visits, has thus far received little attention, especially in regard to visitors' engagement, perception and appreciation of cultural heritage. Here the definition of *visitors* ranges from primary schoolchildren who visit early Christian sites as part of the National Curriculum, to local and foreign tourists, and to university students (particularly those reading Archaeology). My main hypothesis is that proper heritage interpretation and presentation is not only related to the visitor's positive experience at heritage sites but is also a catalyst for continuous archaeological research. To deal with this ultimate challenge, the following supplementary questions need to be answered within the research framework of this study:

1. In what ways was Maltese early Christian archaeology being presented throughout the 20th century and what is the current situation?
2. What gaps exist in the dissemination of data on early Christian archaeology here?
3. Which research activities are currently being carried out that can contribute to the public presentation and interpretation of the catacombs?
4. What do foreign and local visitors have to say about the presentation and interpretation of Maltese early Christian archaeology?
5. How are tourists and tourist guides kept up-to-date with new findings?
6. Are all types of visitors seeking or being provided with different information?

7. To what degree does current research contribute to archaeological tourism in Malta?

8. What is being done by the cultural heritage regulator and operators in Malta to deliver the best cultural heritage product to tourist, local visitors and students?

9. What else can be done to improve the sustainability of Maltese archaeological tourism?

10. How far do museums respond to all the above issues?

The structure of this study which will help to shed some more light on these questions is based on the research model detailed below.

1.4   The Research Model and its Principal Objectives

In order to make this research relevant for different stakeholders, this thesis presents a new research model, which I have entitled *HIRMOTHEA* ('Heritage Interpretation Review Model for Operators in Tourism, Heritage, Education and Academia') and which is built upon specific indicators developed following extensive literature review, ethnography, formal and informal discussions with key stakeholders and the professional experience of the author within the cultural heritage sector. The structure of the model aims to assess current heritage products presented to the public. It considers four main sectors which are regarded as providers or recipients of cultural heritage, namely the academic, education, tourism and heritage sectors. The HIRMOTHEA model sees heritage interpretation and presentation as a chain made up of these four links (or sectors) – if one link weakens, the chain breaks. Best practice, particularly the continuous assessment on the provision of heritage information and interpretation, should reinforce the links in this heritage chain and make them work efficiently and effectively, however, it is crucial that one first takes stock of the current situation and this model is intended to do so in a holistic way.

The implementation of my research model is a tool which aims to reach five main objectives, namely (i) to identify any limitations to the archaeological research carried out so far on Maltese catacombs while taking stock of new research projects in the field, (ii) to increase research interest among Maltese and foreign scholars and university

students on catacombs, (iii) to ensure that heritage and tourism operators are aware of what is going on in the field of early Christian archaeology. (iv) to engage school children and educators in the national cultural heritage, particularly in early Christian archaeology, and (v) to assist tour guides and authors of tourist publications to convey and present (the) correct information to their clients.

The following flowchart (Fig. 1.4) illustrates the scheme of the research model, i.e. how its main components are linked to each other so as to assess the quality of the contribution offered by each sector under review, thus providing useful insights on the weakest element(s) which may affect the overall heritage interpretation and presentation. Each individual component, namely the academic sector, the education sector, the heritage sector and the tourism sector, operates on a number of criteria which will provide a framework for evaluation - this will be developed from the research exercises presented in each chapter, which are based on both qualitative and quantitative methodology. The process of this model offers a holistic evaluation and its function does not stop if one or more sectors are found to be below the set standards.
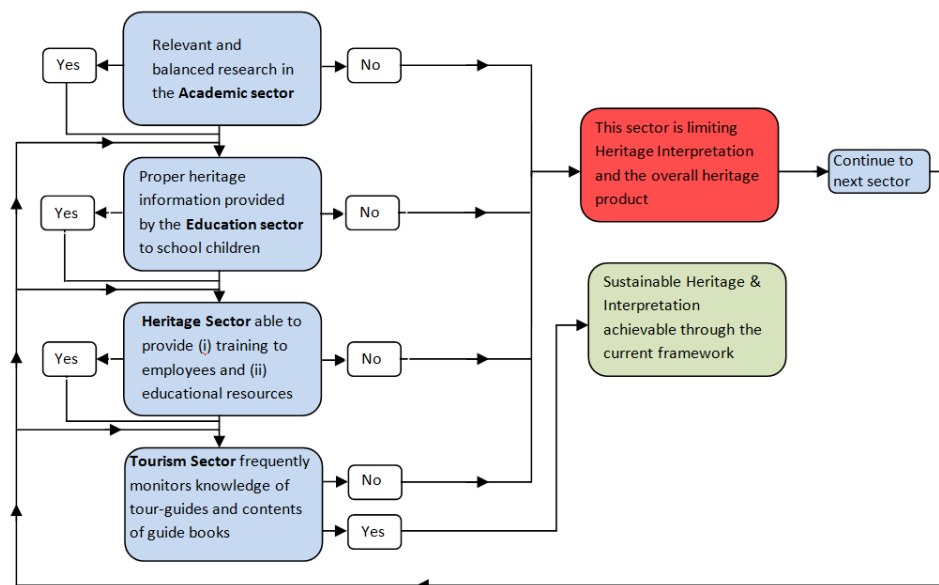
Figure 1.4 – Flowchart showing the main components and scheme of the HIRMOTHEA model (source: Author)

1.4.1 Objective One

The study of the Maltese catacombs goes back to the mid-17th century when native scholars first started recording their history and rich cultural heritage (Buhagiar 1986:7). By that time, interest in Christian archaeology and the catacombs outside the Island had already been established with important monographs by foreign scholars, such as Bosio's *Roma Sotteranea* (1632). Since then, Maltese and foreign archaeologists have placed their attention on other sites dating back to different periods, notably prehistory, which had almost become the centre of attention of local (and foreign) scholars. This objective aims to review the relevant literature published on Maltese catacombs and discuss this in light of its interest during early and late modern history. Furthermore, this objective seeks to explore the elements that promoted (or discouraged) this type of research and how this affected the current trends and developments in this field, mentioning the latest local research on catacombs. In addition, I will identify if such research is published locally (in Malta) or aims also for a wider audience, whether the literature is purely academic or adapted for a general audience, and what gaps emerge from these questions.

1.4.2   Objective Two

A second objective is to stimulate wider study and innovative research projects on the Maltese catacombs. Key for this will be a critical literature review on current investigations outside the Maltese islands and a discussion of how these types of investigations and aspects of their methodology and modes of interpretation can be applied to local Maltese archaeological projects and cultural scholars.

1.4.3   Objective Three

UNESCO has clearly pointed out that [the] cultural heritage assets are 'irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration' (UNESCO, World Heritage n.d.). Therefore, the general public, but above all the cultural heritage operators, have the duty to care for the sites, collections and resources to the highest standards. This should be done in order to provide tourists, other visitors and the sites themselves with the best cultural heritage experience and at the same time help to work for a self-sustainable cultural heritage. According to the Group for Education in Museums (GEM), the latter can only be

accomplished through the investment of staff development (GEM, Learning Outside the Classroom, n.d.). Objective Three will thus seek to evaluate the knowledge and skills of staff members working at Late Roman and Byzantine funerary sites in Malta. Furthermore, I will discuss how gaps within this ambit might be tackled and addressed.

1.4.4 Objective Four

The fourth objective relates mainly to the pedagogical skills in archaeology at education institutions. Since this thesis discusses specific sites, I will emphasise the presentation of funerary archaeology of the early Christians in Malta and the level at which it is being taught (if at all) by teachers, archaeologists, or curators. This will progress from children's books, which refer to the Maltese early Christian heritage, and investigate in which context this subject is being taught to schoolchildren. Secondly, I will discuss any other sources on catacombs used for schoolchildren today, such as interactive tools or games. This thesis will offer a critical review of the 'old and new' literature on the subject and an audit of any new learning sources in cultural heritage sector will be conducted.

1.4.5 Objective Five

At a time when tourism was reserved for the wealthy and the concept of tour guiding was still not developed, local people used to show visitors around archaeological sites. With the growth of a strong tourism industry in Malta in the late 1990s (Bull & Weed 1999), the Maltese authorities felt the need to regularise the guiding sector: courses and training were offered to people who were multilingual and who wished to obtain the tour guide licence (Government of Malta, *Malta Travel and Toursim Services Act, Ch 409*, 1999). The Malta Travel and Tourism Act, which was first published in 1999, was an important milestone in heritage presentation since part of the training delivered to guides included the delivery of lectures by academics who had pioneered Maltese archaeology (V. Camilleri, pers. comm., February 15, 2009). However, during the 1980s little importance was given to the heritage side since only a small number of visitors who came to visit the Islands were interested in Maltese archaeology or perhaps were not fully aware of it due to limited promotion. Nowadays, the guiding course is still being

offered[4] and has been structured in a way to emphasise all aspects of Maltese heritage. I aim to assess the type of information being distributed about Maltese catacombs and suggest recommendations about how tour guides and those who are in the cultural heritage tourism sector can contribute to a better presentation of this important component of the cultural heritage in the future.

1.5   Desired Outputs

In order to explore these listed objectives, I will conduct research on four different sectors:

(i) *The cultural tourism industry in Malta*. This part of my research will discuss various issues such as the training that prospective tour guides are provided with during the guiding course. I will also consider the literature specifically published for tourists and those (individual) visitors who prefer exploring the sites without the service of a professional guide. I will discuss questions such as: 'Are the authors of such books up to date in terms of research?' and 'What encouragement is made for guides to research widely?' Discussions here will outline a system by which cultural heritage information conveyed by those who work in the tourism industry is monitored, whether it is through a text published specifically for individual visitors or a guide who passes on information during a tour.

(ii) *The heritage sector*. A number of cultural heritage employees are, from time to time, engaged with the public and private sectors to assist in the management of Malta's heritage assets. Some of the jobs include front-office work and other posts such as gallery site officer. The latter run the day-to-day operations of the sites and are the main contact points of visitors. I will deal with the levels of knowledge that such front persons acquire during training, especially on late Roman and Byzantine archaeology, or if there is any training provided by Malta's cultural heritage operators at all. Here I will take stock of the current situation within the heritage sector and discuss how the *modus operandi*

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[4] Information on tour guiding course is available from the Institute of Tourism studies <http://www.its.edu.mt/EN.Tour_Guiding.aspx>

of these employees is effecting the overall heritage product, particularly vis-a-vis other sectors such as primary education.

(iii) *Primary education*. In several instances, the Maltese National Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education and Employment 2012), which was revised in 2013, mentions the appreciation of Maltese cultural heritage through learning. Every year teachers organise school visits to heritage sites which they would have previously discussed during lessons. Unfortunately, given the various challenges Maltese teachers face due to the vast curriculum they must follow, cultural visits are nowadays sometimes seen as time-consuming activities (Skeates 2000:116). As such, I will explore the way educators are conducting their visits by using early Christian catacomb as a case study. Here I will discuss the level of assistance educators are provided by the Education Department within the Malta Ministry of Education, as well as from the Education Section of the Maltese government agency responsible for cultural heritage (Heritage Malta), as well as how they integrate other subjects during the same visit. In particular, this part will discuss the degree of resilience within the education sector to integrate heritage subjects within the primary curriculum.

(iv) *Tertiary education and academia*. The Cultural Heritage Act of 2002 regularised the archaeological profession and helped promote scientific excavations and surveys in Malta. Excavations today must be supervised by the Superintendent of Cultural Heritage, who also has the responsibility for publishing results from such studies (*Cultural Heritage Act*, 2002). Archaeologists registered with the Superintendency were among the first who undertook a scientific approach in the study of the Maltese catacombs. This part of the thesis will present a research exercise carried out with University of Malta students reading Archaeology. The semi-structured questionnaire administered to students aimed to explore their research interests and how likely university students might be to choose early-Christian heritage as their area of specialisation. Here I will draw on research conducted with the primary education sector and see if the knowledge acquired by Maltese children at the primary level may affect the way they choose their area of study at a later stage.

1.6   Methodologies

My methodology for this study is based on mixed method research, since qualitative and quantitative analyses are considered mutually important for the best outcome of this thesis. In a time when this 'pragmatic paradigm', or mixed method research, was not convincing enough to be considered or employed by the 'purist' (Cameron 2009:97), or by those scholars who insisted that methods should not be merged , Lewis Binford and Jeremy Sabloff argued that sticking to a single research method in particular cases will not possibly improve one's study and that '...a simple quantitative summarization cannot treat all the things found in association within a single paradigmatic classification. Such a development seems to be the type of "mixed" approach which many Old World archaeologists employ when dealing with materials more complicated than the simple lithic industries of the early time ranges' (Binford & Sabloff 1982:143). Creswell and Plano Clark (2007:5) depict this mixed method as one that aims at collecting and analysing data as well as combining qualitative and quantitative data in a single study or series of studies. Johnson and Turner (2003) describe the fundamental principle of mixed research as one that is 'likely to result in complementary strength and non overlapping weaknesses' (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004:18).

This choice was made in view of the need to improve the qualitative research through the quantitative data gathering (e.g. statistics published by the Malta Tourism Authority in 2012 demonstrate that almost 77% of tourists visited historical and archaeological sites, however the survey does not specify which sites were most visited and, more importantly, there is no detailed information about the segment of tourist who come specifically to Malta for its archaeology and their experience. The quest for such information requires a qualitative approach). Since this thesis deals with the relationship between early Christian sites in Malta and the role of different individuals in conveying and presenting accurate information on these sites to different audiences, whose participation may vary from academic to educational to religious, both the sites and the individuals need to be questioned. The archaeological desktop research related to the catacombs is thus based on a qualitative study, while the approach for gathering data on the knowledge, interest and presentation of the catacombs is centred on quantitative analysis.

For Objectives i and ii, an intensive literature review that includes, but is not limited to, text books, unpublished dissertations, archaeological reports and academic papers is essential. These sources of information help to formulate a 'database' of published information while at the same time identifying findings that have not received much attention. Most of the sources used for this audit and evaluation of the archaeological record of the Maltese catacombs are easily accessible in the islands' libraries and National Archives.

The publications on the latest archaeological excavations conducted on Maltese catacombs are key. The case study of the St. Augustine Catacombs in Rabat where, in 2013, excavation and surveys were carried out as part of European Union project 'Archaeotur' for the valorisation and conservation of both Maltese and Sicilian catacombs shall be examined (Farrugia 2013). One result of the project was to generate a scientific publication of the data gathered. A collection of papers was duly published and put online. The reason for choosing these catacombs as one of my case studies was determined not only by the multidisciplinary approach archaeologists conducted their research, but also due to the first-hand experience I acquired as the Assistant Director of the excavations and Curator of the Project.

For objectives iii, iv and v, I use a quantitative method of research: different surveys are developed and distributed to target respondents, including employees in the cultural heritage sector, primary school teachers, tourists and tour guides (See Appendices I, II, III, IV, and V)

For the cultural heritage employee's survey (see Appendix II), approval was requested from Heritage Malta and The Missionary Society of Saint Paul to conduct the interviews with their employees (Appendix XI). These two entities are responsible for St. Augustine Catacombs and Saint Agatha's Catacombs respectively. Interviews were conducted on both sites and ten employees (eight from Heritage Malta and two from Saint Agatha's Catacombs) were chosen to take part in this survey. The responses will be presented and recorded in a table and analysed in Chapter Six. I use the results of the analysis to

determine how this may or may not affect the other two sectors, that is, education and tourism.

The survey in Chapter Seven consists of a number of questions aimed for primary school teachers. Two different schools were chosen to take part in this study, the Convent of the Sacred Heart Junior School in St. Julians and The Minor Seminar in Rabat, Malta. The semi-structured survey was administered to 18 teachers and the responses were placed in a matrix and analysed. On the basis of the answers given by the respondents and the corresponding analysis, I will explore the gaps within the primary education sector and the affects these might eventually have on the academic sector and vice versa. In addition to the semi-structured survey, an audit of the educational resources available for primary educators and school children will be carried out. The review will identify any lacunae within the teaching of archaeology topics at primary level in Malta and if the curriculum structure is contributing towards a holistic heritage education.

Another two structured surveys were created, one for tourists and local visitors who visit the catacombs and the other dedicated to licensed tour guides. For each survey, 100 respondents were questioned. The first survey was conducted onsite, while the tour guide surveys was emailed using Google-Documents open-source programme. The graphical interpretation presented here will demonstrate the current situation of some aspects of the interpretation and public presentation of the Maltese catacombs.

1.7   Structure of the Thesis

This introductory chapter has set out the parameters of my doctoral research, discussing the research questions and the methodology to be employed and has outlined the current situation of the five main sectors, which are, either directly or indirectly, the protagonists for enhancing in the interpretation and presentation of Maltese catacombs.

Chapter Two traces the history of catacomb research in the Maltese Islands and how it evolved. This part discusses new developments in the field of Maltese catacombs and the religious landscape of late Roman and Byzantine Malta and how these developments

contribute to our knowledge base. Objectives i and ii are an integral part of this chapter, which examines how modern politics in Malta have affected the research on catacombs until recent times and the corresponding effects this had on sites and museums.

In Chapter Three I present a historical account of the transition experienced in the study of Maltese catacombs in the 1980s. At that time a scientific approach started being employed by three archaeologists whose research is still considered as standard work in the field of early-Christian archaeology. This chapter will draw on the work conducted by these scholars to highlight the issues of site access and heritage interpretation of the catacombs and how such issues started being addressed. For the first time, this thesis will provide a detailed account of how the subject of early-Christian archaeology was introduced in Malta at the tertiary level of education and the type of collaboration the local university had with other international institutions in this field of study. The last sections will focus on the various components of public heritage, such as physical and perceptual accessibility, heritage interpretation and policies. The discussions will centre on tangible improvements made in the heritage sector throughout the years in Malta. To make the arguments more clear I use the case study of Saint Agatha Historical Complex in Rabat, which was the first early Christian catacomb in Malta to have a museum on-site.

Chapter Four provides detailed information about the current attitudes and approaches in public archaeology. The arguments will be sustained by two case studies, the Ta' Bistra Orientation Centre in Mosta and Saint Paul's Catacombs in Rabat, Malta. I will discuss the archaeological projects undertaken on these sites to regenerate and improve the final heritage product and analyse the various criteria by which these projects were carried out. Here I draw on the literature provided by the UNESCO about the best practices in managing and regenerating archaeological sites accessible to visitors and determine if the guidelines and targets set by UNESCO were met by the two projects in Mosta and Rabat.

Chapter Five sets out my approach to the analysis of the strategy or strategies followed to present Maltese catacombs as heritage attractions. This part examines how the Tourism industry can contribute towards the archaeological sector and how archaeology

developed to become one of the strongest components of Malta's niche tourism in the last decade. One of the focuses of this chapter is the resources available, such as human and information resources, which can cater for the archaeological site as a heritage attraction. Here, I discuss the knowledge of the tour guides on Malta's early-Christian heritage and their academic preparation. The HIRMOTHEA model plays an important role in this section as it suggests ways to evaluate and monitor the information provided by tour guides on Malta's catacombs and the overall quality of their services. The research model also caters for other tourist resources such as tourist literature or guidebooks and seeks to explore the relevance and quality of the information published. The last section consolidates the results obtained from the studies presented in this chapter and draws on this data to develop the framework of the following chapter, which focuses on the consumers of archaeological tourism

In Chapter Six I examine tourists' experiences at the catacombs. The two main components of this chapter are two different questionnaires administered to tourists and to heritage employees working at catacombs. The hypothesis here is that there is a direct link between the service provided by the heritage employees working at early-Christian sites in Malta and the experience of tourists at catacombs. I will conduct an important exercise based on audience segmentation which will demonstrate if the service providers in the heritage sector need to develop different strategies, particularly in heritage interpretation, to cater for different audiences. Finally this chapter will present a general interpretation of the results in light of the data obtained from the previous chapters to demonstrate how the work of other sectors, particularly the academic and tourism regulators can affect the visitors' experience at archaeological sites.

In Chapter Seven I discuss archaeology and education in Malta and how this is carried out by the Education Department within the Malta Ministry of Education and by the education section of Heritage Malta which is Malta's government agency responsible for the operation of cultural heritage. A brief historical account is presented on the educational resources available for the last three decades. The arguments in this section will centre on the way archaeological topics are being taught at the primary level and if this method is having a direct affect on the students at a later stage, particularly when

they decide to further their studies in archaeology. Therefore, in order to explore the links between primary and tertiary education I carry out an audit on the primary curriculum, particularly for the areas where history and archaeology topics are concerned. This review, which is the third component of the HIRMOTHEA model, presents two semi-structured surveys conducted with primary teachers and university students reading for an undergraduate degree in archaeology. The analysis of the results in the last part will explore links between the methods of teaching Archaeology at primary education and the subjects chosen by archaeology students at tertiary level of education.

Chapter Eight concludes my study and provides a summary of the results obtained in the previous chapters and use these data to give a clear answer to my primary research question on the current structures of Malta's heritage interpretation and presentation sector and how these are affecting visitors' perceptions and understanding of Malta's early Christian heritage. I argue that in order to improve the interpretation and public presentation of the Maltese catacombs, researchers have to think outside the box and employ a multidisciplinary and holistic approach, particularly with the development of review models, such as HIRMOTHEA, which integrates other fields of study and employs different methods of research.

PART I - CATACOMBS COME TO LIGHT:

REDISCOVERY AND EARLY RESEARCH

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORY OF THE STUDY

2.1   Introduction

AD 1530 can be considered as the dawn of the renaissance period in the Maltese Islands, not only in terms of art and architecture but also because of the interest the Order of Knights of St. John, who were the Islands' administrators, demonstrated with regards to Malta's ancient past. During its two and a half centuries (1530-1798) of control, the Order of St John was not only the promoter of a developed political viewpoint, but it also worked hard on issues related to the Islands' economy and social well-being (Said-Zammit 2008). The influx of members and servants of the Order from all over Europe left an impact still evident in Malta's historical infrastructure, however, the historical buildings are not the only legacy left by the order. Malta's National Library holds the largest archival collection of the Hospitallier Knights. These include, among others, correspondence and notes related to Malta's ancient past. This particular interest manifested itself in important monographs such as Gian Frangisk Abela's *Della descrittione di Malta isola nel mare Siciliano con le sve antichita: ed altre notitie, libri quattro* (1647). The interest in Malta's ancient past was also evident during the British colonial period, which lasted for almost two centuries (AD 1800-1974).

This chapter discusses the main texts produced during these periods and which relate Malta's antiquities, particularly the early Christian heritage. I also explore how such interest in the past evolved into a more structured study before a staggering decline in interest in early Christian heritage, where sites such as catacombs suffered severe neglect. First I present a historical and archaeological overview of late Roman and Byzantine Malta including information on the religions of the communities living on the Islands between the 3rd and 7th century AD, the corresponding rituals and associated architecture.

2.2   Late Roman and Byzantine Malta - Dating and Early Research

The period that characterises the last centuries of classical antiquity is generally labelled by scholars as Late Roman and Byzantine. However different terminologies have recently been employed which include: Later Roman Empire, Early Byzantine Age, Late Antiquity, Long Late Antiquity, Early Christianity and Early Medieval. The use of the

different terms seems to depend on the focus of each scholar, which may vary from an empire-wide perspective to political developments to the studies of the Byzantine period (Mitchell 2014:34).

An extensive review of the scholarly work on late Roman and Byzantine Malta reveals that this period was, until the last quarter of the 19th century, simply referred to as the *Periodo Romano* or Roman. In fact, it was not until the 1882 when Dr A.A. Caruana, who served as national Librarian and Director of Education in the last quarter of the 19th century, published a report on Phoenician and Roman antiquities, where he listed the material culture and epigraphic evidence excavated in Malta. He recorded this archaeological evidence under specific chronological settings which included the Roman Dynasties, the early Christian Period and the Byzantine period. Even with Caruana's misconception on the Maltese prehistoric sites and his complete chronological misinterpretation, categorising them as Phoenician remains, the overall report, especially the part which deals with the Roman Period, was a great achievement. Two centuries before, Abela (1647) referred to the last centuries of classical antiquity as deriving from the 'Impero Orientale'. Abela – already described in Chapter One as the 'father of Maltese history' – wrote extensively on Maltese antiquities. His monograph provides evidence that Malta's administration during the 4th century AD was in the hands of the Eastern Roman Authority. He illustrates a medal which was retrieved in Citta Notabile (the ancient city of Melite in Roman times) and which dates back to the reigns of Valentinian II and Theodosius (the last quarter of the 4th century AD). This medal, minted in pure gold, depicted Constantine the Great on one side and *Victoria Augusti* on the other holding the chi-rho. This, Abela explains, is the primary evidence of an administration characterised by the 'Oriental Empire' (1647:248).

Figure 2.1: Frontispiece of Abela's Della Descrittione di Malta (source: http://www.bdlbooks.com/rare-books/4929-della-descrittione- di-malta-del- commendator- abela.html)

Working with common interest in the early 20th century, Albert Mayr and Thomas Ashby generated much research on the Maltese Roman period. This was also the first time that an archaeologist made use of the term Byzantine to refer to the material culture which dating to the 5th century AD. This was indeed another achievement when it comes to the chronological setting and categorisation of the Maltese-Roman period which spans a millennium, from the 218 BC until AD 870. Unfortunately, the study of the Maltese Roman period remained static until the end of the 1970s and early 1980s when Anthony Bonanno and Mario Buhagiar embarked on a more systematic academic study of Roman Malta. A detailed account of such studies and their achievements will be given in Chapter Three.

Jumping forward in time, one must mention the important work of Anthony Bonanno (2005) on the political, social, and religious status of the Maltese Islands under Rome and the Byzantines. Bonanno expanded on the ideas of earlier scholars, such as Mayer and Ashby, and conducted new excavations to update the archaeological record for the Maltese Roman period. This update was much anticipated, especially in a period when the vision of the public presentation of Maltese archaeology was now regulated by Maltese Law.[5]

Bonanno acknowledges AD 535 as the date when Malta was incorporated into the Byzantine Empire. Similar to what Buhagiar claimed twenty years earlier, the author admits that apart from the rock-cut hypogea distributed all over Malta, this period is one of the 'darkest' (2005:259) when it comes to Malta's archaeological data. Bonanno refers to a period characterised by a multitude of crises across the Roman Empire as Late Antiquity.

The most reliable and direct archaeological evidence related to 4th century Malta derives from three types of material culture, namely inscriptions, coinage and funerary architecture. In the early 4th century AD, the people of Gozo, Malta's sister Island, dedicated two separate inscriptions (CIL X, No 7504) to two of the Tetrarchs, namely, Constantius Chlorus and Galerius. These provide a valuable indication of Gozo's political status and administration, and its rise from *municipium* to republic (Bonanno, 2003:260). Another possible clue to Malta's political leaning at the time is the hoard of bronze coins found in 1937 in Rabat which dates back to the third quarter of the 3rd century and was minted in the eastern provinces. One hoard may not be enough to determine Malta's political situation in the 4th century AD and further research must be conducted to enrich the current data.

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[5] The ' Cultural Heritage Act of 2002' was enacted to regulate cultural heritage research, conservation and public presentation among other important issues within this filed.

Figure 2.2: AD 4th century inscription found in Gozo
(source: Bonanno 2005)

 The third and perhaps most tangible evidence are the rock-cut tombs or catacombs. Although to date the catacombs have not provided much information on the cultural profile of the Maltese community from the 4th to the 6th century AD, the discovery of architectural features and other material culture related to these underground structures will help update the archaeological record and thus augment the public presentation of this period. Past scholars have somehow failed to present in detail a number of inscriptions and iconographic evidence discovered inside the Maltese catacombs, which were well documented and partly analysed by Buhagiar in 1986. Understandably, the intention of Maltese and foreign scholars was to push the dates of the Maltese Christian catacombs as early as the 1st or 2nd century AD in order to confirm the narrative found in chapter 27 of the Acts of the Apostles dated to AD 62 which states that the Maltese community was converted to Christianity by Saint Paul himself. No archaeological evidence to date supports such an early chronological setting.

Figure 2.3: Example of a Maltese late Roman hypogeum: the Interior of Saint Agatha's Catacombs (Source: Daniel Cilia)

2.2.1   Religion

Religious structures and monuments are prominent archaeological features on Malta, from prehistoric temples to Christian catacombs. Before outlining the main religions and the corresponding archaeological evidence present in Late Antiquity, the following section will briefly go through their derivation and chronological context.

First, I look at the Pagan religions. Polytheistic religion has been present on the Maltese islands since the early Phoenician period (7th millennium BC), when communities from Near Eastern shores ventured to the western Mediterranean in search of mineral resources (Aubet 2001).   The polytheistic religion practiced by the Phoenician communities survived across the Punic period (500-218 BC) and even into Roman rules (Bonanno 2005). With the arrival of the Romans, more gods, such as Apollo, were introduced to the Island community. However, excavations at the multi-period site of Tas-Silg in the South East of Malta reveal, as Bonanno (Bonanno, 2005:155) states, 'an uninterrupted continuity of function of the place as the most important sacred shrine on the islands, as suggested by Cicero, as well as the survival of the Punic language way into the Roman period.' Furthermore inscriptions found in Mdina and Mtrafa refer to a temple of Prosperina and its restoration in the 1st century AD and the construction of a temple dedicated to Apollo in the 2nd century AD respectively.

Figure 2.4 The archaeological site of Tas-Silg in the South-East of Malta   (source: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/people/research/rossi)

Maltese catacombs reveal another religion which was certainly present on the Island during the 4th century AD, namely, the Jewish faith. In *The Jews of Malta*, Cecil Roth argued that long before the introduction of Christianity, 'some adventurous Hebrew' (1928:188) arrived as part of Phoenician commercial activities and rooted the Jewish faith here. Roth (1928:188) suggested that this event could perhaps be the reason for the 'Semitic imprint which was never subsequently lost, in spite of repeated conquests and changes in the rule'. And yet, when she considers the arrival of St. Paul in Malta around AD 62, Roth observes that this Act, written by St Luke, describes the Maltese community as 'barbaric', which, in a Judaeo-centric context refers to a community with a pagan culture and without knowledge of neither Greek nor Latin language. Might this mean that a Jewish community was not established on the Islands prior to the 1st century AD?

Key to our discussion, however, is Christianity. As discussed above, while scholars have tried to date the establishment of the first Christians in Malta to the mid-1st century AD, the archaeological evidence of the earliest Christian presence does not match this literary source. In fact, when the material culture, such as pottery, burials and the few epigraphic records generated by the early Christians in Malta was compared with that found in the nearby Sicily and North Africa, this was found to date to the 4th century AD

(Buhagiar 1986:38-41). Without debating the validity of the narrative documented in the Acts of the Apostles, and irrespective of whether this event really took place, it is unlikely that a single event like this could have left an instant cultural blueprint which is reflected in the archaeological record. Naturally, there is no single date for the full Christianisation of the Maltese community and current evidence hints instead at a rather slow transition. The latter archaeological record for Christianity overall is not earlier than the 4th century AD.

Therefore, by the 4th century AD, three religious communities co-existed on the Maltese islands – the Pagans, the Jews and the early Christians, with the latter becoming the official religion of the empire with time. Reasonably, with all these faiths on an island of just c. 316 km^2, one would suppose that these communities were bound by specific socio-religious obligations stipulated by Roman law.

2.2.2 Funerary Architecture

This thesis is centred on the management and interpretation of the Maltese early Christian heritage and the main heritage resource are the considerable number of catacombs scattered all over Malta, with a high concentration in the western part of the Island. It is therefore important to outline the forms and different types of architecture of these intriguing sites. This section is not intended to repeat what many scholars have done in the past, i.e. just describing the catacombs, but rather to provide wider contextual information about these underground hypogea, such as the types of funerary rituals associated with them and how they reflect aspects of everyday life in Late Antiquity, in order to inform the arguments raised later in this text.

Key arguments on mortuary archaeology have been made by Mark Parker Pearson (1999) where he argues how funerary architecture is an enduring sign of past life. Unfortunately this has sometimes been undervalued and consequently treated by scholars with theoretical simplicity even though archaeologists have recently been giving due importance to the meaning and causes of monumentality. This has been possible by taking into consideration the concept of agency, which takes into account not only the architecture itself but also the communities and individuals who produced such architecture as well as the psychological processes associated with it (2005:197).

The late Roman and Byzantine hypogea, or catacombs, underwent transformations throughout Late Antiquity. The typical Maltese catacomb, made up of a rectangular rooms and galleries containing different types of tombs, 'may perhaps, mark one of the final stages of the development of Maltese tomb architecture' (Buhagiar 1986:18). Eight different tomb types can be identified in Malta. The first is known as the 'window-tomb' and is considered endemic to the Maltese hypogea since it is practically non-existent in other Mediterranean contexts. (Testini 1985:278). The window tomb is composed of a compartment with a rectangular opening cut within a semi-circular niche, commonly embellished with pilasters in relief on each side.

The second type of Maltese tomb is the 'loculus', the most common type of catacomb, particularly characteristic of Rome. Loculi consist of rectangular recesses on the side walls of the hypogea used in Malta for the burial of children. Elsewhere these recesses were commonly used to bury adults as well. This was due to their simple forms and the fact that these tombs took up very little space at a time when the mortality rate vis-a-vis burial space is claimed to have been unsustainable particularly due to several risks brought by childbirth such as infections and other complications (Harper 2012:685). The 'arcosolium' was also commonly used and occurs in almost all local hypogea. This semi-circular recess excavated into the side walls comes in two forms, with troughs (partitions) or without troughs. The rock-cut head-rest is another typical feature of these tombs. Its form may have been influenced by the architecture found in nearby Syracuse, Sicily later developing into an indigenous structure due to its architectural variations.

The fourth catacomb type is the 'baldacchino' or 'canopied-tomb'. This type is very common in the hypogea located in the Rabat area but is rare elsewhere on Malta (Buhagiar 1986:23). Normally free-standing, these graves consist of a high plinth or table with pilasters rising from the corner of the rock-cut structure all the way up to the ceiling, as if they are holding a canopy. Similar to the 'arcosolium', the 'baldacchino' has variants, which can be distinguished as (i) the troughs with or without head-rests (ii) the open space (or troughless Baldacchino) and (iii) the saddled-back baldacchino. Similar late Roman tombs can be found in hypogea in Ragusa (Sicily), such as the one known as the 'Ipogeo delle Trabacche' (Terranova 2013:112). Similar to the 'baldacchino' is the 'table-tomb' grave type. They have the same characteristics except that the upper part,

or canopy, is not present in the 'table-tomb' type. Another type of grave in the Maltese repertoire is the 'bench-tomb'. This tomb type is usually located in areas which were not commonly used for burials, such as antechambers or foyers. These were cut into benches originally meant for seating, however, due to the problem of space, early communities seemingly decided to change these features into tombs. Examples of this can be found in Hypogeum 2 at the Saint Augustine Catacombs in Rabat (Buhagiar 1986:150).

The penultimate type of tomb is known as the 'floor-tomb' (or *forma*). These shallow rectangular pits were generally dug around the 'baldacchino-tombs', as seen at the Abatija tad-Dejr Catacombs in Rabat. Similar tombs were found in recent excavations at the Trabacche Catacombs in Ragusa. The *cubicula* or 'burial-cubicle' is the last type of tomb identified late Roman Malta. These chambers were usually accessed through an individual opening from a field above, by means of three or four rock-cut steps leading into the chamber. This rectangular chamber may have been commissioned by a single family (Jones *et al*. 2013:102). One of the best preserved *cubiculum* is found in Hypogeum 3 of Saint Agatha's Catacombs in Rabat (Buhagiar 1986:74). Unlike other burial-cubicles, this has a semi-circular plan with low relief of pseudo-Doric style columns and a very well preserved 4th century AD fresco painted in a semi-circular niche. This symmetrical fresco depicts a scallop shell, doves, flowers, vases and a christogram chi-Rho in the centre, all of which may imply an early Christian eschatology (Buhagiar 1986:75).

Reference number	Tomb type
1	Loculi
2	Window-tomb
3	Saddled-backed Baldacchino
4	Baldacchino with burial troughs
5	Floor-tombs
6	Agape table
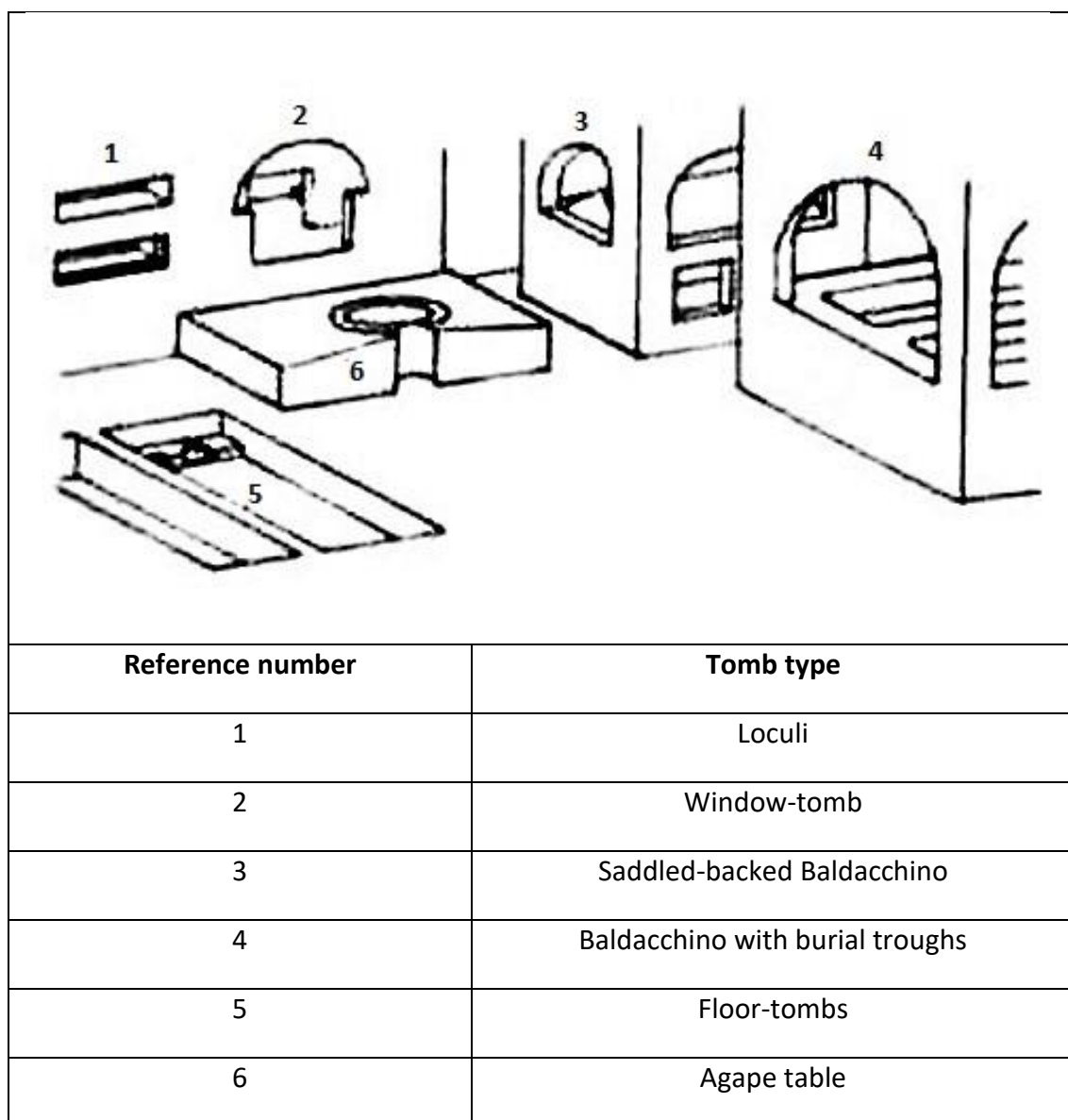
Figure 2.5: Types of burial architecture found in Maltese catacombs
(source: Author, after Buhagiar 1983:28)

These diverse types of funerary architecture were used by a variety of religious groups. Almost all of the grave types mentioned above can be found in catacombs utilised by Christians, Pagans and Jews. This aspect, therefore, does not help in the identification of different religious communities when it comes to funerary architecture. In fact, the notion that catacombs must have been used by different religious communities is shared by a number of scholars such as Onorato Bres, whose research on Malta's antiquities discusses how the artefacts retrieved in these sites show that Christian communities reutilised tombs which were initially used by pagans (1916:324). This situation matches other Mediterranean regions in Late Antiquity. Whether in North

Africa, the northern or western Mediterranean, archaeological evidence shows a continuity of use from pagan into the Christian periods (Buhagiar 1986:29).

Epigraphic evidence that sheds light on the religions of late antique Malta's comes from a complex located c. 200 meters from Saint Agatha's Catacombs in Rabat, namely the 'tac-Cagħqi' Secondary School Hypogea. The south-east Hypogeum contains two different inscriptions. The first was written in Neo-Punic style and was painted above the window door of a cubicle; it reads 'by virtue of the gift [grave goods] offered to you, oh spirit, you that are strong, do not worry and let go'. The emphasis on the spirit, the surrounding tone, and the objects placed within the burial imply a pagan eschatology. The second inscription was inscribed in the same style, however, this time the tone and meaning are completely different. According to Rocco and Borg (1972:70) this inscription reads 'Qum' which means rise or 'Wake Up'. While the first inscription is written in a tone of consolation from someone who acknowledges that the tomb is the eternal resting place, the second is more assertive and it is written in the imperative, as if someone is commanding the soul of the deceased to rise and continue its journey to the afterlife. The latter has connotations with the Christian belief of resurrection. Buhagiar (1986:183) argues that it is uncertain if such inscriptions can be linked to Christian belief despite the presence of the symbol of the palm tree, which accompanies these two letters. Perhaps Buhagiar is too cautious in his interpretation, however, the absence of direct symbolism, such as the cross, might reflect the earliest phase of Christianity in the Maltese islands when the community still embraced a Punic culture. Despite this preference, it is unlikely that a Christian tomb (even if reutilised from a previous pagan burial) featured an inscription referring to pagan eschatology. Therefore a possible reinterpretation of this could be that these two tombs were either used contemporaneously by a pagan and a Christian family around AD 300, or the pagan tombs were abandoned and not reutilised by Christian families. In any case, this indicates that if the interpretations provided by Borg and Rocco (1972) are correct, the individuals buried here and their families did not have reservations about the funerary space being used by different religious communities (Farrugia 2016).

Unlike Christians and Pagans, the Jewish communities here in Malta seemed to have had their own hypogea with private entrances. This is evident from the inscribed symbol

of the menorah indicating Jewish burial at each entrance of the catacombs, such as hypogeum 17 at Saint Agatha's Catacombs. This hypogeum was discovered during the construction of the Missionary Society of Saint Paul Mother House (Buhagiar 1986:91). Archaeological excavation has also revealed that Jewish hypogea rarely interconnected with other hypogea unless the adjacent one was owned by another Jewish family. No archaeological evidence has been found so far that shows the reutilisation of tombs, especially in light of the unfinished tombs noticeable near tomb nine of the same chamber. In view of such evidence, no assumptions can be made about the relationship between Jews and the rest of the community except that religious conflict in general was unlikely considering the very close proximity of the Jewish catacombs with the rest of the hypogea.

The archaeological evidence related to religion in Malta's Late Antiquity, although limited, is crucial for understanding the situation in the 4th-5th centuries in terms of religious transition and Christianisation within the wider context. Religion across this period has to be seen in light of the political situation of the time. In fact, literary sources demonstrate that, although Malta was under Roman rule, it held no political importance (Bonanno 2005:143). This probably led to high tolerance and a flexible administration. Evidence of this can be found in the implementation of Roman laws and regulations in Malta, which took much longer to enact than in any other Roman province (see Section 2.2.3). This may have affected the way the Maltese communities, embracing different ideologies and religions for centuries, co-existed while adapting to new currents (such as Christianity) that slowly penetrated from overseas.

2.2.3 Rituals

The *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (2012) defines ritual as 'a symbolic activity in a religious context', while in *The Archaeology of Death and Burial*, Parker Pearson defines it as 'one form of customary practice - in which participants are aware of socially agreed conventions from brief matters politeness to long and elaborate religious rites' (2005:194). Parker Pearson indicates that there are two types of outcomes from funerary rituals, namely the funerary monumentality, which is ritual materialised and 'visible for all to see centuries after the event', and those rituals, that leave no visible

mark whatsoever. For the latter, Parker Pearson cites the order of a funerary procession, that is, who led the procession and who was present for the funeral celebrations. These questions are extremely important for interpreting an archaeological site where we know ritual took place. However, unless all this is represented and recorded in documents, funerary artefacts, architectural features and/or art, it would be extremely difficult to include this information in any public presentation and interpretation of late Roman hypogea. It is perhaps due to this intangibility that Maltese archaeologists have written very little on the rituals in Christian Late Antiquity. In fact, research on the customs of early Christians has proved to be problematic (Bonanno 2005:265), however, it is surely explicit that certain rituals must have prevailed and remained clearly visible in the artistic and architectural features in Malta and elsewhere.

The *stibadium* is one of the main [rock-cut] features of late Roman hypogea. This was used as a couch during the *refrigerium*, or the commemorative meal, which was a common celebration across the Roman Empire in honour of the deceased (Buhagiar 1986:30). A circular platform was usually incorporated to serve as a table or *mensa* to place the food upon. Robin Jensen's *Dining with the dead: From the mensa to the altar in Christian Late Antiquity* (2008:107-143) gives a comprehensive overview of the archaeological findings relating to the *refrigerium*. The commemorative meal was a ritual that originated before Christianity but continued to be practiced after the establishment and legitimisation of the religion (Jensen 2008:120). Jensen observes frescoes and sculptures, in low and high relief, found in catacombs and ancient Roman villas, including at Pompeii and Herculaneum that illustrate people lying down, inclined on their sides around a three-legged table eating and drinking, sometimes with the main character of the scene being the deceased. One must say that the meaning behind this meal, especially in a pagan context, has nothing to do with the afterlife *per se*, but was meant as a reminder of how short the life of a human being can be and therefore one must enjoy it before death comes (Jensen 2008:145). Banqueting in catacombs would not have been the best experience, not just because of the dark ambience but also because of the smell of the decomposing bodies in the tombs, despite efforts made to counteract this with perfumes. The latter may be one of the factors explaining why the *stibadia* and *mensae* are absent in the Jewish catacombs. Hygiene played an important role in the Jewish religion and therefore such a feature would have probably been

prohibited. The practice of the *refrigerium* and the custom of taking food into the catacombs are also mentioned in Augustine's *Confessions*, written c. AD 400. This text explains how Bishop Ambrose of Milan had once instructed a woman who was seen taking food in the catacombs not to continue with this practice but to give any extra food to the poor. This event perhaps marks the inception of the 'campaign' against those pagan funerary customs that were adapted by the early Christians and whose practitioners were now reluctant to stop because 'of the weakness of the newly converted, who were used to their long-standing pleasures' (Jensen 2008:142). However, almost a century and a half after Saint Augustine, all this came to an official end with Pope Gregory the Great, who, in c. AD 590, abolished the practice, which had been transformed to a profane custom.

It is indeed interesting how the architectural features related to the *refrigerium*, at least in the Maltese Islands, remained perfectly preserved even after this abolition. This may imply a continuation of this ritual beyond the time of eradication. This continuity, however, must be seen in light of various factors, especially in locations such as Malta, where Roman jurisdiction, including the religious authorities, was not vigilant due to the Island's noted political and religious marginality to the rest of the Roman Empire.

Artefacts retrieved from undisturbed archaeological contexts are important indicators of daily activities across ancient communities. Regrettably, there are few artefacts retrieved in Maltese late Roman and Byzantine hypogea that inform directly on early Christian funerary rituals. In addition, the few artefacts unearthed from Maltese catacombs are not particularly indicative of the community who produced, used and disposed of such cultural material. Preliminary archaeological reports have been published describing some of the artefacts uncovered in late Roman hypogea, the most recent published in the form of a paper discussing the main findings at the Saint Augustine catacombs in Rabat (Cardona and Farrugia 2014). Here, the authors do not confirm if such findings are early Christian or Pagan since the catacombs under excavation do not reveal enough information about the nature of the religious community using this space. The artefacts include a bone bracelet, 41 small beads (14 of which came from tombs and the rest in the common areas of the hypogeum), a gold earring found in tomb 20b, several fragments of Romano-Maltese oil lamps, and five metal nails bent in a u-shape near the skeletal remains of a foot in tomb 9. Scientific

testing is still being carried out and one hopes for an absolute date in order to 'place the use of this catacomb within a specific timeframe' (Cardona and Farrugia 2014:71).

Figure 2.6: Sample bead excavated from Saint Augustine's Catacombs &
One of the metal nails unearthed from tomb 9 (source:
Scerra (ed.): 73, graphics: author)

Another preliminary report from the excavation at Saint Augustine's Catacombs deals with its human remains. Michelle Padovani's work on the osteological evidence from St Augustine's catacomb (2014) provides important information on the position of the remains and possible burial practices, stating that the corpses were buried in a supine position, i.e. laid on their back with their hands by their side and the lower limbs extended or slightly bent at the knee joint (2014:79). In one instance, the deceased was buried on the right side, looking south-east. This was the only exception and so one cannot know if this was done intentionally for some cultural belief or burial practice or if the bones ended up in that position due the reutilisation of the same tomb. Padovani states that overall the corpses were wrapped in shrouds, as was the common practice in Late Antiquity (citing Gospel of John 19:39-40). Unfortunately no evidence of such material or fibres was retrieved from the excavation, the unstable humid environment of the catacombs no doubt promoting the fast decomposition of the bodies and of other organic material within the burial context. Padovani notes that 'if there were any brooches to keep the shroud in place, none were found' (2014:79), however, she does not take into account the two bone pins found in these catacombs which may have served this purpose – or alternatively were used as hairpins. Similar bone pins were found in the adjacent catacomb complex of Saint Agatha (Camilleri 2001:127).

*Figure 2.7 - A partially articulated skeleton in Saint Augustine's Catacomb, Hypogeum 3
(Source: Michelle Padovani)*

Other important evidence for burial practices during Late Antiquity which has not yet been properly explored locally, is the presence of *unguentaria* found in an undisturbed tomb at Saint Agatha's Catacombs. Similar to ones found in the 6th century AD site of Abila in the Jordan[6] , these *unguentaria* were placed within the burial. Their functions are directly related to the funerary practices and rituals of the communities using them (Anderson-Stojanovic 1987:105). Scholars used to call these objects *lacrimaria* as it was initially thought that they were used to collect the mourners' tears as part of the funerary rite. This was later dismissed by archaeologists who started calling these objects *balsamaria*, representing the contents of these bottles. These bottles might have been used in different ways during the burial ritual, for example to hold 'oil, wine, or water…for short-term use' (Anderson-Stojanovic 1987:105). If these bottles really contained such liquids, these may have been involved in the commemorative meal celebrated in honour of the death. The question of their purpose remains, however,

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[6] Abila tombs. (2006). Retrieved from http://users.stlcc.edu/mfuller/abila/AbilaTombs.html [accessed 13 November 2014]

especially since the archaeological evidence indicates mass production of these objects for funerary practices. Another interpretation offered by Anderson-Stojanovic on the *unguentaria* is that they were filled with ointments meant for use during the preparation of the deceased's body before burial (1987:121).

The application of ointments, the wrapping of the deceased in shrouds and the placement of lit oil lamps near the heads and feet of the deceased were all funerary practices derived from the Jews and later used by Christian communities (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2006:244). Another common practice of these religions was the 'secondary burial'. Secondary burial was common in Near Eastern communities, notably the Phoenicians, as early as the 4th century BC, long before the introduction of Christianity (Stern 2001:333). This was directly related to Jewish eschatology, which upheld that the spirit of the deceased found eternal peace once there is no more flesh attached to the bones. The full decomposition of the body thus marked the end of the mourning period and the reburial of the bones in ossuaries was considered as a positive event (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2006:246). As much as secondary burial was tied to the Jewish and Christian beliefs, this was also convenient when it came to the reutilisation of tombs. With a very high mortality rate in long Late Antiquity (Nathan 2002:134), cleaning and reutilising a used tomb would have surely reduced the burden of further extending the underground catacombs. This practice, therefore, not only had religious significance, but was also integral in the logistics in the sustainable management of such places.

As noted, although the material culture retrieved from the catacombs is quite limited, the information from the artefacts combined with the architectural features may reveal a series of actions making up part of a funerary ritual, such as the preparation of the body with oils and spices, the wrapping of the body in a shroud, the placing of the corpse in the tomb, the celebration of the commemorative meal, the placing of *unguentaria* in the grave, the sealing of the tomb and any secondary burial and rituals associated with that. Some of the meaning behind the actions can never fully be identified or easily understood as this is something related to the cognition of its ancient community.

2.3   FROM ANTIQUARIANISM TO ARCHAEOLOGY

Societies have always been interested about their past and different cultures have speculated about this from antiquity to modern times (Renfrew and Bahn 2004:22). One can simply mention the prehistoric temple of Ggantija, whose name derives from *ġgant*, meaning giant. This temple is located on Gozo, Malta's sister island, and was first excavated by Col. Ottot Beyer in 1827 (Maltese Superintendence of Cultural Heritage 2011). The origins of the site name relate to the tradition that a race of local giants built this temple, given the enormous dimensions of the stones (Abela 1647:19). Reference to this local myth comes in the very first lines of Thomas McGill's *A Handbook or Guide for Strangers Visiting Malta* where he writes that 'When the history of a country (Malta) is traced back to obscurity, then tradition steps in and fills the vacant space with giants' (1839:10). Prehistoric artefacts such as stone heads, phallic symbols and a snake relief were unearthed from the Ggantija temples, although none of these were exhibited until the 1960s (Gozo Museum of Archaeology, Heritage Malta 2015). This was not the only case of keeping local archaeological artefacts in repositories for more than a century, leaving the general public unaware of such heritage. In addition, we see wealthy individuals building collections of ancient artefacts (e.g. the Count Sant Manduca collection in Mdina owned by John Sant Manduca and his family) (Peter Sant Manduca, pers. comm., 5 December 2016). The reason for such collections may have varied from simple curiosity to the uniqueness of the artefact itself to its value, not so much cultural as monetary. This topic - the growing local interest in antiquities - especially before archaeology started being considered as a proper field of study, is very underexplored in Maltese academic literature, and whereas foreign scholars such as Arnold Momigliano writing in the 1950s and Tim Murray in 2007 have discussed Antiquarianism and the practice of collecting ancient objects from multiple perspectives, Maltese scholars such as Anthony Bonanno describe the term 'antiquarian' as one which 'implies negative, outdated attitudes disdained by modern academic institutions and scientific approach' (1984:28). In the same text, Bonanno praises Gian Francesco Abela, considered as the Father of Maltese History, as an antiquarian in the positive sense, or as an archaeologist *ante litteram*. Although not very clear, this article almost hints at the late 16th century as being a period of positive development in the study of the past.

Figure 2.8: Portrait of Gian Francesco Abela (source:
http://www.akkademjatalmalti.com/page.asp?p=9023)

Maltese scholars concur when describing the contributions made by Gian Francesco
Abela towards Maltese antiquities (Bonanno 1984:28; Said-Zammit 2008:21; Buhagiar
1986:7): field exploration; interpretation of ancient 'objects d'art'; documentation of
discoveries; and toponymic interpretation. Perhaps Abela's only major mistake was his
interpretation of the prehistoric temples of *Hagar Qim* as an edifice constructed by the
giants (Bonanno 1984:29). The latter claim, however, is regarded by Anthony Bonano in
his *Giovanni Francesco Abela's Legacy to the Jesuit College* (1984) as ironic. In this sense,
Bonanno follows scholars like Momigliano and Murray who strongly believe that
antiquarianism played an important role in the reform of historical methods and the
early development of archaeology. These authors try to create a bridge between
antiquarian research and archaeology in order to give due credit to early scholars who

through their knowledge and often rather casual methodology, managed to produce high scholarly work which is still valid nowadays.

Yet we must recognise the negative aspects of antiquarianism practised between the 16th century and the early 20th century in the Maltese islands, which led to the partial destruction of the Maltese cultural heritage. I can first briefly describe two natural disasters which took place in the central Mediterranean in 1542 and 1693, which, in some ways, may have given a boost to the negative part of antiquarianism in Malta. The first was an earthquake of EMS intensity VII in 1542, causing the collapse of many houses. Although information is very limited, the *Chronaca Siciliana del Secolo XVI* describes how this event affected domestic dwellings, religious architecture and monuments. A second earthquake is recorded in 1693, mainly in ecclesiastical documents, and describes the devastation, mostly to ecclesiastical architecture and some prominent houses in Mdina (Galea 2007:732). Excavations conducted by Temi Zammit in the 1920s and by the Museums Department in 2002 revealed that, underneath the ancient Medieval fortified city of Mdina, which suffered extensive structural damage due to these two natural disasters, the remains of the old Roman city of Melite were revealed (Bonanno 2005:2017). An example of this is the De Piro collection dating to the early 19th century, exhibited today in the St Agatha Museum in Rabat, although it remains under the private ownership of the Missionary Society of Saint Paul. Discoveries came through other sources: in the Archivium Melitense (IX 175), we learn how, in AD 1530, as soon as the Knights of St John took over of the Maltese administration, two licences for the opening up of tombs were issued to two common individuals with the names of Luca Darmenia and Antonio Callus. This is just one example of deliberate and legal tomb raiding during the 16th century and we should assume other permissions were issued for similar activities.

Little evidence exists that shows that between the 16th and early 20th century Maltese antiquarians intended to exhibit their collections to the general public; this evidence is found mostly in Last Will documents and Testaments. Perhaps the only direct reference to this argument is found in Abela's monograph where he presents a detail description of the Maltese islands and wherein he authorises the Jesuit Fathers to take care of his patrimony and the antiquities after his death, for the sake of inquisitive friends who were interested in such artefact and professors who studied antiquities - *'per*

sodisfatione de' curiosi amici e professori di essa (antichita')' (1647:19). Much later, in 1913, the Testament left by Dr Edgar Parnis, a magistrate of the Judicial Police serving during the British Colonial period, bequeathed his collection, which included amphorae, tablets and inscriptions to the Maltese National Museum established a decade earlier (Galea 2015:para-21). These few examples illustrate that a considerable number of objects of high cultural heritage value were kept in private collections. Luckily, in both cases mentioned here, the owners left their collections in the hands of authorities (public or religious). Unfortunately, the lack of detailed catalogues must have led to the disappearance of important objects. On this matter, Bonanno argues that the list of artefacts owned by Abela and donated to the Jesuits was far from exhaustive and it is impossible to identify all objects pertaining to him in the national collection (1984:34).

In the 1920s, in the southern part of Rabat known as Saqajja, a floor collapse revealed a considerable number of inverted Roman amphorae (Fig 2.9). The exceptional layout was probably related to a technique used to reduce damp in an internal environment. Local villagers described how, by the time the authorities from the Museum Department arrived on the scene to document the discovery, most of the amphorae had already been stolen, with a number of them later sold in Mdina (Fr. Victor Camilleri, pers. comm., 15 November 2011). All this happened at a time when Malta's legislation did not accommodate for the conservation or ownership of artefacts retrieved in private spaces and, therefore, the person retrieving the object automatically became the owner of the said artefact. As Said-Zammit argues, therefore, one could 'keep, sell or dispose of such artefact according to one's free will' (2008:20).

Figure 2.9: Collapsed roman floor in Saqqajja, Rabat
(source: Bonanno 2005:216)

It was during the same period - the 1920s - that the British government in Malta became concerned about the Island's heritage and how it was being perceived and managed (Superintendence of Cultural Heritage 2015). The 27th of July 1925 marked a big step forward regarding the protection of Maltese Antiquities, when the *Antiquities (Protection) Act* was created as a regulatory law for national cultural heritage. Although this law gave the necessary power to regulate this sector, it still functioned from a 'negative-antiquarianism' perspective, as evident in Paragraph 14 Part 4, whereby any movable artefacts retrieved in a private property were to be considered as property of the state. The government, however, had to pay a disturbance-fee to the land-owner prior to the confiscation of the material culture. In the case where the Museums Department could not pay this fee the law allowed the tenant to keep the artefacts. This was an incentive to those antiquarians who saw monetary value in such heritage. That said, this law was still an improvement in the antiquities sector where private ventures for the exploration of ancient objects were now prohibited, and any infringements of the antiquities act were considered criminal offences. In addition, the role of the Director of Museum was now formally regulated (Antiquities (Protection) Act, 1925).

Previous to the *Antiquities (Protection) Act*, in 1903, the British administration in Malta set up a Museum Committee and appointed a Director to specifically manage an autonomous Museum of Maltese Antiquities. Although this museum was already in existence prior to 1903, this was simply part of the Public Library in the capital city Valletta where two rooms were in place since the Order of Saint John to house artefacts of historical and archaeological Value (Gambin 2003:11). The first Director and Curator of the Museum, Temi Zammit, opened the National Museum in 1905, which had been relocated to an industrial exhibition area used by the Malta Society of Art. In the first Museum Annual Report presented to the Maltese Governor on 17th of May 1904, Zammit writes that the previous museum did not satisfy the needs of students or general public who were interested in antiquities (Zammit 1904:47). This is perhaps (one of) the first official reference to give due importance to the presentation of Maltese antiquities to different audiences, i.e. to students gaining academic training and to the general public interested in their cultural heritage. Zammit's statement to the Governor seemed to go beyond the propaganda of his work but may have marked the beginning of archaeology as a proper academic field of study. Zammit's emphasis on students also implies that education on a higher academic level was needed on matters related to Malta's national cultural heritage. Although this is an assumption, the same period on the Maltese Islands did see many systematic excavations being carried out. 'Systematic' here is meant to imply a complete documentation of the finds and surveying were undertaken. Thus, with the revolutionary efforts made by Zammit to educate the public on their national cultural heritage and to make it accessible, it is more than legitimate to consider him and his period as one signifying a positive transition from antiquarianism to proper archaeology.

With time, antiquarianism, which in some ways was crucial for the preservation of cultural heritage, developed into more specific disciplines such as Art History and Archaeology. However, is the practice of antiquarianism still embraced by certain individuals nowadays and what are the connotations, if any? Texts like *Ancient History and the Antiquarian* (Momigliano 1950) and *Rethinking Antiquarianism* (Murray 20017) offer a more of a positive appraisal of this practice unlike Bonanno's *Abela's Legacy to the Jesuit College* (1984) who gives a more realistic definition to today's meaning of antiquarian - 'negative, outdated attitudes distained by academic institutions'(1984:28).

Antiquarianism today is [locally] conceived as an activity of buying antique objects for personal collections and not as an 'informal' or unsystematic way to do archaeology. Although the new legislation (Cultural Heritage Act 2002), prohibits, without any reservations, the purchasing of any material of cultural heritage importance discovered in Malta and its territorial waters, it should be recognised that archaeological artefacts retrieved both on land and underwater are still being sold at auctions and online. For example, in 2011 a case emerged where a person who had found a Roman amphora on the Maltese seabed and put it online for auction (Cooke 2011: para-1). Similarly, some 33 artefacts of Roman date ranging from terracotta head figurines, flasks, oil lamps, bowl, and other glass objects were put on auction (Belgravia Auctioneers 2013). This clearly shows that even with the monitoring and inspections carried out by the Maltese Superintendent of Cultural Heritage, the quest for ancient objects by private parties persists and the stakes of acquiring such objects in an illicit way are not reduced. Hence, when related to archaeological efforts, the practice of antiquarianism is still considered a negative practice, which is not only disdained by academics, as Bonanno (1985:28) argues, but also by the general public who nowadays are far more aware of the need to protect Malta's cultural heritage.

Figure 2.10: Temi Zammit (standing with black jacket) at the excavation
of the Roman baths at Ghajn Tuffieha, North of Malta in 1930
(source: National Museum of Archaeology, Valletta)

2.3.1   Catacomb Research

> *'..what mattered most to Bosio in his study of martyrial remains was to craft a link between the early Church and the Church of his own day'*
>
> (Rutgers 2000:30)

It is well known that the interest of antiquarians in retrieving, 'studying' and collecting ancient object was driven by motives which varied from monetary value to political and religious agendas such as with the case of Roman catacomb research in the 1590s (see Rutgers 2000:30). The majority of Roman catacombs were known before this period and mentioned extensively in texts such as those produced by Onofrio Panvinio's in 1568*.* Catacombs became the subject of extensive study by the Roman Catholic Church for religious propaganda in a time when the Protestant reformation was experiencing a growth in membership (Osborne 1985:278). Thus, the interest in these underground hypogea was the dawn of what researchers in the following centuries called Christian Archaeology.

The Maltese born Antonio Bosio is considered by many scholars (such as de Rossi 1864; Albright 1940; Ferrua 1978; Renfrew and Bahn 2004) to be the person who kick-started Christian Archaeology. Also known as the 'Columbus of the catacombs' (O'Riordan 1895:482), Bosio was a lawyer by profession who graduated in Rome, but his legal practice did not last for long and he soon realised that this was not his real vocation. In the late 16th century, Bosio accompanied some friends to the catacomb of Domitilla in Rome, where they roamed around the narrow corridors without realising the large extent of the site. Bosio was so impressed by the site and the sanctity of the place that he chose then to dedicate the rest of his life to the study of the catacombs.

Bosio's work was recognised due to his systematic approach in studying such sites. He realised that the underground systems of catacombs were located under the streets leading to the Roman city centre, and therefore he categorised the sites by streets. This methodology led to the discovery of other catacombs. Bosio's research included a

review of the medieval literature, notably the *Itinerarii*, served as guides to early pilgrims (Rutgers 2000:19). Bosio's research methodology differed from that of his contemporary Cardinal Cesare Baronius, a Church historian, who based his study of the catacombs on secondary sources. Baronius was often accompanied to the catacombs by Bosio where the two had lengthy conversations; some of these discussions were presented in his *Annales ecclesiastici a Christo nato ad annum 1198* (Rutgers 2000:21). Bosio did not live to see his sterling work, entitled *Roma Sotteranea* (1632), published. The publication and distribution of this book, was sponsored by the Grand Master of the Order of Saint John, Antoine De Paule.

Bosio's monograph was the subject of criticism for the way it presented the early Christian community was projected, i.e. as a community that had to suffer in order to flourish. Reactions such as that of French theologian Huguenot Jacques Basnage (1706), discusses the funerary traditions of the Jewish community before the establishment of Christianity and argues that underground hypogea were being used way before Christianity. Furthermore, the author argues that catacombs were not intended as shelters during persecution (as implied by Bosio), since their location was known by everyone. Basnage also refers to the *unguentaria*, or ampoules, containing a red substance found inside the catacombs. According to Bosio these contained blood of the martyrs, however, Basnage discredits this and argues that not all the artefacts retrieved in the catacombs should be related to the Christian martyrs. Here the author was not interested in providing a direct contribution to the study of funerary architecture, but as a counter argument to discredit some of the theories put forward by Bosio on the history of the catacombs. Basnage's text did not gain the same importance and popularity as Bosio's, however, his critical approach and theories are very similar to the those used in modern scholarship, not to mention that some of his arguments were recently proven right thanks to modern scientific analysis, such as the those carried out on the red substance inside the *unguentaria* that demonstrated the substance to be a red pigment (see Rutgers 2000:28-29).

The study of Christian archaeology was subject to further research following Basagne. In fact, Giovanni Battista de Rossi researched this subject under the direction of Giuseppe Marchi, Professor of rhetoric at the Roman College, who also devoted his

studies to early Christian art and sculpture. De Rossi's aim was to refine the methodology employed by Bosio and increase the interest of the catacombs not only among scholars, but also the general public. He tried to do this by focusing on epigraphy and the chronology of the catacombs.

The catacombs of the martyrs were key to de Rossi's research. He used the names of the martyrs buried in different Roman catacombs to date the burial sites. Systematic excavation and unveiling of epigraphic evidence in 1854 led archaeologist to determine the chronology of the Catacombs of St Callixtus on the *via Appia* in Rome. De Rossi's efforts in keeping the study of early Christianity secular resulted in a three volume work published between 1868 and 1877 (Rutgers 2000:31).

Giovanni Battista de Rossi and his mentor Giuseppe Marchi were later responsible for the *Museo Cristiano Laterano* which exhibited epigraphic sources, early Christian frescoes and a number of sarcophagi found inside the catacombs. This museum collection was later enlarged in 1922 with other artefacts, historical documents and relics deriving from Christian missionary locations (Lega 2010:102). It was indeed the first space solely dedicated to early Christian heritage and despite the limitations in public interpretation, this was a step forward in the field of early Christian cultural heritage management and presentation.
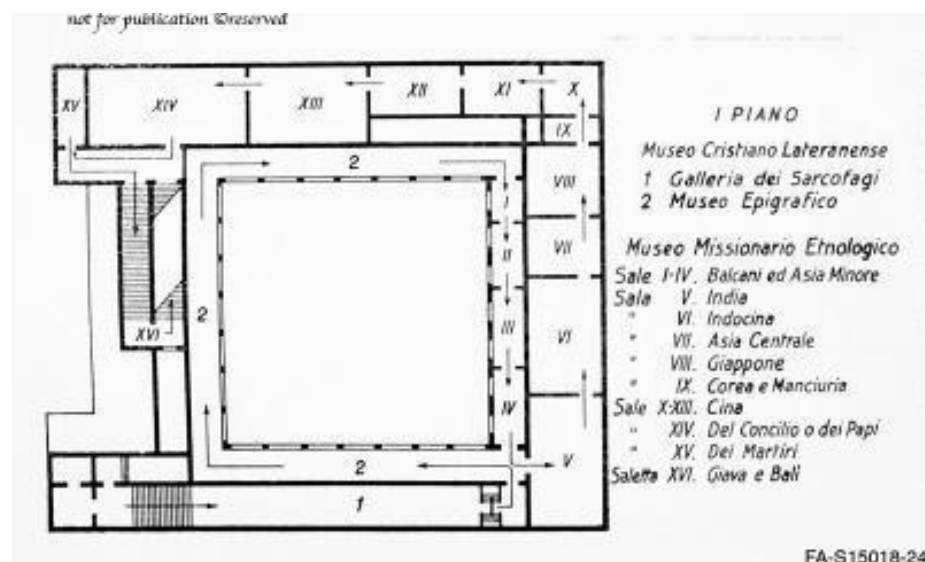
Figure 2.11: Plan of the Museo Cristiano Lateranes
(source: http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/arachne/index.php)

2.3.2   Pioneers of the Maltese catacomb research

The history of Maltese catacomb research follows a similar chronology to that of Rome. In the 16th century, the Maltese authorities were constantly updated on the activities taking place in Rome as part of the political alliance between the Order the St. John and the Vatican – this might have included the research on early Christian sites. The first known documentation of Maltese catacombs dates back to 1610 and is found in Marc Antonio Axiaq's description of the Maltese Islands. Axiaq was a surgeon on the galleys of the Order of St John who had a keen interest in Malta's ancient past. He documents how, while visiting grottos, he noticed bones inside man-made chambers, which he describes as ancient burial sites. No information is provided in his texts to indicate that he carried out further explorations at these sites (Buhagiar 1986:7)

One of the friends of early Christian archaeologist Antonio Bosio was the Maltese Gian Francesco Abela, who, as noted before, was responsible for a detailed historical description of the Islands in the first half of the 17th century . He was completely aware of the work conducted by his comrade on Roman catacombs and seemed to be influenced by Bosio's *Roma Sotteranea* (Abela 1647:34). Abela was the first Maltese scholar to distinguish between Pagan and Christian tombs while recording a number of epigraphic and iconographic sources found in Maltese catacombs, such as the Greek inscription found in Mtarfa (Abela 1647:53).

At the same time Jaques Basnage published his study on the History of the Jews, the Matese nobleman and antiquarian Count Giovanni Antonio Ciantar was busy revising and updating Abela's work (Ciantar 1780:1). Ciantar, who was member of the *Accademia Reale delle Iscrizioni*, worked on the documentation of a number of hypogea not identified by Abela, such as the Bingemma Hypogeum (Buhagiar 1986:8). His research did not focus specifically on the Maltese catacombs, yet this work was extremely important, particularly because some of the catacombs he documented were lost following his publication.

Maltese catacomb research experienced a standstill during the first half of the 19th century. Those studies published in this period were based on general information and did not reveal new information about early Christian sites. Perhaps the most relevant

work during this period was the one conducted by Fr. Onorato Bres entitled *Malta antica illustrate co' monumenti e colla storia* (1816). Onorato Bres was a high ranking member of the Maltese Clergy. His work is mainly a collection of the information gathered by Abela and Ciantar on the catacombs, however, he was able to compare the Maltese early Christian sites with those located in Syracuse and draw some similarities. Bres was also responsible for the investigation of one of the Hypogeum at the Abatija Tad-Dejr Catacombs in Rabat Malta. The results of this investigation were later published in the Malta Government Gazette.

More than half a century had to pass before important archaeological research was conducted by Antonio Annetto Caruana, National Librarian and keeper of Maltese antiquities. Caruana's adventurous character led him to investigate and illustrate catacombs, which he later published in his 1862 report on Phoenician and Roman antiquities of the Maltese islands. Here Caruana produced a good catalogue of sites and pottery. His most remarkable work remains the excavation of Saint Paul's Catacombs in Rabat Malta in 1894; regrettably no reports were produced on this excavation (see Buhagiar 1986:9).

At the turn of the 20th century, investigation and documentation of Maltese catacombs were occasionally conducted by Fr Manwel Magri. Magri was a friend of Caruana and a member of the first Museum Committee. He compiled a good photographic record of several catacombs, such as the one of the Ta' Bistra Catacombs in Mosta. Important systematic work was also carried out on catacombs by the Director of the Museum Committee Sir Temi Zammit. Zammit's academic preparation was key in making important contacts within the archaeological field, such as Erich Becker, a German archaeologist who conducted extensive studies on Maltese catacombs culminating in his work entitled *Malta Sotteranea* (1913). This book was considered a standard work on Maltese catacombs until the 1980s (Buhagiar 1986:10).

There were other individuals who contributed to the study of these hypogea, who, despite their lack of academic background, produced important works, such as P.F. Bellanti. He was as a retired civil servant when he embarked on the study of Maltese catacombs in 1924. Other contributors included Temi Zammit's son, Captain Charles Zammit, who was a good draughtsman and exploited his fine draughtsmanship to plan

a considerable number of catacombs in 1935. Zammit's work was very important as it came just before WWII, when some catacombs were mutilated to serve as air-raid shelters.

In the 1950s excavations were carried out by Cambridge University at Saint Agatha's Catacombs with the help of Fr Victor Camilleri, a cleric who was responsible for these catacombs. These studies were complimented by the analysis of Father Antonio Ferrua who gave a good interpretation of the Maltese catacombs and provided sterling information about some of the inscriptions found here (Ferrua 1950). Finally, a full, valuable and (then) comprehensive study of the Maltese catacombs was conducted by Mario Buhagiar in the 1980s, however, this work will see detailed discussion in the next chapter.

2.4 Politics of Neglect

'..catacomb archaeology had lost much of its appeal as soon as the spirit of the Counterreformation began to yield, in due course, to the writings of less polemical thinkers and theologians.'

(Rutgers 2000:33)

There is no single meaning for 'politics of neglect', especially in terms of cultural heritage, however, I would argue that this may be defined as the intentional abandonment or disuse of heritage sites and promotion of other heritage for political or religious purposes. For example, Ludvig Rutgers highlights the effects which the end of the conflict between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestants had on the study of early Christian sites. This topic is also related to 'archaeology and nationalism' where cultural heritage is exploited by particular groups to apply psychological and political pressure. An example of the this is the Republic of Iraq, which was colonised by the British government in the beginning of the 20th century. The Iraqi community used arguments centring on cultural heritage to present a case for their decolonisation in 1932 (Bernhardsson 2012). Parallels can be drawn between the events in Iraq and in Malta.

The use of cultural heritage as a vehicle for decolonisation has not yet been dealt with across international academic literature and it is hoped that this discussion creates a

platform for future research. The following sections will discuss the endeavour of Maltese and British archaeologists in the study of Maltese cultural identity through the ancient past and its impact on national politics and Maltese heritage.

2.4.1   The decline in catacomb research during the mid-20th century

The study of archaeology helps in the preservation of the past through the study of ancient objects. Archaeologists, therefore, constantly strive to give meaning to the artefacts and features uncovered during excavations. The identity of a community, the meaning of an artefact and the site itself is an added value in a nationalistic context which often lead scholars to select specific sites over others (Van Der Awuera 2012:55).

The lack of interest in Malta's early Christian sites in the second quarter of the 20th century may be related to what Vella and Gilkes describe as a 'gradual rise of a national identity that culminated in the attainment of independence from Britain in 1964' (2001:357). During this period and subsequently, Maltese archaeology took a nationalistic approach to the study of Maltese archaeology. Archaeologists emphasised more on the island's megalithic heritage than on any other sites. This can be confirmed in two different ways, (i) by simply looking at the subjects of the monographs and articles published after the 1930s (in fact the majority relate to prehistoric research, for example, *Prehistoric Malta* by Zammit: 1930), and (ii) the context in which prehistoric and early Christian funerary sites are referred to in the Museum Annual Reports from the 1930s to the late 1990s.

Statistically, 90% of late Roman funerary sites mentioned in these reports were discovered by chance during construction works, while the other 10% involved some form of research or survey. On the other hand, 80% of the prehistoric sites listed in these documents were excavated or survey as part of systematic archaeological research, the remaining 20% were discovered by chance[7]. Unlike the Maltese catacombs, which can be easily compared with their Roman counterparts, the megalithic temples are endemic

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[7] Statistics calculated after analysis carried out on the Museum Annual Reports 1930-1996 register

and this was a good opportunity for the Maltese to promote their identity to their colonisers through cultural nationalism.

The content of this section can be summarised with a quote from Sigrid Van Der Awuera in his *Contemporary Conflict, Nationalism, and the Destruction of Cultural Property during Armed Conflict: A Theoretical Framework*: 'people use the past to give themselves a place in the present. The history of the 'other' can be integrated into this process. However, the past of others can also be neglected (2012:55).

2.5   Conclusion

This chapter discussed the implications which antiquarianism, the lack of proper excavation, the illicit commercial activities of artefacts, and finally the total neglect of the catacombs have had on Malta's early Christian cultural heritage in the mid-20th century. We have identified how these factors have left a complete vacuum in the presentation, interpretation and management of these sites. The evidence here demonstrates how the series of events that impacted upon the study of Maltese catacombs were the result of the socio-political situation of the time. The focus given to prehistoric sites in the mid-20th century often led to the disinterest in other periods and the obliteration of specific heritage, such as the destruction of late Roman catacombs during the construction of houses in Rabat, where this remained unnoticed.

The HIRMOTHEA model considers 'research-imbalance' and 'lack-of-research' among the top indicators of direct negative effect on heritage interpretation and presentation. This chapter aimed to trace the earliest development of catacomb research while taking stock of the core information obtained by scholars on this subject. The evidence presented here demonstrates that the disparity between the study of Maltese Prehistory and early Christianity, at least until the 1970s, was significant and consequently did not allow scholars to address simple questions about the communities living in Late Antiquity. Therefore, museums were effectively deprived of the opportunity to exhibit and interpret cultural material on Malta's early Christian heritage.

CHAPTER THREE

TOWARDS A SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

3.1   Introduction

This chapter will examine scholarly contributions on Maltese catacombs in modern times, particularly during the 1970s to 1980s, and will investigate if these can be linked to a revival in academic interest on this topic following years of research neglect. The discussions here will also draw on the framework of this thesis' research model to evaluate important components of Malta's early Christian heritage, such as accessibility, interpretation, policy and legislation. It will also examine the standards and practices employed during this period and determine whether such procedures have contributed to the overall presentation and interpretation of Malta's cultural heritage.

This chapter is divided into seven sections: Section 3.2 will set the scene by discussing three Maltese scholars who pioneered the subject of Maltese catacombs in modern times; here I will discuss their respective methodologies and compare them to their foreign counterparts working on similar archaeological sites. Section 3.3 will delve into the subject of heritage accessibility and the work carried out, notably by the museums department and other private entities, to improve accessibility at the catacombs from a wider perspective, i.e., ranging from physical accessibility to perceptual accessibility. Section 3.4 offers an outline history of Malta's heritage law and its role in the protection of catacombs while Section 3.5 will discuss the modes of interpretation of Maltese catacombs in view of the standard practices in the field of heritage interpretation. The final section presents the case study of Saint Agatha Historical Complex as the earliest form of a heritage orientation centre on catacombs in Malta. The discussion here will draw on the information and data presented in the preceding sections to evaluate the heritage infrastructure of the Saint Agatha Historical Complex.

3.2   The 1980s: A New Era for the Study of Maltese Catacombs

1980 was an important year for Maltese cultural heritage. For the first time the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) designated Malta's prehistoric monuments with the classification of World Heritage Sites (UNESCO 1980). This was a crucial and major milestone for Malta which had been struggling to promote its cultural identity following decolonisation from the British Empire during the third quarter of the 20th century. The UNESCO listing bound the government of Malta to

commit itself to a long-term management and research strategy for these sites and monuments and conserve other archaeological establishments which were envisaged for future listing. The commitment pledged to UNESCO included submission of reports describing the conservation, preservation and research plans of important archaeological sites (such as the prehistoric hypogeum at Hal Saflieni and the Megalithic Temples).

This was the beginning of a new era of the archaeological research in Malta. Five years after the UNESCO award, the University of Malta entered into a joint agreement with the University of Cambridge and Bristol University in England and embarked on several excavation projects on the Islands. In 1987 the University of Malta approved a new BA programme focusing specifically on Archaeology (Rose 1997:48-49). Prospective Maltese students who were keen in reading Archaeology could do so in their own country, unlike in previous years where students had to pursue archaeological studies abroad. The decision to set up a Department of Classics and Archaeology contributed towards the creation of the archaeology profession in Malta and the overall standards of the archaeological field practices, especially in areas where it was previously thought that field techniques were not suitable for all archaeological environments, such as underground structures (Basilico 2007).

Some growth in study of early Christian heritage is also evident at that time, with international scholars reviving academic interest on catacombs, which, by the 1960s-70s, were subject to studies of quasi-amateurish nature. In 1980s Estelle Shohet Brettman set up the International Catacomb Society with the aim of increasing awareness on catacombs and research common iconographic influences among ancient Pagan, Christian and Jewish communities living under the Roman Empire. This organisation promoted the study of underground Roman funerary architecture by offering grants and scholarships for students while sponsoring the mobility of scholars when delivering lectures or seminars on the subject (International Catacomb Society 2015).

In-depth observation of the literature published on Maltese catacombs from the 18th century to date (e.g. Abela 1647; Becker 1913; Ferrua 1950; Buhagiar 1986; Camilleri

2001. See, in general, Chapter Two) reveals that the methodologies used in these studies evolved little. Perhaps the main, progressive development was eliminating the religious bias afflicting the study and avoiding dissemination of the results of the research as a form of religious propaganda. The development was in fact a question of structure and quantity rather than a shift from archaic to modern practice. Even though the technological improvements of the 1980s became key to much new archaeological research, Maltese scholars did not consider scientific methods, such as radiocarbon dating or Neutron Activation Analysis (NAA), as a way to enhance their research. Perhaps this was because of the limited financial resources available, however, such a situation persisted until quite recent times, even when these technological resources became more accessible to scholars. Therefore, one asks 'if' or 'how' the developments recorded in Maltese catacomb research during the 1980s can be considered 'scientific'. As argued by Dark '[the field of] archaeology is, of necessity, a scientific discipline' (1992: 21). For example, during fieldwork, numbers are constantly used to assign stratigraphic units or to record measurements of an ancient structure for cataloguing purposes. During the post-excavation phase, numbers are used to evaluate the data and interpret artefacts retrieved in a specific context. Most scientific disciplines use comparative methods and classification. Similarly, Archaeology consists of retrieving and classifying an object or a structure and analysing it to obtain information on its process of production through its design, purpose, meaning and usage for the community producing it (1992:22). Ultimately, the information gathered might be passed to heritage managers and curators for dissemination.

Maltese archaeologists were already using 'proper' methods of excavation and post-excavation in the 1980s. Such knowledge was acquired from foreign scholars and institutions, such as the University of Cambridge and the Missione Archeologica Italiana, who, together with the Museums Department (and later the University of Malta), embarked on survey and excavation projects, such as at the multi-period site at Tas-Silg. These foreign institutions were key to improving techniques among Maltese archaeologists. Therefore, it is within this context that the sections below will discuss methodological developments in the study of Maltese catacombs during the 1970s, 1980s and beyond.

*Figure 3.1: Excavations by the Italian Archaeological Mission at the site of Tas-Silg
(Source – Missione Archeologica Italiana)*

While Chapter Two broadly discussed the pioneers of Malta's catacombs, the emphasis here is on advances made in this field and in the related academic literature during the 1980s. Efforts by three key researchers, whose key endeavour was to apply what they had learnt from foreign authorities to their own cultural heritage projects, were core. These researchers were Victor Camilleri, Vincent Borg and Mario Buhagiar. Although their works have been fairly widely available and are recognised still as standard reference works, to date no particular attention has been given to the methodologies employed by these scholars in order to disseminate their work and make it available to the general public. In fact, as often happens with academic literature, the emphasis of the reviews was put on the contents of these works (see the review by Cardona 2007).

Therefore, an appraisal is offered below of the works, methodologies, academic influences and other aspects of the research of this trio of local scholars. This will help shed some light on the development of, and growing public and scholarly awareness of, early Christian heritage in Malta. The details given are the result of a number of non-directive interviews and personal communications carried out with the aforementioned individuals during my doctoral research. The endeavour was to gather oral recollections of particular situations and occasions which modelled the fabric of Maltese early Christian heritage research in the second quarter of the 20th century. As discussed by Fontana and Frey a non-directive interview is not much different from oral histories, which are 'silent memoirs awaiting someone to rummage through them and bring their testimony to life' (1994: 368).

3.2.1   Victor J. Camilleri

Born in 1933, Victor Camilleri spent his early years living in Senglea, an historic town located in the Island's harbour area. Soon after WWII hit the Maltese Islands, his family relocated to the town of Birkirkara. Camilleri joined the religious order of the Missionary Society of St. Paul in 1953, where he later became a priest and served as the Superior at the St. Agatha convent in Rabat. This convent was commissioned by the founder of this religious order, Joseph De Piro, and was built in an area which contained a medieval chapel and a crypt dedicated to Saint Agatha. During its construction, workers started uncovering a sizeable system of early Christian catacombs. De Piro's decision to use these estates, which extended far beyond the chapel, may have been intentional. Camilleri argued that their founder probably knew about the subterranean monument and therefore, as procurator of the chapel and the lands surrounding it, wanted to build a religious infrastructure on top of a striking early Christian site. De Piro perceived this project as a form of continuation of the work carried out by Malta's Christian ancestors (Victor Camilleri, pers. comm., 21 January, 2010).

However, the motive behind De Piro's endeavour – that of setting up a motherhouse for his newly established religious community – might have been far more complex than this, since he was interested in antiquities, being renowned for his large collections. He did not live to see his project completed as he died two years before the society's motherhouse was fully constructed. One room inside this convent hosted the vast collections of archaeological artefacts from the founder's collection, which was bequeathed to the missionary society by De Piro. Among these collections was pottery unearthed from the catacombs during the monastery's construction, pottery brought from parts of the non-western world, as well as local archaeological artefacts donated by individuals from Rabat in return for prayers and 'indulgences' (Camilleri, pers. comm., 21 January 2010).

Camilleri, who spent most of his novitiate at the Saint Agatha Society motherhouse, was constantly reminded by his fellow priests about the treasures left by their founder –

some of these deteriorating badly in humid environments. Camilleri's superiors, who early on noted his interest in archaeology, encouraged him to start curating the bequeathed collections. The Order's authorities had also acknowledged the heritage and religious potential of the archaeological sites under their control. Camilleri's mission was later to become one of the most important contributions in the presentation of cultural heritage located in private quarters.

Figure 3.2: Victor Camilleri (first from left) during the post-WWII assessment of damage to Saint Agatha's Catacombs (Source: Peter J. Shields – British Army photographer)

In the 1950s, the British scholar John D. Evans was involved in a survey to evaluate damage done as a consequence of the WWII air-raid bombing. This survey was commissioned by the British Empire and was funded under the Colonial Welfare and Development scheme (Sagona 2015:14). This project was probably launched following the declaration of unspent money originally intended for the reconstruction of buildings and other infrastructural projects (Parliamentary Debate – House of Commons 1955:1324). Such survey activity, although not originally envisaged by the British Empire, left a positive impact on Maltese archaeology and its conservation. The survey team appointed to draw up this report was particularly interested in assessing the state of the prehistoric temples (such as the one located in Tarxien), although other sites were included, notably Saint Paul's and Saint Agatha's Catacombs. Preliminary archaeological work was conducted by Evans at Saint Agatha's Catacombs under the supervision of the University of Cambridge. Unfortunately no reports were published on this study (Daniel Cilia, pers. comm., 6 February 2016).

Nonetheless, Evans' work encouraged Camilleri to continue surveying areas of the catacombs in a more systematic way. Unlike his predecessors, who removed debris in search of artefacts (Camilleri 1978:vi), Camilleri drew sections and plans of the chambers using a scale of 1:20 (1978:16) and documented the findings using a specific reference system which indicated the areas and specific tombs in which these where found. He uncovered important features and chambers. During clearance of debris he also uncovered two frescoes from the 4th century AD, several christograms and inscriptions which he documented (in Maltese) in his first book (*Sant' Agata: knisja, kripta u katakombi,* 1978). Although very technical, this book was meant as a guide book for local people. In fact it was the first publication about catacombs written in the Maltese language. It is important to point out that this publication does not make reference to the museum, which was not yet established. There were problems of space at the convent and the superiors were not always willing to sacrifice several rooms for setting up a museum – see Section 3.6 below.

Following this publication, Camilleri continued clearing the Saint Agatha Catacombs of debris and retrieved more artefacts. The material culture excavated was considerable plentiful, to the point that the society decided to dedicate a few halls from the convent to set up a museum stores and a small archive. By the early 1990s Camilleri had enough material to publish an updated edition of his previous book. Noticeably, this time the publication was in English to target an international audience and to serve as a detailed guide-book of the site to international tourists. The publication, *St Agatha: An Archaeological Study of the Ancient Monuments at St. Agatha's Building Complex,* includes a section about the museum and its artefacts. This was an important development in Malta's early Christian heritage interpretation as it was the first catacomb (one not managed by the Museums department) with a museum over the site housing the artefacts excavated from the same catacomb (Camilleri 2001:v-vi).

With considerable dedication, Camilleri was a major contributor to Malta's early Christian archaeology. He engaged in archaeological fieldwork and spent years in the recesses of the catacombs trying to shed light on these important monuments. Although his archaeological work cannot be considered of high academic standard, he was able to exploit the time spent with foreign academics like John D. Evans and Antonio Ferrua

to learn from their methodologies; he paved the way for future scholars to continue academic research in the same field.

3.2.2 Vincent Borg

The first and only Maltese scholar to obtain a license in Christian archaeology was Vincent Borg who was born in the town of Birkirara in 1929. When he was 16, he passed the matriculation exam and waited three years to be admitted to the University of Malta, which at that time opened its doors for new students every three years. In 1950, Borg started reading for a degree in Theology with the intention of joining the Maltese diocese as a priest.

In the second year of his Theology degree, Borg started following the course of early Christian archaeology. The introduction to this course at the University of Malta was integrated into the degree structure as a result of Article 27 of the Apostolic Constitution introduced by Pope Pius XI, entitled *Deus Scientarum Dominus* (Bea 1943)*,* which stated that all university Faculties and Departments offering tertiary courses in Theology and whose studies and teachings are regulated by the Holy See should make the subjects of Church History, Patrology and Palaeochristian Archaeology (among five other subjects) compulsory to students who followed this degree[8]. Three years after the publication of these constitutions, in 1934, the University of Malta started recruiting academics to deliver lectures on these subjects. This new constitution offered good opportunities to academics who wanted to pursue a specialisation in Palaeochristian archaeology and related subjects. In addition, this formed a notable contribution to the awareness of Malta's early Christian heritage.

Borg's interest in Christian antiquity and early Church history continued to grow. He was, in fact, one of the founding members of the Malta Historical Society during the 1950s. Unfortunately his keen academic interest in ancient history was not always considered to be beneficial to the Maltese ecclesiastical authorities, to the extent that

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[8] http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/la/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xi_apc_19310524_deus-scientiarum-dominus.html

he had to provide justification for his direct involvement to the Maltese Archbishop, Mgr. Sir Michael Gonzi. After graduating in Theology, Borg's scholarly inclination shifted towards the Sociology of Religion and in time he made a request to Malta's Archbishop to further his studies in this subject. However, the outcome of this request was not positive, as the Maltese diocese had already another candidate in mind to pursue such specialisation. Furthermore, in this period the Maltese curia was experiencing financial problems and therefore it was not in a position to fund two of its members to study the same subject. To this end, Archbishop Gonzi suggested Borg pursue a specialisation in early Church History and Palaeochristian archaeology. After securing funds, Borg attended the Pontificio Collegio Pio Latinoamericano in Rome where he took a specialisation in Ecclesiastical Historiography in 1962. Unfortunately, as funds were not enough to take his studies to doctoral level, he returned to Malta.

During his time in Rome, Borg made contacts with authorities in the field of Palaeochristian archaeology who were intrigued by Malta's early Christian heritage. One of these was Antonio Ferrua, a leading member of the Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana (PIAC). When Ferrua heard that Borg was returning to Malta he convened an extraordinary meeting with his fellow committee members to decide whether they could assist Borg by providing him with an opportunity to continue his studies in Rome while at the same time creating a relationship with the Maltese ecclesiastical authorities for Palaeochristian archaeology. In 1962, the committee awarded Borg with a scholarship for the license in Christian Archaeology. The benefits of this decision were twofold. Borg was able to prolong his stay in Rome and obtain a recognised qualification in Christian Archaeology and in addition the PIAC initiated research collaborations with Malta. Borg obtained the License in Christian Archaeology in 1964.

In 1964, Malta obtained its independence from the British Empire. In the same year, the Italian government presented ten scholarships to the Maltese authorities as a token for managing to obtain this status while trying to restore political relationships which had been completely interrupted as a consequence of WWII. Borg, who in 1965 was given a post at the University of Malta, won one of these scholarships and stayed in Rome another two years to complete his doctorate in Church History and Palaeochristian Archaeology. Once he returned from Rome he began serving at the collegiate church of Birkirkara. One project begun during his early years of tenure as parish priest was the

restoration and reconstruction of the old parish church destroyed by an earthquake in 1856 (Galea 2007:731). This project was backed by the local community who wanted to see this monument return to its original glory. Furthermore, this was a good opportunity for Borg to put his studies into practice.

Borg excavated trial trenches in different areas of the church where he was able to obtain parts of the architectural reliefs and sculpture pertaining to the roof and side walls. This information was crucial when it came to the church's reconstruction. Perhaps the most important trench was the one excavated near the altar, where at a depth of c. 1.5 meters, Borg and his assistant uncovered a burial with an articulated skeleton dressed as a priest with a small round metal pendant around its neck. This discovery came to no surprise to Borg as his fellow priests were always aware that the founder of the collegiate church of Birkirkara was buried somewhere underneath the altar. However, when Borg cleaned and analysed the pendant, he realised that the human remains could have pertained to someone else, specifically one of the most important ecclesiastical figures of the Maltese Church, namely, Gaetano Mannarino from Birkirkara, who in September 1775 spearheaded a revolt against the government of the time. This revolt had its roots in the contestation between the state and the Church for social control (Borg Muscat 2002:240).

The pendant was in fact a commemorative medal issued by the Vatican for the 1775 Holy Year and Jubilee. The date matches the year of the uprising in Malta and the imprisonment of Mannarino – released by Napoleon Bonaparte three years later. Mannarino died in 1814 and was buried in his hometown. Sadly, the exact location of his burial was later forgotten. But according to Borg, the excavation evidence supports that these remains might have been those of Gaetano Mannarino, who eventually died unhonoured. This, Borg explained, was one of the potentials of the application of archaeology to the study of local Church history. The two fields, combined together, could shed light on forgotten events carved in Maltese history – even if fairly recently.

In 1988 Borg was appointed Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Malta where he oversaw courses in Palaeochristian Archaeology and Church History. He conducted study visits abroad with his students to Rome and the Holy Land. On one occasion Borg was asked by the editor of a local bank journal (which focused on Malta's

archaeology and history) to write an article on Malta's early Christian heritage in return for the sponsorship of one of the study visits. The outcome of this negotiation produced an important article entitled 'Malta and its Palaeochristian Heritage: a new approach'. In this article, Borg provides a comparative analysis of the local and foreign early Christian funerary complexes as well as other monuments, but his main emphasis is on the funerary *triclinia* and their function. Borg's intention here was to revisit the interpretation of such features by triangulating data gathered from archaeological contexts (such as Roman funerary art) with epigraphic resources (such as inscriptions found inside the catacombs, sacred scriptures and other ancient liturgical sources of Late Antiquity).

Borg's contribution to Malta's Christian heritage goes far beyond this. In fact, his research interests in Church history led him to embark on a very ambitious project to gather and publish a corpus of data about the Church in Malta from the 12th to 16th century. This culminated in his two volumes entitled *Melita Sacra* (2008 and 2009); the third and final volume is imminent and explores Malta's diocese from the 17th century onwards.

Due to his many commitments Borg could not always dedicate time in the field, barring those site visits he conducted with his students. In this regard, he can be viewed as a desktop archaeologist, who took a different approach to the study of Malta's early Christian heritage. Although this desktop approach may seem unscientific, this situation was, in fact, an opportunity to apply a different methodology in this field. It is important to point out that no known literature emerged prior to Borg's publication which used ancient liturgical resources to provide plausible explanations for local funerary features of Late Antiquity. The data acquired during his research always came from primary sources, mostly written in Latin or other languages, which he had mastered whilst in Rome. In this regard, Borg can be considered as one of the modern scholars who increased the credibility and standing of this study within the international academic sphere and who paved the way for future researchers such as Mario Buhagiar.

3.2.3 Mario Buhagiar

In the late 1980s, the study of Maltese catacombs was at its peak with key articles being published and authorities in this field, such as Antonio Ferrua, regularly visiting the

Islands to seek parallels with similar sites in the Mediterranean. The momentum gained by Camilleri and Borg was an opportunity for Mario Buhagiar (b.1945), who, as early as 1969, engaged in early Christian archaeology. His keen interest in late Roman hypogea manifested itself in his first archaeological report of Saint Agatha's Catacombs in Rabat. This report was drawn up following the work carried out by Din l-Art Helwa, a heritage voluntary organisation for teenagers, in the summer of 1969. Camilleri, who was already responsible for the site at that time, asked his superiors of the Missionary Society of Saint Paul to invite a group of students to help him with his work; 20 were called upon and directed by Buhagiar. The group helped document two chambers located within this complex of hypogea and to draw the decorative medieval stone slabs found in nearby fields. This 'improvised' archaeological exercise was the first step in kick-starting long-term research on these catacombs. In his report, Buhagiar (1969:20) admits that the team's work was merely descriptive and that it would be 'presumptuous' to draw any conclusions since he had not yet developed his academic and technical skills on early Christian archaeology in Malta. He explains, however, that qualified researchers would be able to shed light about the origins and development of the complex. Buhagiar was probably referring to Vincent Borg, who by then had obtained his doctorate at Rome.

In the mid-1980s Borg, who had already observed Buhagiar's keen interest in early Christian archaeology, advised him to carry out his postgraduate research on Malta's catacombs. Until then studies on this early Christian heritage were fragmentary and, to a certain extent, lacked a methodological approach based on archaeological techniques. Therefore this was an opportunity for Buhagiar which eventually led to the completion of his MPhil in 1986, with his thesis entitled *Late Roman and Byzantine Catacombs and Related Burial Places in the Maltese Islands*. Two years later, Buhagiar introduced History of Art as a main area of study at the University of Malta. He then began his study at the doctoral level, dealing with the Christianisation of Malta, successfully defending his PhD in 1993. During his ten year project, Buhagiar successfully catalogued more than 90 hypogea in Malta and Gozo. Most of the sites had already been discovered and mentioned in the Museum Annual Reports, but other sites were only known to local inhabitants who, for one reason or other, never revealed their exact locations. The reality faced by Buhagiar during his research was quite challenging. Indeed, on various occasions, he expressed his disappointment at not being able to access a particular site

because of its state of conservation or the extensive debris which prevented survey (Buhagiar 1986: xi*).*

Despite these difficulties, Buhagiar generated a quasi-exhaustive document of Maltese catacombs and burial sites. Visiting the sites in person was not always possible, however, he made it a point to refer to, reproduce and interpret information found in other documents and included all this in his catalogue. In his valuable academic contributions, his regular attempts at elucidating and elaborating the argument of the early Christianisation of Malta from an archaeological point of view vis-à-vis the Pauline cult in Malta are evident. This is most apparent in his *The Christianisation of Malta – Christian Catacombs, Cult Centres and Churches in Malta to 1530* (2007) and in 'L' iconographie des tomes rupestres Punico-Helléniques, Paléochrétienne, et Byzantines de Malte' (2001). Buhagiar has also mastered subjects related to Art History and he integrated this subject into the archaeology of Malta's early Christian archaeology in a systematic way, as is clear in his 'The Maltese Paleochristian Hypogea. A Reassessment of the Archaeological, Iconographic and Epigraphic Source Material' (1992) and 'The Artistic Heritage' (1993).

Perhaps Buhagiar's most notable contribution was tackling the Maltese catacombs from an art history perspective. As an art historian, he kept an eye on specific artistic details (including frescoes and graffiti), such as the different types of crosses used by early Christian communities. Such features, according to Buhagiar (1986), are not only important evidence about the presence of Christian communities, but they also provide a good indication of foreign cultural influences. A good example of this is the representation of the Greek cross in catacombs in Rabat. This type of cross can be dated back to the 4th century and originated from the Eastern Mediterranean (Marucchi 1902). This, together with other artistic representations, such as the painted Constantinian christogram at Saint Agatha's Catacombs in Rabat, were used by Buhagiar to place Maltese late Roman and Byzantine funerary architectures in their correct chronological context.

Buhagiar is duly considered an authority in the field of early Christian heritage in Malta. He was the first person who dealt with this subject in a comprehensive way, adding new sites to previous fragmented lists and creating a new way of protecting heritage,

cataloguing sites with full descriptions, plans and photographs where possible. Buhagiar saw that his methodology could be easily adopted by the Maltese government at a national level in order to take stock of the cultural and historical sites which fall under its jurisdiction. He initiated this exercise in the early 1990s and pioneered the card-cataloguing system for the planning authority which was crucial in scheduling sites and knowing their state of preservation. This led to the adoption of designated archaeologically sensitive areas and buffer zones for the purpose of commercial and housing developments around the Maltese Islands.

3.3   Improvements in Early Christian Heritage Research in Malta

Identifying the factors that led to positive developments in the field of Malta's early Christian heritage research is not straightforward. This is due to the homogeneous methodologies which hampered scholars until the late 1970s, such as simple descriptions of the catacombs and their locations without proper plans or illustrations, as for Caruana (1882:106-111), and the heavy reliance on religious traditions (e.g. Bres 1816:391). Some such characteristics are also identifiable in the studies carried out during the 1980s, however, one observes improving elements which reflect Mayr's argument about the need for a scientific approach to the study of early Christianity in Malta. Here the term 'scientific' does not necessarily refer to computer technology, but rather to the evidence which is not based on traditions but which builds its interpretation and presentation around archaeological evidence (Mayr 1896).

Therefore, the improving factors emerging during the 1980s to be identified here are (i) the attempt to distinguish between late antique, Punic, early Christian and non-Christian funerary architecture, (ii) the use of primary evidence for proper archaeological survey and interpretation and (iii) efforts to make the information available to the general public.

3.3.1   Christian versus non-Christian tombs

Rock-cut features found within a particular archaeological context are often difficult to date and interpret, unless features allow for comparison elsewhere or accompanying material culture such as pottery or inscriptions help situate the site and finds chronologically (Valeva et al. 2015:137). A good example of this are the unsung 'vine-trenches' uncovered in different areas of the Maltese islands. These sub-surface features, rectangular in shape and sometimes up to 2.0 meters deep, are in no way related to ancient burial, however, they have provided similar challenges to archaeologists with respect to dating. Farmers still dug such trenches until a century ago so as to increase water supply to the roots of vines, especially in locations where the level of the bedrock was shallow. Archaeologists had no clue if such trenches were ancient or modern until excavations at the Roman villa at Zejtun (in the south of Malta) revealed these features as an integral part of Roman agricultural activity (Superintendence of Cultural Heritage 2008). This important find was not sufficient, however, to create a paradigm by which archaeologists could learn more about their dates and function. Therefore, similar discoveries still have to be dealt with on an *ad hoc* basis in order to place this material culture in its proper context.

Figure 3.3: Vine trenches found at the Roman villa site of Żejtun
(Source: www.wirtizzejtun.com)

This example provides a good parallel with the situation archaeologists face (and keep facing) every time they try to determine the connection between late Roman hypogea and the various religious communities present in Malta in Late Antiquity. Such a

difficulty does not arise just from the fact that the material culture offers limited evidence, but it might also be due to the interrelationships between communities living in Malta and elsewhere in ancient times. Research indeed shows that different religious communities in Late Antiquity often adopted similar symbolisms. In *Between Pagans and Christian* (2014), Jones argues how literary and epigraphic sources show homogeneity in pagan and Christian symbolism and tendencies, discussing how in the sacred scriptures St. Paul is portrayed referring to Greek and Roman culture in an attempt to 'build a bridge' between these communities and the newly established Christians (2014:xiv). These teachings might have, ultimately, affected ancient funerary architecture and other material culture used by the different communities. Therefore, even though Buhagiar laments how ancient religious symbolism occurs only in very few catacombs in Malta, and how more symbols would help distinguish between Christian and non-Christian tombs (1986:29), it would still be inappropriate to assign a religious label to these on the basis of common symbols found in Maltese catacombs unless concrete evidence - usually in the form of inscriptions – is retrieved.

That said, Maltese scholars during the 1980s, notably Vincent Borg (1986), conducted a detailed study of funerary *triclinia* and the relationship between these and the community using them in an attempt to use this feature type as an indicator of the different religious communities using the catacombs. It is important to point out that Maltese archaeologists in the early 20th century, such as Temi Zammit (1920) and Charles Zammit (1934), did indeed record these *triclinia* and were also knowledgeable about their use, however, explanations about these features were superficial – as Borg puts it, 'no attention has been dedicated to follow the historical development of the ritual and hence to determine its impact and particular evolvement within the Maltese context' (1986:54). To this end, Borg felt that, in order for these features to be an added value in the archaeology of Late Antiquity, it was crucial not only to document these features and produce plans but make detailed study of the literary, historical and iconographic sources which affected the development of these features. Borg's study suggests that, although these *triclinia* were indeed used by both pagan and Christian communities in the Roman world, in Malta such features might have been used primarily by Christians. The chronology of the late Roman hypogea, at least those that include the *triclinia,* can be traced back to the 4th century.

Figure 3.4: One of the two funerary triclinia near the entrance of Saint Paul's Catacombs in Rabat (Source: Malta Tourism Authority)

Even though the dates proposed by Borg and later by Buhagiar remain uncalibrated, a valuable contribution was made in the way rock-cut features are studied and approached. The new methodology, used for the first time in Malta by Borg, required a multidisciplinary approach, which, at that time, was not easy to employ due to the 'close-mindedness' of the Church authority who indefatigably promoted the advent and impact of St. Paul in Malta. Borg, who was a cleric and knew the politics of the local Curia, sought a balance between archaeology as a scientific discipline on the one hand and the subjects of patrology and Church history on the other. This was perhaps among the greatest contributions that a local scholar has given to Malta's early Christian archaeology.

3.3.2   Proper archaeological survey and interpretation

The identification and recording of archaeological sites and features are the very first stages of archaeological fieldwork. Such an approach was commonly used by antiquarians and later by professional archaeologists who documented discoveries in reports and government gazettes[9]. However, the second stage was not a common factor

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[9] A local example of this is the Museum Annual Reports which started being issued by the Maltese Museum Department as early as 1904. See Zammit, T. (1904) 'The Museum', in *Malta Government Gazzette* Gazette 17 May 1904. Malta Government Printing Office: Valletta, p. 10.

for both categories. In fact, the actions taken following the discovery of an archaeological site are indicators of who might have been responsible for what. As explained in Chapter Two, the intentions and ideologies of antiquarians varied from those of more modern archaeologists. There was a greater probability that an adequately trained scholar would have taken the discovery of a site a step further, notably by assessing its size, type and layout (Renfrew and Bahn 2004:93). This could primarily be achieved by carrying a systematic topographic survey, which will eventually result in the drafting of plans and sections. Similar methods, as explained by King in 1978 were used by antiquarians and civil servants, however, 'these studies were a far cry from the systematic surveys conducted by archaeologists today; they were simple explorations in which the fieldworker described those phenomena that came to his attention with no pretence of identifying all the vestiges of past human activity in the area. Such full descriptions were not necessary to the authors' purposes.' (King 1978:4). The study conducted by Buhagiar in 1986 focused on documenting the Maltese catacombs via detailed individual plans for each site while providing site locations and wider maps of Malta and Gozo. The latter gave a clear idea of the distribution of these sites around the islands. This was another important achievement since no such detailed catalogue had previously been compiled into one single volume.
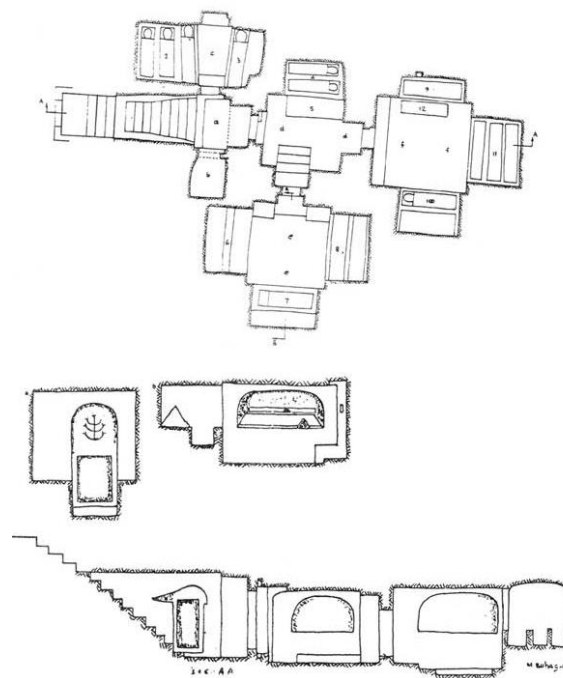
Figure 3.5 – Examples of plans and sections of catacombs (Source: Buhagiar 1986:112)

In addition, plans produced during this period led to the corroboration of hypotheses about how late antique funerary architecture may have developed – a theme still at the centre of extensive studies locally and abroad. Extensive literature on the evolution of the catacombs and their developers exists (e.g. Becker 1913; Borg & Rocco 1972; Stevenson 1978; Rutgers2000). Buhagiar could then compare his plans of the Maltese late Roman and Byzantine burial architecture with illustrations drafted more than half a century earlier by Zammit of the Punic tombs at Tac-Caghki burial grounds in Rabat. Buhagiar noted Zammit's observation that the individual tombs here 'often opened into each other [and this] may have led to the grouping of tombs served by a single shaft' (1923:6). From this comparison, Buhagiar hinted at a natural transition of a funerary architecture going back to the Punic period (5th-4th century B.C.) rather than an instantaneous development of the funerary architecture as a consequence of the establishment of a new religious community on the Maltese Islands, namely, the Christians. He provides examples of catacombs located near the Torri l-Abjad (the 'White Tower') in the outskirts of Rabat. Buhagiar explains that this site never received proper attention and was in a poor state of conservation as early as the 1920s. Luckily, some information was provided be Bellanti (1920) in his field notebook.

Another important strand of Buhagiar's research was the identification of the different typologies of local tombs. His quantitative methods showed that the relatively elaborate funerary architecture as well as the compact dimensions of the local sites are different from their foreign counterparts to the extent that these do not qualify as catacombs *per se* and should be only called as so in respect of the their dating and usage (1986:13).
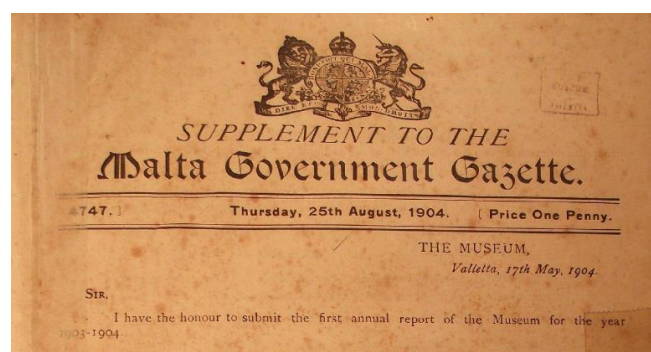
Figure 3.6 – The Museum Annual first issue of the Report published on the 17 May 1904 (Source: Heritage Malta)

3.4 Public Accessibility

Accessibility to archaeology is perceived by many as a concept which is purely related to 'physical' accessibility, such as a clean and safe environment equipped with adequate stairs, lighting, air circulation, ramps for the physically impaired and other similar amenities. However, the other concept of accessibility is too often forgotten – namely the *accessibility of knowledge* that accompanies the site, whether via printed material, outreach activities, guided tours, exhibitions, etc. Only in the last couple of decades has this strand of 'accessibility' been considered an important asset among archaeologists and curators who had previously largely put the site and the artefacts at the centre of their studies without considering if and how their studies should be accessible to/by the general public. This was not wholly the case, however. In the 1980s, Victor Camilleri realised the importance of providing down-to-earth information to tourists and to the local community for both cultural and academic purposes. He produced various booklets in different languages as well as educational work-sheets targeted at primary students[10]. The Saint Agatha Historical Complex was among the first cultural heritage establishments to host interns from local as well as foreign universities (Camilleri, pers. comm., 10 November 2010). In addition, Camilleri and Buhagiar both addressed non-academic audiences, via magazine articles, local newspapers and radio interviews.

3.4.1   Heritage Accessibility

'Heritage accessibility' is a relatively new concept with no single definition, however we might draw on that provided by the CHARTS[11] project team whose publication *Good Practices: Heritage and Accessibility* (2014), argues that this area 'involves a physical moment of material access to infrastructures and sites, a perceptual moment involving

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[10] Booklets on the Saint Agatha Historical Complex were published in four different languages – Maltese, English, Italian and Spanish. Later, as the tourist market expanded, this content was translated into Russian and Chinese. Electronic work-sheets were also made available for primary teachers in both Maltese and English. See http://stagathamalta.com/download.html

[11] CHARTS (*Culture and Heritage Added value to Regional policies for Tourism Sustainability*) was an EU project composed of 13 partners from 11 European countries. Its primary aim was to explore how good practices in the management of cultural heritage and tourism can contribute to tourism sustainability. Among the topics tackled here were accessibility to heritage, quality criteria, visitor information, cultural routes, railway heritage, local products, and gastronomy.

an understanding of the symbolic meanings inherent in cultural products and activities, and a culminant appropriation moment when such meanings are appropriated, consciously accepted or re-presented and re-worked by those in contact with them' (CHARTS 2014). This EU-targeted volume presents a model of heritage accessibility and argues that accessibility can be divided into two core streams – the physical and the intellectual or perceptual ambits. Here, the authors argue that, in strict terms, accessibility refers to infrastructure, however, this is not always the case, especially when accessibility must be augmented with other factors in order to achieve the maximum benefit out of a cultural heritage site, such as the corpus of data and its interpretation with which an audience should be provided so as to add educational value to a visit and its experience.

Heritage accessibility in the Maltese islands was a concept applied on *ad hoc* basis until the mid-1960s. Important sites such as the prehistoric hypogeum at Hal Saflieni were being made accessible to the public as early as the 1913, where the then Director of Museums made permanent interventions to the unique site to give access to the general public. The same was done at the catacombs in Rabat, notably Saint Augustine's, where the Museums Department dug corridors to join three separate late Roman hypogea (Cardona & Farrugia 2012:55) – interventions which today would surely be considered unethical in light of heritage conservation and preservation guidelines. The problem here was that this activity was in no way regulated by conservation policy or legislation. In fact, the *Antiquities (Protection) Act 1925* (Government of Malta), the legislation regulating Maltese antiquities until the 2002 , was more inclined towards the regulatory ambit of heritage, which included initial discovery, expropriation, ownership, ecclesiastical heritage as well as the import and export of items. Little attention was given to the operational side of heritage, such as conservation, preservation and accessibility. Locally, this sector had to wait until 2002 – the year when the Cultural Heritage Act 2002 was launched – to see something being done by the government to prevent further destruction and neglect of heritage resources.

The loopholes in Maltese heritage legislation prior to 2002 allowed for a number of abuses which left perpetrators unpunished while the sector kept losing its authority among the general public, who did not always cooperate with the Museums

Department when a discovery was made. As a reaction to this, in 1965, a year after Malta obtained its independence from the British Empire, a group of individuals set up the Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) *Din L-Art Helwa* ('This Fair Land'). The objectives of this NGO were in line with other similar organisations, such as *Europa Nostra,* who by that time were actively discussing topics related to conservation, preservation and accessibility of heritage monuments and the commitment of every nation to leave the heritage resources in a 'pristine' state for future generations (Farrugia Randon 2014:21). Certainly, *Din L-Art Helwa* was set up just in time to avoid irreversible destruction of heritage. In addition, one notable characteristic of this NGO was to educate and inform the public through lectures and tours. Thus its role was not only to promote sustainable heritage through conservation and accessibility but also to enhance public understanding of their heritage – an endeavour which would have been impossible for the existing Museums Department on its own, considering its limited human and financial resources.

3.4.2   Physical Accessibility

In 2013 UNESCO organised a European symposium about heritage and accessibility. This event aimed to discuss physical accessibility to heritage sites while identifying different categories of people and how accessibility or inaccessibility may affect the interactions between different cultures and knowledge (UNESCO 2013). This subject has mostly been discussed by architects and heritage planners who sought to address issues of tangible heritage and its presentation and perception via the human senses, notably the sight and the hearing. The 21st century was marked by sensible arguments about accessibility in light of issues related to persons with mobility impairment, e.g. wheelchair users and elderly people. Therefore, one finds a myriad of literature and case studies dealing with issues which try to set standards and best practices among heritage

operators (e.g. the Ontario Historical Society[12] and the National Disability Authority of Ireland[13]).

Few heritage sites in the Maltese islands were fully accessible to the public during the 1980s. The Saint Paul and Saint Agatha Catacombs, the Palaeolithic cave at *Għar Dalam* and the Domus Romana in Rabat were mostly visited by students, school children and tourists (Government of Malta, *Museums Annual Report* 89). However, their setting and the lack of on-site amenities made it impossible for individuals with mobility impairment to experience such heritage. Archaeological sites are often made up of intricate and complicated layouts (Holtorf 2001:286). This aspect offered, and still presents, a great challenge to curators in preparing heritage spaces for visiting. A case in point is the type of physical environment which characterises the Maltese Late Roman catacombs (and other catacombs located elsewhere). These sites are made up of steep rock-cut uneven steps leading to narrow corridors and chambers hewed out of the living rock. The only way of making the catacombs fully accessible is by altering the original architectural fabric of these sites, something which in the 1980s was already considered as unethical. Therefore, site visits at the catacombs and similar archaeological sites were limited to persons who were fit to do so.

The situation of accessibility at Saint Agatha's Catacombs was perhaps less complicated than the one at Saint Paul's Catacombs - which had restricted front office and wall space to install illustrations (e.g. photos or plans) and which would have, at least, catered for those visitors who were not able to access this site because of mobility problems. At Saint Agatha's Catacombs complex, the location of the site allowed wheelchair users to enter the foyer of the museum located on the ground floor where various maps, artefacts and illustrations were exhibited. This added-value often resulted in an increased number of visitors (V. Camilleri, pers. comm., 10 January 2010).

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[12] In 2008, the Ontario Historical Society launched a project entitled the *Accessible Heritage Initiative*. This project included the drafting of the *Accessible Heritage Toolkit*, the publication of a series of bulletins entitled *Access Beyond the Ramp*, the organisation of educational workshops and a number of webinars. Further information can be obtained via the Sustainable Heritage Case Study on https://sustainableheritagecasestudies.wordpress.com/2014/12/16/accessible-cultural-heritage-imperative/

[13] National Disability Authority (2011) *Access: Improving the Accessibility of Historic Buildings and Places.* Government Stationery Office: Dublin

Two years after the establishment of the NGO *Dina L-Art Helwa*, a number of teenage students decided to set up the *Din L-Art Helwa* Youth Section. On 6th May 1967, Mario Buhagiar was appointed President of this section where he led some students who started carrying out cultural heritage voluntary work on a number of sites. The tasks assigned to this team were mostly related to the improvement of heritage accessibility. One of the group's first activities was the restoration of the medieval chapel at *Hal Millieri* located in a rural context in south-east Malta. This cultural heritage monument is one of the earliest medieval Christian structures on the Maltese islands and produced Romanesque frescoes similar to those found in the Crypt of Saint Agatha's Catacombs in Rabat. Until 1968 this chapel had been obscured by vegetation and agricultural debris. The *Din L-Art Helwa* Youth Section removed this vegetation, cleared the rubbish and gave a general uplift to the chapel's surroundings. During the clearance works, supervised by Mario Buhagiar and other members of the Museums Department, a number of objects were retrieved, including fragments of pottery, carved stones and coins (Farrugia Randon 2014:52). This important exercise kick-started important discussions about the possibility of restoring the chapel and its 13th century frescoes. This ambitious project, which was proposed during an exhibition in 1968, served to nudge a number of stakeholders, such as the Maltese government and the ecclesiastical authorities to take action and support this NGO so as to safeguard this important heritage. Following a number of agreements, sponsorships from private companies and the establishment of the *Hal Millieri and Bir Miftuh Trust* restoration and archaeological works started in 1974 and 1977 respectively. In 1978 the rehabilitation project was successfully completed and the *Din L-Art Helwa* Youth Section started opening the chapel to the general public on the first Sunday of every month till today (Farrugia Randon 2014:54-57).

The *Hal Millier* chapel project and other projects under the direct responsibility of this NGO (such as the St Roque medieval chapel in Birkirkara) can be considered as important contributions to the aspect of accessibility to heritage sites in the Maltese islands. Such projects not only included an aesthetic and superficial overhaul for visiting purposes but were also supported by scientific interventions, such as restoration works carried out by George Farrugia in 1978 and archaeological excavations conducted by Anthony Bonanno and Anthony Luttrell in 1977 (Farrugia Randon 2014:56-76), which

were, *a priori,* part and parcel of the project's master-plan. Such actions show an increase in professionalism and maturity in the way cultural heritage started to be perceived by the regulators and operators of Malta's heritage during the 1980s while leaving important legacy in the field of national heritage preservation.

3.4.3   Perceptual Accessibility

The term 'perceptual accessibility', when discussed in the context of cultural heritage, can be described as the right of the general public to access and understand information related to heritage sites, either through the direct assistance of trained persons, such as Site Officers, or other interpretational facilities such as information panels, multilingual audio-guides or captions (CHARTS 2014:16-17). Until the 20th century, the predominant approach characterising the curators' work on perceptual accessibility of Malta's archaeological sites was 'one-size-fits-all' (Heritage Malta 2013:12-13). There seemed to be, however, an exception for primary school children visiting a site or a museum. Here, museum curators and gallery site officers conducted *ad hoc* tours for young students whereby adequate information was provided to children who, due to their young age, were unable to understand the standard onsite interpretation material (e.g. the captions describing the artefacts or features) (Camilleri V., pers. comm., 10 January 2010). Despite these efforts, there were still a number deficiencies in making the information accessible to all visitors, such as those with literacy problems, learning disabilities and the visually impaired, among others.

The *Cultural Heritage Act* of 2002 was an important achievement for Malta's heritage sector. Unlike the previous Antiquities *(Protection) Act 1925* (Government of Malta), the 2002 legislation emphasised the importance of an integrated knowledge-based system accompanying the tangible and intangible heritage. Part II of this law does, in fact, speak about the duty of the heritage regulators and operators to promote knowledge, however, it leaves the 'when', 'where' and 'how' up to designated heritage agencies. In leaving such a policy open to a number of interpretations and without further guidance for the new entities responsible for Malta's heritage, it created further dragging of feet which caused disillusion among the National Council for Persons with Disability which

hoped that the new legislation would create better 'democratisation' of heritage information.

The duty to make accessible includes the duty to exhibit, to research, to render accessible for research, study and enjoyment, the cultural heritage and to promote knowledge, appreciation and awareness of this heritage within the principle of social inclusion. The right of access to, and benefit from, the cultural heritage does not belong merely to the present generation. Every generation shall have the duty to protect this heritage and to make it accessible for future generations and for all mankind.

(Cultural Heritage Act 2002, Part II para. 5)

It was not until 2013 that Heritage Malta published a document entitled *Cultural Heritage for All: A Social Cohesion Approach.* The scope behind this document was to fill in the gaps in the agency's social inclusion policy. The implementation strategy proposed included: the identification of key personnel responsible for implementing the inclusion policy; the organisation of activities targeting different social groups with special needs (such as tactile and other multisensory experiences); creating a Standard Operation Procedures; and promoting best practice among staff who are in direct contact with the general public. Other actions proposed were the regular study of visitor profiling so as to understand the needs which arise from time to time, the introduction of alternative forms of interpretation where heritage sites are not accessible for everyone, and the collaboration with museum professionals and researchers to give necessary training to heritage employees and update them with the latest approaches towards a better presentation and interpretation of heritage information to a wide variety of audiences (Heritage Malta, 2013:4-5).

Despite ten years having passed from the enactment of the latest heritage legislation, the implementation of such a policy has only recently started taking place. Furthermore, some sections may seem inconsistent with the aims of the same policy, notably the last sections, which states that 'The establishment of a policy will not automatically imply that the policy can be applied in the same way across the board in all Heritage Malta museums/sites, particularly because of specific limitations of the sites' (Heritage Malta,

2013:13). While understandable that it is unethical to alter the original fabric of the site to provide accessibility, such a statement may convey a sense of doubt in reaching the desired objectives of improving both physical and perceptual accessibility of cultural heritage sites in the Maltese islands.

3.5   Heritage Legislation

Heritage legislation remains a very fragmentary area of law internationally, as this is often incorporated with other laws related to Land Use and Urban Planning (Mifsud Bonnici 2008:10). We arguably lag far behind on this. Indeed, as early as the sixth century AD, the *Codex Justinianus* provided clear rules on how important architecture such as ancient temples, the stadia and the theatres should not be owned by particular individuals but rather the right of common ownership of these sites belonged to all Roman citizens(see Thomas 1975:65). Similar concern about the protection of monuments came with Pope Sixtus IV in 1474, whose Bull *Quum Provvida* prohibited Church administrators from remove marbles, inscriptions, works of art, mosaics and other artefacts exhibited in the churches for public enjoyment (see Fèa 1806:22). One could mention many other laws regulating cultural heritage over time, however, that is not my objective here. That said, a cursory study of these laws reveal that the common factor lies in fact that ancient monuments provided communities with a sense of identity and belonging to a particular place, so much so that prominent figures, such as Napoleon Bonaparte of France and Carlo III of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies understood this mechanism and made sure to protect their peoples' heritage through legislation.

The history of Malta's heritage legislation goes back to the beginning of the 20th century with the first law enacted in 1910, the *Preservation of Antiquities Ordinance* (Malta Government Gazette, 1910). The policies that formed part of this ordinance were influenced by Italian laws. This document provided a simple framework for the protection of national heritage but lacked the detail required to implement its rules in an efficient and effective way. In later years, the Ordinance was improved with more practical policies introduced to the legal framework, e.g. the setting up of the Antiquities Committee which served as the primary advisor to the Maltese government

under British rule on such matters. This Ordinance officially became the *Antiquities (Protection) Act* and was published in 1925 (see Pickard 2001:203).

This law remained unchanged until 2002 when the new *Cultural Heritage Act* came into effect. During the 1980s, the Maltese islands experienced a fast-growing tourism industry, but the government of the time was not prepared for the numbers of incoming tourists, notably from Britain, and the situation soon became unsustainable, especially in view of property development which was being undertaken in order to cater for large amounts of tourists. Indeed, important historical architecture was even demolished to make room for new establishments. As a reaction to this, three committees were set up in 1987 to oversee the rehabilitation, conservation and preservation of important cultural heritage in Malta's most visited historic cities, namely Valletta, Mdina and the Cottonera. These committees are the Valletta Rehabilitation Committee, the Mdina Rehabilitation Committee and the Cottronera Rehabilitation Committee. These working groups still function today and act as the consultant body for the Maltese government on projects concerning the respective localities.

Subsequent were the *Development Planning Act* of 1992 and the *Cultural Heritage Act* of 2002, which replaced the previous *Antiquities (Protection) Act* of 1925. These two legislations are independent from each other. The 2002 act deals specifically with the protection of Malta's heritage and sets out strict guidelines. Perhaps the most significant development this law prompted was the de-merger of the previous Government Museums Department into four separate entities, namely the *Superintendence of Cultural Heritage*, which became the regulatory body, *Heritage Malta*, which was designated as the national agency responsible for the operation of heritage sites, the *Malta Centre for Restoration*, responsible for the academic preparation of prospective conservators while offering restoration and conservation service to the Maltese government and other private entities, and the *Committee of Guarantee*, designed to facilitate communication and coordination between the different agencies, both public and private, responsible for the protection of Malta's heritage (Mifsud Bonnici 2008:72-84).

The current legislation is the result of a process which capitalised on previous experiences, often ending with the destruction of heritage due to the lack of awareness

and a satisfactory regulatory framework. Efforts since 1987 have been crucial in ensuring concrete actions were taken to secure a future for Malta's cultural heritage, not only from a physical point of view but also in terms of education, interpretation and presentation of this common asset. The success of such legislation can be seen where new archaeological discoveries not only obtained due protection but the entities created as part of this law, notably Heritage Malta, obtained European funds to conserve and open the site to the general public. Good examples are Saint Augustine's Catacombs in Rabat and the *Ta' Bistra* Catacombs in Mosta. Today, these early Christian sites, which underwent expropriation from private parties under the Cultural Heritage Act and complete rehabilitation by Heritage Malta, can be enjoyed by a wide variety of audiences, including tourists, school children, and persons with mobility impairment. Such opportunities could have never come to light without an effective national heritage strategy backed by the required legislation.

3.6   Heritage Interpretation

Discourse on heritage interpretation is often centred on the practices employed in this subject, notably the tools – some traditional and other more technological – which were, and are, being used to facilitate such activity on a heritage site or museum. Although these discussions are very important, especially in today's world where technological equipment can increase the appreciation of heritage among individuals (King *et al.* 2016), heritage professionals must not forget the theoretical aspect of heritage interpretation that provides the necessary fundamentals which go far beyond the equipment used. In his Foreword to the third edition of Freeman Tilden's monograph on heritage interpretation, the former Director at the National Parks Services Gary Everhardt argues that, had Tilden's book focused on 'gadgetry and methodologies of interpretation',   it would have become quickly obsolete due to the fast technological developments made in the second half of the 20th century (Freeman 1957:xi). Freeman's monograph comprises six principles, highlighting the philosophy behind the subject which, in his opinion, should be the foundation of every activity related to Interpretation. These are:

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate to what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
2. Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
3. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
4. The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
6. Interpretation addressed to children (say up to the age of 12) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program.

While Tilden's arguments may perhaps sound old-fashioned for this present age, more recent literature (Stone & Molyneaux 1994; Howard 2003; Bryant 2006; Staiff 2014) is still heavily influenced by his six principles, despite criticism that his views of Interpretation were 'much more than – and essentially different from – straightforward factual information' (Bryant 2006:173). Writing in the mid-20th century, Tilden argued that the best means of interpretation is by having a specialised person who guides individuals throughout their visit while providing the audience with relevant information about the heritage attractions (Bryant 2006:184). Nowadays, such practice is somewhat challenged due to the authoritarian nature of the tour guides and the lack of interaction between the large number of visitors and the guides whose excursions are more commercially led (evident in the considerable amount of time spent in souvenir shops) rather than focused on the cultural heritage experience. Such arguments are, however, not completely out of sync with Tilden's fourth principle which says that interpretation is not simply a way of informing but a mean of positively provoking the interest of visitors. Therefore, if a tour-guide is 'old hat [and] boring' (Bryant 2006:184), then he or she is not fulfilling their roles as a guide who, according to Tilden, is also meant to interact with the visitors rather than simply pass them information.

In 1956, Malta's Museums Department was preparing for the opening of the first official National Museum of Archaeology housed at the Auberge de Provence, the former seat of the French section of the Knights of St John. In one of his Museums Department report, notably the one dated 1957-58, Director Charles Zammit informed the Governor of Malta that the Museum was inaugurated on the 11th January 1958 by the Minister of Education and that the important archaeological, artistic and historical collections were all exhibited in the galleries of the museum and accessible to the general public. Despite providing some information about the setting of the exhibits, such as the arrangements of the prehistoric artefacts in a chronological context for ease of understanding, Zammit does not specify if the necessary information (e.g. captions, illustrations or information panels) were installed so as to facilitate the presentation and interpretation of the artefacts exhibited. In addition, the report outlines the action taken by the same director to store artefacts which, in his opinion, were not likely to be of interest to the general public.

The decision to store important artefacts, such as inscribed pottery fragments – which could have eventually supported the narrative of the exhibits – implies a lack of interpretation and presentation strategy employed by the Museum management of the time. Inexperience in setting up a proper museum has also affected decisions on what is important for the public to see and what is not. Nonetheless, considerable efforts were made to increase the interests of individuals in their heritage. In the *Museum Annual Report*, notably that of 1958-59, a clear improvement in presentation and interpretation of artefacts is recorded by Zammit who informs the Governor that 'The order of the many [show]cases in the Punic and Roman rooms has been altered to show more clearly the sequence of the development of cultures in these [Maltese] islands...The passage between the temple-sculpture gallery and the Punic room was adapted to take a temporary exhibition of recent work in the field of the Museum Department. The finds at Tarxien and Ggantija will be the first to be put on display, illustrated by drawing and photographs' (Government of Malta, Museum Annual Report 1958-59:1)

It was not until the 1960, however, that important actions started being taken in an effort to satisfy visitors' needs to understand the artefacts on show. A new Curator, F.S.

Mallia, was appointed under the mentorship of David Trump, who gave a detailed account to the Maltese government about the illustrations and maps which were being installed in the entrance hall of the archaeological section 'for the guidance of visitors' and the placement of information cards (i.e. captions) related to the objects exhibited in each showcase.

In each case was placed an outline map of the islands showing the provenance of the exhibits and a chronological card giving their relative and absolute dates in the sequence. These cards were later redrawn in accordance with the changes necessitated by the Borġ in-Nadur and Baħrija results (see below), and with the redesignation of the prehistoric phases by Prof. J. D. Evans in his book "Malta", published in the course of the year. For reference purposes, the correlation of phase lettering runs as follows:

Type site:	Għar Dalam	Mġarr	Żebbuġ	Ġgantija
Old lettering:	Ia 1 early	Ia 1 late	Ia 2	Ib
New lettering:	IA	IB	IC	ID

Type site:	Tarxien	T. Cemetery	Borġ in-Nadur	Baħrija
Old lettering:	Ic	IIa	IIb	IIc
New lettering:	IE	IIA	IIB	IIC

An illustrated guidebook to the Archaeological Section of the Museum, the first of a series of five intended to cover the archaeology of the islands, was prepared and passed to the Government Tourist Board for publication.

Figure 3.7: An extract of the Museum Annual Report 1959-60 referring to interpretation

(Source – Heritage Malta)

Despite such improvements inside the National Museum, such developments were not matched at major archaeological sites, such as Saint Paul's Catacombs, which lacked space in which to exhibit related artefacts onsite and where information and interpretation provided had to rely solely on tourist guides, tourist literature (e.g. guide books) as well as the custodians who took care of admissions (see the more detailed discussion in Chapter Five on the catacombs and their role as heritage attractions).

Further progress in the presentation and interpretation of Malta's cultural heritage was made in the late 1970s and 80s. This was probably due to the exponential increase in inbound tourism which saw heightened numbers of foreign individuals visiting sites such as Saint Agatha's Catacombs, which, by 1979, had a newly-established museum housing

most of the artefacts excavated for the early Christian funerary and offering useful interpretative material.

Figure 3.8: Archive photograph showing the entrance to Saint Paul's Catacombs leading directly to the chambers (Source: Heritage Malta)

The constant tourism slowly modelled the way interpretation was executed in both sites and museums in the present century. In 2012, Neil Silberman, President of the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Interpretation and Presentation, delivered a keynote speech at the conference *Your Place or Mine? New initiatives engaging communities in interpreting and presenting heritage,*[14] where he explained that for several years, until very recently, the excellence of public interpretation was 'how effective the actual message got through'. He explained how things have slowly changed with the influx of foreign tourists. One development was that the narrative of the

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[14]http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/events/past-conferences/your-place-or-mine-april-2012/#sthash.4ldM7JGh.dpuf

archaeological sites started to change as well. Silberman argued that the terms *interpretation* and *presentation* are often considered as synonyms and hence used interchangeably in laws, policies and guidelines, however, when one reflects on the how both interpretation and presentation were and are applied in practical terms, one notices that interpretation as a heritage activity is more inclined towards 'exercising' the 'unexercised' mind of the visitor to ask questions and to provoke in a positive sense – something which Tilden/Freeman had already proposed in the late 1950s but which was not always exercised by the authorities working in the cultural heritage sector, especially in Malta.

In the last decade heritage interpretation has become more dynamic, wherein the curator, who is considered as the authority in this field, interacts with the visitors, while the visitors become co-inquirers of national and international heritage. The limitations discussed above led Maltese heritage operators to adopt best practices in the field of heritage interpretation relatively late when compared to foreign counterparts. That said, a very small number of heritage sites and museums such as the Saint Agatha Historical Complex (see below) and the Cathedral Museum did implement specific techniques and adopted a pro-active mentality in order to provide a strong heritage experience to their many visitors.

3.7   The Saint Agatha Historical Complex – A First Heritage Interpretation Centre?

To refer to the St Agatha Historical Complex as an 'Interpretation Centre' is perhaps a little pretentious, however, this establishment was indeed among the very first historical complexes in Malta – hence its official name - which not only showcased artefacts in its small gallery but tried to interpret the cultural heritage it exhibited in an effective and clear way. This Victorian-style museum was inaugurated in 1979 but did not change from its original setting and content – bar the few artefacts and collections which were donated to the museum with the condition to exhibit them (Camilleri 2001:127). In this regard, the museum became more cluttered than it was originally intended to be. Currently, the lack of space presents challenges to the museum management in terms of presentation and interpretation of its contents. Despite this,

the unchanged environment provides a good opportunity for my own research to obtain a clear picture of the original objectives of this complex while seeking to understand the direction the first curator wanted to give to the newly established museum. In addition, similar sites, such as the St Agatha Historical Complex, which are mostly famous for being a 'time-capsule', allow for a comparative study with modern interpretation centres including the possibility of identifying visitors' preferences and experiences, notably if they prefer a traditional 'old-style' museum to today's visitors' centre equipped with modern interpretive technology. Photographs (Fig 3.9) dating back to the initial years of this museum indicates (at least to my eyes) that there was a good balance between the items exhibited, the space for presentation and the corresponding interpretation, as well as good lighting through the windows which overlooked the quiet yard of the convent.

Figure 3.9: The St Agatha Museum when first opened to the public in 1979
(Source – SAHC)

 The primary objective of the Museum was to 'reveal' in a specific way to the general public how late Roman communities in Malta, notably the Christians used to live back in the 4th century, by exhibiting artefacts retrieved from Saint Agatha's Catacombs. Thus, Camilleri, who acted as the curator during the 1980s, started categorising the finds from the tombs into different themes, such as objects related to cooking and food such

as plates, cups and pots, artefacts related to body-care and aesthetics such as *unguentaria* and hairpins, basic household object such as oil-lamps and artefacts related to the religious beliefs such as inscriptions, frescoes, iconography and others. All these objects were retrieved from the Saint Agatha Catacombs and set up in such a way as to create a narrative of the everyday life of the local late Roman community (Camilleri, pers. comm., 21 January 2010). One particular showcase was built so as to resemble a tomb of the 4th century AD, with genuine articulated skeletons and grave goods placed to show how the community used to bury their dead.

Figure 3.10: The main gallery at St Agatha's Museum in the late 1980s (Source - SAHC)

One notable decision taken by the curator prior to the opening of the catacombs was to place real human remains, excavated from the same catacombs, in the tombs so as to make the visitor experience the real environment as it was back in Late Antiquity. This was not an easy decision considering such action may have raised ethical concerns back in the 1980s. However, the primary objective was to present and facilitate the information to the visitor by using models and other visual aids. This, according to Camilleri, helped the audience, mostly composed of tourists and school children to remember what they saw and, at least, be able to relate the catacombs with burial by the end of their visit. Here, Camilleri was correct regarding the visuals in a museum – in fact, a study carried out by Lewis (1988) revealed that 'visitors remember 90 per cent of

what they do, 50 per cent of what they see, 30 per cent of what they read and 10 percent of what they hear' (Bryant 2006:184 *cf.* Lewis 1988). The St Agatha Historical Complex not only provided visual assistance through reconstructions of tombs but also provided free tourist information in more than seven languages (English, German, Italian, Russian, Chinese, Spanish and Dutch)[15]. Furthermore, this complex was the first heritage centre to have a dedicated booklet for primary schoolchildren (for use either during or following the visit)

Figure 3.11: St. Agatha Historical Complex courtyard entrance (Source: Anton Koutsarsky)

The Saint Agatha Catacombs and its museum, both of which can be accessed from the same courtyard through separate doors located few meters away from each other (Fig. 3.11), formed not only a centre for tourists or school children but also a centre where tertiary students and academics in the field of cultural heritage and others carried out important studies in subjects ranging from Roman history to history of art, conservation, biology, anatomy, museology and education. The open-minded and proactive approach pursued by the curator from the outset, particularly by making all heritage assets available to everyone (including scholars), could not always be seen in other museums managed by the state. The various aspects which have characterised the running of the complex do indeed follow Tilden's principles of interpretation, despite the curator not

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[15] Information obtained from the site's official website: http://stagathamalta.com/books.html

being fully aware of the philosophy behind this field of study. Nonetheless, the evidence presented above for the St. Agatha Historical Complex surely indicates that such a complex deserves to be designated as one of the earliest heritage interpretation centres on the Maltese islands, one which served as best practice for future curators and a model for heritage interpretation in museums and sites during the 1980s.

3.8   Conclusion

This chapter has traced the developments and achievements of the study of Maltese early Christian heritage, including its management and interpretation during the 1980s and 90s. An evaluation of the practices employed by scholars and heritage professionals during this period was carried out in terms of international standards and principles available at that time. The discussions presented here demonstrate that a number of factors, such as a stable political environment in Malta, the setting up of environment and heritage policies, but mostly an increase in inbound (niche) tourism were sources of encouragement to key stakeholders in Malta's early Christian heritage to work on new strategies thus making a leap forward in the way this topic is presented and interpreted to different audiences. The next chapter will explore the current research in heritage management and interpretation, particularly in light of Maltese catacombs and investigate whether this has capitalised on the 'anticipated' work carried out by scholars like Buhagiar, Borg and Camilleri.

PART II – THE STATE OF PLAY: HERITAGE AND THE MALTESE CATACOMBS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

CHAPTER FOUR

CURRENT RESEARCH APPROACHES, PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY AND TECHNOLOGY

4.1   Introduction

The ethos of cultural heritage studies has been in flux since its inception. The practices employed by scholars in this field cannot be described as homogenous (Harvey 2008),and this is especially true in early Christian heritage. The notion that 'archaeology is limited to the rich' slowly changed to an 'archaeology for all' attitude (Young Archaeologists' Club 2008:28). Therefore, nowadays scholars and heritage managers endeavour to present the archaeological findings in the best ways possible to a wider audience (Hodder and Hutson 2003). The contents of this chapter, which are primarily based on the review and analysis of two case studies, compare and interpret the current approaches employed in the field of public archaeology and Maltese catacombs. These case studies are based on projects related to early Christian heritage management undertaken by Malta's government agency responsible for the operation of cultural heritage, Heritage Malta. Furthermore, this chapter will posit arguments on how technology is helping – or can help curators and archaeologists – make ancient site knowledge accessible to a larger audience. The primary aim here is to determine whether the current approaches employed by Heritage Malta are contributing towards a holistic heritage interpretation and presentation, particularly for Maltese catacombs. I will explore the effects that different approaches may have had on two other sectors integrated in the HIRMOTHEA model – the education and tourism sectors. The criteria used to evaluate the heritage operator are drawn from latest academic literature and official guidelines issued by international bodies, such as the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).

The following sections build on the content of Chapter Three, which discussed early forms of heritage interpretation, to identify the changes and further development, if any, taking place in recent years on the way heritage sites in Malta, especially those related to early Christian heritage, are interpreted and presented to the general public.

4.2 New Attitudes and Approaches in Heritage Interpretations

Until the early 21st century, evaluating the relevance of heritage interpretation had an element of subjectivity due to the absence of official or standardised guidelines to aid heritage managers assess their product. In this sense, Scott's article '*Some notes on recent catacomb research and its literature*' published in 1883 could not be considered less relevant than other recent publications, such as *The "place" of interpretation: A new approach to the evaluation of interpretation* (Stewart et al. 1998), which discusses new approaches to the evaluation of heritage interpretation.

This situation changed in 2008 with the publication of *The ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage sites*. The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) generated a set of policies 'to define the basic principles of interpretation and presentation as essential components of heritage conservation efforts and as a means of enhancing public appreciation and understanding of cultural heritage sites' (ICOMOS 2008). Now, curators, archaeologists and heritage operators were asked to be guided by seven cardinal objectives when rehabilitating cultural heritage sites and making them accessible to the public.

 'Access and Understanding' is the first principle discussed in the ICOMOS Charter. Here, the content discusses the importance of interpretation and presentation programmes and how these shall be designed to assist the public access heritage sites from a physical and intellectual point of view. The Charter explains how interpretation programmes must enrich the heritage experience and try to increase the visitors understanding on the conservation and sustainability of cultural heritage sites. Furthermore, curators must ensure that the activities are centred on a learning environment. ICOMOS argues that heritage managers must know their audience well and this can only be done through demographic research – see Chapter Six of this thesis centred on visitors to the catacombs in Rabat. In addition, this principle suggests that the necessary interpretative

infrastructure must be created in order to cater for the different language of the visitors who access the sites. Physical accessibility is also considered as a crucial aspect which provides a full-immersed experience to the visitors (ICOMOS 2008:7). The topic of Physical Accessibility in cultural heritage sites has been the subject of debate for years (e.g. Timothy 2011:339; McClean 2011:8; Goodball et al. 2005:178). The literature mainly discusses the conservation of heritage sites vis-à-vis the possibilities of making these accessible to visitors with physical impairments. Scholars understand the limitations of accessing archaeological sites that can in no way be altered, however, there seems to be a general consensus about off-site interpretation in cases where there are no options for accessibility.

The second principle of the ICOMOS charter entitled 'Information Sources' stresses the importance of professional interpretation. The data presented to the public should be based on the work carried out by recognised cultural heritage bodies through scientific methods and studies from living cultural traditions. The content discussed here brings balance between the archaeological practices employed by both Processual and Post-Processual scholars and therefore such arguments indirectly refer to the multidisciplinary approach which heritage professionals should use in their research. In fact, this part of the charter suggests that, where available, collective memory related to traditional storytelling should be used at the advantage of the heritage interpreters who, on the other hand, must not exclude collaboration with other science professionals such as computer modellers and architects among others. These may assist in visual reconstructions of cultural heritage while enhancing the archaeological record and providing a good opportunity for comparison. Therefore, this multi-lateral collaboration and modus operandi will not only contribute towards the public presentation of heritage but will also put the archaeologist in a position to explore different research avenues (ICOMOS 2008:8).

Every cultural heritage site exists in a unique 'Context and Setting' referring to the third principle of ICOMOS with respect to the social, cultural and historical aspects of the sites (Kelly & Thomas 2013:70). The argument presented here discusses the importance of looking at sites from different perspectives. Although it is very important to present the correct archaeological data to the general public, curators should enhance this by

providing information on the process and evolution of the sites. In most cases, archaeological sites are characterised by multi-period use spanning from ancient to modern times. An example of this is Saint Augustine's Catacombs in Rabat, which was originally used as a burial place for early Christian and other communities in the Long Late Antiquity, then as an air-raid shelter during WWII and later as a construction store until a decade ago. When a site is used in different periods, archaeologists tend to find considerable destruction of the original archaeological context and sometimes tend to cover-up recent interventions by neglecting this aspect in public interpretation (Cardona & Farrugia 2012). A similar case is the Saint Agatha Catacomb in Rabat Malta, where the first curator white-washed parts of the walls of the catacombs containing modern and early-modern graffiti (Camilleri, pers. comm., 20010). According to the third principle of the ICOMOS Charter, the interventions to use (or dis-use) heritage sites are part of its evolutionary process resulting in the current state of conservation and, therefore, these interventions should be part of the rest of the heritage interpretation and presentation. Sometimes, reasons behind modern interventions can be found by looking at the surrounding landscape and geographical location, which should also be taken into consideration. For example, the reason why some catacombs in Rabat were converted into air-raid shelter is because the town was located a few kilometres away from what once was a military airplane runway. Thus, during WWII, Rabat experienced frequent bombing. The community living in these areas knew about the early Christian sites underneath their houses and the urgency to create safe places led them to alter these sites into bomb shelters. Other intangible heritage, such as spiritual traditions, should also be considered during interpretation activities. From this aspect, the case of the Maltese Islands is very particular due to the so-called Pauline tradition. The cult of Saint Paul in Malta, especially in Rabat, is very strong in view of the biblical texts available and other religious-cultural traditions. Local and international scholars have been discussing the narration of Saint Paul's shipwreck in Malta for ages - some confirming and others denying what might have happened in the first century AD (Azzopardi (ed.) 2009:9) – and with the tendency to emphasise on the evidence which confirms this event rather than the ones which deny it[16]. ICOMOS argues that 'the range of perspectives about

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[16] An example of this is the court case opened by a group of Maltese against Robert Cornuke, author of *The Lost Shipwreck of Paul* (2005) who claims Saint Paul shipwrecked off the coast of Malta. The group of Maltese requested US federal to stop the book from being distributed in Malta. The US federal judge decided against this request and the book is being distributed in Malta (Timed Of Malta, May 16, 2003)

them [the sites] based on scholarly research should be considered in the formulation of interpretive programmes' (ICOMOS 2008:9). It is therefore crucial that such 'censorship' does not, in any way, affect the site narrative when presenting cultural heritage sites to the visitors.

In 1994 the International Council on Monuments and Sites published a document about the 'Authenticity' of cultures and cultural heritage sites. *The Nara Document On Authenticity (1994)* argues that obtaining international appreciation of a cultural heritage sites depends very much on its authenticity and therefore scientific studies are crucial to confirm and secure this important characteristic. A site may be 'authentic' for the function it served in ancient times or for its architectural features. It is thus crucial that such aspects are clearly explained and accentuated in the heritage presentation. The ICOMOS Charter about cultural heritage interpretation and presentation includes the subject of authenticity as its fourth principle. This argues that interpretation programmes should not only 'respect the tradition social functions of the site' but also must take into consideration the 'dignity of local residents and associated communities' (ICOMOS 2008:10). Furthermore, heritage managers must respect the original fabric of the sites. Here, the document states that in case of the installation of interpretative material such as information panels, digital kiosks as well as infrastructure that make the site more accessible should in no way alter the authenticity of the site itself. Altering the original structure of a heritage site to make it accessible was the order of the day for the Maltese government authorities during the 1920s, especially since at the time catacombs were being discovered every day during constructions works in Rabat. Unpublished documents, for example, reveal the actions taken by the Maltese administration when Saint Augustine's Catacombs was rediscovered: workers were ordered to create a new, independent entrance to be used by the Government authorities, to clear the hypogea of any debris, and to join the three independent hypogea with an underground tunnel (Cardona & Farrugia 2012: 55). Such interventions are no longer acceptable as these may seriously affect the authentic character of a cultural heritage site while making it extremely difficult to present these to the public. In fact, at Saint Augustine's Catacombs it is difficult for any visitor to determine which corridors have been excavated in recent times unless this is pointed out by a guide.

Sustainability is a key topic in cultural heritage. The charter's fifth principle stresses this subject and asks that heritage managers ensure that the necessary studies are duly carried out. This shall include conservation impact assessments as well as social and financial sustainability studies. The reality within the cultural heritage industry is that if a site is made accessible to the public and equipped with good presentation and interpretational facilities, then tourists, students and local communities are more likely to visit the site – sometimes even in large groups (Hribar et al. 2015:104). Although the turn-out of visitors is crucial for a site's financial sustainability, heritage managers have to take into account the conservation aspect as well. Therefore, while implementing interpretation programmes to attract more visitors and possibly sustain the site with the income from entrance fees, curators must know the sites' limits of acceptable change (Nicolics 2013:99). The operators of heritage sites must ensure that interpretation facilities are regularly maintained not only from a working-order point of view but also by keeping the content updated. An example of the latter is the information kiosk installed in 2012 at the main reception of Saint Paul's Catacombs in Rabat, which provided information about ancient Roman recipes. This digital information panel was out of order for at least two years and was still kept at the reception despite its malfunction. This equipment was purchased as part of a European funded project, however, the authority responsible for the kiosk never allocated funds for its maintenance following purchase (Cardona, pers. comm., 23rd November 2015).

This chapter's introduction referenced the notion of the 'archaeology for all' attitude. This concept resonates in the sixth principle of the ICOMOS charter where it suggests that the presentation of cultural heritage and interpretation programme should not be a 'one-man-show'. Heritage professionals together with the general public as well as other interested stake holders, such as tourist's operators should contribute and collaborate in the setting up of these programmes. The charter takes it a step further by encouraging a multidisciplinary approach towards its formulation while respecting 'traditional rights, responsibilities and interests of property owners and host institutions' when planning support infrastructure, such as visitor facilities (ICOMOS 2008:12). Furthermore, the heritage operators and regulators should involve the general public when planning or expanding interpretation and presentation programmes. The ICOMOS argues that since cultural heritage is for everyone, then it is

also the responsibility of the general public to provide feedback and assistance (where possible) when such projects occur. However, one should not forget the aspect of intellectual property and copyright. It is essential to discuss these issues during planning phases.

The seventh and last principle is by far the longest part of this charter and deals with 'Research, Training and Evaluation'. Here ICOMOS argues that heritage operators should not consider an interpretation project as static and closed once this is finished. Since the basis of interpretation derives from heritage research – one which strives to update the cultural heritage record – heritage interpretation programmes and the supporting physical and digital infrastructure should allow for a non-problematic update whenever content revision or expansion is needed. The updating activity should in no way be esoteric but shall involve the general public, tourist operators, guides, educators and tertiary students. This principle also discusses the importance of the constant evaluation of the presentation and interpretation programme. Curators must be up-to-date with the latest methods of presentation and abreast with recent discoveries made by cultural heritage researchers in their respective fields. Furthermore, the programmes should be implemented in the spirit of academic curricula provided by educational institutions. Likewise, educators must take into consideration these programmes when updating and drafting academic curricula and other educational resources for a wide range of people, such as in primary and secondary schools as well as in the case of life-long learning education. In order to achieve this level of integration, the staff employed to create and operate these programmes should obtain the necessary training. In effect, the institutions responsible for providing courses in interpretation, such as those leading to a cultural heritage profession, must include a strong component of interpretation and presentation. If one looks at the case of Maltese higher education institutions which offer undergraduate courses related to cultural heritage, such as archaeology, these do not include such a component[17]. Courses on this topic should not only target prospective curators and heritage managers but should be made available to other staff such as gallery site officers who spend most of their time onsite and may sometimes

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[17] See the overview of the courses provided as part of the Bachelors of Arts (Hons) Archaeology - http://www.um.edu.mt/arts/programme/UBAHARCFT-2015-6-O

know the needs of the visitors more than their managers, who, in view of the nature of the work, are not able to dedicate much time in the field.

Finally, the charter cites the need for a constant professional development in order to maintain the international standards in heritage presentation and interpretation. Workers in this field should attend workshops, seminars, conferences and lectures on this topic to ensure the necessary knowledge can be gained. Furthermore, networking with other professionals can promote sharing of information and experiences about the variety of possibilities and opportunities present in heritage interpretation (ICOMOS 2008:13-14).

These ICOMOS principles are integral to the evaluation model framework of this thesis, which will be employed on two projects at Maltese early Christian sites. The first to be discussed is the Archaeotur project, followed by the example of Saint Paul's Catacombs.

4.3   The Archaeotur Project

On 8th June 2011, a group of heritage experts and tourism professionals from Malta and Sicily convened at the Mosta Civic Centre to open a project which saw the rehabilitation of 11 late antique hypogea in Malta and Sicily between 2011 and 2013. The eight project partners were led by one of the largest local councils in Malta, namely Mosta (Figure 4.1). It was assisted by the governmental agency responsible for overseeing Malta's cultural patrimony, Heritage Malta, as well as the Malta Tourism Authority. Rabat Local Council was the fourth partner since one of catacombs to be rehabilitated was located there.
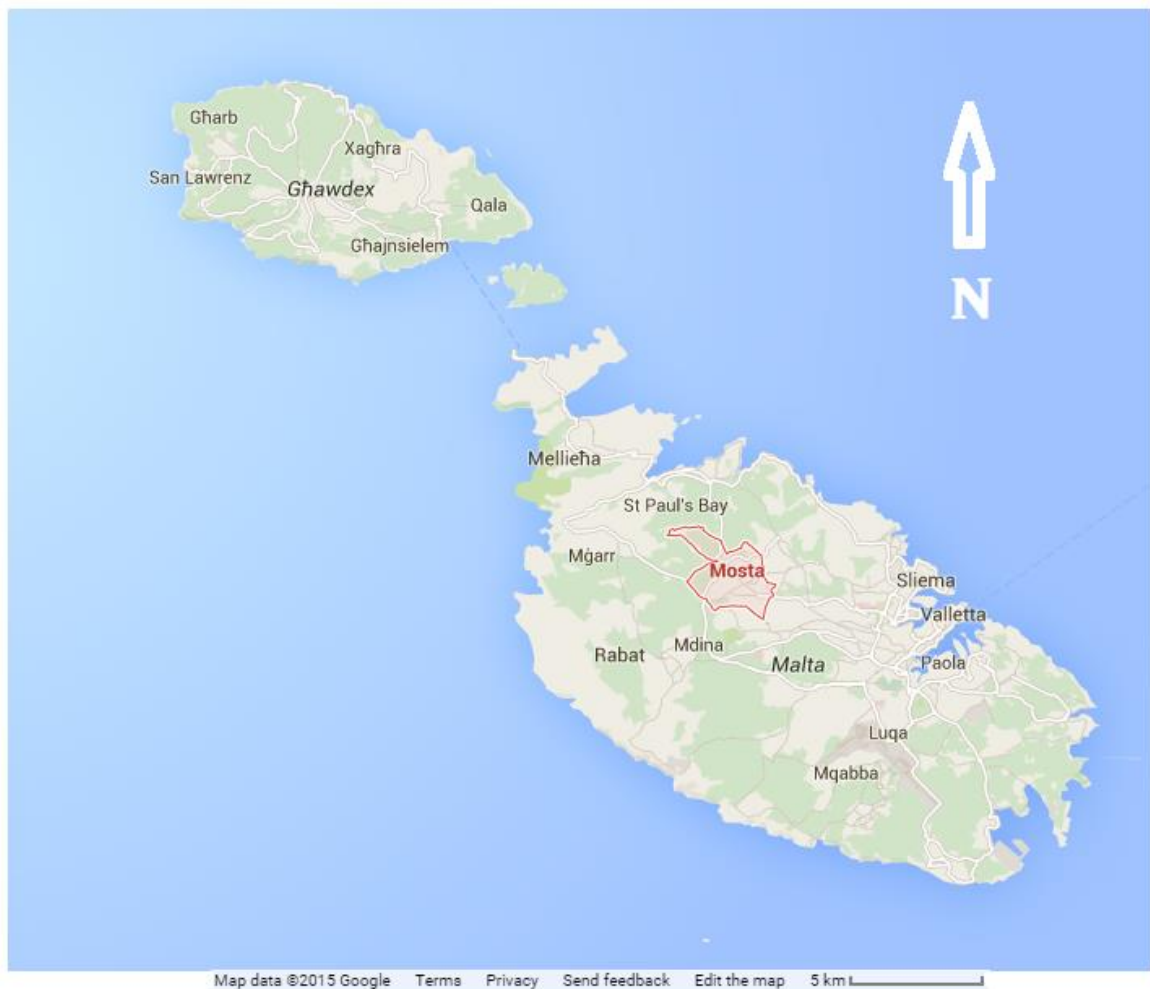
Figure 4.1 – Map of the Maltese Islands showing the location of Mosta
(source: Google Earth)

The other four partners were from Sicily and included two local councils, namely Ragusa and Santa Croce Camerina, the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage of Ragusa and Giritravel srl, a private company specialising in cultural tourism. More widely, Archaeotur was a European-funded project under the Italia–Malta cooperative programme. The European Commission (EC) gave it a green light following a thorough evaluation of the project proposal and provided 85% of the funding, while each partner committed the other 15% through internal contributions such as staff costs.

The project's main objective was to develop a model for the management of archaeological sites – one including not only the conservation and rehabilitation processes, but also the promotion and valorisation of late antique necropoleis located in the two neighbouring Islands. One key activity was to create a Ragusa–Malta tourist route in order to improve the socio-economic development of the two territories, from

an environment sustainability point of view, by increasing the number of tourists during off-peak seasons. This could only be done by providing a specific heritage tourism product which emphasises the common origins and cultural identities of the Sicilian and Maltese communities. Different heritage trails were created linking small early Christian hypogea in Rabat, Mosta, and Ragusa. The sites were chosen on the basis of which catacombs were more feasible to rehabilitate in terms of time and resources available; choices depended also on the size of the hypogea and ease of accessibility.

Following agreement between the eight project partners and the necessary consultation with the cultural heritage regulators, eleven late Roman hypogea were selected: (i) Saint Augustine's Catacombs in Rabat, Malta, (ii) Ta' Bistra Catacombs in Mosta, Malta, (iii) Cava Ispica Archaeological Park in Ragusa, (iv) Cisternazzi Catacombs in Ragusa, (v) San Leonardo Valley in Ragusa, (vi) Donnafugata Catacombs in Ragusa, (vii) Trabacche Catacombs in Ragusa, (viii) Celone Catacombs, (ix) Mirio Necropolis in Ragusa, (x) Pirrera Necropolis in Ragusa and (xi) Mausoleum of Mezzagnioge in Ragusa.

The project was built around six different work-packages (WPs) which were created in order to guide and assign different tasks to the project partners. The entities involved were responsible for one or more work-packages. WP1, for example, under the responsibility of the lead partner – the Mosta Local Council – related to the administrative management of the project, such as financial reporting and coordination, including coordination of steering and scientific committee meetings.

The work envisaged for WP2 was related to cultural heritage analysis and archaeological investigation. Heritage Malta and the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage of Ragusa were responsible for conducting preliminary analysis at the above mentioned sites, which mainly included conservation assessments. The results were determinant of whether the sites, which had not seen their internal environment change for centuries, would allow for intakes of visitors should these be conserved and made fully accessible to the public. Key was the engagement of a cultural heritage professional to act as Project Curator and Consultant to the project partners: Heritage Malta employed a curator with previous experience in early Christian site management, presentation and interpretation. Heritage Malta and Giritravel were also responsible to determine the profile of the tourists visiting the areas near these catacombs.

*Figure 4.2 – The 1950s Ta' Bistra farmhouse with underlying catacombs
(source: Heritage Malta)*

The third work package of this project foresaw archaeological excavation and documentation of the eleven ancient burial sites. The Superintendence of Cultural Heritage of Ragusa and Heritage Malta who were responsible for such works had the opportunity to contract freelance archaeologist and osteologists and build a proper archaeological team to carry out the works according to best practice, and to process the data gathered promptly so as to utilise these in the interpretation programme.

*Figure 4.3 – Archaeological excavation and documentation at Saint Augustine's Catacombs
(Source: Heritage Malta)*

The geographical setting of the sites on both Islands is quite different: the Maltese sites largely lie in urban and semi-urban contexts, whereas the sites in Ragusa are in the countryside. The latter offered a challenge to archaeologists in terms of logistics. The

Sicilian team had to obtain special permission from third party owners of fields to access their property to reach the hypogea. The Superintendence of Ragusa negotiated with the authorities to expropriate parts of fields and transform these into passages allowing access to the Ragusan archaeological sites. The situation with the Maltese sites differed substantially, since both catacombs had their own individual entrance and direct access was not a problem. In the case of the Ta' Bistra Catacombs, the archaeological features were incorporated into a farmhouse constructed in the 1950s and the burial chambers used as animal pens. Thus, the initial plan was to clear and document the underlying catacombs, while retaining the modern infrastructure and transforming it into an orientation centre. The Ta' Bistra Orientation centre will be discussed in more detail in the following section. At Saint Augustine's Catacombs, the works were carried out by the Rabat Local Council with the help of Heritage Malta who directed the excavations.
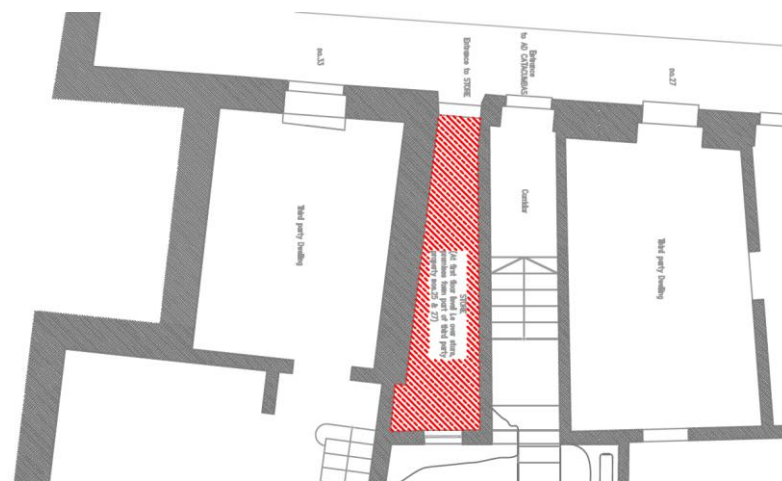
Figure 4.4 – The store adjacent to the entrance of Saint Augustine's Catacombs marked in red (Source: Heritage Malta)

Figure 4.5 – The entrance to Saint Augustine's Catacombs extended by demolishing a dividing wall (source: Author)

A heritage management plan and the development of heritage trails were among the main activities envisaged under work package four. The main partners responsible for drafting this document were Heritage Malta and the Superintendence of Ragusa. These key institutions had to present a plan on how to conserve, interpret and present the catacombs to the visitors and how to make it sustainable in the long term. The Mosta and Ragusa local councils together with Giritravel were responsible for drawing an economic plan, which had to suggest good management methods for these sites that can increase revenue and create further employment opportunities within the cultural heritage industry in Malta and in Sicily. In addition, all eight partners had to contribute to the development of heritage trails in their respective localities. In addition to this, the Lead Partner – Mosta Local Council - was responsible for creating a mobile application platform where heritage sites could be uploaded onto a map and with the help of IT infrastructure guides the users to the sites. More than sixty sites in Rabat and Mosta were uploaded onto this application with information, photos and videos for each site. This application was downloadable free of charge from PlayStore and Istore.
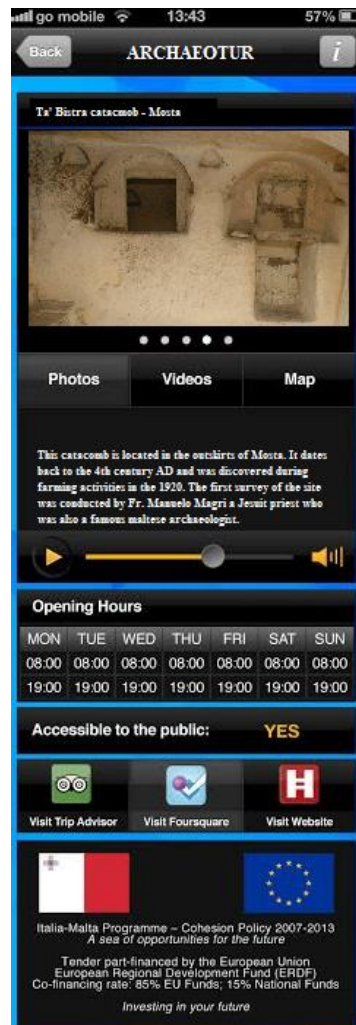
Figure 4.6 – Archaeotur mobile application (source: Archaeotur project archive)

This project had a particular focus on the pedagogy of heritage at primary education. For this reason, the consortium considered ideas on how to create education resources in order to cater for schoolchildren. Besides the mobile application, which was mainly targeted at an adult audience, a series of cartoon-based maps for the Maltese sites was created for a younger audience (fig. 4.7). For the Sicilian sites, a more detailed map illustrating the proper route had to be created since the sites were located in the middle of the countryside and could not be as easily located as the ones in Malta. The map was created using Geographic Information System software (GIS).

Apart from the physical outputs of this work package, a number of seminars were planned as a way of disseminating and promoting Late Antique hypogea and promoting research about these sites. There were two seminars organised over two years – the first one in Malta and the second in Ragusa. The seminar held in Malta emphasised how

heritage professionals, such as curators, should look at the sites in terms of management and human resources. Another theme included was related to the marketing of heritage and a study carried out by post graduate students about the visitors' profile of the tourists in key areas. The second seminar was held in Ibla, a medieval town in Ragusa. Here the presentations were more related to heritage as a scientific and multidisciplinary field.

Figure 4.7 – Archaeotur heritage map for children
(source: Archaeotur Project archives)

The activities carried out as part of work package number five were perhaps the most intensive. This work comprised the development of public interpretation and presentation programmes. Until three years ago (i.e. the time when these programmes were being developed) the concept of interpretation programmes on late antique

hypogea in Malta did not exist. Thus the project team had to develop something from scratch and hope that these programmes were successful. For the Sicilian sites, interpretation and presentation was more complicated since their location did not allow for the implementation of sophisticated interpretation material. Accordingly, this was limited to information panels installed along the way near the catacombs as well as digital information kiosks set up at the city centres of Ragusa and Santa Croce Camerina. The digital information kiosks were linked to the project website which was populated with information related to the description of each sites, photos, maps, and objectives of the project. For the Maltese sites, the infrastructures adjoining the catacombs made it easier to implement interpretation programmes. Infrastructural works were carried out on the 1950s farmhouse to transform it into an orientation centre. As soon as these works were finished, the rooms were furnished with computer equipment, some for audio-visual presentations and others for curators, gallery site officers and front-office staff.

*Figure 4.8 – The conversion of Ta' Bistra farmhouse into a heritage orientation centre
(source: author)*

One of the activities of the Malta Tourism Authority was to engage experts in 3D documentation by scanning the site and creating a 3D full immersed navigation program (or simulator), which could be used by individuals who, due to physical impairments or psychological conditions such as claustrophobia, are not able to access these restricted spaces. Following the successful completion of the 3D scanning of Saint Augustine's Catacombs, computer equipment was purchased and installed in one of the halls at the Ta' Bistra farmhouse. As part of the interpretation and educational programme, Heritage Malta used the 3D documentation of Saint Augustine's Catacombs to create a model of a section of this hypogeum to create a board game for schoolchildren (figure 4.8 – right). This board game included information cards related to the Maltese catacombs, the material culture retrieved at these sites and the communities living in Malta during the Long Late Antiquity.

The last work package of this project was related to the setting up of a communication and marketing plan to reach a wider audience – from academics to tourists. In order to reach this objective, the project team drafted a plan which saw the involvement of all partners on various media, such as television and radio. Publication of articles in community magazines was also an important method for communicating the efforts being made. A scientific publication entitled *Integrated management and promotion of archaeological sites in Ragusa and Malta* (2013) was one of the major outputs of Archaeotur (Fig 4.9). It contained 19 papers which dealt with five different themes: heritage education, heritage conservation, heritage tourism, heritage accessibility, and the archaeology of catacombs. All contributions discussed the works carried out under this project and presented the results. Therefore, this publication not only helped disseminate the studies completed under this project but also served as a detailed report for the excavation and other interventions carried out at the eleven sites. This deliverable furthermore conveyed an important message that many archaeological institutions, due to lack of funding, tend to delay the publication of archaeological findings and their presentation to the general public. This argument was put forward by the Superintendent of Cultural Heritage of Ragusa, Rosalba Panvini, who was asked to provide a Preface to this book. She highlighted the value of the swift and clear publication by scholars long active in the field of archaeology for years and other early

career researchers; the data offered an opportunity to update the archaeological record and hence present fresh information to the public (Panvini 2013:6).

*Figure 4.9 – Front cover of the Archaeotur publication
(source: Archaeotur Project archives)*

The last activity carried out under this work package was the participation of the consortium at the annual fair on archaeological tourism that takes place every year at Paestum, in Salerno, Italy. The Mediterranean Exchange of Archaeological Tourism is a fair that has been organised since 1998, the initial scope of which was (and, to a certain extent, still is) to exhibit the various cultural heritage destinations in the Mediterranean regions. The BMTA (Borsa Mediterranea del Turismo Archeologico) later evolved into an international event, which, apart from showcasing and promoting world heritage sites and their tourist-friendly environment, gave the opportunity to archaeological teams and heritage institutions to publicise their work, important archaeological discoveries or new technologies for visitor interpretation and presentation. In fact, the management created a specific sub-theme for the fair called the Archaeovirtual, where new technological platforms, either prototypes or ready to be launched on the market, were being integrated into the field of heritage interpretation. This activity took the

form of a competition and saw hundreds of private companies as well as early career researchers exhibiting.

Figure 4.10– The Archaeotur project management team standing in front of their stand which was set up at the Borsa Mediterranea del Turismo Archaeologico at Paestum (source: Archaeotur Project archives)

The award for the best overall stand during the 2012 BMTA edition was in fact won by the Archaeotur project team (Figure 4.10). The decision came after the judges agreed that design of the stand represented what a contemporary heritage interpretation centre should be like nowadays. Although compact, the design included: audio-visual material, exact replicas of artefacts exhibited in showcase, information panels, material for young and higher education students, and a 3D boot which projected the 3D laser scanning of Saint Augustine's Catacombs. In addition, the project team was responsible for one of the BMA conference parallel sessions. Here they presented five papers which dealt with: (i) the impetus provided by the project to the operators in Cultural tourism, (ii) the overall project objectives, (iii) some reflections on Maltese catacombs and research that has been carried out as part of the project, (iv) the necropolis of Ragusa and (v) the new ways of communicating heritage via 3D technology.

Figure 4.11 – The 3D boot which was set up inside the stand to pilot the model and technology applied to the catacombs in terms of documentation and visualisation (source: author)

Next I will evaluate the effectiveness of the outputs from the Archaeotur project in light of the seven principles set by the ICOMOS Charter for Cultural Heritage Interpretation and presentation. Each activity will be placed under the respective principle headings and an analysis will be carried out on whether this was executed according to the ICOMOS guideline document. Knowledge about the process of the works and the critical analysis of the same derives from the author, who was the Archaeotur Project Curator, and other projects delegates who discussed this during a focus group. Therefore the results of this exercise reflect the outcomes from the discussion which occurred during this meeting held on 30th November 2015.

4.3.1   Access and Understanding

The activities based on the concept of physical and intellectual accessibility of heritage interpretation and presentation consisted of: (i) Infrastructural and rehabilitation works to make all eleven sites safe for visiting, (ii) Coordination with education departments to provide the correct pedagogical resources onsite for schoolchildren, (iii) The acquisition of fifty audio guides and supporting IT infrastructure to provide information

in five different languages, and (iv) The development of a 3D interactive model which could be adopted as an alternative archaeological experience in case of individual who cannot visit the actual site.

This project, however, was not able to involve the general public during the restoration works and setting up of the interpretation programmes and therefore were not able to benefit from being able to discuss their perceptions of these underground burials sites. As the first principle of the ICOMOS Charter explains, this would have surely added extra value to the interpretation programme and 'stimulated further interest, learning, experience, and exploration' (2008:7) at grassroot level.

4.3.2   Information and Source

The heritage experts involved in this project came from different fields, such as archaeology, information technology, conservation, science, tourism, architecture and engineering as well as documentation and illustration. The outcome resulting from their collaboration was one which secured an important piece of heritage from being lost forever, for example the reutilisation of catacombs during modern period and the discovery and conservation of modern graffiti as evidence. Furthermore, the curators and the directors of excavations constantly engaged in informal discussions with individuals living near the archaeological sites in order to document their perception and their childhood story related to the catacombs. All these stories were documented, such as that mentioned in Chapter Two where a certain woman called Pauline used to go inside the catacombs with her friends to seek shelter from the scorching summer heat and play with the beads. Such stories were included in the interpretation programmes and audio-visual material on-site. The 3D laser scanning commissioned by the Malta Tourism Authority and monitored by curators of Heritage Malta enabled the documentation of the site in three dimensions and the model was used for interpretation.

An aspect perhaps neglected under this theme, as suggested by ICOMOS, was the decision not to include any information, such as photos or illustrations, on the sites prior

to conservation. Even though the state of conservation of these catacombs was extremely poor it would have represented another historical phase of the sites. In this sense, the interpretation programme, which emphasised the reutilisation of the catacombs, failed in presenting narratives and pictures of the modern period (example WWII when people used catacombs as air raid shelters). The decision was also taken in light of the limited time available for desktop research.

4.3.3   Context and Setting

The audio visual presentation installed at Ta' Bistra orientation cover topics related to the religious, social, cultural significance of the catacombs. The project team presented data on how these sites have evolved to become an integral part of the culture and architecture of particular communities – such as the one in Rabat. For example, all houses in Rabat considered the underground funerary sites as part of their private houses, and used these spaces for domestic purposes (mainly for storage, as improvised workshops and to keep domestic animals).

Although the multi-period aspect of the sites is well displayed in the interpretation materials, the heritage experts failed to identify and present this onsite. In fact the areas used to raise domestic animals or as workshops were completely cleared and restored to their original state. It would have been appropriate if at least one chamber reflected this usage. This could have been done by installing mannequins or projecting role-plays of such activities on the walls of the chambers.

4.3.4   Authenticity

The infrastructural works carried on the eleven sites to improve their accessibility respected the original fabric of the late antique catacombs. All the interventions were reversible and, in most of the cases, the structures, such as walkways, were either free standing or composed of natural materials. In the case of the Saint Augustine's

Catacombs, intelligent illumination was needed and more than 300 meters of wiring had to be installed. In order to reduce the visual impact of this wiring, the Project team buried these wires under a small layer of special aggregate; this served to reduce the wear on the original floor of the catacomb. Therefore, technicians first installed a layer of geotextile material directly on the original floor, followed by the necessary wiring and electrical boxes. When the installation was ready, a few inches of non-abrasive aggregate was laid and compacted. This formed not only the most feasible solution from a conservation point of view but also the cheapest when compared to typical wooden walk-ways made of high-resistant decking and surgical-grade stainless steel. The walking paths installed at the Sicilian sites respected the rural environmental setting in which the necropolis were located; the railings were fabricated out of non-processed wood to give a natural look to the supporting structures.

Installing digital interpretation equipment at the Sicilian sites was almost impossible due to logistical problems, such as the lack of electrical power supply. Thus, information boards had to be drilled near each burial site. The absence of electricity also meant that the sites could only be visited only at specific times of the day, that is, during full daylight. Furthermore, this posits health and safety issues since some sites are without any gates or gate-keepers watching over, not to mention the risks of these being vandalised.

4.3.5 Sustainability

The interpretation and presentation programmes created as part of Archaeotur project were under the responsibility of Heritage Malta (for the Maltese Partners) and the Superintendence of Culture Heritage of Ragusa (for the Sicilian part). The Project consortium decided that these specific institutions should be responsible for such activity after general agreement that both had the necessary human and financial resources to continue updating the information and maintaining the interpretation equipment. Heritage Malta, in fact, has its own IT department who is responsible for this. The Superintendence of Cultural Heritage of Ragusa has fewer resources; however, it has secured the sustainability of such interpretation and maintenance of the

infrastructure through a Memorandum of Understanding with the Forestry Department of Ragusa who is responsible of the Ragusan countryside. This department has agreed to include this work as part of its official tasks.

Although the Sicilian project partners have secured a sustainable future for the infrastructure created through Archaeotur, they failed in setting up a plan to provide further training and possible employment related to interpretation and custodianship of these sites. During the focus group, it transpired that not even a minimal fee was being charged to tourists who visit the sites and therefore there were no opportunities to increase revenue. Therefore, there is no return on investment whatsoever either from a financial or human resources point of view. With regards to the Maltese scenario, the visits to the catacombs were integrated with visits to other major sites such as the Catacombs of St Paul. These were being promoted as special tours with a gallery site officer responsible for the opening of the sites and distribution of audio guides installed at the entrance of the same catacombs.

Sustainability of project implementation was a major issue of the Sicilian partners. Even though discussions are being held on a yearly basis to avoid losing the fruition acquired through this heritage project, the continuous changes of staff in the public sector is not helping in the stability of decisions being taken in this regard.

4.3.6   Inclusiveness

Saint Augustine's Catacombs was among those sites that required extensive infrastructural works. It located in an urban context, abutting two private houses on each side. The roof of the main chamber seems to have collapsed years ago and was later replaced by a roof made out of steel beams and slabs during the 1920s. Due to the high level of humidity, the steel beams were in a very bad state and had to be replaced for safety reasons. Architects and heritage managers decided to recreate the same type of roof constructed in the 1920s to show the intervention made in different periods. This offered a great challenge for workers, however, who had to carry out the interventions with the minimum impact to the adjacent houses which were still

habitable. The interventions were a success and no damage was made to third-party structures. Another issue which had to be dealt with during the course of works was the identification of multiple openings leading to private properties and their permanent closure. As already explained, catacombs were being used as air-raid shelters during WWII and therefore houses-owners used to connect their houses with these underground chambers. This intervention, once again, is visible and was included in the interpretation of the sites.

The development of the interpretation programme envisaged under the Archaeotur project was among the last in the order of activities to be carried out. This posed serious time constraints due to administrative problems encountered during the course of the infrastructural works, such as appeals from bidders whose offers were not accepted and the delay in the issuance of development permits. All this impacted on the time-table of works including developing the interpretation and presentation programme. Although a proper programme has been set up – one which caters for a wide range of visitors – during its development not all stakeholders were consulted. In fact, the cultural tourist operators as well as educators were never approached. A considerable amount of time was required to organise a public consultation with all these parties, and according to the project team such activity was out of reach. In this sense, the project failed in integrating the knowledge of important operators who visit these sites with different audiences and who may have provided relevant insights on the way catacomb should be presented. These narratives would have added great value to the interpretation of these sites.

4.3.7   Research, Training and Evaluation

The interpretation equipment installed as part of Archaeotur in Malta and in Sicily, such as information kiosks/digital information panels and audio guides have the capability to change the information uploaded on them remotely. Although there has been no need to update the information following the closure of the project, since no further research has been carried out on the sites in question, Heritage Malta team and the Giritravel srl,

who are responsible for this IT equipment, are in direct contact with the IT administrators who will effect necessary changes should the need arise.

As discussed above, the project team had limited time to interact with the general public prior to the creation of the interpretation programmes. However, even though the administrative issues have now been resolved and there is no time constraint due to strict reporting deadlines, the institution responsible for the content management have still not engaged in public consultation in order to include important content not considered during project implementation. There was also a discontinuation in the research envisaged following the completion of the project, namely the analysis of the material found inside Saint Augustine's Catacombs and which consisted of several beads from a gold earring. Sources from Heritage Malta confirmed that these analyses have not been carried out two years after the project's completion due to a mistake in the register of artefacts retrieved from the site. Such information would be extremely important for the interpretation ambit since it would shed light on the religion of the communities buried in these catacombs. In fact, Roman law prohibited any type of gold items to be buried with the deceased (Mears 1882:589) and therefore an early dating of this artefact would give an opportunity for different interpretations. When it comes to onsite training for gallery site officers and other heritage employees on the development and good standards of the interpretation programmes, this has never featured in the project plan. This issue is discussed in more detail later in this thesis (see Section 6.7) where the results of a questionnaire with heritage employees is analysed.

The results concluded from the analysis of both the project review and the focus group reveal that Archaeotur was, overall, a very worthwhile project which employed the best practices of cultural heritage interpretation as part of its programme. It was successful in most of its activities as it has been confirmed by the technical evaluators of the European Commission following the submission of final technical reporting and site visits. A common problem that could be identified in the analysis of this project was the delay in setting up the management structure and the identification and engagement of heritage experts. This resulted in a delay in research activities which led to a request for a project extension. The bureaucratic procedures which characterised the administration of this project were also an aspect which affected the smooth process of implementation. Although sustainability of these sites was a high priority for the project

partners, following the completion of the project, this has lost a lot of momentum in terms of the continuation of research and interpretation of catacombs.

The financial and administrative crisis which hit the Sicilian Island since 2007 led to a halt in the procedures of transferring the responsibility of the catacombs of Mezzagnone to the management of the Parco Archeologico di Camarina. Members of the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage of Ragusa explained that as regulators of archaeological affairs, their office does not have the necessary competences to operate these sites and therefore, if such a situation persists, there is the risk that the sites that have already been rehabilitated under Archaeotur will fall into neglect once again. One of the archaeologist involved in this project claimed that *'… la grave situazione di crisi della Regione Siciliana non ha permesso alcuna progettualità ulteriore sui siti demaniali come Mezzagnone in procinto di passare nelle competenze del Parco Archeologico di Camarina'*

In conclusion, even though there is still uncertainty regarding how some of the Sicilian sites will be sustained and managed, this project has passed an important message (on funerary sites of the late antique period) to local and foreign authorities – one which obscured the idea of ignoring archaeological sites which are 'much of the same'. Presently these sites can be visited by the general public and that is a crucial aspect in heritage, but what is perhaps most important is that new distribution of visitors over the new sites is alleviating the problem of mass visiting which was a deterrent for the conservation of other important archaeological sites in the areas covered by Archaeotur Project.

4.4 Current and New Routes for the Interpretation of early Christian Heritage in Malta

In the last three years there have been at least two key factors which have overcome the traditional way of interpreting early Christian sites and hypogea of long Late Antiquity. These factors are: (i) the type of space specifically dedicated to the presentation of the material culture and other interpretational resources integrated onsite, and (ii) the use of latest computer technologies in documentation. These factors are frequently mentioned in academic literature. For example, in 2005, Angelo Beraldin

and his colleagues presented a study on 3D technology as a tool for cultural heritage interpretation and entertainment where they clearly demonstrated how this latest technology can be used for underground spaces to support multimedia heritage interpretation programmes. The authors discuss work carried out at the Byzantine crypt of Santa Cristina in Apulia as a case-study (2005:110). In their work focusing on the presentation of archaeological sites in Hungary and the visitors centre, Jerem *et al.* argue how 'the structure [of a visitor centre] must be integrated into the protected archaeological and natural site, and secondly, the characteristic design must create an emblematic building. In addition to its role in heritage protection, education and information flow, an archaeological park is obviously also a tourist attraction, therefore its architecture and interior design are of high importance' (2004:98). These examples are a few among the plethora of literature available on the important factors which should be considered nowadays when interpreting cultural heritage. It is important to point out, however, that there is very limited literature which brings these factors together and integrates them into one holistic approach to heritage interpretation. Although by the time this thesis is completed other key sites will probably be implementing advanced plans to create state of the art heritage interpretation centres, next we can discuss the methods employed in the Ta' Bistra and Saint Paul's Catacombs project to serve as a model for other bigger projects in areas of the Mediterranean, such as Sabratha and Rome, where there is a concentration of underground hypogea dating to Late Antiquity.

4.5   The Ta' Bistra Catacombs Orientation Centre and Saint Paul's Catacombs Visitor Centre

In the last two years, two important heritage centres, Ta' Bistra in Mosta and St Paul's in Rabat, were opened to the public as an effort to improve the visitors' experience at Malta's early Christian heritage sites. These activities were all part of different European projects and works were carried in tandem with Heritage Malta's master-plan for the interpretation of late Roman catacombs in Rabat.

Figure 4.12 – Saint Paul's visitor's centre (Source: author)

These two establishments are sometimes referred to as the Catacombs Interpretation Centres since they contain a corpus of information exhibited in ways to facilitate the understanding of cultural heritage to the visitors. However, scholars argue that the definition of the word 'interpretation' is not always used correctly and therefore 'interpretation centre' often becomes a misnomer (Tilden 1957; Beck and Cable 2002; Ward and Wilkinson 2006). Freeman Tilden, for example, argues that the correct definition of interpretation (of heritage) is one which provides 'an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information' (1977:8). In an attempt to clarify his argument, the author sets six principles that should define the meaning of interpretation in light of the heritage exhibits:

i.   *Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.*

ii. *Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.*

iii. *Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.*

iv. *The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.*

v.   *Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.*

vi.   *Interpretation addressed to children (say up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program.*

(Tilden 1957:9)

Manuals of procedures have also been published to guide heritage managers in planning interpretative infrastructures, such as the ones by Harper Ferry Centre and Izquierdo Tugas et al. (eds.) published in 1998 and 2005 respectively. Both documents recognise the importance of involving all stakeholders during the planning stage. The authors argue that consultation should be an integral part of planning to avoid problems with operations and installation of interpretation material at the implementation stage. Different stakeholders may assist in determining the type of experience visitors seek – such as knowledge, attitudes, behaviour and sensory experiences.

The document entitled *Planning for Interpretation and Visitors Experience* (Harper Ferry Centre 1998) explains how knowledge must be accompanied by interpretative themes; however, curators must also take into consideration the fact that people might decide to visit a site just to acquire information without seeking further experiences and therefore the infrastructure should allow for such flexibility. In addition, interpretative planners should set clear goals and make sure all the objectives can be measured and evaluated (1998:16-20). Teams should explore specific elements which support the message – these can be either digital or real. Audio-visual resources, for example, should project a proper chronology of events while imposing a sense of realism and creating an emotional impact on the visitor. Good audio-visuals and other multimedia resources may generate the right atmosphere – one which may alter the mood of the visitor in a positive way. Personal services are another important aspect in interpretation. Although the introduction and constant development of new technologies in this field are adding value to visitor centres, the physical presence of a heritage interpreter or a guide may break the impersonal feeling which 'haunts' most interpretation centres. The advantage of having an ad hoc guide is multifaceted. In fact, this can contribute to the monitoring of the information and interpretation being provided onsite and updating as necessary. At the same time, guides

can gauge their explanation according to the audience and so resolve issues of having to install multiple interpretation media in the same visitor centre (Harper Ferry Centre 1998:34-36).

Tilden has argued that interpretative information should not be reduced or drastically scaled down for younger audiences but curators should rather explore ways of simplifying the same interpretation (Tilden 1957). Harper Ferry Centre's manual also refers to the various publications dealing with the specific sites and how these may add value to the interpretation centre; one should not forget that among normal visitors and schoolchildren, sites are often visited by tertiary education students and academics that might look for specific information and interpretation of the same sites.

Prior to the construction and rehabilitation of Ta' Bistra and St Paul's Visitors' Centres, the presentation of material culture available and of archaeological features was purely descriptive. This was partly because there was not enough space and Heritage Malta was not ready to invest in an interpretation programme without having an adequate area in which to implement this (D Cardona, pers. comm., 24 November 2015). Therefore, the limited exhibits available at the reception of Saint Paul's Catacombs were not able to raise the need for further discussion among the visitors. Another core problem was the lack of research in the field of early Christian heritage. In recent years, funds have been secured from the EU with the goal of conducting archaeological research on catacombs which could, in turn, produce enough data to update the archaeological record and feed information to the visitor centre. This gave the opportunity to curators to incorporate the information in different interpretation media such as audio visual, permanent exhibition of artefacts, tactile models of the sites, and educational interactive games to schoolchildren.

Figure 4.13 – One of the permanent exhibits at the St Pauls visitor centre (source: Heritage Malta)

The short documentaries on Malta's early Christian sites projected in each of the visitor's centres contain reconstructions of the funerary traditions of the late Roman communities on the Island, such as the re-enactment of the *refrigerium* (funerary meal) held inside the catacombs in honour of the deceased. Actors were engaged and a semi-professional production was set up to come up with real scenes of this ancient tradition. The narration which accompanies this re-enactment on screen is one which drives the visitor to imagine how the environment must have been 2000 years ago (such as the smell of the decomposing bodies…). This feature is in line with what Tilden discussed about the real experience. In fact, he argues that, unless visitors physically experience what is being explained, they will not take up the necessary knowledge or remember the heritage experience (1957:22). Both at the Saint Paul's Catacombs and Ta' Bistra Visitor's Centre this aspect has been catered for by creating sensory halls that offer a 'real' experience of what the environment in the catacombs during the 4th century looked, sounded, and smelled like. Furthermore, the information discusses not only what happened in ancient times but it provides parallels to funerary rituals nowadays and how did they evolve.

Figure 4.14 – Screen shot from the audio visual clip on the late Roman funerary ritual projected at Saint Paul's and Ta' Bistra visitor centres (source: Heritage Malta)

When Tilden discusses interpretation and how this should not be a tool for instruction but for provocation (1957:9), he partly refers to the objectivity of explaining the meaning of heritage. For example, one of the main features at Saint Paul's Interpretation Centre is that visitors can walk over a glass floor and see an uncovered tomb which pre-dates the late Roman burial complex. The importance of this tomb lies in the fact that its typology is different from the hypogea of the late Roman period. Its close proximity to the catacombs was crucial in confirming that the late Roman catacombs evolved from a previous Phoenician/Punic burial tradition and not specifically with the introduction of early Christianity in Malta. This fact may provoke the need for more questions among the visitors, especially from those who visit the site specifically for religious purposes. These are the facts that have been brought to light by scientific studies and are now being presented and interpreted to the public. In this regard the curators of Saint Paul's Catacombs were successful in exhibiting and interpreting a much more 'real' picture.

Figure 4.15 – A replica of an articulated skeleton placed inside the original Phoenician/Punic tomb and covered by a walking glass (Source: Heritage Malta)

Another common aspect of these two projects was the creation of a space for learning at primary education level. This was done in order to assist the education sector to comply with the Maltese National Curriculum Framework (NCF), which stresses the value of first-hand experiences that schoolchildren must acquire regarding their cultural and national heritage. This document, together with other academic literature, such as the one on heritage site activities by Yosanne Vella (2005), recommends that such experiences are obtained through visits, exhibitions, hands-on activities and games (Ministry of Education and Employment 2012:52; Vella 2005). Both at Ta' Bistra and Saint Paul's visitor centres, rooms were dedicated specifically for schoolchildren, with the intention of creating an environment where children could acquire knowledge through play. An example of this is the board game installed in the Education Room at Ta' Bistra; this space was furnished with low, coloured chairs and specialised edgeless furniture which makes it safe for very young and primary schoolchildren. In addition, adapted sanitary facilities designed specifically for children were installed. Similar installations have been carried out at Saint Paul's Catacombs. Such amenities are important to help teachers as well as parents to support their children to acquire good learning experiences through a dedicated infrastructure (Graham 2008:6). This, however, must be supported by other resources, such as worksheets and specialised books and activities, otherwise the value of the heritage infrastructure dedicated to young individuals will be lost. A detailed review of the available resources comes in Chapter Seven.

The main problem with Malta's early Christian heritage was, until recently, related to its presentation and interpretation. Different stakeholders, such as operators of cultural and religious tourism as well as school teachers, had frequently expressed their disappointment in the lack of interpretation facilities and a space where visitors can orient themselves on this subject. With the above-mentioned projects, which saw the rehabilitation and construction of new visitor centre, this issue has been addressed. Although the planning of this infrastructure offered a notable challenge due to the nature of the site and its archaeology, a multidisciplinary team was able to solve most of the issues which arose during the construction phase – for example, the adjustment and reformulation of architectural plans when tombs were discovered during removal of soil to build the foundations of Saint Paul's visitors' centre and, perhaps the biggest challenge, to make Ta' Bistra Orientation Centre fully accessible to wheelchair users (even at catacomb level). Following evaluation of the new characteristics in light of the academic literature and guidelines set by scholars and practitioners in this field, it is evident that these new spaces offer greater opportunities to implement interpretation programmes. These spaces included multimedia and sensory halls, educational rooms, lecture rooms and sanitary facilities. In addition, these sites are fully accessible to persons with physical impairments. Thus, it can be concluded that, finally, the Maltese catacombs are adequately accompanied by interpretation centres which are up to international standards.

4.5.1   3D Laser Scanning of the Saint Augustine Catacombs in Rabat, Malta – an example of virtual cultural heritage

The term ''virtual cultural heritage'' is generally accepted to mean: virtual reality (3D and 4D computational and computer graphics systems that support real-time, immersive, and interactive operations), employed specifically for the presentation, preservation, conservation, and documentation of natural and cultural heritage

(Cameron and Kenderdine 2007:10)

In the introduction to the book on virtual archaeology Colin Renfrew (1997) discusses the importance of a fast-growing field within cultural heritage, namely, Virtual Archaeology. The author praises the technological advancements made in the last years

and agrees to the integration between these new methods and archaeology; however, he raises several questions on how archaeology can benefit from such applications. He argues that 'what we cannot understand now, we will be able to comprehend later' (1997:9) – with this in mind, the topic of Virtual Archaeology should be given due importance so as to gather as much data as possible for future research.

More recently, Neil Silberman (2015) published an article on how modern technology, particularly Information Technology can contribute to cultural heritage and its public understanding. Here he puts forward an important argument linked to the reconstruction of important archaeological monuments that have been destroyed, either because of political conflict or due the poor state of conservation. Silberman discusses two examples: the first is the destruction of the Mostar Bridge in Sarajevo, and the second the detonation of the Buddhas of Bamiyan by the religious extremist group Taleban in March of 2001 (2005:9). In June 2015 a group of people used 3D laser projections to re-create the original monument in the empty cavities of the site. Although this was only for one night, the project team was able to show that latest technology can help in the appreciation of the world heritage, even if some of the most important sites have been the victim of destruction due to political conflict (Russon, 2015).

In most of the cases the 3D documentation of ancient monuments and artefacts is carried out to assist researchers to better understand the sites and in helping heritage managers setting up interpretation programmes, such as in the case of the Saint Augustine Catacombs. Here, the 3D documentation was commissioned to tackle six main objectives:

(i)   To renew the interest and understanding of the catacomb.

(ii)   To serve as a tool for conservators and curators in preserving the underground site.

(iii)   To allow for a detailed analysis of the surfaces without spending a considerable amount of time underground due to the low light intensity and high level of humidity.

(iv)   To identify possible wall paintings and inscriptions.

(v)   To record the ancient and modern graffiti as well as tool marks on the surfaces of the chambers.

(vi)   To create an accurate interpretation and presentation tool accessible to a wider audience.

The team used laser scanning technology and high definition panoramic photos. The special equipment recorded thousands of coordinates of the internal spaces. These coordinates, also known as point clouds, were then merged to create a wireframe structure on Computer Aided Design (CAD) software. The second part of the documentation was to photograph the surfaces of the chambers in high definition and 'wrap' the photos around the corresponding wireframe to produce surface texture such as the contour lines of the underground rock-cut cemetery.
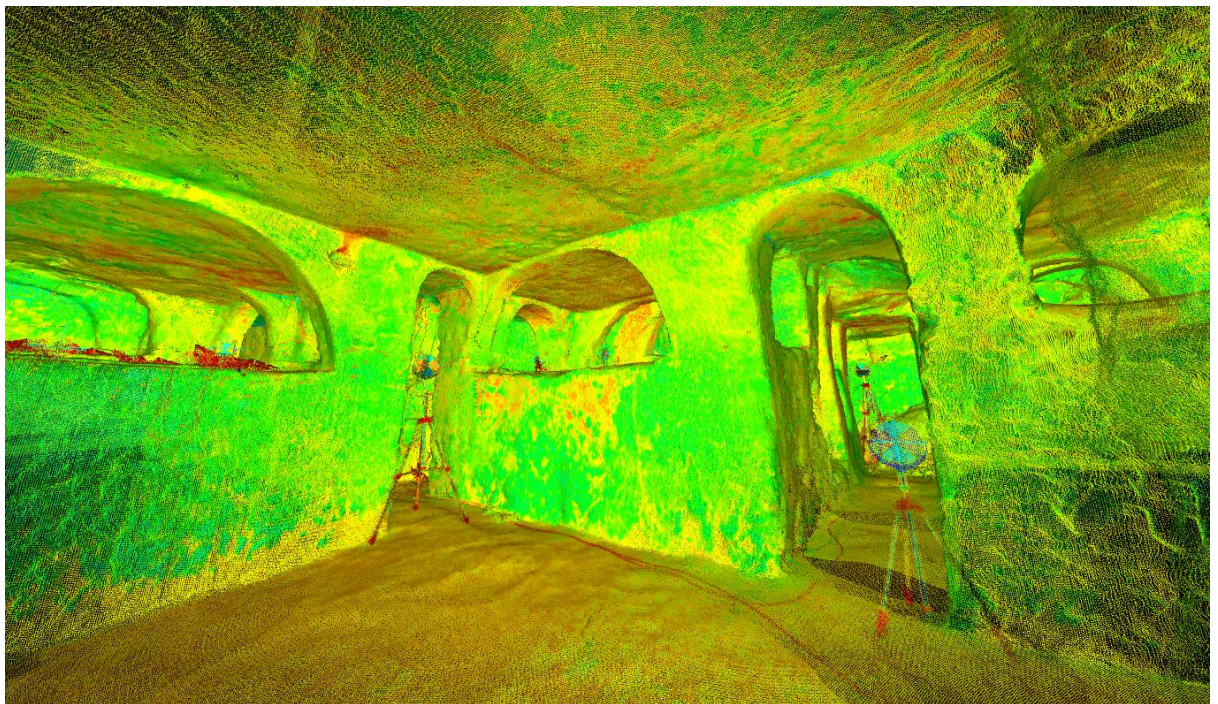
Figure 4.16 – Internal view of Saint Augustine's Catacombs composed of Point Cloud
(Source: Digitarca s.r.l)

The end result allowed users to examine the catacombs using different views, such as walk-through camera and outside-view. In addition, it was now possible to take measurements in a 3D platform, allowing for the insertion of sounds in various areas as well as the insertion of hotspots with different type of information media, such as text and audio-visuals (D'Ambruoso 2013:48-49). In this regard, the model is in no way static,

and, unlike what Barcelo (2007) argues in his article 'Automatic Archaeology: Bridging the Gap between Virtual Reality, Artificial Intelligence and Archaeology', this model is not a modern version of an artist's reconstruction in watercolours, such as those mentioned in previous chapters composed by Houel (1782) in his *Voyage pittoresque des isles de Sicile, de Malte et de Lipar*.
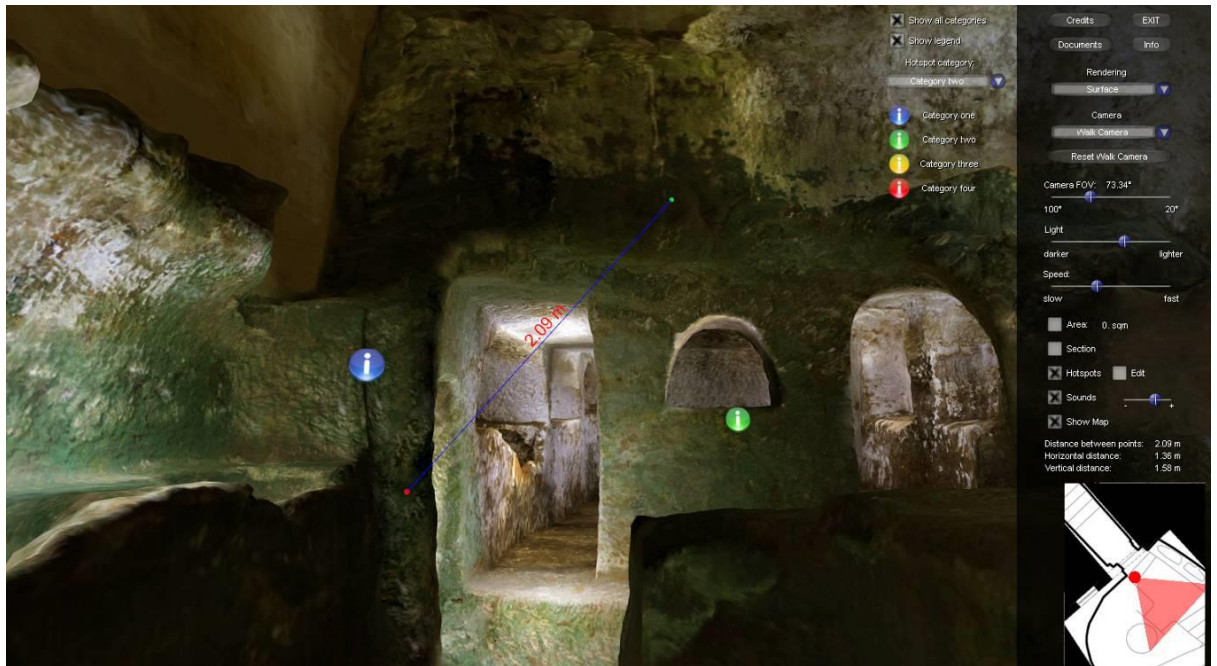
Figure 4.17 – View of the final computer model of Saint Augustine's Catacombs
(Source: Digitarca s.r.l)

Through this 3D documentation, Heritage Malta and the Malta Tourism Authority (who commissioned the works) have provided a multifaceted opportunity to archaeologists as well as the general public. First, the versatility of the model gives archaeologists and academics the possibility of comparing the underground structures with other local and foreign monuments. Although the programme itself was never meant to analyse the features, it was designed in a way to assist heritage professionals in doing so – such as the function of recording measurements, both from interior and exterior, and the superimposition of the site's extents on the overlying domestic architecture – and to determine the topographic relationship between other sites in the vicinity.

A most challenging decision was related to the full dissemination of the model - that is, whether the 3D model of the catacomb should be uploaded on a web-platform. Following discussions among the researchers of Heritage Malta, its IT section and

delegates of the Malta Tourism Authorities, it has been decided that only a small part of the catacomb would be available for online 3D navigation. This decision was taken after evaluating the consequences a full online projection would have had on the turnout of visitors of a newly restored site. It is important to point out that this decision was not taken on the basis of any outcomes from survey showing the negative impact on visitors' turnout to a site when this is projected in 3D on a web-platform or a strategy to increase the numbers of visitors. To date, the model has not been uploaded and the only way that visitors can make use of it is by visiting the Ta' Bistra Orientation Centre in Mosta.

4.6   Conclusion

Today's technology and advanced studies can offer a myriad of opportunities to the presentation and interpretation of cultural heritage. Such research is beneficial to the general public as well as to the academic field of public archaeology. The evaluation carried out on the Archaeotur Project and the Saint Paul's Catacombs project was done in light of the ICOMOS Charter for the Presentation and Interpretation of Cultural Heritage which pre-defines the rules before heritage managers set up interpretation programmes on or off-sites. Following a critical literature review on the same subject which complemented the outcomes of the two case studies, it can be highlighted that, in both cases, the activities carried out by the project research teams are in-line with international standards. In addition, it is important to point out that Malta's heritage operators employed some of the latest research methodologies (in an effort to produce interpretation programmes) on sites which often are considered difficult to present in view of the ethical and even spiritual implications they may bring. Both research teams managed to create a no-nonsense environment inside the respective interpretation centres - one which includes educational as well as recreational facilities which helps improve the visitor experience for the whole duration of the visit.

The next chapter will discuss how the new approaches employed in heritage interpretation, such as the dedicated infrastructure, are affecting the tourism operation sector and the work carried out within this sector to improve the quality of Malta's heritage interpretation and presentation, particularly at the catacombs.

CHAPTER 5

THE MALTESE CATACOMBS AS HERITAGE ATTRACTIONS

5.1   Introduction - Archaeology and Tourism

Archaeology and Tourism are two components which may not seem complementary due to the intrinsic value of cultural heritage sites and the demanding and diverse needs of the tourism industry. This is, however, a misconception which is 'as old as heritage tourism itself' (Ashworth 2009:79). It is a known fact that cultural heritage sites around the world have attracted local and foreign tourists for centuries (McManamon, 2000:6). Nowadays, cultural heritage and tourism are considered to be 'inextricably linked' (McGettigan & Rozenkiewicz 2013:1). The so-called Grand Tour of the 17th-18th centuries was perhaps the first phase of what could be considered as the dawn of heritage tourism (Richards, 1996:11). Yet even prior to the mid-17th century, there were other occasions when individuals engaged in visits to ancient sites either for curiosity, religious purposes or cultural admiration. In fact, the 2nd century AD saw Roman elites travelling to Greece and Egypt to explore – and take away – art, architecture, and ideas (Feifer 1985:15). From the reign of Constantine, the ancient biblical sites of the Holy Land became what could be termed 'tourist foci' for aristocrats, bishops, kings, nuns and others (Richards 1996:11).

During the Early Middle Ages, many pilgrims turned their attention to the Roman catacombs. At the end of the 12th century, the Roman Catholic Church, which by this time was still trying to resolve the West-East schism, encouraged its followers to make pilgrimages to places which shaped its religious values. Places like Rome, the Holy Land and Santiago de Compostela were among the most visited places (Feifer 1985:30). This was among the earliest forms of cultural heritage tourism.

In the late 18th century, the purpose of The Grand Tour changed from an educational cultural resource offered to or sought by young aristocratic students to a more leisure-oriented type of activity practised by the social class of professionals or middle class (Towner 1985:300). With the exception of the German tourism market which, in the mid-20th century still offered specialised cultural tours or 'study tours', the rest of the European tourist operators were offering a completely different type of experience to their clients, namely one which increasingly had to do only with seeking out the warm and stable Mediterranean climate (Roth & Langemeyer 1996).

This latter assertion is supported by the Malta National Report published in 2002 by the Maltese Government, which reveals that the influx of visitors experienced by the Maltese Islands during the early 1990s exceeded one million per year and that the main concerns related to the negative impact produced by the large number of tourists were about 'the overcrowded beaches, traffic congestion and noise pollution, increased demand for land on which to build hotels and tourist facilities, as well as increased production of solid and liquid waste.' (Government of Malta, Malta National Report 2002:14; Markwick 2008:230). Peculiarly, but significantly, no mention is made regarding the protection of cultural heritage in this report.

Prior to this Malta National Report, an important paper on the conservation of Maltese cultural heritage and cultural tourism was published in the *Architectural Heritage Series* number 22 (1992). The paper by Anthony Bonanno was presented during the European colloquium with the theme 'Archaeological sites in Europe: conservation, maintenance and enhancement'. He discussed the mutual impact between archaeological sites and cultural tourism (1992:57). Here Bonanno, in the capacity of archaeologist and academic advisor at the Foundation for International Studies, argued how Malta had, since the early 1960s (a time widely recognised as the kick-start of mass tourism industry in Malta), been exploiting its heritage sites for mass-tourism without investing in the basic needs of these sites (1992:59). He proposed a number of priorities regarding to the preservation, presentation and enhancement of archaeological sites, namely:

- Preservation in the best possible condition of the archaeological site, a condition as near as possible to its original.

- Evaluation of the archaeological site both as an individual monument and as an integral component of the national heritage, as well as of the common universal heritage of mankind.

- Elaboration of the archaeological site and its contents into an organic, comprehensive picture of the history of the human development through scientific analysis, research and publication.

- Site presentation to the public for educational purposes as a source of pleasure and enjoyment and as a source of personal and cultural enrichment.

(Bonanno 1992:57-58)

Figure 5.1 - Visitors at Saint Agatha's Catacombs being conducted by the author

(Source: Peter J. Shields)

These four objectives, which offer a solution to the issues of commodification – or unsustainable commercialisation – of heritage sites, recur in almost all literature dealing with archaeology and tourism published in the present century. David Pacifico, for example, in his 2012 work on the impacts of tourist on archaeological sites argues that the concept of public archaeology and its approach towards the presentation of archaeological sites to the general public provide a warning on the risks of developing an archaeological site for visiting purposes if no proper management or financial plans are made to protect the site after its development as a heritage site (2012:1597). Pacifico states that a proper plan must not only refer to the site as an intrinsic cultural heritage resource but should also incorporate the general public and other stakeholders who need to be 'trained' in how to respect such archaeological sites (2012:1598). In preliminary research conducted on the development of archaeological sites for tourism purposes in Belize, Central America, Ramsey and Everitt argue that the growing cultural and heritage tourism, although important for sustaining archaeological sites from different aspects (such as human resource and maintenance infrastructure), 'is not

without impacts' (2008:909). The authors base their research on Mayan cultural heritage sites, to which millions of visitors flock every year. They also highlight the visitor expectations from such sites and the potential knowledge gained during visits. However, the actual questionnaire they present fails to ask specific questions related to the methods by which the information is provided to visitors and its accuracy.

'The Impacts of Tourism Development on the Archaeological Site of Petra and Local Communities in Surrounding Villages' is a further important paper which tackles issues of site conservation in light of the fast-growing tourism industry in Jordan. Mustafa and Tayeh (2011:94) argue that it is of highest importance to raise awareness among tourists and local visitors in order to reduce the negative impact which is mainly constituted by 'wear and tear'. They discuss ways to lessen or prevent damage to heritage by supplying heritage sites with interpretational methods that focus on or recognise the behaviour of tourists when accessing heritage or by conducting short presentations before the visit.

A meeting held between heritage experts in 2002 in Ma'agan, Israel, dealing with the management of archaeological sites, produced several guidelines and recommendations for other heritage experts on best practices. *'Management Plans for Archaeological Sites: A World Heritage Template'* covers various topics such as proper excavation, conservation, monitoring and maintenance of the sites, presentation and interpretation, tourism and visitor infrastructure (Cleere 2010:4-12). Although of high importance for professionals in the heritage field, this 'manual' is unsuccessful in merging the issues of archaeology, tourism and conservation. In fact, each recommendation is separate from the other and does not refer directly to the problems which may arise from other activities listed in the same document, such as the direct impact of tourism and visitor facilities on heritage sites.

The topic of tourism, archaeology and conservation has been discussed with regards the major archaeological site of Pompeii in Italy (Fig. 5.2). Wallace-Hadrill's article 'Presenting Pompeii: Steps towards Reconciling Conservation and Tourism at an Ancient Site' (2013) discusses the impact here of mass-tourism, arguing that 'The principal use of presentation is to communicate the history, values and significance of a site with its various audiences, but it can also help mitigate the negative impacts caused by visitors. The relationship between tourism and conservation is, however, often antagonistic.'

(2013:116). The study, summarising the preliminary results of a doctoral research project, recommended ways to improve various aspects of the visitor experience at Pompeii while at the same time reducing concomitant negative impacts. Ideas are offered on site presentation and on information given to different types of visitors, and unlike other studies, he considers the behaviour of tourist guides vis-à-vis site conservation and manages to portray a clear picture of this situation. However, Wallace-Hadrill rather seems to skirt around the issue of the knowledge of tourist guides and the type of information they provide to their audiences, by simply referring to the recommendations made by UNESCO – namely 'the service provided by guides should be constantly monitored' (Wallace-Hadrill 2013:127).

Figure 5.2 - Mass tourism in Pompeii: only partially 'controlled' and not hugely informed on-site (Source: www.independent.co.uk)

Although Archaeology and Tourism could be considered as being on the verge of (a) common ground, a holistic approach towards 'Archaeological Tourism' as a complete subject leaves much to be desired. In fact, the literature dealing with this topic is surprisingly patchy and issues important for the better understandings of Archaeological Tourism are generally mutually exclusive. An example of this emerges from Omneya Khairy El-Sharkawy's article (2007), which discusses how, with the increasing number of licensed tourist guides every year to cater for the flow of visitors to Egyptian heritage sites, it is extremely important to evaluate their knowledge from time to time. The self-administered questionnaires that the author distributed to the tourist guides posed

fairly simple questions related to methods of presenting information and guiding. Nonetheless, El-Sharkawy's research model can still be applied in future research and contribute towards a more holistic approach to archaeological tourism.

Also available is 'Il Turismo Archeologico come esperienza 'sensibile' metodologie e tecnologie per la valorizzazione con iPhone/smartphone dei beni culturali', in which, Ronc, Masetto and Varisella argue that recent archaeological discoveries have increased awareness on sustainable archaeological tourism, as well as on the public presentation and interpretation of heritage sites (2011:123). The authors discuss a recent development in computer technology, augmented reality (Fig. 5.3), and how this can contribute towards a better visitors' experience while at the same time potentially decreasing the visual impact of on-site information panels. Similarly, Stuart Eve's paper (2012) 'Augmenting Phenomenology: Using Augmented Reality to Aid Archaeological Phenomenology in the Landscape', considers how this new technology might enrich the tourist experience and help to 'explore past experience or approach archaeological research questions' (Eve 2012:594), with the latter feeding directly into the quality of information given to tourists as well as school children to these archaeological sites.

In summary, the academic literature on tourism and archaeology seems to revolve around three main components: conservation, the presentation of sites, and the impact that the development of archaeological sites may have on the local community. Although these components are of major importance for a continuous audit of archaeological tourism, other notable issues are given less weight in the scholarly literature. Some of these issues that have already been hinted at above include: the knowledge of the tourist guides (both from an informational and conservation point of view), the knowledge of the cultural heritage employees who are responsible for the day-to day running of the sites, the pedagogical aspect of archaeological sites, and the level of information which visitors take with them from archaeological sites. Below we focus on the first issue mentioned above, namely tourist guides' knowledge and on aspects related to the provision of cultural heritage information to visitors and the perception of licensed tourist guides on the means of interpretation in Malta's heritage sites. The Rabat catacombs and the Maltese early Christian heritage are used as a case study in Sections 5.4 and 5.5.

5.2   Archaeological Tourism as Niche Tourism in Malta

'..archaeological tourism and its components is a niche tourism category subsumed into the heritage tourism that, due to the tourists' interests and typology, is a constituent of a wider term - cultural tourism.'

(McGettigan & Rozekiewicz 2013:121)

The term 'archaeological tourism' is commonly interchanged with 'cultural heritage tourism' or 'cultural tourism' (McGettigan & Rozekiewicz 2013:120). Visitors engaging in such activities may be interested in both archaeology and the culture of the place which they intend to visit. Although similar, and not mutually exclusive, the by-products of culture and archaeology may be quite different. Tourists can experience a culture of place or of a community but not necessarily supporting its future; however, an archaeology tourist can contribute to the archaeology of a place by visiting the sites, paying a fee which will contribute to its management and conservation and even excavation.

'Niche tourism', is meanwhile a concept which was introduced a decade ago in order to categorise the context in which tourists visit a place (Robinson & Novelli 2005). When tourism became widespread and accessible to a majority of individuals around the globe (due chiefly to improved, quicker and cheaper ways of transportation and networks), cities and remote places experienced a flow of visitors which later became to be known as 'mass' tourism. This boom in visitors, as in the case of the Maltese Islands, was not always expected and caught small islands and places of heritage interest in difficult situations, often with very limited resources to cater for such numbers, and this resulted in a disorganised tourism management (Markwick 2008). Recognising tourism trends and tourists' preferences enables tourism and heritage operators to improve their experience via a better product. For example, as early as 1905, the curator of the Maltese Museum of Antiquities, Sir Temi Zammit, noticed that public interest in Malta's heritage was already very high and he hoped that this 'will not readily die out' (Zammit 1905:E3). In fact, in the same year, Zammit informed the Governor of Malta that a vast collection had been (duly) set up and the museum was ready to be opened to the public.

In his subsequent Museum Annual Reports and as early as 1910, the curator registered the number of individuals who visited accessible archaeological sites. Where possible, Zammit divided the numbers into two, namely those who paid for entrance and those who accessed the sites free of charge (1910:15). Although there is no concrete information regarding who accessed the sites for free – one would assume that local visitors and dignitaries where not charged for viewing their heritage - and the rest may have been foreign tourists who arrived in Malta. In fact, the number of visitors registered in the 1910 report clearly shows that the majority were admitted for free: only 1,454 visitors out of a total of 5,709 paid entry. However, the figures for paid admissions in following Museum Annual Reports kept increasing; in fact, by 1929, there was an overall increase of more than 50% (Zammit 1929:10).

Figure 5.3 – Museum Annual Report 1905 (Source: Heritage Malta)

Today, the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA), which was set up in 1999 by the Malta Travel and Tourism Service Act (Government of Malta 2015), is responsible for the analysis of in-bound tourism. It conducts general surveys to determine the purpose of visits. In the last five years, the yearly number of tourists exceeded 1.5 million. It is reported that more than 75% (fig. 5.4) now visit historical and archaeological sites (Malta Tourism Authority 2015:5). Heritage Malta, the governmental agency which operates the archaeological sites, generates more detailed information and takes stock of the number of visitors per archaeological and historical site. Since 2010, more than one million local and foreign visitors registered at Heritage Malta sites each year. Among these are Saint Paul's Catacombs, which reached a peak of visitors of approximately 74,000 in the years 2010, 2011 and 2012. Oddly, 2013 saw a drastic fall in the number of visitors to this early

Christian site by 20,000; however, recent statistics reveal that the numbers recovered to 51,000 in 2014 (Heritage Malta Annual Reports 2010-2014).
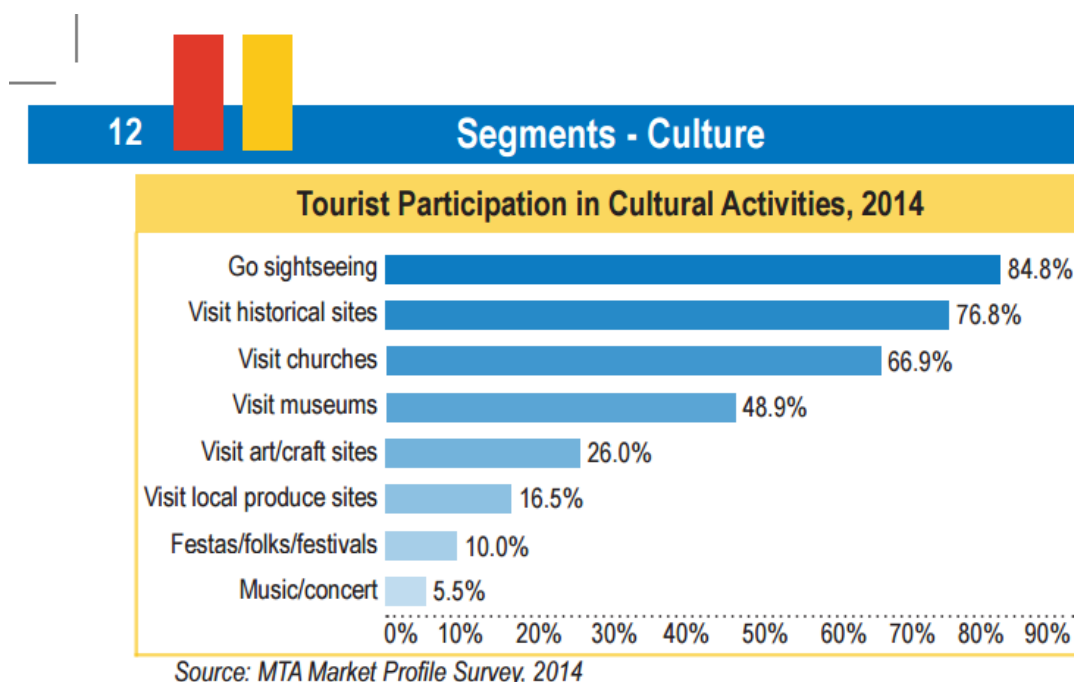
Figure 5.4 – Malta Tourism Authority Survey on the tourists' preferences in 2014
(Source: Malta Tourism Authority)

Importantly, these figures reveal that archaeological tourism in Malta is one of the major touristic products foreign visitors prefer over the '*Sea, Sun and Sand*' product. It cannot be denied, though, that the Maltese climate is still an important asset in Maltese tourism and, to a certain extent, one can never rule out this aspect from tourism and heritage research. However, it is also true that in recent years, the public and private sectors have invested millions of Euros into making Malta's top heritage sites accessible [18]. This was not only done as a way of preserving Malta's heritage – as stated by the Cultural Heritage Act of 2002 – but also to cater for constantly increasing site visitors and hence to secure a self-sustainable, financially-viable future for Malta's cultural heritage.

Therefore, the benefits of archaeological tourism, or archaeotourism, can be viewed from multiple perspectives – the first being the addition of other touristic 'products'

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[18] An example of this is the ERDF 32: Archaeological Heritage Conservation Project which saw the rehabilitation of Catacombsaint Paul's Catacombs and other Neolithic sites in Malta. https://investinginyourfuture.gov.mt/project/heritage-and-tourism/archaeological-heritage-conservation-project-33947660

catering to a specific sector of cultural tourists. This means that more heritage professions are needed for the management, interpretation and maintenance of the sites. Secondly, archaeotourism may boost archaeological research in light of updating the record and providing fuller information to the tourist, as observed in Chapter 4 with the Archaeotur and Saint Paul's Catacombs projects.

It is widely recognised that archaeotourism can provide considerable benefits to the places and communities hosting the visitors. Increase in economic activity is one benefit that can motivate heritage practitioners to manage and conserve the heritage sites. However, in order to achieve best practice in the heritage management there must be collective effort, not only from the agencies which operate the sites, but also from the tourist operators, policy makers, property owners and the local community, who can serve as catalyst to foreign visitors appreciating the sites and hence secure their sustainable future (Pedersen, 2002).

There are currently 55 international tour operators registered with MTA who specialise in cultural heritage tours and another 14 who offer religious tours (Malta Tourism Authority 2015) – although religious tourism is part and parcel of Malta's heritage tourism as identified in Chapter One. Although it is outside the scope of this research to delve into the religious tourism subject, it is crucial to take this into consideration, especially regarding the management of the catacombs. These sites are often small, underground and not very extensive. Religious tourism operators often cater to pilgrims who are in large groups.

In 2006, curators at Heritage Malta noticed that tourism in the locality of Rabat was increasing and likewise the visitors registered at Saint Paul's Catacombs. In the same year, the Senior Curator of Roman Archaeology started drafting an application for European and Regional Development Funds. Following the approval of a grant amounting to over nine million Euros, divided between Saint Paul's Catacombs, the Tarxien and the Ggantija Temple, work on these sites commenced in 2008 (Malta's Minsitry for Justice, Culture and Local Government 2015). The same has occurred at the Saint Augustine's Catacombs which lies c.100 meters away from Saint Paul's and the Ta' Bistra Catacombs in Mosta (a village north of Rabat which attracts a considerable amount of tourists every year). The infrastructural development and conservational and

interpretation activities carried out as part of these projects cannot be viewed merely from an aesthetic point of view. One of the major attributes of these large scale projects is related to the distribution of the high tourist numbers. Although heritage managers may question the sustainability of all the catacombs that are open to the public, in terms of every day running and conservation costs, it would be more viable in the long run to have multiple catacombs open at the same time. Thus, archaeological tourism in Malta cannot be viewed as a deterrent to the archaeological site itself, but, if managed well, it can offer great opportunities to archaeologists and curators to invest in sites that currently are not accessible but may in time become so.

5.2.1   The Increased Interest in Dark Tourism: An Opportunity for Maltese Catacombs

While cultural and religious tourism presents an important opportunity to showcase the rich early Christian heritage of the Maltese Catacombs, it is important to explore other opportunities to expand interest in these sites in order to target a wider audience and secure a sustainable future for Malta's national heritage.

One of the recent opportunities from which Malta's catacombs can benefit is the increased interest in 'dark tourism' (Farrugia & Sultana 2014), a phenomenon where tourists (often younger visitors) visit sites often associated with the macabre, such as cemeteries, battlefields, dungeons and concentration camps. In his *Shedding light on Dark Tourism: An Introduction,* Richard Sharpley (2009) highlights that since the inception of tourism, tourists have been attracted to sites which are directly or indirectly related to death or dying, torture, suffering, violence or disaster. Other scholars (e.g. Wight 2006) argue that dark tourism is in no way a recent activity but can be traced back for centuries.

In modern tourist literature and travel memoires, one often finds reference to visit to heritage sites which attracts the author's attention due to their peculiarity. One example of this is found in Lourdes Odette Aquitania Ricasa's (2010) *Running with Echoes of Desire.* The author describes her experience in Rabat, Malta, and how she felt on her first visit to the Saint Paul's and Saint Agatha's Catacombs:

'Onwards to Rabat, we explored the macabre burial places with vaulted tunnels, tombs cut into niches, the catacombs of St Pauls and St Agatha. It was a quite eerie experience to creep into bones and canopied agape tables dug out with semi-circular benches used for religious rites. Ducking our heads into claustrophobic passageways with frescoes was quite grim. But, as an adventurer, I wanted to see everything'

Figure 5.5 – Frequency bar graph showing the reasons given by respondents for visiting Rabat
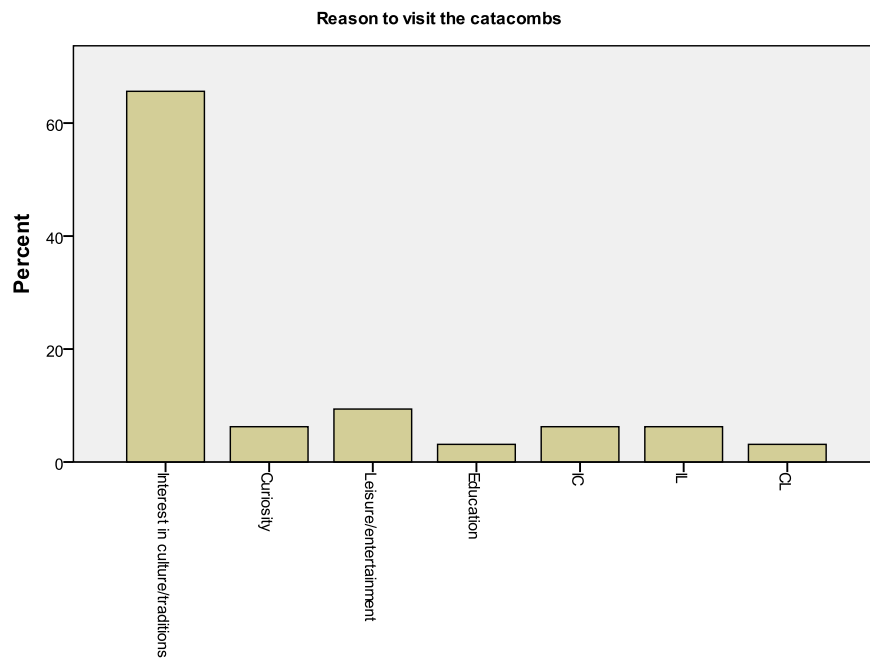
catacombs (Source: Author)

As 'grim' as the Rabat catacombs might have been to Ricasa, it is evident that this was what incited her to see every part of them. The same reason seems to be common for 10% of the participants who took part in the author's *Questionnaire on visitor Experience at Two Major Catacomb Complexes in Rabat Malta* (see Chapter Six). Data in Table 5.1 show that 65.6% of foreign tourists visited the Rabat catacombs because they are interested in culture. The second highest reason for visiting, 9.4%, was because of the 'dark' side of these heritage sites as entertainment. Although the number of tourists visiting the catacombs for dark entertainment is relatively low when compared to the cultural purpose of the visits, this should not be ignored, especially when considering that these are twice as much as the number of tourists who visited the catacombs for educational reasons.

	Purpose of visit	Percent %
Valid	Interest in culture/traditions	65.6
	Curiosity	6.3
	Leisure/entertainment	9.4
	Education	3.1
	IC (Culture and Curiosity)	6.3
	IL (Culture and Leisure)	6.3
	CL (Curiosity and Leisure)	3.1
Total		100

Table 5.1 - Percentages of the reasons to visit the Rabat catacombs (Source: Author)

Early Christian heritage plays a strong role in Malta's dark tourism. Martyrdom, Christian symbolism and the whole eschatology of this religion may be one of the reasons why the western world is fascinated by death and all its components (Seaton 2009:45). But when it comes to exhibiting this, the story can be different. Ethical issues have to be taken in consideration when presenting, interpreting and exhibiting death and dying – irrespective of which religion – since the argument is of extreme sensitivity and, if not dealt with carefully, may even lead to conflict. Thus, in January 2010 a protest (figure 5.6) was organised in Rabat when Heritage Malta was excavating the Jewish hypogea as part of the restoration of Saint Paul's Catacombs; the Jewish community strictly opposed the disturbance of the human remains inside the tombs (Sansone 2009).

Such issues are discussed as part of the subject known as 'dissonant heritage', a topic originally pioneered by Gregory Ashworth and John Tunbridge in 1996. Dissonant heritage can be described as that tangible and intangible heritage which is related to an event or series of events that happened in the past but which may be viewed today as having (or conveying) a negative impact among modern generations (Farrugia & Sultana 2014). Therefore, although heritage must always be regulated by national and international law, heritage managers have to be cautious on how to present it, especially if a site will be presented in a way to target a particular audience and a particular topic such as dying and suffering. Such sites attract visitors, especially young tourists, because of their nature. Furthermore, the continuous increase in interest in these sites may be seen in an opportunity for a new market; however, it is in the interest of the heritage operators (and the visitors who contribute to the sustainability of such sites) to keep

heritage interpretation ethics always in their minds. So, while dark tourism may provide an important opportunity for Malta's catacombs and early Christian heritage, one has to make sure that such an opportunity does not backfire.

The noted case of the Jewish community in Malta is a good example of how the heritage of death and dying and its presentation may cause problems during heritage projects which are intended for the common good. Sometimes heritage is a contested asset and difficult to deal with; however, such issues should not impede us from exploring different ways to bring heritage to the general public. Surveys conducted as part of this thesis show that dark tourism is indeed one of those ways that can keep both touristic and scholarly interest in Maltese catacombs and, more widely in the islands' early Christian heritage.

Figure 5.6 – The Jewish community in Malta protest against the disturbance of human remains in the Jewish hypogea in Rabat (Source : www.timesofmalta.com January 10, 2010)

5.3   Tourist Guiding in Malta

Tourist guiding is often described as an activity where an experienced, qualified and licensed individual shows the attractions of a locale to another, (often) foreign individual or group who visit the place either for leisure or other reasons. Nowadays, tourist guiding is a profession regulated by law and an international code of ethics (Malta Travel and Tourism Service Act 1999). In the case of the Maltese islands, the Malta Tourism Authority

is responsible for issuing the licenses to tourist guides following a two year course at the Institute of Tourism Studies (see below). The number of licensed guides in Malta amount to around 400[19]. However, most of them conduct tours on an occasional basis or part-time during the summer period, i.e. from May to September. The following sections will explore the development of the tourist guide profession in the Maltese islands since the early 19th century, and the relevant 'guiding tools' such as guide books and online tourist literature for those tourists who choose to visit heritage without the assistance of a licensed tourist guide.

5.3.1 Origins of Guiding in Malta – Travellers and Visitors

Tourist guiding in Malta can be said to date back to the Middle Ages, although this was only a 'matter of coincidence or pre-arranged hospitality' (Donath 2004:12). During the Knights period, the Maltese Islands obtained considerable notoriety, especially following the defeat of the Ottomans who attacked Malta in AD 1565. Following this, the Grand Master of the Order of St John, Jean Parisot de Valette, decided to build a fortified place to serve as a mother house to the Knights of St John coming from all over Europe. This place was called after his name, Valletta, and later became the capital city of the Islands during Napoleonic rule in 1798 (Cassar 2008:305). Before this, however, Renaissance-period Malta during the 16th and 17th centuries saw noble individuals (e.g. Jean Quintin d'Autun), merchants and artists (e.g. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio) come to the islands.

One of the famous artists who produced detailed paintings of Malta's important ancient sites was Jean Houel. His *Voyage Pittoresque des Iles de Sicile, de Lipari et de Malte* (1782) recalls how he was taken around important sites, on the back of a mule, and guided by individuals who knew their way well and provided good information. His own images acted as a visual prompt for other European visitors. With the advent of British rule in AD 1800, the number of visitors increased drastically due to the transportation and business

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[19] The list of Malta's licensed Tourist Guides can be downloaded from the following website - http://www.visitmalta.com/en/tourist-guides

activities between England's colonies. To this end, archival information reveals how local people, often described as lower class, waited for visitors to disembark from their ship in order to offer their services as guides. A series of letters sent to the Governor of Malta in 1848 describe how a small group of people requested the exclusivity of this service since this was their only way of income. This small group of petitioners suggested that they should be provided with a licence to operate. The Superintendent of Police forwarded this request to the Governor of Malta who agreed to this. He thought that this would reduce the abuse and negative reports which were being receiving on this matter. Following the Governor's recommendation to issue a guiding licence – to those individuals who had no criminal record and were of good conduct – a metal plate with a number and the word 'Guide' engraved on it was provided to these individuals (Donath 2004:18).

Although a number of controls were adopted by the Maltese administration to regulate the guiding profession, petitions in this regard continued to be received by the Governor. A particular case goes back to 1886 when a handling company with the name of *Smith & Co* wrote to the Superintendent of Police, lamenting that one of their clients, by the name of Lady Hudson, was almost ambushed by guides who were waiting for tourists to disembark from a vessel to offer their services. Although Lady Hudson refused this service, the guides kept on insisting until she decided to pay them to go away (N.A.M CSG01 1886). Following this event, official laws were stipulated and the term 'Guide' was for the first time published on the Malta Government Gazette in 1889 (Donath 2004:19).

Archival evidence also gives us an indication about the relationship between travellers and guides in the late 19th century. A letter from the Acting Superintendent of Police to the Governor of Malta describes how, in September of 1895, Mr Cardona, a tourist guide, was with a French tourist and had his licence withdrawn after permitting the tourist to photograph the fortifications. Since this was not allowed, the guide was sanctioned by being removed from the official tourist guide list. This particular instance shows how tourist guides indeed cared for the visitor's experience, so much so that they let visitors photograph parts of the Island's military infrastructure which was forbidden from documentation in any way (N.A.M CSG01 1886).

In the first quarter of the 20th century, tourist guides arguably had enough information about the catacombs and other sites such as the prehistoric temples and Roman Villas to

draw upon. In fact, five detailed guide books were published on Malta's top archaeological sites; this included a volume entitled *The St. Paul's Catacombs and Other Rock-Cut Tombs in Malta* (Zammit 1923b). Yet, in this period there was still no formal education or guiding course which could have assessed the intellectual and communication skills of those practising this activity. However, efforts were being made by prominent individuals, such as Professor Napoleon Tagliaferro and the museum director Themistocles Zammit, to share knowledge and so increase the interest of Malta's historical and archaeological patrimony. On 26 June 1909, the 'Malta Historical and Scientific Society' was instituted (Archivum Melitense 1910:5). Among its various tasks, this society took care of identifying secondary school students who showed interest in Malta's cultural heritage and introducing them to the guiding profession. This was a step further in changing the perception that tourist guiding was a job reserved for lower class Maltese (Donath 2004:79).

In the mid-20th century the guiding profession experienced some improvements in terms of recognition and quality of the service (Donath 2004:75). However, the same cannot be said for the control checks that were being made on the types of information given to tourists, especially by the non-official guides who worked illegally and were not academics. In 1955, at Saint Agatha's Catacombs in Rabat, the Missionary Society of Saint Paul, who to this day owns the site, opened a small part of the catacomb to the public to show the work which was being done and to generate some income for the cloister located above. The Education Minister, Agatha Barbara requested a visit to the catacombs and was guided by an old farmer who lived adjacent to the site. But the information provided by this farmer was totally incorrect and fictitious – for example, he claimed that the burial spaces were used by ancient women to deliver their babies. The Minister considered the information provided to be so shameful that she threatened to expropriate the site to avoid similar cases in the future. However, following a series of justifications and apologies by the missionary society, the Minister withdrew her threat of expropriation, subject to appropriate guidance and correct information being provided to the visitors and to the site being properly conserved and managed (Cammilleri, pers. comm., November 7, 2011).

Despite all the improvements, there were still a considerable number of tourists and local visitors who opted for visiting the sites alone. During WWII, Malta, which was a British military base, was full of navy men who, in their recreational time, roamed around alone

on archaeological sites, often leaving their marks by inscribing their names and the company or ship on which they served. For example, the walls of Hypogeum 8 at Saint Agatha's Catacombs are covered with modern graffiti and so is the entrance to the Saint Augustine Catacombs in Rabat (Figure 5.7). This shows that, until the mid-20th century, it was not mandatory for tourists and visitors to be accompanied by guides - who would also act as conservation monitors and not just as a vehicle of information and interpretation at a time when archaeological sites were not fully oriented towards public presentation.

Figure 5.7 – WWII graffiti located at the entrance of Saint Augustine Catacomb in Rabat marking one of the air-raids. (Source: Author)

5.3.2   The Organisation of Modern Licensed Guides in Malta

In a study conducted by Erik Cohen (1985) on the origins and roles of tourist guides, two types of guides are identified, the 'Original Guide' and the 'Professional Guide'. Cohen describes the former as a 'pathfinder' (1985:7) – one whose role is limited to escort foreign explorers to places of interest. This type of guide has, in most cases, general topographic knowledge of a place but is not capable of providing information about specific sites located in the area. Furthermore, the Original Guide is usually engaged as a mean of security and translation to foreign visitors. On the other hand, the nature of the Professional Guide is seen as more informative and one who developed from the

150

role of the tutor (1985:8). This guide has to be prepared from an academic point of view as were those of the 18th century who were responsible for hundreds of aristocratic students during the so-called Grand Tour (Mead 1914:118). It is not the ultimate role of the Professional Guide to lead the visitor to the site – for this there is the pathfinder. However, once on-site, this type of guide takes over by providing correct and up-to-date information about the site or answers questions posed (Cohen 1985).

Although the role of the Original Guide may seem archaic in nature or even obsolete nowadays, in reality travellers can still find this situation in tourist-oriented and developed areas such as Malta. Nowadays, it is the guide who chooses whether to act as a mentor or a pathfinder since a guiding licence is needed in both cases. To obtain a guiding licence in Malta a person must first be awarded a Higher National Diploma in Tour Guiding from the Institute of Tourism Studies (Malta Tourism Authority 2015). This full-time course lasts for two years and covers several topics, such as languages, guiding techniques and Maltese History (see above). Following the award of this national diploma, guides must apply for the license through the Malta Tourism Authority (Tourist Guides Regulations 2010:11). The guiding profession is regulated by Subsidiary Legislation 409.12 and Legal Notice 288 of 2010; the official duties of the tourist guides are listed in Article Eight of this law which states that:

> *8. (1) It shall be the duty of a tourist guide to conduct or guide an organised excursion in a professional manner.*
> *(2) An organised excursion shall be conducted in accordance with the itinerary set by the operator. A tourist guide may, in exceptional circumstances and for a valid reason, vary the itinerary.*
> *(3) A tourist guide shall, except when free time is allowed, accompany the organised excursion at all times.*
> *(4) The Authority may, in consultation with the recognised professional body or bodies representing tourist guides, establish codes of conduct or any other codes in order to ensure the advancement of quality of services offered by tourist guides.*
>
> (Tourist Guides Regulations 2010, L.N. 288 of 2010)

This law clearly gives tourist guides the necessary impetus to conduct their job in a professional manner. However, as in any other law enacted from a national body, one

can still identify loopholes that may affect its by-products. Although these regulations emphasise the qualifications attained from the regulatory body and the renewal of the licence subject to a refresher course (LN 288 2010:2), no regulation mentions the monitoring of the information provided to tourists, such as random checks on guides during site tours. Another issue with this law is related to the code of conduct. Paragraph four clearly refers to the setting up of a code of conduct; however, to date, this remains non-existent.

During their training, prospective guides are provided with an overview of various topics from tourism experts - this ranges from leisure to heritage tourism guiding. Most students choose to specialise in a specific topic in order to increase their possibility of employment. In fact, when applying for the guiding licence, applicants can specify in which area they want to specialise. However, this is not mandatory and such information is not in any way indicated on the licence[20]. To this end, guides are not obliged to indicate their area of specialisation when applying for a guiding job. This may create problems in the long run when specific tours are led by guides who have too little knowledge of the places or sites to be visited. This is especially relevant in topics where guides need to be prepared and constantly updated with the information provided by academics – such as, Maltese culture, history, archaeology and ecology. Similar situations can be monitored if the tourism regulators introduce onsite checks in collaboration with the curators or heritage managers of the sites or attraction.

Presently, a list of names of all guides licenced by the Malta Tourism Authority is published on the authority's website every two years[21]. Once again, there is no information about their guiding interests here. However, the online document provides prospective tourists with relevant contact information and the language in which the guides conduct their guided tours. It is also important to highlight that around 25% of the persons registered as licensed guides with MTA do not operate on a full time basis or do not operate at all. This type of guide keeps renewing their licence to avoid re-applying in case they decide to resume/take up guiding as their full-time job[22].

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[20] https://forms.mygov.mt/FormDocuments/SubmissionGuidelines/SDA120Guidelines.pdf
[21] The list of licensed tourist guides operating in Malta - http://www.visitmalta.com/en/guides-inner
[22] Farrugia, Glen. (2014). *Questionnaire to Tour Guides and the relevance of information they convey on Maltese Catacombs.* Survey carried out as part of this doctoral research.

One can state that the current organisation of tourist guides in Malta and elsewhere has had an overall positive impact on cultural heritage and its interpretation. Guided tours provide a more interactive experience in which visitors can ask question directly of the guide. The reality of the tourist guide, however, is slowly changing as a consequence of the fast growing digital interactive medias (such as audio guide or digital information panels), individual travelling and the wide corpus of information one can find nowadays on the internet or as printed matter. This can be corroborated by reports and surveys of the Malta Tourism Authority carried out every year which indicate that tourists travelling in a group together with a guide are decreasing every year (Malta Tourism Authority 2015). Although extensive research has been conducted on visitor satisfaction when using audio guides (Mann and Tung 2015; Viehöver 2006), in-depth studies on the effect of modern interactive guiding versus the licensed guide have not yet been carried out. The same can be said for the material published online intended for individual tourist. The next section forms a preliminary review of tourist guide literature which deals with Malta's early Christian heritage.

5.4   Guide Books – Evaluating Tourist Literature

In his *Subterranean Rome* (2000), L.V. Rutgers discusses the earliest forms of guidebooks, namely the pilgrim 'travel guides' or 'itineraries' which date back to Late Antiquity. An example of this is the 7th century AD itinerary entitled *Concerning the Places of the Holy Martyrs that are located Outside the City of Rome* (Rutgers, 2000:20). Although these guides were written in a religious ambience and given a spiritual tone, their main objective was to locate catacombs by providing directions and describing the site. In this sense, modern tourist literature is not very different, since many of these do not enter into much detail and try mainly to give a general overview of the most interesting sites.

Maltese guide books on archaeological attractions and museums were being published as early as the 1870s. For example, in 1872 Cesare Vassallo wrote the *Guida Al Museo Ovvero I Monumenti Di Antichita Maltesi,* and in 1923 Themistocles Zammit published five guide books on different archaeological sites. To a certain extent, Zammit's guide books and other similar books published earlier in England (such as Murray 1858) were

the first examples of what were to become today's tourist literature (Koshar 1998). Although Malta's guide books were more detailed – in fact, each of these dealt with a specific site - the style of writing was different from the standard academic text. Therefore, information was intended to (i) reach a wider audience and (ii) to promote national identity of the place. Tourist literature grew in importance with the increase of tourism around Europe. This is evidenced by the number of reviews which appeared in various newspapers, such as in *The Athenaeum* (1899) which discusses the quality of the information provided by tourist guidebooks. For example, the author of the review *Tourists' Guide-Books* (Unknown Author), argues that although tourist literature should provide general information about the attractions, a number of the tourists are not 'ordinary visitors' and therefore expect detailed information and interested facts about the place they visit; however, due to restrictions of space, most guide books tend to leave the most important parts out of their texts (Tourist's Guide-Books 1899). This review also gives information about errors in historical dates and information (such as in the *Guide to Harrogate* 1871 by Black & Black).

 Today, it is very difficult to find modern guide-book reviews in journals or newspapers; however, these are often published online, such as on web-portals dedicated to tourism destinations. These websites are often highly interactive and offer the general public the opportunity to share their personal experience about specific tourism destinations, including heritage sites and museum (e.g. the online platform *Tripadvisor.com*). Reviews written by the general public should be given due value, chiefly because such feedback can help tourism and heritage professionals cater for the needs of a wider audience. Despite the growing use of online portals for tourism purposes, one might argue that some tourists still rely on traditional guidebooks to plan their itinerary (Hanrahan and Krahenbuhl 2011); accordingly, it is important that guide-books provide sufficient valid and up to date information about a destination. It is within this context that the next section presents a review of tourist literature and sets a number of criteria for the audit of the content of modern guide books, particularly on the information published on heritage sites such as catacombs.

This audit exercise started with a formal communication with the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) in order to obtain the list of guide books endorsed by MTA. Officials

within the Authority's History and Culture department explained that the commercialisation of current tourist literature makes it difficult for MTA to have full control on the quality and relevance of their content. This often leads to outdated tourist publications (A. Said, pers. comm., March 25, 2015).

Tourist literature focusing on heritage sites can be divided into two, namely: (i) literature published by cultural heritage scholars, where the primary aim of these publications is related to the divulgence of academic research to a wider audience, such as, *Malta: An Archaeological Guide* (Trump 1972), *Malta: An Archaeological Paradise* (Bonanno 1987) and *Malta Its Archaeology and History* (Sammut Tagliaferro 2000); and (ii) 'traditional' guide-books which provide wider information on a country or destination, e.g. cultural, historical, culinary, artistic, leisure and archaeological characteristics (among others) written by tourism journalists (such as the ones published by local and foreign publishers e.g. BDL, Miller, Petit futé and Bradt Publications). Of these two types, the 'traditional' guide-book is the most popular among tourists. Despite local publishers have experience a slight decrease in request for such publications in the last decade, the overall demand is still strong and keeps the sector responsible for tourism-literature stable year after year (Joseph Mizzi[23], pers. comm. 24 October 2014).

In order to obtain a clear picture on the validity of current tourist literature on Malta, particularly on one of the core components of its archaeology, i.e. early Christian destinations, we can critically review six of the most popular guidebooks among visiting tourists. Three of these were produced and published locally, while the others were written by foreign tourism journalists and published in France, Italy and England. The results of the reviews are represented in two matrice, one for local publication (Table 5.3) and another for guides produced and published by foreign entities (Table 5.4). These matrices include ten indicators, namely: dating of catacombs, location, basic information on early Christianity and Roman Malta, religion in Malta in the Long Late Antiquity, funerary rituals, early Christian art, inscriptions, illustrations, artefacts/museum, and the type of information provided onsite (audio guide/ tour guide). These are the main topics related to Maltese catacombs and which, so far, have been dealt with by scholars in academic literature (with the exception of information provided onsite). The only type

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[23] Joseph Mizzi is the owner Midsea Publications, one of Malta's major publishing houses.

of literature which can be considered as well-researched is academic publications and, naturally, these cannot be considered as tourist literature. However, the topics discussed are still relevant and can be used as indicators to determine if the more tourist-oriented information is, in fact, faithful to the academic research conducted by scholars on Maltese early Christian heritage sites. Therefore, these indicators were considered to be the minimum criteria for a tourist to acquire the necessary knowledge on catacombs *a priori* and decide whether to visit these sites or not.

For each indicator (see Table 5.2) four levels of measurement were determined: (i) well researched, (ii) fairly well-researched, (iii) not researched and (iv) misleading. These rankings were given according to the type of content listed in the guide books and the degree of correctness according to the information provided in Chapter Two above.

Table 5.2: Criteria of the indicators used to evaluate the tourist literature

	Well researched	Fairly Well-researched	Not researched	Misleading
Dating of Catacombs	4th – 8th century AD	Any date between the 4th – 8th century AD	No dates	Prior to the 4th and after the 8th century AD
Location	Street address and Town or Village	Town or Village only	No location provided	Wrong location provided
Basic information on early Christianity and Roman Malta	Advent of Romans in Malta (218 BC), Punic Culture, Introduction of Christianity and the tradition of St Paul	The tradition of St Paul's Shipwreck in light of the introduction of Christianity in Malta	No reference to the Maltese-Romano period and early Christianity in Malta	Wrong information about the Romans in Malta, such as dating, traditions and religion.
Religion in Malta in Long Late Antiquity	Distinguish between Christian,	Reference to either Christian,	No reference to any religion	Reference to the wrong religion

	Pagan and Jewish Religion	Jewish or Pagan religion		
Funerary rituals	Reference to the triclinia or Agape table, preparation of the bodies in light of religious eschatology	Reference to either Agape table, preparation of the bodies	No reference to funerary rituals	Wrong information about the funerary rituals
Early Christian Art	Reference to early Christian frescoes and their description	Reference to early Christian frescoes	No reference to early Christian frescoes	Wrong information about early Christian frescoes. Such as confusing medieval frescoes at St Agatha Catacombs with early Christian art
Inscriptions	Reference to early Christian inscriptions and their interpretation	Reference to early Christian inscription	No reference to early Christian inscription	Wrong information about inscriptions in Early Christian catacombs
Illustrations	Colour photos/plans	Sketches/ artistic impressions	No visual interpretation at all	Wrong photos/plans/sketches
Artefacts/museum	Reference to museum (where applicable) and its content	Reference to museum (where applicable)	No reference to museum if this is present onsite	Wrong information about the museum
information provided onsite (audio guide/ tour guide)	Reference to audio guide/tour guide and the relevance of the information provided	Reference to audio guide/tour guide	No reference to the type of information provided on site	Wrong information on the type of onsite interpretation and information.

	Indicators	City of Mdina and Rabat (2003) Author – Manduca, John Publisher – PEG Publications	Malta, Gozo & Comino (2014) Author – Zammit, Vincent Publisher – BDL Books	Malta & Its Islands (2015 Author- Monica Bonechi (ed.) Publisher –Miller Publications
i	Dating of Catacombs	Fairly well-researched	Well researched	Well researched
ii	Location	Fairly well-researched	Fairly well-researched	Fairly well-researched
iii	Basic information on early Christianity and Roman Malta	Misleading	Well researched	Well researched
iv	Religion in Malta in Long Late Antiquity	Fairly well-researched	Well researched	Well researched
v	Funerary rituals	Not researched	Fairly well-researched	Fairly well-researched
vi	Early Christian Art	Fairly well-researched	Well researched	Well researched
vii	Inscriptions	Not researched	Not researched	Not researched
viii	Illustrations	Misleading	Well researched	Well researched
ix	Artefacts/museum	Fairly well-researched	Well researched	Well researched

	information provided onsite (audio guide/ tour guide)	Not -researched	Not researched	Not researched
x				

Table 5.3. *Matrix of Malta guide books published locally*

Table 5.4*: Matrix of Malta guide books published abroad*

	Indicators	*Le Petit futé : Country guide – Malte, Gozo & Comino* **(2015) Auhtor: Auzias, Dominique et. al. Publisher: Petit futé Publications, France**	*Malta : Valletta, la citta dei cavalieri – Mdina, Rabat,le Dingli Cliffs, Victoris, Gozo, Comino* **(2005) Author: Touring Club Italiano Publisehr: Touring Club Italiano, Italy**	*Malta and Gozo (2013)* **Author: Juliet Rix Publisher: Bradt Publications, England**
i	**Dating of Catacombs**	Misleading	Fairly well-researched	Well researched
ii	**Location**	Fairly well-researched	Well researched	Well researched
iii	**Basic information on early Christianity and Roman Malta**	Fairly well-researched	Fairly well-researched	Well researched
iv	**Religion in Malta in Long Late Antiquity**	Not researched	Not researched	Not researched
v	**Funerary rituals**	Fairly well-researched	Fairly well-researched	Well researched
vi	**Early Christian Art**	Well researched	Well researched	Well researched
vii	**Inscriptions**	Not researched	Not researched	Not researched
viii	**Illustrations**	Not researched	Not researched	Well researched

ix	Artefacts/museum	Not researched	Well researched	Well researched
x	information provided onsite (audio guide/ tour guide)	Fairly well-researched	Not researched	Well researched

A preliminary observation of the reviews carried out here reveal that the tourist guide books produced and published in Malta scored slightly higher when it comes to overall quality. In fact, the percentage of the indicators which were considered 'well researched' amounted to 43% against the 40% of the guide books published abroad. The tables below (5.5 and 5.6) show the overall scores.

Table 5.5. Overall scores for tourist guide books produced and published in Malta

Levels of Measurement	Percentage %
Misleading	4
Not researched	23
Fairly well-researched	30
Well researched	43

Table 5.6. Overall scores for tourist guide books published abroad.

Levels of Measurement	Percentage %
Misleading	4
Not researched	30
Fairly well-researched	26
Well researched	40

A closer analysis of the individual indicators show that both guide books, i.e. local and foreign publications are relatively 'not researched' when it comes to the inscriptions found in the catacombs or in the respective museums. Local guide books are poor with regards to listing of information provided onsite. For this, foreign guide books obtained

a better score. Almost all guide books make reference to the artefacts retreived on-site and mention whether they are exhibited in a museum. A considerable weak point in non-Maltese tourist publications is the lack of information on the types of religions present in Malta during Late Antiquity; this contrasts with the detail which Maltese guide books offer in this respect.

Another key indicator relates to the illustrations provided, which offer tourists with an idea of what to expect when visiting a site. Illustrations may also serve as a 'teaser' which entice tourists to choose one particular site over another. Guide books published in Malta seem to give considerable importance to this component, in fact, all three publications contained good quality ilustrations. In contrast, most of the guide-books written by foreign tourism journalists and published abroad (except for the one produced in English), neglected this aspect and no illustrations or photos of the sites or objects related to the catacombs were included.

A number of indicators used in this excercise, such as the 'dating of catacombs', may not directly affect the decision of a tourist to visit the site; however, other components such as illustrations and intresting facts about early religions or ritual, may indeed help in promoting the site. Furthermore, it could be noticed that guide books which target specific nationalites tend to emphasise on aspects which are of particular interest to the communities who will purchase the book. For example, the guide book produced for a French audience puts particular emphaisis on early Christian art while the one catering for an Italian audience stresses the architectural forms of the sites. Intrestengly, the guide book written in English and which probably is targeted for a wider audience is the most detailed - in fact this scored an overall 90% 'well researched'.

Guide books should be as accurate and updated as possible, particularly when individual tourists are given the option to visit the sites without an audioguide or tourist guides. Sites such as Saint Paul's Catacombs, Saint Catald's Catacombs and Wignacourt Catacombs (all of which are located in Rabat, Malta) provide this opportunity. The tourist literature on Malta currently on the market reveals no serious errors, particularly on Malta's early Christian heritage. That said, there are other guide books around the world, which may be outdated and full of mistakes. One might ask if the setting-up of

international guidelines regulating tourist literature can contribute to improve the misinformation among tourists following an individual unassisted site visit, such as with the case of a tourist visiting Saint Paul's Catacombs in Rabat who published his personal review on *Trip Advisor* – here the tourist expresses his positive experience at this site; however the same review reveals that the correct interpretation was not taken up, so much so that this tourists still believed that 'Christians [used catacombs] to hide from local authorities'[24].
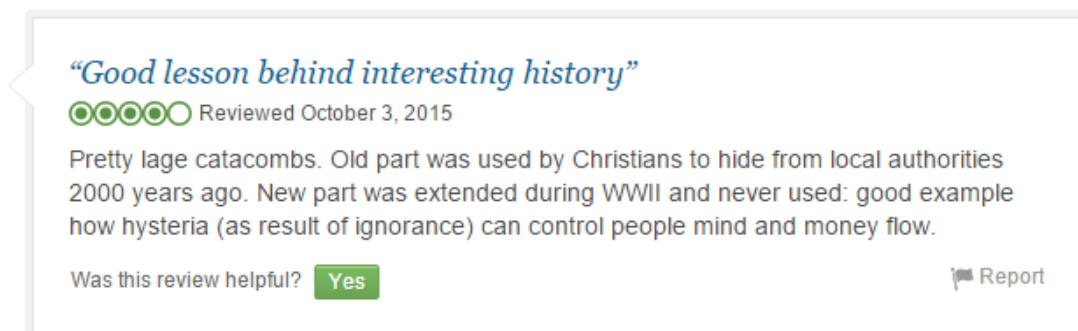
Figure 5.8 – A visitor's review on Saint Paul's Catacombs on Trip Advisor
(Source: www.tripadvisor.com)

The methods used to write or update a tourist guide book, often starts with the writers referring to a previous edition of the literature they intend to update. Most changes are related to transportation, routes, tourist establishments and venues. Although some background research is conducted when it comes to the cultural heritage sections, it is not always possible to meet the curators or heritage managers and to ask if there are any update in terms of archaeological record. Therefore, most of the times this content remains the same especially if the author of the previous edition is engaged to update a new edition (Maya Lefebvre, pers. comm. October 8 2013).

A collective effort is required from publishers of tourist literature, particularly when identifying writers for their guide-books, and heritage operators and curators, who must work on developing a relationship with these publishers and regularly share information so as to convey the right messages about archaeological sites.

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[24] Review retrieved from http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g190326-d2624344-Reviews-St_Paul_s_Catacombs-Rabat_Island_of_Malta.html. Access on the 13th of October 2015

5.5   Evaluating Tourist Guide Knowledge and Perceptions of Early Christian Heritage Interpretation in Malta

The topic of tourist guide knowledge was partly discussed in 1988 by Anthony Bonanno and Mario Buhagiar at the 'European Workshop on Cultural Tourism in Mediterranean Island'. The researcher presented by Bonanno & Buhagiar argues that the deficiency in specialised human resources will jeopardise Malta's heritage resources. Here the authors highlighted that the heritage sector must have three levels of recruitment: the top level must include professionals in the heritage field such as archaeologists, conservators and curators; the middle level must constitute of technical personnel such as site officers, photographers, and surveyors; while the lower level must include other support staff with skilled or unskilled labour.

Bonanno and Buhagiar usefully dedicate a brief section to the tourist guides in Malta and explain how these 'play the role of ambassadors of their country vis-à-vis the tourists. It is therefore, very important that they [heritage employees] carry out their task in the most proper way' (1988:34). For this, the University of Malta, in collaboration with the then Ministry of Tourism organised short courses for those who wanted to obtain a tourist guide license. The authors also write on the aspiration of setting up courses leading to a University Diploma in tourist guiding, museum guides and custodians, as well as the launching of a long term programme to include heritage sites and museums in the concept of educational institutions (Bonanno & Buħaġiar 1988:34). At the time this paper was presented, the suggestions made were perhaps too avant-garde for the Maltese government to consider. In fact, some of these suggestions (such as the heritage education) started being implemented only after the Cultural Heritage Act[25] came into effect in 2002.

As noted above, the tourism industry is a major contributor to Malta's economy and therefore the Maltese government, together with tourism regulators, emphasises the level of interaction between the host country and the tourists. The type of service

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[25] Chapter 445 of the Maltese Legislation available at
http://www.culturalheritage.gov.mt/filebank/chapt445%5B1%5D%20Latest%20copy%20as%20at%20Se
ptember%202010.pdf

offered must be of high standard, particularly if Malta wants to keep benefitting from sustainable tourism. The national entity responsible for the regulation of the tourism industry in Malta (the Malta Tourism Authority) conducts yearly surveys to record the visitors' satisfaction with Malta's tourism product. Although latest analysis indicates that the visitors are satisfied with the services such as guided tours, visitor attractions and museums, a quarter of the participants rate this service as 'not so bad, 'poor' or 'very poor' (Ministry for Tourism 2015). This survey does not specify the reason for such negative ratings, and hence the value of this thesis in shedding more light on this problem. Below I will discuss the first survey in a series of five semi-structured questionnaires.

The survey entitled *Questionnaire to Tourist Guide about Maltese Catacombs* was passed to one hundred licensed guides operating in Malta. This constitutes a sample of 25% of the total number of guides. The semi structured questionnaire was composed of twenty questions and sent via the online Google Forms survey. This system allowed the participants to submit their replies directly on their computers while the answers were saved on a spreadsheet which could be accessed only by the author. The main objective of this exercise was to explore the education and knowledge of the guide, as well as their perception on Malta's early Christian heritage. Therefore the following sub-sections are based on discourse and quantitative analysis of the respondents' replies to the following key questions: (i) Did you have specific lectures on Maltese archaeology? If yes, kindly mention these topics. (ii) Were you assessed for your Historical/Archaeological knowledge during training? If yes, how? (iii) How often do you conduct guided tours for groups who visit Malta specifically for its early Christian archaeology? (iv) How do you rate the information that is being given to the tourist on site on the Catacombs? (v) How do you rate the information on the site information panels? (vi) How do you rate the audio tour guide? (vii) If you had to change something in the way catacombs are currently presented to the public what would it be? (viii) How might you rate the service of the Cultural Heritage Agency that operates these [catacombs] sites?

5.5.1   Academic preparation of tourist guides

The demographic aspect plays an important role in this study especially in view of changes made in the way tourist guides were prepared and educated in the last decades (see Section 5.3.2). The majority of respondents aged 64 and over, who constitute 22% of the total participants, explained that back in the 1980s, their training was mainly offered by the University of Malta and the Ministry of Tourism who organised lectures with a main focus on Maltese archaeology, history and culture. Furthermore, most respondents of this age group clearly mention the names of the lecturers who were involved in this course - such as Anthony Bonanno, Mario Buhagiar and the late David Trump who passed away on the 31st of August 2017 – all of whom considered to be authorities in their respective fields. By the end of the evening courses held in the 1980s, the prospective tourist guides were assessed through a written and a viva voce examination that took place on a heritage site chosen by the examiners. This information reveals that the course was intensive and very well structured to the extent that 5% of the respondents decided to register for a Bachelor's degree in either history or archaeology after obtaining the tourist guide licence.

78% of the participants aged 20 to 64 years and over, declared that their training was provided by the Institute of Tourism Studies. This course is regulated by the Education Act (CAP.327)[26]. The training received from this institution followed the same principles as those set up by the University of Malta back in the 1980s. However, this course was upgraded in order to include subjects related to guiding techniques and modern European history (Institute of Tourism Studies 2015). Although there is little difference between the courses offered in the 1980s and the current one, it can be observed that students following the current system do not have the opportunity to meet local archaeologists during classes related to Maltese heritage. This is because the Institute of Tourism Studies has a centralised teaching system where only one lecturer is in charge of heritage subjects (Zammit, V. Pers. comm., August 28, 2015).

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[26] This governmental law has been revised in 2012 in order to cater for today's curriculum - Government of Malta. (2012) *Education Act: Institution of Tourism Studies Regulation.* *http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lp&itemid=23103&l=1* accessed on 15/10/2015

Although this survey did not look into the effects of the centralised teaching system vis-à-vis the students' heritage education take-up at this Institute, a relative difference could be noticed in the replies submitted by the respondents who have been lectured by different experts; in fact the latter provided more detailed and specific information about Malta's archaeology.

Both the University of Malta and The Institute of Tourism Studies have contributed in setting-up an accredited course in tourist guiding. This survey shows that all participants were not only instructed on Malta's heritage but also examined at the end of the courses, particularly in early Christian heritage.

5.5.2   The demand for early Christian heritage tours

This survey seeks to shed light on how often guides conduct tours specifically related to Malta's early Christian heritage. The results are shown in Table 5.7:

Frequently	Infrequently	Quite frequently	Rarely
8%	35%	10%	46%

Table 5.7. Results of the responses obtained on the frequency of guided tours to catacombs

The results reveal that 46% of tourist guides operating in Malta rarely conduct tours on early Christian heritage due to the limited demand by tourists. This often leads tourist guides to 'specialise' in other periods, which are more popular among tourists (such as Malta's Prehistory – see below). Furthermore, this situation seems to be affecting the structure of the 'tourist guides' refreshers course, which does not include specific lectures and seminars on this subject.

5.5.3   Rating the information provided by guides on catacombs

Question 18 of this survey is based on self-assessment, notably on the quality of information provided by their peers to tourists. Despite the risk of obtaining biased results, this is important to understand what the overall feeling is among participants. In

fact, 46% of the respondents claimed that the information given by themselves and their colleagues is good, while 30% ticked satisfactory as their answer. Only 11% of the respondents believe that the information conveyed is of excellent quality. The rest of the participant, that is, 13% claim that the explanations are poor.

5.5.4   *Rating onsite information resources (audio guides and information panels)*

Modern technology, such as audio-guides, has in recent years assisted tourist guides with their work, particularly when a single tourist guide has to lead a large group. This technology was introduced at Saint Paul's Catacombs in Rabat around a decade ago. The information provided by the audio-guide is prepared by curators and archaeologists of early Christian sites who carefully write the scripts based on their desktop and field research. This information is updated from time to time according to the outcomes of research activities and new information retrieved in the archaeological records. However, this also depends on the funds that the heritage operator has at its disposal during the year (Depasquale, Suzannah, pers. comm. August 15, 2015). This survey reveals that 56% of the guides believe that the information provided by the audio guide is good, while 33% claim this is satisfactory. These figures are relatively higher when compared to the results obtained on the quality of information provided by the guides themselves. This indicates that the majority of the tourist guides believe that the information offered by the audio-guides regarding early Christian sites is better than that offered by themselves.

5.6   Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the Maltese catacombs as heritage and touristic attractions. Here I provided an alternative viewpoint from which scholars can tackle this subject. Whereas the initial focus of the subject dealing with archaeology and tourism revolved around the conservation of the sites and the importance of having dedicated infrastructure (as discussed in Chapter Four), we have shown that a different type of research can contribute to other facets of the management of Maltese catacombs – the focus here being the human resource. This chapter started with the argument that tourist operators

and tourist guides acts as ambassadors of Malta's heritage and mentors to tourists and therefore authorities must ensure that this sector is supported in the best way possible. My review of the tourist literature revealed that a collective effort must be made between heritage operators and tourism publishers to produce and updated information on Maltese catacombs.

This chapter also discussed a semi-structured survey carried out with a strong sample of Malta's tourist guides, to observe their knowledge and perception of Malta's early Christian heritage. This survey showed that a lack of interest among tourists on the subjects related to catacombs and early Christian archaeology is similarly affecting the interest of tourist-guides on the same topic. The following chapter will draw on this data to analyse the relation between this lack of overall interest and the tourist experience at Malta's catacombs and their perceptions of heritage interpretation and assistance provided onsite by heritage employees.

CHAPTER 6

CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM TODAY:

EXPECTATIONS AND PROVISION - A VISITORS' SURVEY

6.1   Introduction – Evaluations of Tourist Experiences

The presumption in some quarters is that visitors are no longer interested in the quiet contemplation of objects in a cathedral culture. They want to have an "experience".

(Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:139)

Tourists' experiences are never the same, even if visiting the same places at the same time and picking up and accessing the same information (Sharpley and Stone (eds) 2011:2). Naturally, individuals visiting a place or a heritage site have different 'social-baggages', thus leading to non-homogenous perceptions of a site due to their own sociocentric thinking and background. For example, modern European visitors may view the ancient practice of the *refrigerium* (eating in honour and near a dead body) as gloomy, unlike some tourists from the non-western world (such as the community of Torajan in Indonesia) who might still practise comparable traditions (Bennett 2016).

Research on tourists' motivations for visit cultural heritage sites and their experiences has been mainly carried out by tourism researchers who have based their studies on a leisure tourism framework (e.g. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Nuryanti 1996; Richards 1996; Richards 2007; Sharpley 1998; Silberg 1995). The outcome of such research may be extremely relevant for marketing heritage tourism; however, it does not really 'clarify the nature of the [cultural heritage tourism] phenomenon' (Poria *et al*. 2003:238). Scholars working in the field of archaeology have contributed to the subject of cultural heritage tourism (e.g. Bonanno and Buhagiar 1988; Hoffman *et al.* 2002), but sadly most of their arguments seemed to bypass issues related to the 'heritage clients' who, most of the time, are the main reason for these types of publications. Arguably,

the literature produced by heritage scholars on the subject of cultural heritage tourism can be placed under two umbrellas, namely: (i) the negative impacts which visitors may have on the conservation and sustainability of the heritage sites, particularly if no adequate plan is implemented; and (ii) the positive impacts which the tourism industry has on the moneyboxes of cultural heritage establishments (e.g. Hems and Blockley (eds) 2006; Howard 2003; Hussein Mustafa 2011; Pedersen 2002; Speight 1973).

Despite acknowledging the importance of funds, archaeologists and curators tend to be less proactive than tourism specialists when it comes to the development or upgrading of the heritage product, notably by improving interpretation, in an effort to generate more funds. This is because the revenue generated from tourism via heritage site-visits does not always match the return on investment required to conserve and manage the site in the best ways possible (Archaeological Institute of America 2016), with the risk of falling into the trap of the commodification of heritage. In his monograph focusing on heritage management, interpretation and identity, Peter Howard argues that most countries nowadays recognise that heritage is for people; however, he adds that 'some of these people have not yet been born' (2003:245). Here Howard indirectly refers to those 'quality' tourists who understand the sensitivity of an archaeological site and act as such when visiting important heritage establishments. Therefore, he suggests that, in some cases, it would be better to put that cultural heritage at risk, and make it inaccessible to the public in an attempt to conserve it for future generations.

State-of-the-art heritage interpretation has a direct effect on the conservation of the sites. In fact, important archaeological establishments which are equipped with a good interpretation centre (such as the recently completed Stonehenge visitor centre – http://www.stonehenge.co.uk), usually experience higher numbers of tourists every day – although this may lead to irreversible damage, as happened in Lascaux, France (Howard 2003:245). Yet the act of making sensitive sites inaccessible or of limiting the provision of information and interpretation so as to make heritage attractions less visitor-friendly and hence reduce the flow of visitors, may create issues of communication between heritage specialists, particularly between archaeologists or conservators and tourism professionals who have, in recent decades, been developing high-end heritage tourism 'products' (e.g. at Chichen Itza and Tulum in Mexico and

Stonehenge and Bath in England – see Walker 2005:60; Baxter and Chippindale 2005:137). Such decisions may be seen as a detriment to the main scope of cultural heritage tourism, which aims to increase one's knowledge regarding ancient cultures and provide the best experience to visitors in order to increase the sense of appreciation and of interest in heritage sites (Poria *et al*. 2013). Accordingly, it is crucial to understand how a lack of communication deriving from authorities in this field is affecting the overall heritage experience and appreciation.

This chapter discusses this important issue from two main perspectives: from the viewpoint of those individuals who are 'at the receiving end' of this activity, notably the visitors; and those 'at the giving end', such as gallery site officers who are in daily contact with visitors. This part of the research employs a mixed-method approach characterised by semi-structured interviews as well as discourse analysis of the responses of participants. The objective is to investigate those factors which affect satisfaction or dissatisfaction from either parties (*receiving end* or *giving end*); this can range from lack of signage to reach the site, no or poor information panels and inadequate knowledge of front-office staff and gallery site officers. Such an exercise may seem unconventional for an archaeological research project, being usually associated with tourism market research; however, this empirical exercise has to be seen in the wider context of this thesis where the data-gathering methods, notably the questionnaires, have been designed to contain a strong element of knowledge-evaluation where the respondents (mainly those who are considered to be 'at the giving end') had to provide basic information on the heritage site they work at. This enables a more in-depth analysis of current standards in ever-growing heritage tourism products.

Usefully, the Malta Tourism Authority carries out regular surveys on visitor satisfaction and experience; however, these provide only a general overview without entering into much detail on how satisfied visitors feel following a heritage site visit (MTA Heritage Locality Survey 2015). An MTA research initiative which is worth mentioning but which has, since 2012, been stopped, is the *Quality Seal for Visitors site.* This activity consisted of on-site audits of Malta's heritage sites. MTA researchers evaluated specific criteria such as (i) the promotion of the site, (ii) accessibility and (iii) on-site interpretation. All this was done in an effort to improve the heritage tourism sector while setting standards

for such establishments. In this sense, the MTA served as a regulator for the provision of quality information and presentation of Malta's heritage sites. This was, to some degree, a very useful system by which the operators in the heritage sector (e.g. Heritage Malta, the St Agatha Historical Complex and others) were monitored for their provision of cultural heritage service, thus offering an opportunity to these entities to address any issues and improve their product.

This exercise foregrounds one of the main components of the HIRMOTHEA model which seeks to review the effectiveness of current information which tourists are offered through the different interpretation methods while analysing the corresponding impacts this is having on visitor satisfaction. In addition, the framework of this model provides the opportunity to explore how heritage operators are contributing, or not contributing, to this. To make the arguments clearer, this chapter is divided into seven sections: Section 6.1 has provided a brief literature review on the main components of archaeology as a tourism product, focusing mainly on the consumers of heritage (the tourists) and the 'mediators' (site officers); Section 6.2 discusses the research design, notably the criteria by which the subjects under study were chosen; 6.3 and 6.4 present and explain the structure of the two separate questionnaires administered to tourists and heritage site officers (see Appendices II and III); Sections 6.5 and 6.6 discuss the results of the surveys with a number of graphical representations for ease of comparing results; and the final section (6.7) includes an overall discussion and interpretation of the results.

6.2   Methods and Targets to Evaluate

There is no single motive behind tourists' decisions to visit heritage sites, which may vary from simple enjoyment to a quest for cultural heritage information or simply because a site-visit is included in a tour package (Richards 2007; McIntosh & Goeldner 1986). Recent research carried out in England demonstrates that there might be a homogenous justification in such action – one which is based on the well-being of the individuals who visit heritage sites (Historic England 2014, para.1). The Cultural Participation Survey launched in 2011 in Malta explored the frequency of attendance at

archaeological sites and museums and this revealed a direct link between the type of visitors and participation in heritage activities. In fact, the survey results show that those people visiting heritage sites are more likely to have a formal education background when compared with those who are not interested in heritage sites (European Commission Barometer 2013; Briguglio 2016:13). The outcome of this research came after administering structured questionnaires to a random but representative sample. This, however, did not target a specific audience but it certainly allowed for cross-country comparison of tourists who visit heritage sites and those who do not. Unlike such surveys, this chapter draws on data obtained from semi-structured interviews adapted for a local scenario and a specific audience, namely foreign and local tourists visiting Maltese catacombs. A cluster sample composed of a particular section of tourists who visited early Christian funerary sites was taken and analysed in light of the framework of this research. An interpretivist approach was employed in order to investigate the different experiences these tourists visiting Maltese catacombs are likely to obtain.

Admittedly, a cluster sample – namely a selection of a specific group identified among different clusters which form a larger population (Fraenkel *et al*. 1993:2) – might not provide a clear cross-section of tourists' general perceptions of Malta's presentation of heritage; however, it should give a clear enough statement related to the focus of this thesis, namely whether Malta's early Christian heritage is being adequately presented and interpreted to the visitors. Therefore, my main targets to evaluate have been those respondents who visited Saint Paul's and Saint Agatha's Catacombs. The selection of these two sites comes from two main factors: (i) both establishments have been catering for visitors for at least two centuries ,meaning that it is possible to trace the development in modes of presenting early Christian archaeology and making this accessible to visitors; and (ii) despite both having adequate spaces where visitors can orient themselves on the subject/period, the methods of presentation differ – in fact, a new establishment equipped with modern technology hosting interpretation material, such as 3D visualisation and multisensory rooms, is active at Saint Paul's Catacombs, whereas the visitor centre at Saint Agatha's Catacombs has remained more or less the same – i.e. an establishment adapted in the 1970s as a museum and arranged in a

'Victorian' style. My research exercise thus also has scope to assess how 'new' and 'traditional' modes of presentation appeal and impact on the overall experience and appreciation of visitors.

The arguments presented so far have focused on cultural tourists as clients of Malta's heritage industry; however, we need also to explore the experience of visitors from a second perspective, namely that of heritage employees, who are in daily contact with visitors and who are responsible for the daily running of the sites; these include especially gallery site officers (GSOs) and curatorial assistants (CAs). A second semi-structured questionnaire was thus created entitled *Questionnaire to cultural heritage employees working at early Christian sites in Malta*. Some of the questions included in the two questionnaires complement each other in terms of correlation of data envisaged from the different respondents. All this was carried out in order to see how and in what ways specific indicators, which are only applicable to GSOs and CAs, such as knowledge transfer and approach towards tourists visiting the catacombs, might affect the visitor experience.

The preliminary and overall design procedure was common for both questionnaires. First, an extensive literature review was undertaken to identify research gaps in the subject both at local and international level. Next, a number of questions were drafted. Where possible, wording was kept simple, with the exception of the second questionnaire, namely that for the heritage employees, which required a high degree of technicality. The third stage was to identify the possible answers to each question and decide on the type of reply options. Since this survey was to be based on semi-structured interviews, a decision had to be made about which questions would provide the opportunity for open-ended replies. In both questionnaires, particularly the one for heritage employees, open-ended questions would help to eliminate any bias from my/the researcher's part which might influence the replies of the respondents when listing specific options.

When the answers to specific questions were predictable, such as with the case of demographics, multiple options were included. In addition, some other questions, such as those related to physical accessibility were given the option of rate responses.

Leading questions were avoided for both questionnaires since this could influence the responses of the participants. Each question was given a number and the responses, which were either based on rating, scaling or multiple answers, were given a code so as to facilitate the input of the data in statistical programs at analysis stage. The final phase of the design was to include the consent forms which listed the rights of those participating in this survey. The final drafts of the questionnaires were eventually submitted to the Ethics Review Committee at the University of Leicester for approval (see Appendix VI and Appendix VII).

6.2.1   The questionnaire on visitor experiences at the Rabat catacomb complexes

When designing questionnaires, whether structured or semi-structured, key links must be identified between the main objectives of the research and the questions dealing with a specific issue (Burgess 2011:12). First, the main issues related to visitor experiences at Malta's catacombs were listed in a table (Table 6.2). Two columns were created: the first included the topics/themes under study and the second column included the corresponding indicators. This method was useful when developing the questions to ask to the respondents – e.g. since one theme was to explore the scope of visiting, the first column indicated the 'issue', which was then converted into a research question (such as 'For what reasons do tourists visit catacombs?'), while the second column included the focus each of these questions should be given – e.g. are tourists visiting the catacombs because they are interested in religion, dark sites, archaeology or culture in general?

In total, 33 questions were identified and included in the questionnaire entitled *Visitor's experience at two major catacombs complexes in Rabat, Malta*.

Issue:	Question focus:

Could age, gender and education affect the reason why tourists visit or do not visit the catacombs?	- What is the age of the individuals visiting the catacomb? - Are visitors mostly males or females? - What is the level of education of those visiting the catacombs?
Could the mode of visiting affect tourists' experience at early Christian funerary sites?	- Are tourists visiting the catacombs alone or as part of a guided tour? - Was the visit to the catacombs already planned? - How likely is for tourists stumbling across early Christian sites during sightseeing to actually visit the catacombs?
Could information and promotion of the catacombs determine the types of tourists visiting these sites?	- Which are the sources providing tourists with preliminary information (such as location and presence) on Maltese catacombs? - How likely are tourists to visits those catacombs which do not benefit from any promotion? - Are the sites which are less famous accessible to the visitors?
Could physical accessibility affect visits and tourist's experience at early Christian funerary sites?	- How do tourists perceive of the physical accessibility at Maltese catacombs?
Could intellectual accessibility affect visits and tourist's experience at early Christian funerary sites?	- How do tourists perceive of the type of information available at Maltese catacombs?
Could the type of information presented affect the visitor's satisfaction on the overall visit?	- Are the current methods of interpretation and presentation adequately being applied to satisfy the visitors' needs?
Could the information at the catacombs which is characterised by a 'one-fits-all' method of presentation affect more specialised tourists?	- What types of tourists are visiting catacombs? - Are the Specialised Cultural Tourists expecting more detailed information on specific topics?

Table 6.1 – Table showing the topics to be tackled by the survey on visitor experience and the corresponding indicators.

6.2.2   Questionnaire to cultural heritage employees at early Christian sites in Malta

Sectors and industries that contribute to a country's gross domestic product are often susceptible to continuous scrutiny, monitoring, upgrading and auditing. These are common actions when a service provider wants to improve its product, not only to secure ongoing revenue, but also to provide continuous professional development to staff while maintaining the quality of the service (Elliott 1997). In this regard, the cultural heritage services provided by many countries, including Malta and England, are no exception. Despite regular controls by Maltese governmental authorities at those heritage sites accessible to the public, particularly the Health and Safety regulators, the Sanitary Department, and (as discussed in Section 6.2) the Malta Tourism Authority, such visits are never related to the heritage employees, or their performance, knowledge and approach towards the provision of heritage service. The hypothesis that led to my development of a questionnaire was that semi-professional employees in the heritage sector are integral to the heritage interpretation available onsite and, accordingly, their expertise and modes of delivery may well affect the visitors' experience, particularly those specialised cultural tourists who are more likely to ask for specific information of the sites in question. Hence, a table comparable to the one produced for the visitors' survey was created, again with issues and question foci set in the different columns prior to the formulation of questions to be included in the questionnaire (Table 6.2).

Issue:	Question focus:
Could adequate experience of heritage employees affect the visitor's experience at Malta's early Christian funerary sites?	- How long have cultural heritage employees been working at catacombs? - How is a heritage employee deployed to a site? Because of interest, education, other?
Could employees' particular interest in catacombs affect the visitor's experience at Malta's early Christian funerary sites?	- Are the heritage employees actually interested in heritage or do they consider their role within the heritage agency only as a money generating activity/job?

Could adequate knowledge of heritage employees affect the visitor's experience at Malta's early Christian funerary sites?	- What is the degree of knowledge which is acceptable for a heritage employee to work in catacombs? - Are heritage employees assessed on their knowledge of the sites and the historical period/s in question?
Could the way senior heritage staff, such as Chief Curators and Managers, deal with deployment of junior heritage employees affect visitor satisfaction?	- Is the management providing the right training and information to the heritage employees prior to being deployed at catacombs? - Are heritage employees being provided with adequate information resources, such as books, journal articles and reports about the site they will be working at?
Could lack of communications skills of a heritage employee affect the visitors' experience at the catacombs?	- How often do tourists ask questions related to the site and are provided with correct and clear answers?
Could lack of training opportunities to heritage employees affect the quality of the product being offered by the operating agency - not only to tourists but also to other visitors such as schoolchildren?	- Are there any specific ways by which heritage employees are regularly assessed for their knowledge on the site? - Are heritage employees expected to conduct self-taught exercises to keep abreast of the current state and latest information and research on the site? - Do heritage employees look forward to carry out guided tours to schoolchildren? - Do heritage employees gauge their explanation to satisfy the needs of young children?

Table 6.2 – Table showing the topics to be tackled by the survey on heritage employees and the corresponding indicators.

In total, 16 questions were identified (six of which were open-ended while the rest provided option-responses) and included in the questionnaire entitled *Questionnaire to Cultural Heritage Employees working at early Christian sites in Malta.*

6.2.3   Selection of participants for the research – Piloting the survey

In their work on questionnaire research, Boynton *et al.* argue that 'the greater the social distance between researcher and participant, the greater the risk of misunderstandings' (2004:1433). Choosing the correct sample is paramount to the validity of any semi-structured exercise. While there are a number of ways respondents can be recruited for such a study, such sample gathering very much depends on the type of survey and whether a large-scale or a more contained survey and sample is anticipated (Teddlie & Yu 2007).

An important first stage for my study was a pilot study consisting of 17% of the total sample envisaged, that is 120 visitors; this pilot was carried out in May 2014 so as to obtain preliminary information on the type of tourists who visit the catacombs. Despite obvious limitations, such as the issue of seasonality, which may have affected the representation of the sample population envisaged for the full-scale survey, the pilot exercise was instrumental in identifying the actual targets to evaluate. In order to reduce the effects of seasonality, the month of May was chosen since this period often yields a balance between the types of tourist visiting Malta, particularly between (i) cultural tourists who tend to avoid peak season and (ii) leisure tourists who avoid the peak summer tropical weather and opt for more bearable temperatures (Tania Sultana[27], pers. comm., January 25, 2014). All these considerations were taken into account to secure a smooth implementation of the fieldwork. Furthermore, rather than taking a large sample in an effort to obtain a minimum number of adequate replies, an *ad hoc* semi-structured questionnaire was designed in light of the results obtained from this preliminary exercise. This increased the prospects of obtaining real data which are relevant to the overall scope of the research model proposed in this thesis.

My pilot study was based on the initial hypothesis that the main motive behind a visit may provide an indication on the interests of the visitor (cf. de Rojas & Camarero

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[27] Tania Sultana is the head of research department at the Malta Tourism Authority. Prior to the pilot study she was asked if MTA held any data which could indicate a specific period or periods in a year which are more likely to be representative of the total population of tourists visiting the Maltese islands. Despite no such data being available, other surveys carried out by MTA's Research Department (such as the *Locality Surveys*) demonstrated that May is the most likely month that will see different types of tourists with a wide spectrum of preferences and scope of visit.

2008:533). Thus, if a tourist visiting the catacombs is only interested in the religious aspect of the site, that visitor is more likely to be interested in religious tourism and the attractions which fall under this category. The same can be said for those individuals interested in archaeology, macabre sites or the natural environment.

Determining the main purpose of visits to specific heritage sites is extremely important as it allows for audience segmentation. Such information can only be captured by asking the right questions and analysing specific correlations, such as the association between the various categories of tourists and the sites they are more likely to visit. This enables further sub-categories of tourists to be explored.

The term 'cultural tourism' often encapsulates fields like archaeological tourism, ethnic tourism and art tourism (Timothy & Boyd 2003:5). This generalisation of terminologies poses a problem when it comes to the categorisation of participants, especially in a research like this where one of the objectives is to see 'who is getting what' in terms of information in relation to interest. In fact, a typical situation could be that of cultural tourists who, despite their keen interest in culture, are less likely to visit heritage sites and vice versa. In this sense, Richard's notion that '… cultural tourism encompasses both heritage tourism (defined as being related to the artefacts of the past) and art tourism' (2001:7) might not be useful in the context of this present research exercise.

A further objective was to formulate a method to determine which categories of tourists are more likely to visit *archaeological* sites and what the main factors are that lead to a positive heritage experience. The importance of identifying different categories lies in the hypothesis presented here that visitors' underlying interests are directly related to the experience acquired during a site visit, and that the type of experience depends on the ability of the site to cater for a 'personalised' level of interest. Therefore, we need to consider questions such as:

- What do different categories of tourists think about the onsite information – is this adequate for the experience they were envisaging?
- Does the site and the supporting interpretation facilities provide enough information to satisfy the quest for knowledge?

- Is the narrative of a heritage site being presented in a way to cater for the various categories of tourists?

- Is there any censorship being applied to the site and its interpretation in order to avoid religious/political/social bias hence limiting the risk of dissonant heritages?

- What is the perception of the tourists who visit a heritage site just because it is included in their tour package about their time spent onsite?

- Is the tourists' experience good enough to entice them to visit more archaeological sites in Malta and elsewhere?

It was hoped that these questions will take the research on heritage vis-à-vis tourists' expectations and experience to another level, one which, on the one hand, goes far beyond the generic research which has been carried out so far by tourism scholars and, on the other hand, breaks through the '*quasi*-resentment' which researchers in the field of archaeology and heritage might still have towards the tourism industry in general.

Therefore, to reach these objectives, various domains were included in the pilot questionnaire, including topics directly or indirectly related to the main characteristics of Malta's heritage, namely archaeological sites, museums, fortifications, churches, historic houses and landscapes. This exercise allowed me to improve the (later/large-scale) questionnaire and to add in specific criteria which were not envisaged at the design stage. In addition, the pilot survey asked the same questions to tourists visiting either Saint Paul's Catacombs or Saint Agatha's or both. This was particularly crucial in testing the survey and the way the questions were structured.

The pilot involved questionnaires being given to 20 visitors who visited either the Saint Paul or Saint Agatha's Catacombs. Since this exercise was a pilot, it was decided that the data gathering should be executed in an interviewer-administered approach. This method provided the opportunity to take note of any problems in the contents, such as the absence of specific criteria and the relevance of the questions being asked. In addition, my exercise capitalised on the availability of other secondary sources such as the *Market Profile Analysis* carried out by the Malta Tourism Authorities in 2012 in order to triangulate the data obtained and see if this yields any differences or similarities.

6.4   Audience Segmentation

The concept of audience segmentation saw its inception in the mid-1940s with Max Weber's *Class, Status, Party* (1946) with arguments centred on social theories about economic classes, social status and political powers. This model was later applied to other fields, such as tourism market research and cultural studies. The latter capitalised on Weber's research framework to categorise specific social actions previously considered as one common activity, such as with the case of Fine Arts and Popular Culture (Peterson 1992:244; Gane 2005:212). Audience segmentation is also relevant in heritage interpretation studies in relation to visitor satisfaction, if applied to site-specific cases (see Deufel 2014). Therefore, if a core aim of my thesis is to explore how the quality of current heritage interpretation and presentation of Malta's early Christian archaeological resource is affecting tourists' satisfaction, then we must consider the possibility that different tourists may perceive heritage sites in different ways due to their cultural backgrounds, preferences and moods. Accordingly, my sample must be classified according to specific categories to allow the matching of specific responses with one or more designated tourist categories.

The results obtained from my pilot study demonstrated that the respondents can be divided into two different segments, namely: (i) general cultural tourists and (ii) specialised cultural tourists. These two categories draw on the concept of Robert Stebbins' *Identity and Cultural Tourism* (1997), as discussed below. The formation of these categories is also identifiable from the secondary data which were used for triangulation purposes, that is, the MTA's Market Profile Analysis. Below I give a concise definition of each category to clarify their specific characteristics while determining any patterns in their behaviour which could be comparable to the characteristics of the respondents exposed through the questionnaire.

6.4.1   General Cultural Tourists versus Specialised Cultural Tourists

A 'cultural tourist' can be defined as an individual who travels to another country to experience foreign folklore, customs, natural landscapes and heritage sites (Richards

1996: 41). Some commentators in heritage tourism scholarship, such as MacDonald and Jolliffe (2003), argue that this category of tourists is likely to engage in additional activities which are based on adventure, sports, festivals, crafts and sightseeing. As a reaction to the generalised description of cultural tourists, scholars such as Robert Stebbins (1996) and Aluza *et al*. (1998) argued that not all cultural and heritage tourists opt for the same experience and therefore these must be targeted in different ways. To this end, Stebbins contends that the main category of cultural tourists ought to be sub-divided into two different categories, namely the *General Cultural Tourist* and the *Specialised Cultural Tourists* (1996:450-451).

The General Cultural Tourists (GCTs) are a segment of the tourist population likely to engage in cultural and heritage site visits when travelling to a foreign country for leisure purposes. In broader terms, GCTs are considered to make up part of the mass tourist category, who, by definition, are those travellers who tend to choose specific package-deals which satisfy their budgets. The attractions, or better still, the way the cultural itinerary is chosen by the mass tourists makes it one which is 'socially, financially and geographically accessible to large numbers of people, as seen for example in much of guided tourism' (Stebbins 1996:450). Local and foreign tour operators offer a number of products which are based on guided cultural tourism in Malta, such as the *The Cultural Tour* Package[28] and *World Heritage Malta: from Neolithic to now*[29], which claim to provide a cultural experience. These tours usually include visits to archaeological sites, churches and other attractions; however, they are often carried out at speed due to time constraints, as evidenced by the programmes available on their websites (Figure 6.1). Visitors opting for such tours do not always have the opportunity to explore the sites in their entirety but are happy with a swift overview; hence each visit rarely lasts more than one hour – arguably not enough to obtain a good understanding of the attraction. In addition, guided tourists are normally required to stay with their guide at all times and not to roam alone on site as that might delay the reorganising of the group for the next set of visits. We might call this 'light-touch' heritage participation.

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[28] This service is provided by Exploring Tourism Malta, a company which specialises in local niche tourism.
[29] This tour is offered by the British company Martin Randall Travel; its expert lecturer is Ms. Juliet Rix – author of a number of Maltese guide books in English (see Chapter Four).

Figure 6.1 – Extract of the site visit programme of The Cultural Tour Package (source: http://www.excelsior.com.mt/specialoffers/history-culture-package)

A particularly good example of this situation occurs at the Saint Agatha's Catacombs in Rabat. Here a number of tour operators regularly accompany groups of tourists to see the unique early Christian frescoes; however, only part of the site is shown to tourists on such tours. During my tenure of office as curator of the Saint Agatha Historical Complex (which comprises the catacombs, the crypt and museum) I encountered situations where the tourist guides did not even mention the presence of an on-site museum and yet this is an integral part of the site visit since the artefacts exhibited here were retrieved from the catacombs and accordingly provide important materials in terms of content, interpretation and presentation. All this occurs despite various signs being specifically installed to indicate the presence of this well-ordered museum. Guided tourists are usually asked by their tour guide to wait (for the custodian to open the site) outside the museum's reception area in order not to block the entrance. Even though the reception space at Saint Agatha was never intended to host large groups, the main reason for such action is to restrict the time spent by guided tourists in the museum. On occasion, tourists insist on visiting the museum following their visit to the catacombs and some guides do spend a little time at the museum, but others are often asked to

185

choose between the catacombs and the museum due to time constraints (Angela Peel[30], pers. comm., 12 August 2014). This situation is less likely to be contested by GCTs who, despite their interest in foreign cultural heritage, may be less knowledgeable about the sites and their respective heritage facilities prior to their visits; this forces guided tourists to rely on the authority of their guides who, despite their knowledge and professionalism, may have to offer only the bare minimum site information to keep within their tight schedule.

Additionally, some operators decide to leave important heritage sites out of their programme due to limited timetables. For instance, one of the cultural tours provided by a Maltese tourist operator has a specific theme on early Christianity in Malta entitled 'In the Footsteps of St Paul'[31]. This tour, however, incredibly fails to include visits to the catacombs in the itinerary. It seems inconceivable that visitors interested in Malta's early Christian period, and who therefore chose specifically this excursion, are not given the opportunity to see an example of a catacomb.

Potentially one might place into a different category those tourists interested in foreign cultural heritage but with limited scope to pursue this during their stay. It is within this context that Stebbins (1996) refers to the 'general' in the category of *General Cultural Tourist*. The criteria identified by Stebbins were also identified among the respondents of this research during the Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) stage. It is with this understanding that the segmentation of the respondents for this research is envisaged.

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[30] Angela Peel is one of the tour guides who specialises in cultural heritage guided tours and who often includes the visit to the Saint Agatha Historical Complex as part of the itinerary.
[31] This tour is being offered by *Malta Tour Guide* - http://www.maltatourguide.com/tour/show/19

Figure 6.2 – One of the signs located at the entrance of the alley leading to the complex
(Source: Peter J. Shields)

The second category identified by Stebbins in his *Identity and Cultural Tourism* (1996) are the 'Specialised Cultural Tourists' (SCTs). SCTs can be recognised by 'their serious approach to [heritage] tourism and their unusual tastes in touristic objects to stand out from the mass of tourists now roving the globe' (Stebbins 1996:451). In addition, SCTs are less likely to perceive the money spent on heritage sites and related facilities as a burden to their budget; on the contrary, they believe that such expenses provide a rewarding return of investment in terms of personal cultural development (Stebbins 1992:93-10).

The characteristics that describe SCTs are based on two variables: the money spent to visit cultural heritage sites and similar attractions, and the extra efforts made to visit cultural heritage sites. SCTs are most likely to be individuals who have a high/very good degree of knowledge and experience in visiting such sites and accordingly often arrive at a particular heritage attraction already with a baggage of knowledge acquired through background reading or because they have previously visited similar sites. In addition, the outcome which such visitors aim for is mainly related to 'self-actualization, self-enrichment, self-expression, self-gratification, and enhancement of self-image' (Hall &

Weiler 1992:8-9; cf. Stebbins 1996:450). On some levels such tourists recall perhaps those aristocratic individuals engaged in the Grand Tour during the 17th century, notably to increase their cultural knowledge (Richards ed. 1996:11). Furthermore, such a category of tourists is more likely to see cultural tourism as a practice which may require a specific commitment both in terms of funds but also in preparation, since these tourists are more likely to visit heritage sites on their own and at their own pace in order to make the most out of the heritage visits. According to Stebbins, none of these characteristics fit the parameters of a GCT (1992:93-111).

The topic related to the heritage experience among different tourists is one warranting more in-depth research, especially because the data presented by scholars so far are characterised by a 'one-size-fits-all' paradigm (see Gouthro 2011:211). The analysis of visitor profiles may contribute to a basic homogenous segmentation of the audience which may in turn assist heritage managers and curators to plan the most effective heritage products. As discussed above, my pilot study and the secondary data identified two types of tourist who are likely to experience heritage sites from different perspectives and who may have diverse interests in the same site. Therefore, when this occurs, audience-segmentation must be used as a tool to explore visitor satisfaction and expectation and not merely for statistical purposes. The indicator which has been inserted in the semi-structured questionnaire, and which will help identify these two segments, asks participants if they consider themselves as *individual* tourists or *guided* tourists. The responses to this question, together with related discourse produced by participants on analogous indicators, should provide adequate data to determine whether the majority of guided tourists fall within the GCT category and whether the individual tourist can be considered as SCTs. If this is the case, such segmentation will enable comparative analysis of the results between these two categories.

6.5   Results obtained from the pilot study

The pilot questionnaire consisted of 33 questions divided into three parts, namely (i) socio-demographics; (ii) interest in heritage; and (iii) experiencing the Maltese catacombs. The fieldwork revealed no major issues with regards to the questions

188

planned for the full-scale survey. In fact all 20 respondents were able to answer the questions without any difficulty. The main issue emerging from this pilot exercise was related to time: indeed, more than ten prospective respondents who were initially enrolled prior to their visit refused to take part in the survey after completing the individual tour, primarily because their tight visiting schedule did not allow for more time spent on-site. Therefore, a practical solution had to be identified in order to overcome this unforeseen limitation and make sure that this would not affect the fieldwork of the full-scale survey. A two-day participant observation exercise was thus carried out at the common waiting areas of Saint Paul's and Saint Agatha's Catacombs in order to identify a possible time-window in which visitors would be most likely in a position to spare 15 minutes to take the survey[32].

The pilot survey was carried out over two separate days and the 20 questionnaires were divided in two batches of ten – one administered in the morning during a weekend while the other was carried out in the afternoon of a weekday. This maximised the probability of obtaining a reliable cluster sample (cf Booth 1991:13). It took a total of eight hours to successfully compile 20 questionnaires.

The results obtained were organised in a table so as to allow for an Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA). The data were included in 20 columns, one for each visitor and given a label – V1 to V20 – representing all 20 respondents. Each domain included in the pilot questionnaire was placed in rows and given keywords – *Experience Accessibility* and *Experience information boards* were, for example, the keywords chosen for questions 19b and 19c which explored the overall experience on the accessibility and interpretation of catacombs (see Table 6.3).

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[32] Interestingly, during this exercise, I observed that four out of ten visitors used the resting areas located just in front of the entrance of Saint Agatha's Catacombs or the open space near the *Dejma cross* (Figure 6.9). A review of available tourist guide books (see Section 5.4) and similar information material revealed that the *Dejma* cross is *de facto* considered as point of reference for tourists visiting the catacombs and is often included in tourist maps. Accordingly the *Dejma* cross was a good catchment area for visitors willing to take the questionnaire.

Visitor	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	V8	V9	V10	V11	V12	V13	V14	V15	V16	V17	V18	V19	V20
Age	40-54	40-54	55-64	55-64	40-54	25-39	55-64	65+	25-39	40-54	40-54	40-54	65+	55-64	25-39	25-39	25-39	25-39	16-24	25-39
Motivation & Experiece																				
purpose of trip	Leisure		religous	leisure	leisure	leisure	leisure	leisure	leisure	leisure	leisure	leisure	leisure	work	leisure	leisure	work	leisure	education	leisure
experience accessibility	1		1	2	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	2	1	1	2	2	4	2	1	1
experience information boards, audio visual, guides etc	1		3	2	1	1	1	2	4	1	2	2	2	3	2	4	4	2	1	2
Interests																				
Archaeological Sites	☒	☒			☒	☒	☒		☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒		☒	☒		☒	☒
Musuems	☒			☒	☒	☒	☒	☒		☒	☒		☒	☒		☒	☒		☒	☒
Fortifications	☒				☒	☒						☒	☒	☒		☒			☒	
Churches	☒	☒	☒		☒	☒		☒				☒	☒	☒		☒			☒	☒
Historic Houses	☒				☒	☒		☒					☒	☒				☒	☒	☒
Landscape	☒			☒	☒	☒							☒	☒		☒			☒	☒
None															☒					

Table 6.3 – Extract of the results obtained from pilot questionnaire (source: author).

In summary, the demographic data gathered suggest that visitors aged between 25 and 39 are more likely to visit the catacombs. These are followed by tourists who fell in the age group of 40-54 at 30%, those aged between 55 and 64 at 20% and those who are considered senior citizens aged 65 and over, amounting to 10% of the total pilot sample. The lowest amount of visitors was recorded for the age group 16 to 24 (Fig. 6.3). Despite being a pilot study, meaning that no concrete assumptions should be made, at least before obtaining the results from the full survey, EDA shows that the data gathered here are comparable with the overall European statistics on the engagement of archaeological site visits by individuals of this age group who claim a basic lack of interest in such activity (European Commission, Eurobarometer 339 2013:38). This Eurobarometer survey (2013:8) also records a slight decrease in visits to archaeological and historical sites by 2% from the 2007 wave, attributable to the financial recession which affected most of Europe between 2007 and 2013).
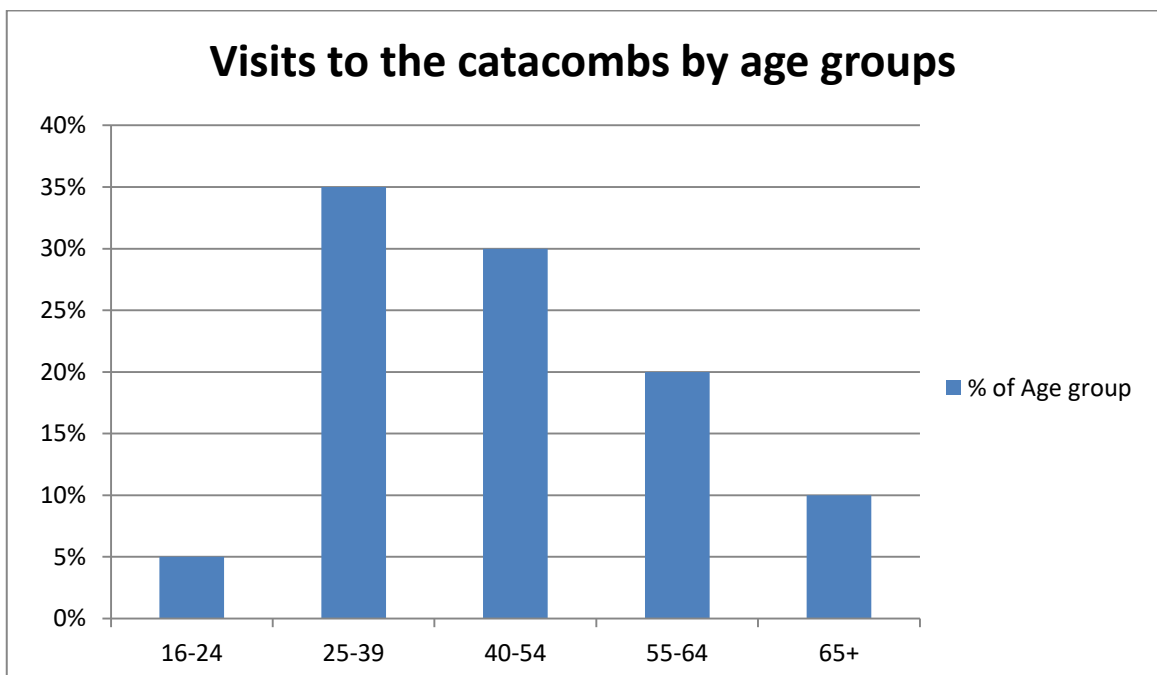
Figure 6.3 – Results obtained from the pilot on the visits to catacombs by age group

The data from the analysis of the heritage attractions indicate that archaeological sites and museum are most likely to be the top preferences of tourists visiting catacombs,

with 75% and 70% of the respondents choosing these attractions as one of their preferences respectively. These are followed by the 60% of participants interested in Maltese churches, 45% in historic houses and the landscape, while 40% claimed their interest in fortifications. An additional 5% said that they were not interested in any of the sites but still visited the catacombs (see Table 6.4). While this 5% may seem a small percentage, this should not be ignored, especially in a pilot survey where the sample taken is usually between 10 to 20% of the full survey.

Type of heritage attractions
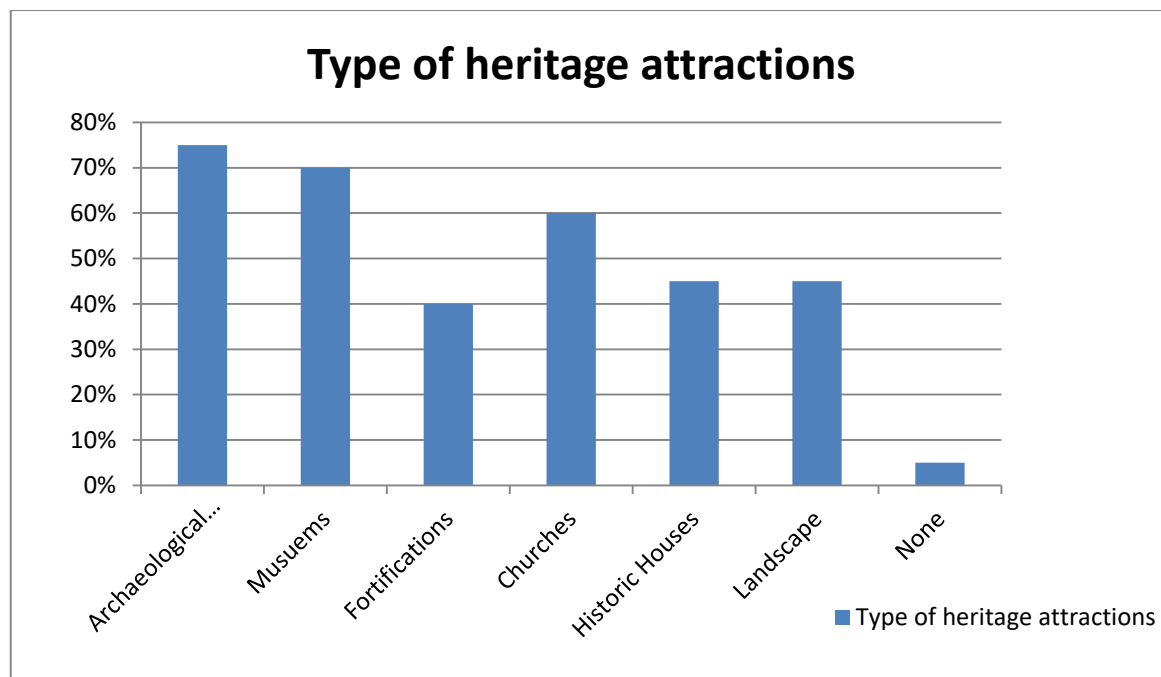
Figure 6.4 – Results obtained from the pilot on the interest of participants on visiting various heritage attractions

Feedback was also sought regarding accessibility, with the respondents asked to rate (i) accessibility within the Saint Agatha's and Saint Paul's Catacombs and (ii) the information boards, audio-visual guides and guide books (Fig. 6.5). The analysis of these data was subdivided by the scope of visit, namely those who visited for leisure, education, religion or work. In sum, 45% of the visitors stated that accessibility to the site was very good; the same rating was given by 5% of the respondents who visited the islands for either religious, work or education purposes. 25% and 5% of the participants who came to Malta for leisure and religious purposes viewed accessibility as fairly good, while the rest (5%) of those travelling for leisure claimed that access was reasonable and the other 5% who were engaged in work travel disagreed. No correlation between age

group and ratings of accessibility was carried out at this stage; however, such analysis was envisaged for the full-scale survey in order to see if age is somehow determinant to the visitors' satisfaction in relation to site accessibility.
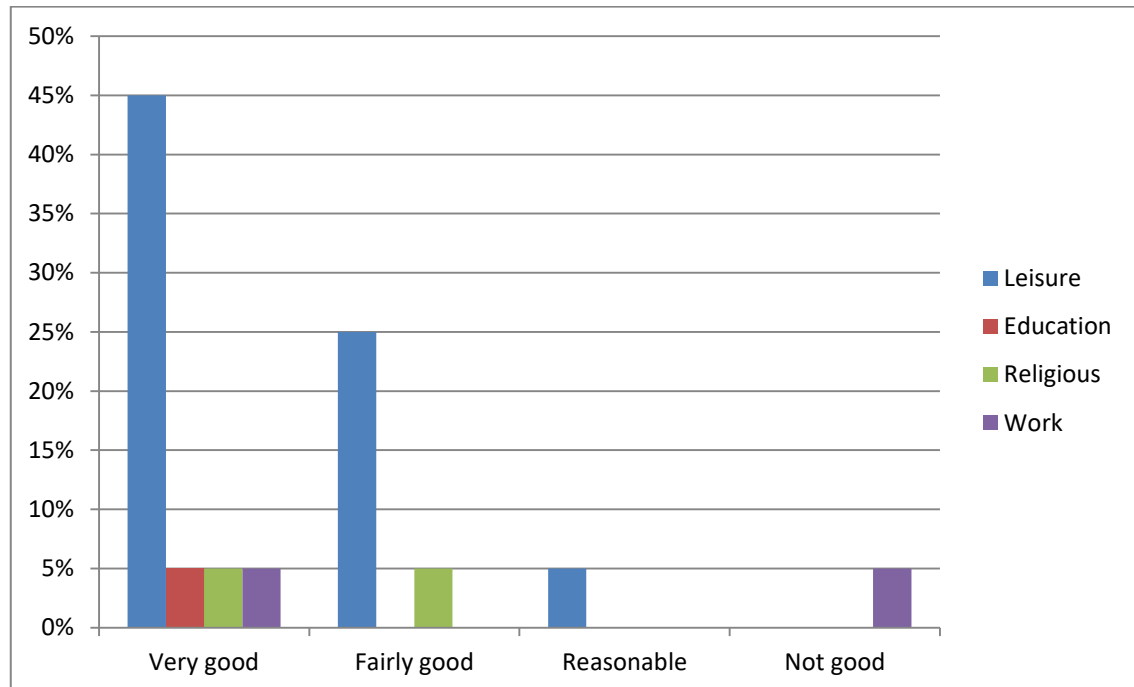
Figure 6.5 – Results obtained from the pilot on the ratings of accessibility to the catacomb given by participants who visited Malta for the scope of Leisure, Education, Religion or Work.

Important findings came in terms of views on the on-site heritage interpretation facilities (Fig. 6.6). Question 19c asked respondents to give a rating on the quality of the information boards, the audio-visuals and the guide-books. The value of such a question at pilot stage centres on the possibility that this may demonstrate the relation between the different categories of tourists and their corresponding expectations on heritage interpretation. The results reveal that 25% of the leisure-category was satisfied by the type of interpretation facilities on site. 5% of the respondents travelling for education purposes shared this opinion and rated the information material present on these sites as 'very good'. In contrast, 40% of the respondents falling under the leisure category saw this as 'fairly good', while 15% and 20% of the participants travelling for religious purposes and work have respectively rated the interpretation facilities as 'reasonable' and 'not good'. Even though the sample of this pilot is not considered to be large enough to be fully representative, Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) indicates that those tourists

who visited the island for religious purposes or work were not completely satisfied with the type of information and its presentation. Issues and trends should be elucidated with the analysis of the representative sample (see Section 6.5). However, our preliminary results may show that the scope of visit may indeed affect how visitors perceive the quality of interpretation and information being presented by curators and heritage managers. This further confirms the importance of audience segmentation where the 'one-size-fits-all' approach may have a serious impact on specific categories of tourists.
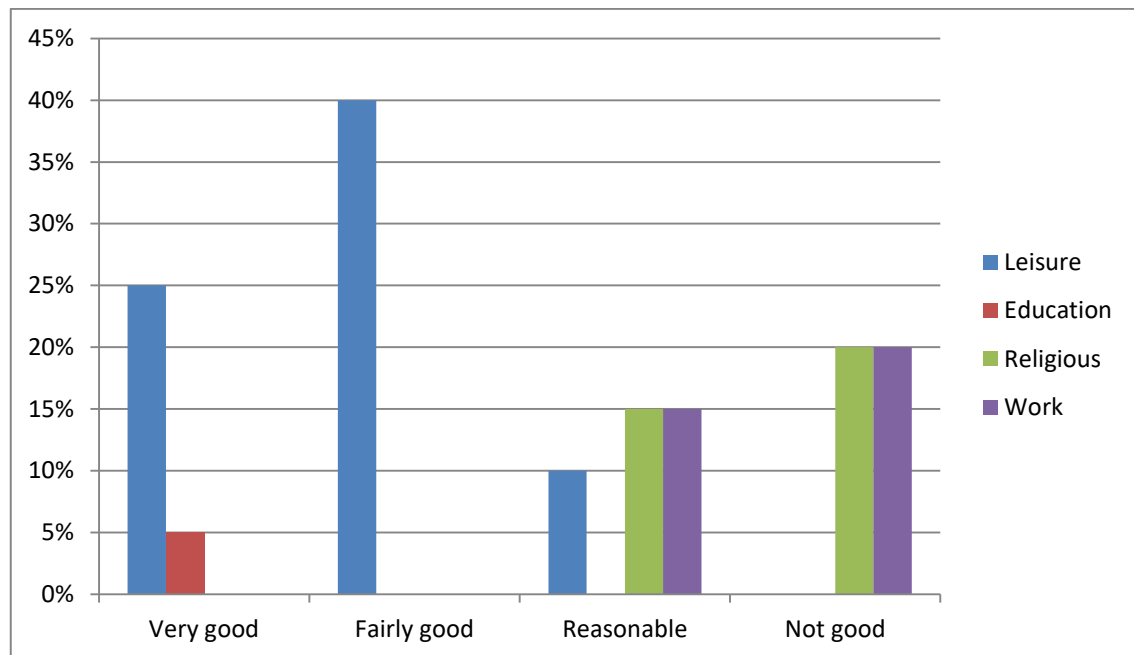
Figure 6.6 – Results obtained from the pilot on the ratings of interpretation facilities and information on the catacomb given by participants who visited Malta for the scope of Leisure, Education, Religion or Work.

6.5.1   Secondary data obtained from National Market Profile Analysis

Data triangulation is a method that allows for the accurate interpretation of results (Redferm & Norman 1994:12). Following the results of the pilot study, a dataset already available was identified on the basis of specific domains similar to those used for the pilot questionnaire, notably the demographics and engagement on specific site visits. The *Market Profile Analysis* of 2012 – an annual survey carried out by the Malta Tourism Authority – was utilised. The survey seeks to assess different trends in tourism and to seek to cater for the tourists' needs, often providing assistance to main stakeholders in

the tourism industry, including heritage operators, and to address any deficiency within the industry (Malta Tourism Authority 2013). The data extrapolated from this survey included (i) the age-group of the sample being interviewed and (ii) the main heritage attractions visited by tourists during their stay in Malta. The 2012 data have been organised in graphs similar to the ones used for my pilot survey for ease of comparison (see Figs 6.6 and 6.7).

Demographics are very important in a semi-structured exercise, being among the main correlating factors which might be applied to various other domains such as main cultural interests and engagement in site visits (Balnaves & Caputi 2001). The results recorded by MTA on the age groups visiting Malta in 2012 showed that the highest percentage of the respondents, that is 27.5%, were aged between 55 and 64. These were followed by the category of senior citizens, who amounted to 27% of the total sample, and by tourists aged between 45 and 54 amounting to 22%, 35 to 44 at 12%, 25 to 34 at 9%, 19 to 24 at 2.5%, while those visitors under 19 were around 1%. The MTA's presentation of data also provides the results obtained from the previous year – in this case the data illustrated were those of 2011. A review of the annual data over time demonstrates a consistency in the results obtained over the two years with no sizeable differences in the range of age-groups visiting the island and the type of heritage attraction preferred by the visitors. The only change in statistics evident was a slight increase of in senior citizens visiting the Maltese islands (+2%). (Fig. 6.7).
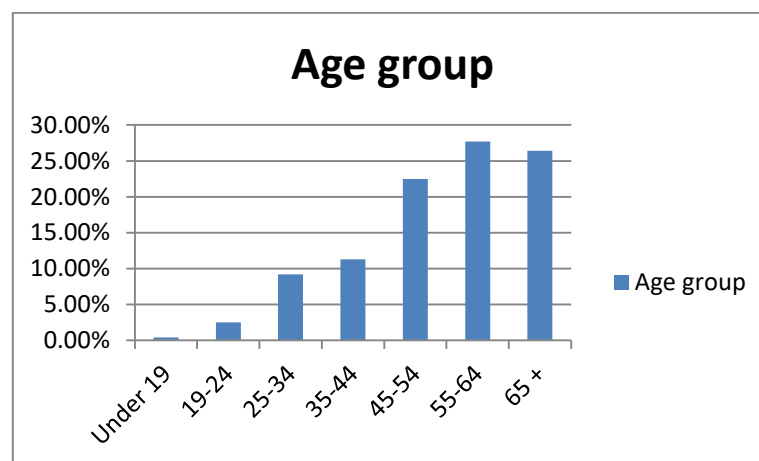
Figure 6.7 – Results from the National Tourism Market Profile Analysis of 2012 on visitor ages

This preliminary audience segmentation exercise has also drawn on the types of heritage attractions most popular among the tourist population (Fig. 6.8). MTA's *Market Profile Analysis* for 2012 demonstrated that 86% of its respondents engaged in sightseeing tours, either via 'Hop-on-Hop-off' busses, pre-booked tours, or heritage trails, while 79% of tourists visit specific historical and archaeological sites. Visits to religious establishments obtained a high score of 69%, with churches being the main sites of religious interest among tourists. Museum visits were the least popular. In fact, only half of the respondents admitted to having visited a museum during their trip.
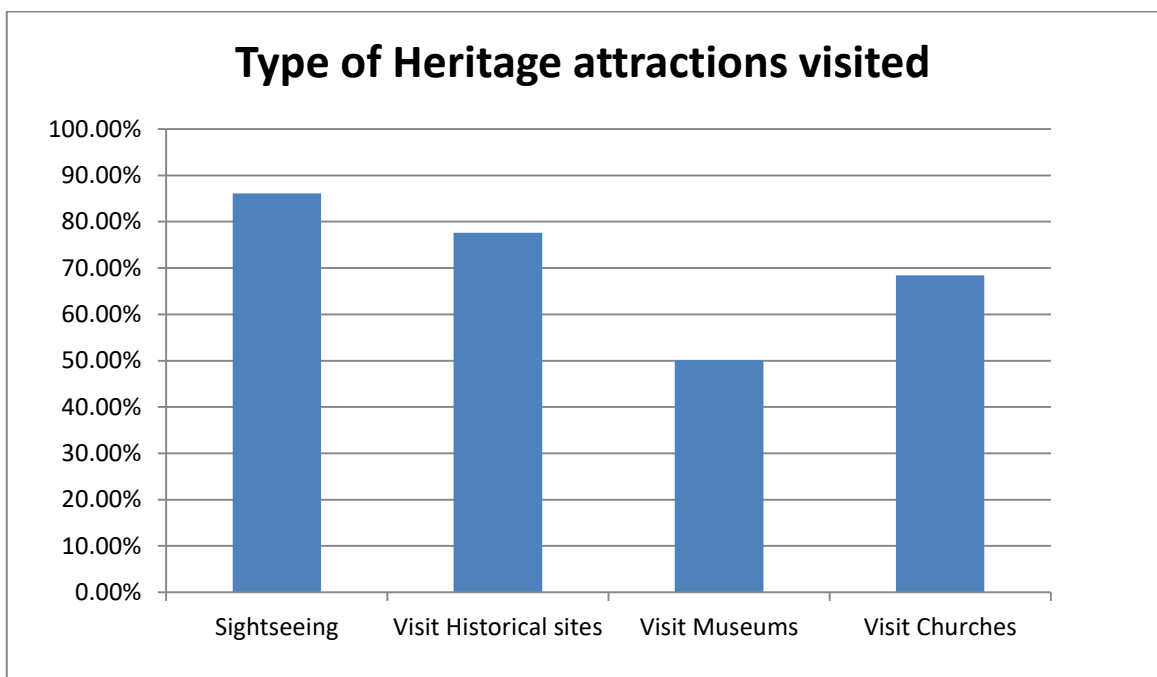
Figure 6.8 – Results obtained from national Tourism Market Profile Analysis of 2012 on the engagement of visitor activities with various heritage attractions

6.6   Interpreting the Results of the Pilot Study in Relation to Secondary Data

Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) conducted on both the pilot study and the MTA's 2012 *Market Profile Analysis* reveals considerable difference in the age-groups of tourists interviewed. EDA demonstrates that the main differences between the age group recorded in my own primary data collection and that of the secondary data, is related to the oldest age category; compared to 10% of senior citizens visiting early Christian

tombs, the overall percentage of senior citizens visiting Malta and the area of Rabat amounted to 27% of the total tourist population (MTA Market Profile Analysis 2012). In effect, only one out of three senior citizens visiting the Mdina and Rabat area is likely to visit the catacombs. This low figure could relate to accessibility and the difficulty of visiting the narrow and/or uneven underground environments of the catacombs. Contrary to the *Market Profile Survey*, the age-group more likely to visit the catacombs is between 25 and 39; they amount to 35% of the pilot sample. This factor might directly link to the sense of adventure of the younger tourist population who have no issue with accessibility and mobility. However, we will see below how far these assumptions are confirmed or dismissed when analysing the fuller survey results (see Section 6.5).

As stated, the pilot study formed a fundamental guide for the full survey, particularly about: (i) the selection of participants, (ii) the reliability of the sample, and (iii) the segmentation of audience visiting the catacombs. This helped ensure the relevancy of questions included in the final questionnaire while increasing the possibility of obtaining a good spread of data from different visitors. The following sub-sections include statements on the key considerations suggested by this first-stage research.

6.6.1 The selection of participants

The participants 'catchment-area' known as the *Dejma* cross, where tourists visiting the catacombs gathered to wait for their friends who were still onsite or to rest after their visit (Fig. 6.9), enabled me to capture a good sample for the full survey, not only in terms of the 'quality' of the respondents but also with regard to the number of tourists needed for this study. Even though this exercise was not meant to be a large-scale survey, a sample of 120 respondents was deemed necessary in view of the overall figures of tourists visiting the Saint Paul and Saint Agatha's Catacombs which was estimated as a total of 18,000 in 2013.[33] Thus my sample size was meant to give an 8.9% sample error with 95% confidence level. Overall, the target respondents were 60 different

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[33] This information comes from the Finance Office of Heritage Malta and the Missionary Society of Saint Paul which is the entity responsible for the Saint Agatha Catacombs, following a formal request made to the respective legal representatives of both entities.

participants visiting Saint Paul's Catacombs and 60 different respondents from Saint Agatha's Catacombs.

Figure 6.9 – The Dejma cross located in front of the entrance to Saint Paul's Catacombs and the alley leading to Saint Agatha's Catacombs

6.6.2 Reliability of the sample

During my pilot study I observed that the flow of visitors at each of the catacombs was rather slow between 10am and noon but picked up in the afternoon. A two-day observation exercise (plus informal questioning of visitors who did not necessarily take part in the pilot survey) revealed that the first port-of-call for most tourists arriving in the areas of Rabat was actually the medieval city of Mdina. The Rabat heritage attractions, which lie approximately ten minutes' walk away from the medieval city, was in fact usually the last item (or one of the last) on the 'to-do' list of tourists. In addition, I discovered that only a small proportion of these tourists proceeded with their visit to Rabat. It is not within the scope of this section to determine why, despite the close proximity to Mdina, tourists do not visit the Rabat heritage sites; however, one main cause seems to be related to transport connections: public transport stops near the main entrance of Mdina but does not offer a route which passes from the main square of Rabat. Even though the 'heritage hub' is ten minutes' walking distance from the historic city, elderly tourists with restricted mobility may decide to stay in Mdina. Potentially, therefore, administering the questionnaires near the entrance of Mdina

would have increased the intake of participants; however, since the common sequence of site visits began first in Mdina and then in Rabat, this would have had a direct impact on the duration of my fieldwork, with more time spent waiting for those few individuals who visited Rabat first and then proceeded to the medieval city.

6.7 The Full Survey: Evaluating Tourist Experiences at Maltese Early Christian Heritage Sites

It is a known fact that tourists create individual experience based on their own 'background, values, attitudes and beliefs' when visiting a heritage attraction (Middleton 2011:216); however, the same experience can either be improved or hindered by the different types of facilities (such as information, interpretation, accessibility, etc.) and the overall quality. My own survey of the tourists to Saint Paul's and Saint Agatha's Catacombs in Rabat, Malta was designed to explore those aspects which might impact on tourist satisfaction levels at Malta's catacombs. The survey design enabled the segmentation of the sample so as to understand whether the current methods of interpretation and presentation used by heritage operators (detailed in Chapter Four) are satisfying the needs of the different types of visitors, notably the GCTs and the SCTs discussed above.

The following evaluation is divided into five different sections based on the research questions listed in Table 6.1. This will allow a systematic and organised analysis of the data obtained from the sample of 120 respondents. These main sections are: (i) *Demographics – Who is visiting the catacombs?* ; (ii) *Guided Tourists vs Individual Tourists;* (iii) *Physical accessibility at the catacombs;* (iv) *Information about the dead;* and (v) *The Traditional vs the Modern*.

6.7.1 Demographics – Who is visiting the catacombs?

Archaeology is often perceived as a masculine activity (Knapp 1998), although as a profession in Europe there are imbalances, with, for example, a higher number of female archaeologists, archivists, etc. in countries like Italy and Spain. In terms of visitors to archaeological sites, there might be little difference between genders, yet in the United

States, research carried out by Ramos and Duganne (2000) in their *Exploring Public Perceptions and Attitudes about Archaeology* used over 1000 US respondents and their results revealed that males tend to visit archaeological sites there more often than females (2000:21). The same cannot be said for the tourists visiting Maltese catacombs, with female respondents to my detailed survey outnumbering male visitors by 15% (Figure 6.10).
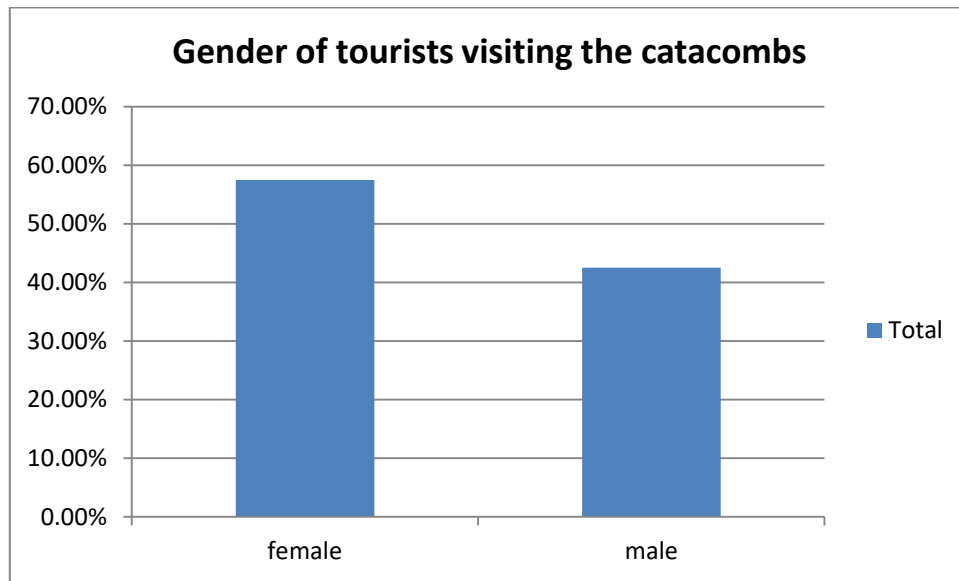
Figure 6.10 – Graph on Gender of respondents

The second indicator relates to the age of the respondents (Fig. 6.11). Here 35.9% of the participants were aged between 25 and 39, followed by 32.5% of those aged between 40 and 45. The youngest age group was among the lowest turnout with 10.8%, followed by senior citizens at 9.1%. The data here reflect the information obtained during our pilot survey where, despite the small sample, the percentage obtained for those visitors aged between 25 and 39 was 35% while that of the senior citizens was 10%, that is less than +/- 1% in both cases.
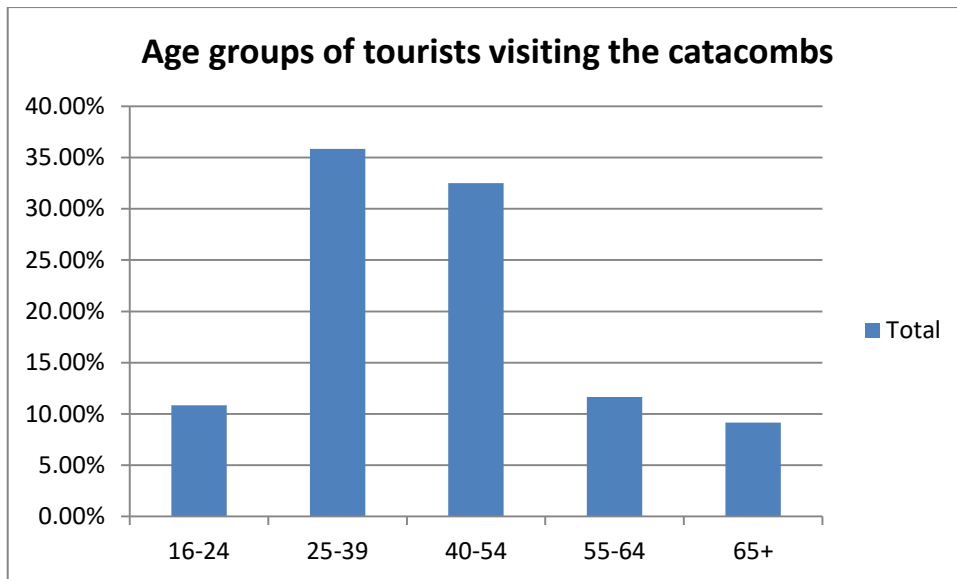
Figure 6.11 – Graph on Age of respondents

6.7.2   Guided Tourists versus Individual Tourists

Were tourists visiting the catacombs alone or with a guided tour? This question, plus enquiring of tourists whether they had already planned their visit to the catacombs, was key to determine if participants could be identified as GCTs or SCTs. A staggering 91% of the respondents claimed that they were individual tourists, 5% stated that they hired a guide specifically for the catacombs, while 4 % were with a guided tour (Fig. 6.12).
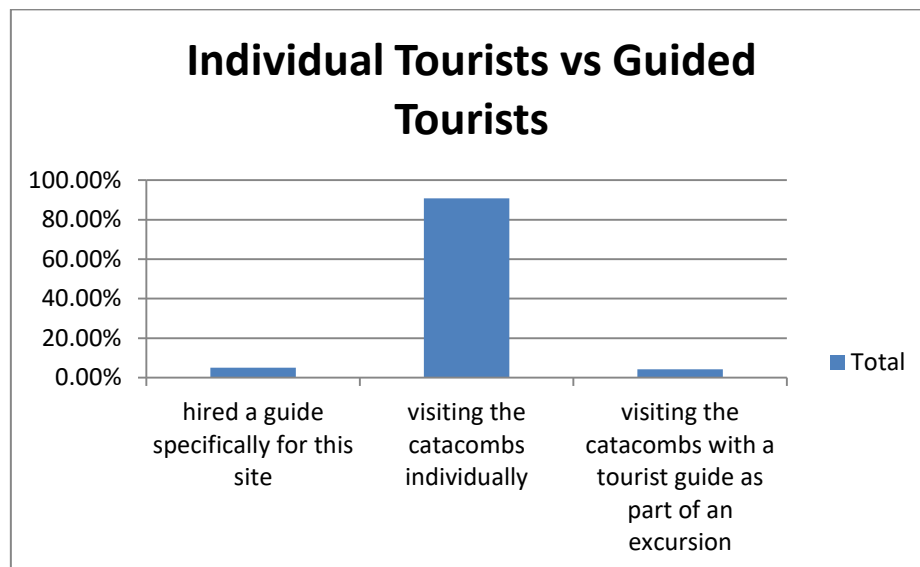
Figure 6.12 – Graph on Individual Tourists vs Guided Tourists

However, out of the 91% of the individual tourists, 56% had planned the visit well ahead of their arrival in Malta; the rest came as part of general sightseeing. These percentages may well indicate that not all individual tourists can be considered as SCTs (Fig. 6.13).
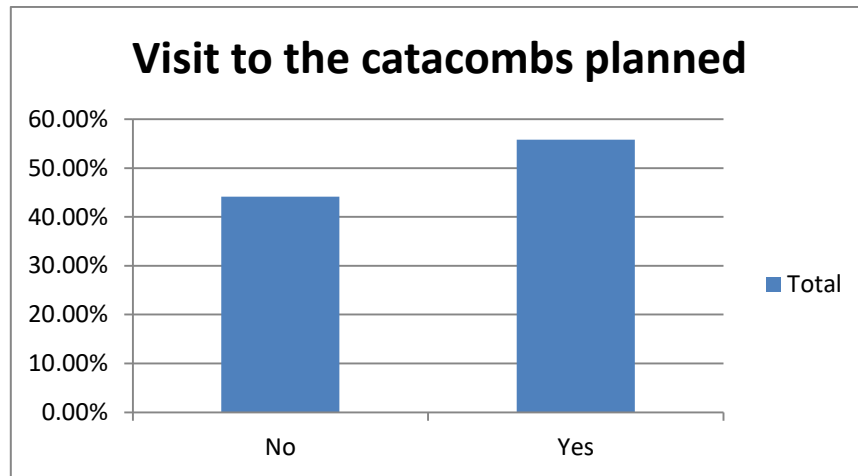
Figure 6.13 – Graph showing percentage of visitors planning their site visit

6.7.3   Physical accessibility at the catacombs

Physical accessibility at heritage sites emerges as one of the key factors which determine visitor satisfaction (Garrod & Fyall 2000). It should be noted, however, that making a heritage site accessible to the public is not a straightforward task, particularly when no physical alterations are possible, such as to an interior of a catacomb (Cardona & Farrugia 2012). My questionnaire provided the opportunity to compare the results of the respondents who visited two distinct sites, namely Saint Paul's Catacombs – which has been recently upgraded to incorporate a fully accessible visitors' centre, and Saint Agatha's Catacombs – the first catacomb complex that had an on-site museum but whose visitors' infrastructure has remained unchanged for the last 30 years.

As already observed during the pilot survey, the positive rating provided by younger audiences on the accessibility of catacombs is among the highest recorder. In fact almost 51% of the respondents aged between 25 and 54 rated accessibility as very good and fairly good (Fig. 6.14). These were followed by 10% of those between 16 and 24 who provided the same rating. The results obtained from older age groups was surprising: when considering that the number respondents falling within this age group was lower than the others, the replies obtained from this category are almost equivalent to those

of the other age-groups. The pilot survey had indicated that replies by senior citizens on accessibility would have been susceptible to a low rating; however, the full survey demonstrates that 14% out of the 20% of the sample who are of an older age group rated accessibility at Maltese catacombs as 'very good' or 'fairly good'.
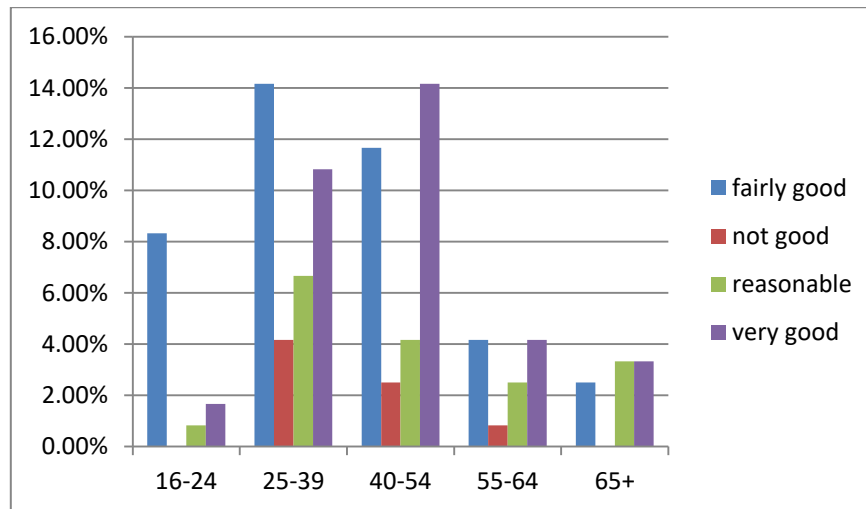
Figure 6.14 – Rating of accessibility of the catacombs by age group

In order to better understand if the respondents were referring to both sites or to one particular site, a second graph was created (Fig. 6.15). The outcome of this analysis shows that 20% of the respondents believe that accessibility as Saint Paul's Catacombs is very good, compared to 14% at St. Agatha's. This was followed by 25% and 16% of the respondents who rated accessibility at Saint Agatha's and Saint Paul's as fairly good respectively. Despite the upgrade of Saint Paul's visitors' centre, it was noticeable that respondents were still satisfied with the accessibility at the more old-fashioned Saint Agatha's Catacombs (but it should be noted that this site was among the first archaeological sites in Rabat to have rest rooms for persons with mobility impairment).
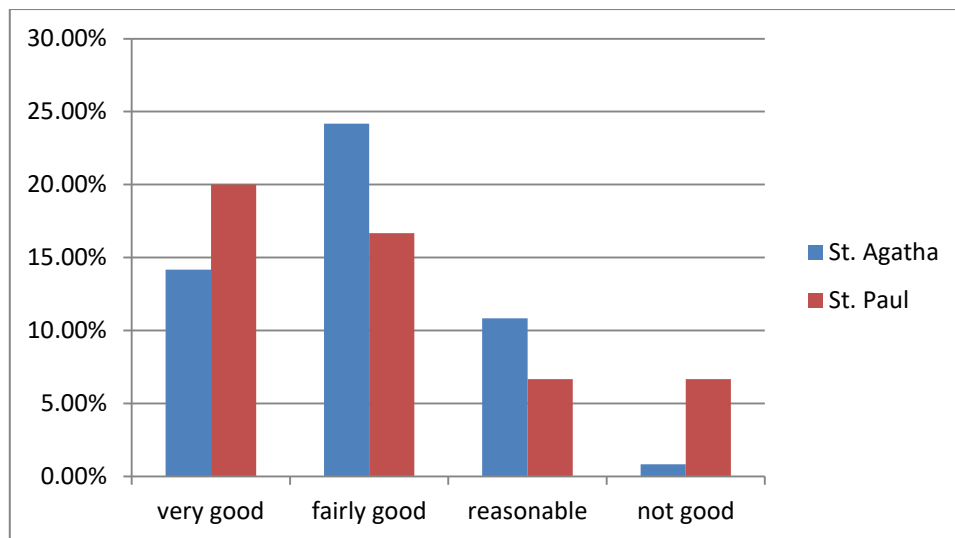
Figure 6.15 – Comparative rating of accessibility at Saint Paul's and Saint Agatha's Catacombs

6.7.4   Information about the dead

Having a diverse range of information available at heritage sites is paramount to the overall experience of visitors (Masberg & Silverman 1996). The responses obtained from the participants who were asked to rate the interpretation facilities (such as information boards, audio-guides and audio visuals) were almost evenly distributed. In fact, 29%, 26% and 27% of the total sample claimed that these facilities are 'very good', 'fairly good' or 'reasonable' respectively. Only (although this is still a fairly high number) 17% considered the information provided as not good enough.
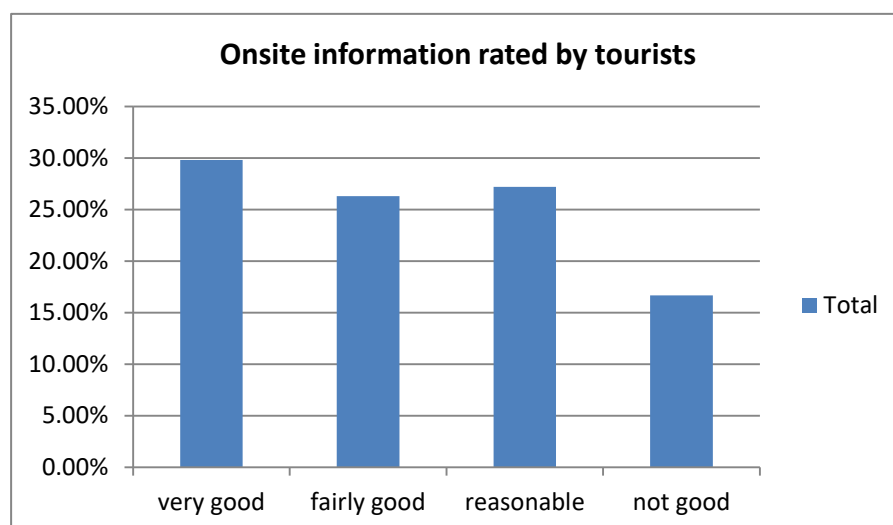
Figure 6.16 – Rating of onsite information at Saint Pauls' and Saint Agatha's Catacombs

In order to obtain a clear picture about which site the participants are more likely to attribute higher scores, a graph was created to distinguish between the replies related to each (Figure 6.17). Saint Paul's Catacombs obtained the highest score, with 19% of the respondents claiming that the information present at this site is very good; however, it is interesting that 13% saw the same information just as 'fairly good'.
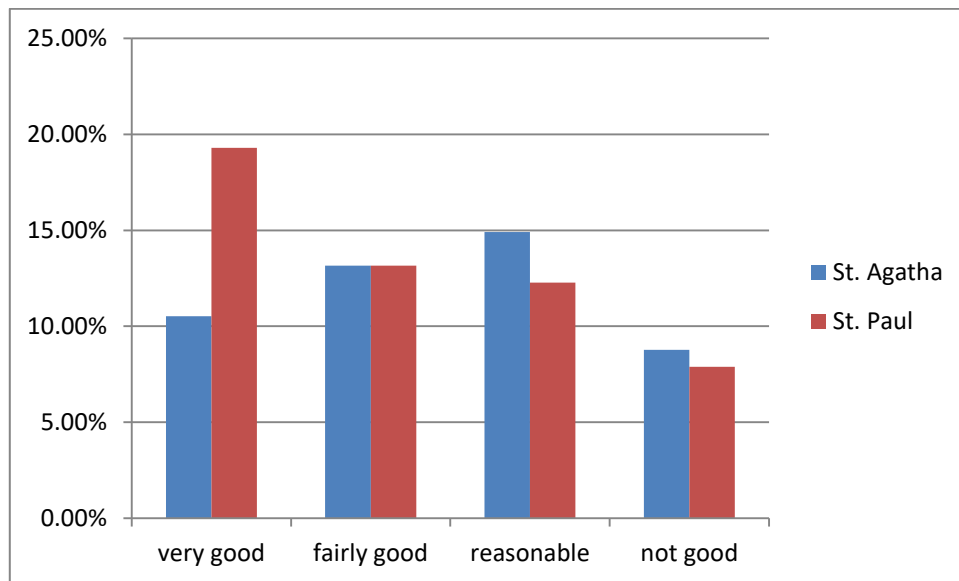
Figure 6.17 - Rating of on-site information for each catacomb

A third, more complex graph (Figure 6.18) documents the correlation between individual tourists, particularly those considered here as General Cultural Tourists and Specialised Cultural Tourists, to see how different tourist types/segments view the quality of information presented at both sites. A prominent 18% of the respondents to the newly established visitors' centre at Saint Paul's Catacombs rated the information as very good, while less than 11% of the SCTs visiting Saint Agatha's Catacombs claim that the information provide here is very good. One interesting figure, which fits the discussion presented earlier in this chapter (see Section 6.4.2), is related to those respondents visiting the catacombs with a guided group or as part of an excursion. The total percentage of the respondents in this category rated the on-site information as not good or reasonable. This outcome could confirm the argument that the way information is presented to this category (mostly via the tourist guides) is currently not good enough.
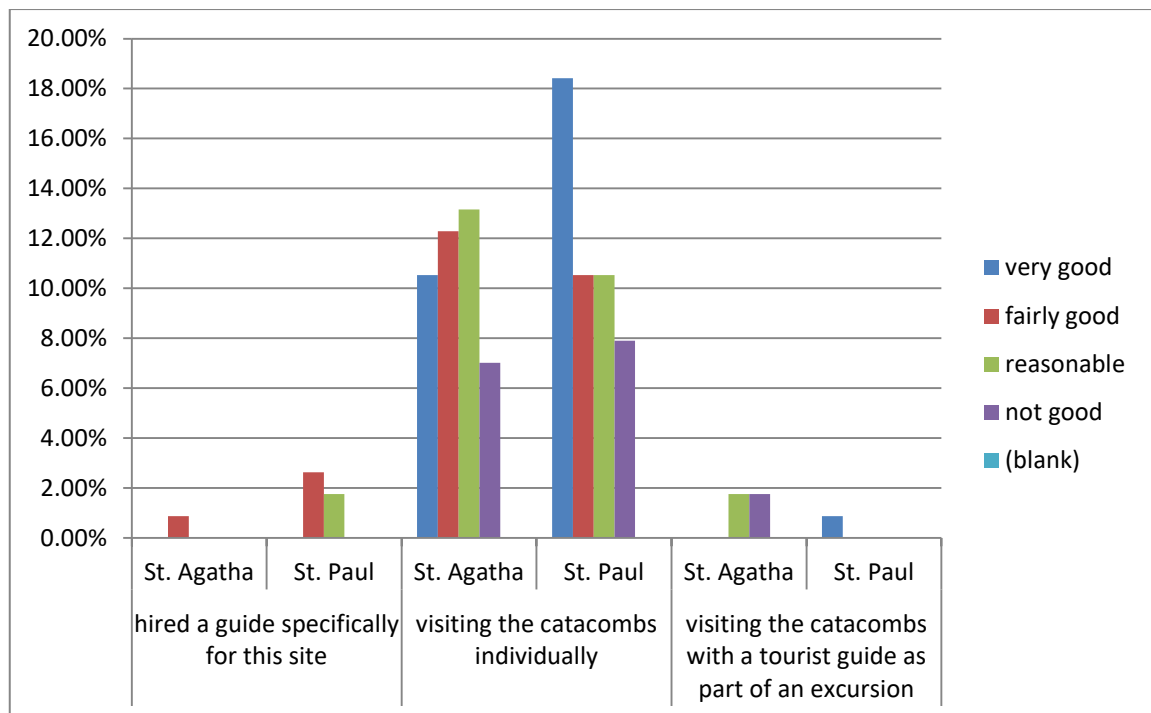
Figure 6.18 – Rating of information per catacomb per tourist's category

6.7.5   The Traditional vs the Modern

Technological advances in the last decades have changed how heritage sites are (or should be) presented. The initial thought is that such technological facilities, for example, digital information panels, 3D experiential heritage, audio-visuals and more, improved the position of heritage operators who continuously strive to provide the best product. Malta is investing considerable funds on new technologies at heritage sites in an effort to increase the appreciation of cultural heritage among different audiences; however, one might ask, to what extent is such investment providing return? To answer this, my survey included questions which (when analysed and correlated) could shed more light on this situation, which has not so far been given due importance at local level.
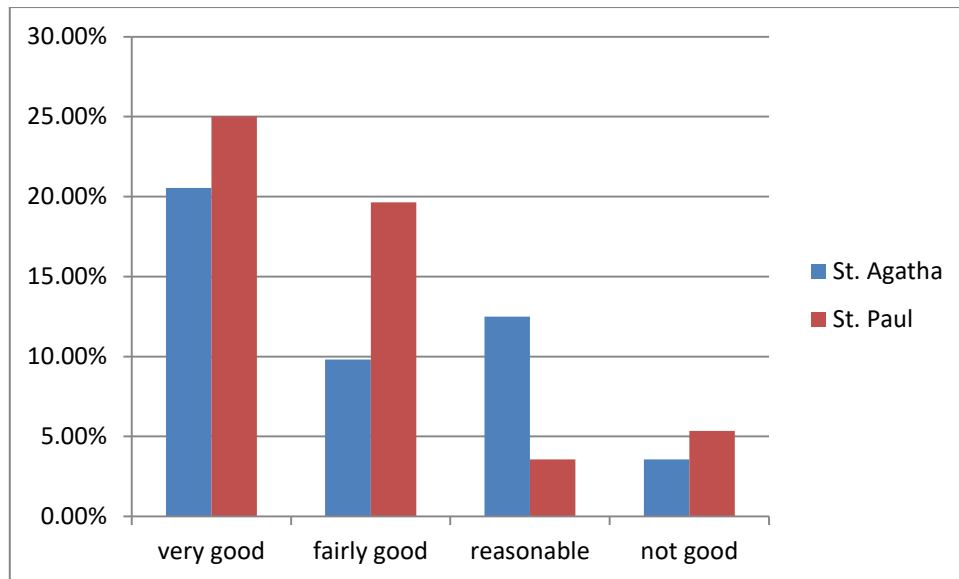
Figure 6.19 – Rating of interpretation at the Saint Paul's and Saint Agatha's Catacombs

In order to understand whether the methods of heritage presentation and interpretation are satisfying the needs of the visitors, participants were asked first to rate the overall experience at both catacombs. The results reveal that visitors obtained a better experience at Saint Paul's Catacombs with 25% and 19% of the respondents claiming that their experience was 'very good' and 'fairly good' respectively. Tourists visiting Saint Agatha's Catacombs provided a lower rate, with 20% and 9% of visitors saying that their overall experience here was either 'very good' or 'fairly good'. (Fig. 6.19)
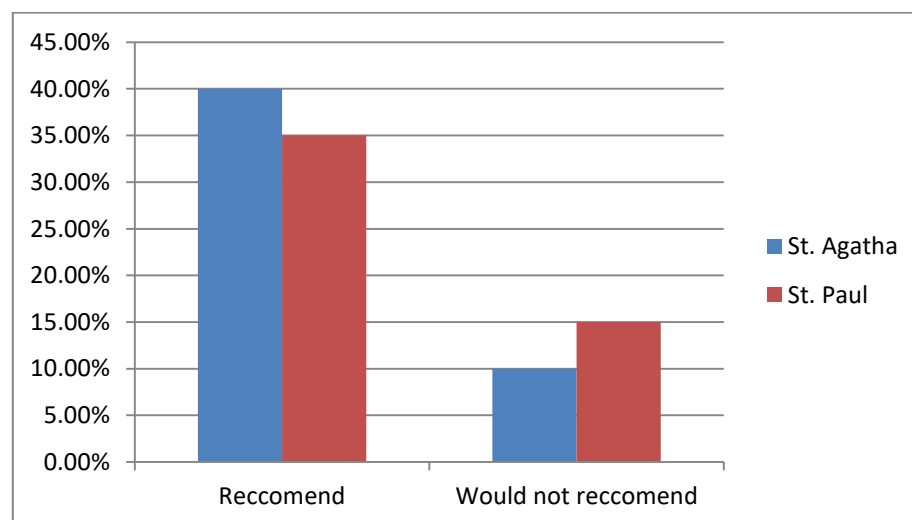
Figure 6.20 – Visitors' recommendation about the catacombs

207

Next were responses to the question of which catacomb would participants be likely to recommend to others (Figure 6.20). The results show a different trend from Figure 6.19, which mainly favoured Saint Paul's Catacombs. This time, 40% of the respondents claimed that they would recommend Saint Agatha's Catacombs against 35% for Saint Pauls. 15% of the tourists visiting Saint Paul's Catacombs were less likely to recommend the site while a lower percentage of 10% would not recommend the Saint Agatha's Catacombs.
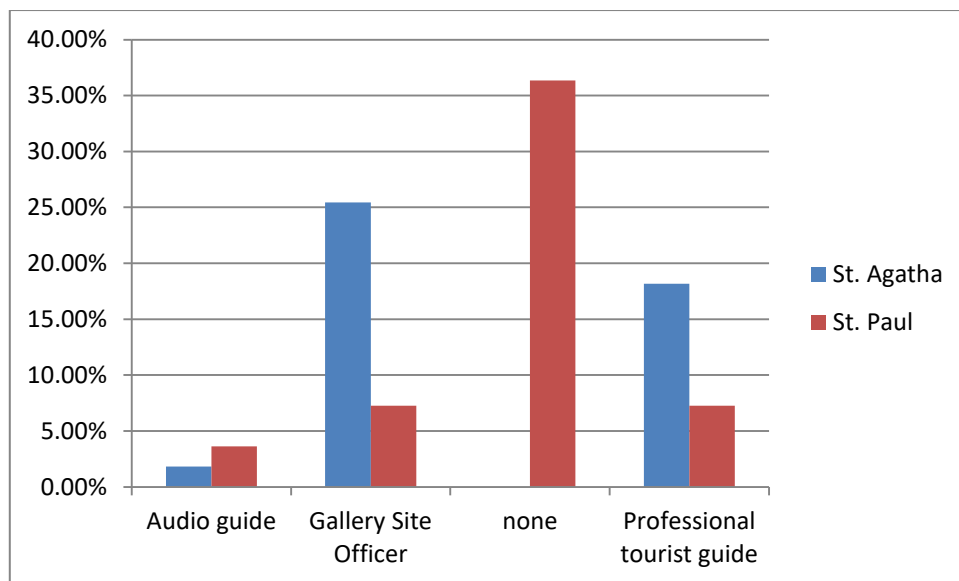
Figure 6.21 – Graph on who guides visitors at Malta's catacombs

In an attempt to understand why Saint Agatha's Catacombs are more likely to be more recommended (despite the high degree of satisfaction recorded among participants visiting Saint Paul's Catacombs), Figure 6.21 was generated which drew on the method of conveying the information during the actual visit. The results here demonstrate a considerable difference in the 'freedom' given to visitors at Saint Paul's and Saint Agatha's Catacombs – in fact, whereas at Saint Paul's tourists are allowed to visit the sites on their own, at Saint Agatha's a guided tour conducted by an in-house guide is mandatory. Here the guide is in charge of providing information while monitoring the early Christian frescoes and other cultural heritage features to prevent possible vandalism inside the catacombs.

These different situations seem to affect the tourists visiting the two catacombs. Overall, 36% of tourists claim that no direct information was provided during the actual visit to

Saint Paul's Catacombs; 6% were provided with information by the gallery site officer; and 2% chose to take an audio guide at an additional cost. The picture is completely different for the results for Saint Agatha's Catacombs: here 40% of the respondents stated that their visit to the catacombs included an explanation either by the gallery site officer or a professional guide. There were no respondents who claimed that no direct information was given to them during the visit. This situation might indeed affect the visitors' experiences at the site. Despite increases in technological gadgets, mobile applications and interactive interpretation, the data here show that the human factor remains strong when it comes to the presentation and conveying of information, to the extent that it may indeed affect the tourist's satisfaction at a particular heritage sites.

The structure of my extended questionnaire also gave respondents scope to highlight three aspects of the catacombs and its narrative which they thought made the site fascinating (Q.27 of Appendix III). The scope of this question was two-fold: (i) to demonstrate the visitor's positive engagement during the visit - which should be reflected in the level of knowledge acquired following the visit, and (ii) to reveal those aspects of the sites which attract visitors most and to determine whether these are actually the right aspects that require attention in terms of presentation and interpretation.

Very significantly, analysis showed that around 60% of the respondents were not able to highlight more than one general aspect, notably the antiquity of the site. The answers given by the rest of the participants (40%, and identifiable as Specialised Cultural Tourists) were various and can be ranked as follows:

(i)   The early Christian frescoes

(ii) The tombs for the infants

(iii) The underground structure, size and typology

(iv) The skeletons inside the tombs

(v) The state of conservation

These aspects are indeed very important for the catacombs; however, as discussed in Chapters Two and Four, there are many other notable features and aspects which make Maltese catacombs unique when compared to foreign counterparts, notably: the rock-

cut head-rests; the rock-cut triclinia; the internal architectural development; inscriptions; the early Christian symbols; the different religions in the same catacombs; the deceased themselves, and their palaeopathology.

The fact that the respondents were not able to highlight any of the above is, in my opinion, rather worrying in terms of the messages and information being presented at Malta's early Christian funerary sites. While the very basics are being conveyed, the information received and retained seems too superficial – despite the displays and modes of delivery of information at the new visitors' centre at Saint Paul's Catacombs. This, I believe, is not acceptable, at least, when questioning SCTs.

6.8   Evaluating the Cultural Heritage Employees

In 2012, Malta's Superintendence of Cultural Heritage published its second *National Cultural Heritage Strategy* (NCHS) with the aim 'to create a greater symbiosis between Central Government investment on one hand, and the significant contribution of Local Councils, Voluntary Organisations and Private Enterprise in the care and development of Malta's immense cultural patrimony' on the other (2012:3). Employment in the cultural heritage sector was among the various topics discussed in this 52-page document. The arguments presented focused on the potential to increase employment levels in order to contribute to a better management of the cultural heritage resources while increasing the well-being of the population which, as explained earlier on this chapter, has a direct link with engagement in cultural heritage (Government of Malta, NCHS 2012:17).

Key, therefore, were proposed measures by the Maltese government as a way forward. Among the number of actions envisaged were: (i) the operational capability of the national agency responsible for Malta's cultural heritage to broaden citizens' participation and engagement at heritage sites; (ii) best practices in conservation; (iii) the interaction between tourism and cultural heritage; and (iv) the promotion of high quality research in cultural heritage (2012:12-17). Objectives 3.6 and 3.7 of the 2012 strategy also refer to the importance of addressing the 'needs of the labour market

within cultural heritage sector, including issues of continuous staff development, capacity building, and educational preparedness' (2012:31). In addition, there is occasional reference to the importance of training of professional staff, such as conservation scientists - who are among the most professional body of workers and who are regularly provided with professional development opportunities (particularly via new courses such as the Diploma in Cultural Heritage which targets conservation technicians wishing to specialise in a specific field of conservation (MCAST 2016).

One can observe that this strategy refers to heritage employees in broad terms and fails to specify roles within this sector which may be considered as secondary, particularly the semi-professional staff such as gallery site officers and front-office personnel working at cultural heritage sites, who are responsible for the daily running of these sites. Nevertheless, the broad comment made on the training of 'different levels of employees' (Government of Malta,NCHS 2012:33) is meant to include this category of workers and therefore an evaluation on the current state of play on the continuous professional development of such workers is very important since, as evidenced in this chapter, the approach of these 'front-liners' may affect the visitor's satisfaction at heritage sites.

Evaluation and monitoring of staff performance working at heritage sites are not new to countries such as England and Scotland who have specialised programmes and online toolkits which provide step-by-step guidelines on such evaluations (e.g. the SPMM[34]). The exercise carried out as part of this chapter draws on GEM's model of evaluation and uses some of the indicators listed in the SPMM in an effort to explore the current state of play of Malta's cultural heritage employees. The following list identifies the indicators used for the evaluation of cultural heritage employees working at Maltese early Christian catacombs.

Indicator 1 – Number of years working in the Heritage Sector

Indicator 2 – Whose decision to work at catacombs

Indicator 3 – Assessment on employees' knowledge on the site(s) they work in

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[34] The *Staff Performance Monitoring and Management* is an evaluation system created by the Group for education in Museums (GEM)
 - http://www.gem.org.uk/lotc/lotc_resources/dev_learning_services/guidance/gn_staff_perf_mgt.pdf

Indicator 4 – Provision of training opportunities

Indicator 5 – Self-evaluation

The evaluation was carried out on all four employees working at Saint Paul's and Saint Agatha's Catacombs who work as full time gallery site officers (GSOs) and in-house guides. My one-to-one semi-structured interview consisted of 16 questions, some of which provided response-options while others were open-ended (see Appendix II).

One early question was related to work experience, notably the number of years that the respondents have been working at the catacombs. Three out of four employees reported over ten years of experience whereas one GSO had been working at the catacombs for just one year. In terms of whether the employees had had a say on the decision to work at the catacombs, both GSOs working with Heritage Malta (the governmental agency) explained that their deployment came from the HR department and they had had no say on the decision made by senior officials. Conversely, the employees working at Saint Agatha, which is a private organisation, explained that it was their own decision to apply for the job of GSO following a call for application.

Assessment of the employees' knowledge about the sites and their historical and chronological setting would seem not to be a priority for the senior management at Saint Agatha's Catacombs. In fact, both employees working here claimed that they were not assessed on this aspect. On the other hand, the respondents from Saint Paul's Catacombs explained that despite there being no formal assessment, they had been asked about the period in general prior to their employment. Yet the Heritage Malta employees stated that they were not provided with relevant literature about the specific site in order to develop and increase their knowledge about their workplace; however both employees said that they regularly search for new literature about the catacombs so as to keep updated on current research and so be able to inform visitors should they ask for specific information. By contrast, the GSOs working at the Saint Agatha's Catacombs reported that they were indeed provided with publications related to the site. These publications were issued by Victor Camilleri, the first curator of those catacombs (see Chapter Three) who had also set up an archive containing a wide range of literature on local and foreign early Christian archaeology. However, despite all the

available resources, employees affirmed that they are less likely to search for new literature and update themselves on this subject – despite having a unique archive (with limited access to the general public) at their disposal.

One notable issue arising from these interviews appears to be the lack of communication between GSO and Curator, especially when it comes to current or relevant archaeological activities taking place at the site they work in. One GSO stated that during recent excavation works carried out as part of the restoration project, they were not made aware of any discoveries, and that general information on what was going on had to be retrieved from articles on the newspaper and social media. Yet the GSO explained how foreign and domestic tourists visiting the catacombs always ask about new finds at the catacombs. All participants in this evaluation showed serious concern that they might not always provide the visitors with the correct and latest information. Despite these deficiencies, which may have their roots in the way heritage is governed by the national agency, the catacomb employees seem to have acquired good/very good knowledge of their respective sites – as seen in the evaluation table which lists a number of academic questions about the sites which all of the employers were able to answer in detail (see Q.16 in Appendix II).

The results obtained from this evaluation demonstrate that the level of confidence of the GSO may be hindered by the lack of Continuous Professional Development offered to them by their employer. Despite opportunities like these being envisaged in the *National Cultural Heritage Strategy* (2012), no activities seem to be currently in place which address such issues. This may in turn have a direct and indirect impact on visitor satisfaction and overall experience at Malta's early Christian catacombs – and, of course, other heritage sites on the islands.

6.9   Interpretation of the Results and Conclusions

A key issue which emerges from this chapter and which could impact on the experience of visitors is the generic mission statement that the National Agency operating Saint Paul's Catacombs has with regards to the archaeological sites. Strikingly, the

organisation responsible for the Saint Agatha Historical Complex does not even have a mission statement. Creating a mission statement would give scope to set clear targets and objectives on the service which the management provides to the visitors. Such a coherent and specific mission statement could gear visitors' understanding and expectations of the respective sites while provide a clear view of what the management intends to do with the heritage resources trusted in their hands. The results obtained from the above research exercise confirms the initial premise presented in the introduction of this chapter that different visitors may be interested in the same heritage site for various reason, be it religious or archaeological; however, the site and their respective visitors' centres focus on a single theme which may not always satisfy different audiences. It is not the scope of all heritage sites to cater for a wide spectrum of visitors, especially when the history of the site or its content creates what is known as *dissonant heritage* (a topic explored by Tunbridge & Ashworth 1996). Therefore, having curators and heritage managers, who are bound by the necessary ethical requirements, setting their own mission statement for the site they administer may not only contribute to keeping up the standards and best practices in the heritage sphere but also will inform visitors of what they should expect from a site which is presented in a specific way for a specific reason.

A clear mission statement would not only improve the experience of visitors who have specific expectations (which can range from religious to academic) but it also contributes to the sustainability and conservation of the site itself. The suggestion being made here does not par with Howard's *Keep'em out* notion (2003:245), but rather it provides an opportunity to curators to target the right audience while allowing visitors to choose a heritage site responsibly. Such an objective should not be seen as one which promotes exclusivity to a particular audience but as a way forward to help protect heritage.

The second issue discussed was related to the preparation of the front-office personnel working at the catacombs. Despite the results of the semi-structured questionnaire demonstrating positive results in terms of the relevant site-knowledge of these individuals, from a participant observation carried out during a heritage activity, it emerged that the approach of the front office was not adequate enough to reach international standards. In fact employees seemed to give less attention to those

tourists who tended to be less aware of/interested in the site while giving far more attention to those who are considered as Specialised Culture Tourists (SCTs). This deficiency in approach comes out clearly from the results obtained during the interviews where most of the GSOs admitted that they were never given proper training for their position but felt that they should be regularly provided with adequate training.

In conclusion, the literature review together with the survey presented above demonstrate that there are a number of factors which could affect the visitor's experience and satisfaction at Malta's early Christian sites. The core determinant of visitor satisfaction identified here is lack of human interaction (such as on-site conversation, explanation and extended question and answer sessions) between the visitors and a site-officer or guide. This is directly linked to the results obtained in Chapter Five where lack of interest in specific topics among tourist guides, such as early Christian heritage, and the negative impact this may have on the professional development of tourist guides, is affecting the quality of information being provided to the visitors. Tourists who are interested in learning about Malta's early Christian catacombs would appear to prefer to engage in a visit where guided tours are offered by curators, GSOs or an in-house guide rather than being left to roam around alone or even with the help of audio-guides (despite these being highly rated by professional tourist guides), digital information panels and other modern technologies. For many of the tourists who took part in this survey the real interactive experience seems to have been the one obtained where a dedicated guide was leading their visit. Why? Perhaps it is about retention of information: hearing from someone will register more as one might concentrate more; reading a text or listening to a recording may generate far less 'take-up'. An additional need would thus be to understand better which types of text, visual and other information appeals most and why.

The research exercises presented in this chapter draw on the HIMRMOTHEA model, particular on the components of tourism and heritage as operators, managers and interpreters of heritage, to explore links between the two sectors. This model might be extended on a larger sample which matches an adequate percentage of the total inbound tourists to Malta. It is only then when overall generalisations can be made and compared with other countries without limiting the conclusions to specific sites and

audiences. My surveys have, however, demonstrated important links between the tourists, the site officers and their knowledge, which have previously lacked empirical discussions. The next chapter will discuss the knowledge on specific heritage topics in a more formal context and consider the pedagogy of archaeology – notably at primary education level - and how the quality of teaching the past, particularly local heritage, may affect future research and interpretation.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ARCHAEOLOGY AND PEDAGOGY IN MALTA'S EDUCATION SECTOR

7.1   Introduction

The study of archaeology is often perceived as an activity primarily reserved for Higher Education students. This is evidenced by the staggering imbalance between the literature published on topics related to university-based archaeology teaching (e.g. Colley 2004; Handley 2015; Richardson an Almansa-Sanchez 2015; Stone and McKenzie 1994) and those carried out at primary schools (e.g. UNESCO 1989; Malone *et al.* (eds) 2000; Steele and Owen 2003; Zarmati 2015). In their introduction to *The Excluded Past: Archaeology in Education,* McKenzie and Stone spell out how their study tries to justify why archaeology should be taught at university level; however, they go on to say that the framework of their research may eventually lead to 'identify some of the reasons for the inclusion of the teaching of archaeology at earlier stages of learning' (1994:7).

The objectives of this chapter are not to find a balance or a solution to this disparity but rather to critically evaluate the educational resources which are currently available at the two ends, particularly in Malta. Therefore, I ask if limited research in the pedagogy of archaeology in primary education as well as restrictions within the academic sphere (such as the lack of accessibility to material culture) are somehow affecting the resources through which primary educators and academics can carry out their teaching in an effective way. The hypothesis here is that lack of educator resources – where the term 'educators' is used broadly so as to incorporate both primary teachers as well as university lecturers – can hinder (i) the appreciation which school children and university students can develop about specific topics in archaeology, and (ii) the degree of interest of both educators and students in cultural heritage.

Primary education and academia are two core components of the HIRMOTHEA model. Both fields are considered to play a key role in the overall 'heritage product' and its interpretation, as these not only drive the students to 'gain knowledge, intellectual skills, and attitudes that enhance their capacities for maintenance and improvement of

our society and ways of living' (Hunter 1988:2), but are also essential tools by which prospective heritage specialists are educated and trained. Accordingly, the mechanism of the review model being proposed in this thesis considers both these fields as two (out of the four) indispensable links of a chain which should secure a sustainable heritage interpretation. The other two links – tourism and heritage – have been discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

This chapter is divided into two main parts: the first section will provide a review of literature related to the study of archaeology topics in primary education, drawing on examples from both local and foreign contexts. More detailed discussion will come in a form of a case study (Sections 7.3.1 and 7.3.2), related to school visits to one of Malta's early Christian heritage sites, while a preliminary audit of the available primary education resources on archaeology in Malta is offered. I will examine the data obtained from semi-structured questionnaires to educators working in two different primary schools; these will determine if and how any educational resources are in fact being used by school teachers.

The second part discusses the study of early Christian heritage as a core component of Maltese archaeology at the University level. I will present the results of a second survey carried out with undergraduate students. The key objective here is not to audit the modes of teaching at the University of Malta but rather to explore the interests of students in early Christian themes and to identify those main issues which are holding back tertiary students in Malta from furthering their studies in this specific field.

7.2   Primary Education and the Study of Archaeology Topics in Malta and Abroad

It is a known fact that a good proportion (c. 10%) of visitors who conduct archaeological site visits are young students accompanied by their teachers during educational outings (Heritage Malta (HM) Annual 2014). Site visits by Maltese schoolchildren are organised

as part of the requirements of the Social Studies syllabus for Primary Education and History syllabus for Secondary Education (Government of Malta, Department of Curriculum Management, 2013). One objective of the 'Malta National Curriculum Framework' (NCF) published by the Maltese Ministry of Education and Employment in 2012 is to teach students how to respect and promote Maltese culture and heritage. In fact, this document states that 'Different learning areas provide students with opportunities to experience our [Maltese] national culture and heritage to appreciate and strengthen their national identity. A good programme of complementary curricular activities including cultural visits and projects would support formal class teaching in the achievement of this aim' (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012:78).

The country's past history as a British colony has certainly influenced the way the Maltese education system has been shaped (Vallejo & Dooly, 2008:3). Similar to the British educational model, Archaeology topics in Malta are taught during History lessons. This is not completely wrong per se, especially because the Maltese History curriculum clearly lists how the skills to be taught should: (i) stimulate interest in and enthusiasm for the study of the past; (ii) promote the acquisition of knowledge and understanding of human activity in the past, linking it, as appropriate, with the present; (iii) ensure that candidates' knowledge is rooted in an understanding of the nature and the use of historical evidence; (iv) help pupils towards an understanding of the development over time of social and cultural values; (v) promote an understanding of the nature of cause and consequence, continuity and change, similarity and difference; (vi) develop essential historical research skills; and (vii) provide an appropriate integration of our national history within a wider international context (University of Malta History SEC Syllabus 2015, 2014:2).

Mike Corbishley, in his *Pinning Down the Past: Archaeology, Heritage, and Education Today* (2011), claims that the majority of archaeologists often lament that archaeology is not taught as a regular subject at schools. The author, however, argues that the fact that the word 'archaeology' is not present in the curricula does not mean that evidence-based learning, which archaeology can be, is not being integrated into history lessons. Corbishley explains how archaeology is most generally present in different syllabi or

curricula and that it is, to a certain extent, the responsibility of archaeologists to assist educators in giving due importance to such subjects (2011:110). The latter has to be discussed in light of the fact that most history educators prefer the didactic teaching method and therefore tend to teach history only 'in terms of period based topics rather than themes or skills based activities' (Henson 2004:35).

Corbishley's arguments can be easily compared with the current situation in Malta. If one had to go through the Maltese curriculum, one would see that archaeology topics are scattered over two subjects, namely religion and social studies (Government of Malta, Primary Curriculum 2013). In fact, topics like catacombs are covered as part of the topic 'early Christians in Malta and the Advent of St Paul' during religion classes while Maltese prehistory is taught during social studies lessons. There is no doubt that the integration of these topics at primary level is very important, however, the fragmentary way in which these topics are taught may not be ideal. Teresa Rosegrant, Professor of Early Childhood Education at Illinois State University, argues that schoolchildren are not always able to summarise what happened during lessons the same day and consequently tend to lose interest on similar topics taught in different subjects. For this reason a fragmentary curriculum should be avoided and instead learning through similar themes should be promoted (Rosegrant 1993:12). Thus, if one had to apply this understanding to the current situation of Archaeology education in primary schools in Malta, teaching archaeology topics in different subject areas will *not* give the best learning outcomes.

Despite current efforts to improve the system, particularly by the Maltese government agency for cultural heritage, Heritage Malta, which has recently set up an education section to cater for schools (Fig. 7.1), an analysis of the overall framework from the viewpoint of archaeological and historical pedagogies, leaves much to be desired. The strategy proposed by the NCF on archaeology topics taught at primary level is rather unstructured and imbalanced, notably due to the unrefined chronology of events which puts considerable emphasis on prehistory. This aspect will be discussed later, following

a detailed review of the educational resources offered by the Education Department within the Malta Ministry of Education as well as Heritage Malta[35].

As noted, Malta's NCF explicitly acknowledges the importance of cultural visits and encourages participation at specialised activities related to cultural heritage. Despite the stance of the Ministry of Education about being very clear, a closer look at the work plan set by the Maltese Government Education Department reveals a number of gaps within the same framework – these are particularly characterised by the haphazard chronological order in which archaeological and historical topics are taught, such as events on Malta during the late Middle Ages being covered *before* topics related to prehistory (Government of Malta, Department of Curriculum Management 2013).

In the article 'Teaching the Next Generation - Archaeology for Children' (2003), Steele and Owen argue that archaeology has nowadays managed to remove the stigma that this discipline is only for academics. They describe how children are increasingly involved in hands-on archaeological activities and how this is contributing towards a better understanding of this field (e.g. 'The Big Dig' in Sydney, Australia - www.thebigdig.com.au/). Steele and Owen (2003:672) explain that developing an archaeology school programme does not require large capital but more a number of fundamental basics, namely, an 'archaeological site, school children, and small team of archaeologists willing to develop educational material concerning the history and material culture relative to the study site.'

Heritage managers and archaeologists have recently explored new avenues in archaeology education and interpretation for young audiences and schoolchildren. In particular, higher education institutions and government organisations have embarked on outreach programmes with schools. The University of Leicester, the University College London and the University of Cambridge are among those UK institutions which offer specific programmes such as archaeology camps and hands-on experiences. This

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[35] The educational resources offered by Heritage Malta can be accessed via the following link http://heritagemalta.org/learning-2/worksheets/ while those provided by the Education Department within the Ministry of education are available here http://primarysocialstudies.skola.edu.mt/

is perhaps the best way that schoolchildren are provided with 'new information, ideas and techniques which complement curriculum study' (School of Archaeology and Ancient History, school visits and activities session, University of Leicester[36]), while at the same time introducing topics which are not included in the curriculum.

Elizabeth Ayling, founder of the online review *Malta Inside Out*, in her article 'Children's' Events at Malta's Museums', argues that although the Maltese heritage sector has recently improved on how it provides young audiences with heritage information, it still lacks even the simplest hands-on activities. She discusses her experience when she was still living in Britain and compares it with Malta: she notes how her young son 'spent an entire afternoon on a mock-up 'archaeological dig' at an Iron Age hill fort in southern England in summer and had a ball dressed up as a Roman Gladiator at an open day – with 'live' gladiatorial fights – at a Roman Villa museum also in the UK' (Ayling 2013). It is important to mention that hands-on activities are offered by Heritage Malta's Education Department on an *ad hoc* basis. Furthermore, an informal interview with the person heading Heritage Malta's Education Department revealed that most of the schools which take their pupils on a site visit are often in a hurry and so the teachers request to skip any hands-on activities and proceed directly to the guided tour (Vanessa Ciantar, pers. comm., February 22, 2016).

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[36] http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/archaeology/outreach-2/school-visits

Figure 7.1 - School children taking part in a mock-up archaeological excavation in the Island of Gozo (Source: Daniel Cilia)

As Donald Henson points out in his article 'The educational purpose of archaeology: a personal view from the United Kingdom', the educational purpose of archaeology is to teach adults and youngsters the importance of seeking evidence in order to support ideas and knowledge while helping them analyse and understand the historical environment they live in (Henson 2011:223). Teaching archaeology to schoolchildren will not simply enhance their general knowledge, it will also contribute towards an appreciation of material culture and the ancient communities who created them, and help to make mental links with those past peoples.

7.3 Educational Resources on Archaeology for Maltese Primary Education Students

The first official textbook for primary school children in Malta which addressed topics related to Maltese archaeology and history was published in 1987 and provided by the Education Department within Malta's Ministry for Education (Pace 2014:para 1). Edited by Charles Galea Scanura, *Studji Soċjali – Gwida Għall-Għalliema tas-Sitt Sena* (translated in English as "Social Studies – A Guide for Year Six Teachers") was divided into three sections, namely (i) civic studies, (ii) geography, and (iii) history. During the

1990s the Ministry of Education felt that these three topics deserved fuller focus and therefore three different books were published by Education Officers, namely *L-Ambjent Storiku* ("The Historical Environment")*, L-Ambjent Geografiku* ("The Geographic Environment") and *L-Ambjent Uman* ("The Human Environment"). In 1996 a change in the primary syllabus led to the reintegration of the three subjects into one main topic – social studies. Accordingly, official workbooks were published and distributed to all Maltese primary state schools. Four years later another change in the syllabus took place for all years (years One to Six); however, this time no official workbooks were published to reflect such change. Only the final year of primary schools, that is Year Six, were provided with a new workbook, particularly in view of the material that had to be covered for the exam leading to secondary school (Vassallo *et al*. 2011).

Figure 7.2 – The Social Studies text book used by Year Four primary school children in Malta in 2000 (source: Mireva Online Bookstore)

These workbooks covered seven main archaeological and historical periods: Malta's Megalithic temples; the hypogeum; the Romans; Saint Paul; the Great Siege of Malta; the construction of Malta's Capital, Valletta; and World War II. The first three topics were intended to inform primary students about Malta's prehistoric culture while the second and third themes delved into the transition from pagan culture to early Christianity. For the latter, the catacombs were the centre of discussion and class explanations by teachers who were recommended to conduct site visits to one or more

burial site in Rabat. Here, I can provide my own account and experience of these visits when I was still at primary school. The visits were held at the Saint Agatha Historical Complex in Rabat. The first part of the outing comprised a quick tour of the museum where we were shown a number of artefacts, some of which were not at all related to the catacombs, such as the Egyptian mummified crocodile. Later we were taken to the catacombs. Our large class, 40 or so pupils, made it almost impossible to listen to the explanation of the guide or the teacher who constantly pointed out features discussed in class prior to the visit, such as the agape tables (or *triclinia*). Pupils like me were more interested in the skeletons and one could hear the constant quizzing of the guide whether the bones in the tombs were real human remains. Following the visit, teachers used to ask us students to write some sentences on their experience at the catacombs – the majority of my classmates wrote about the 4000 year-old crocodile (Fig. 7.3).

My personal experience points to the largely ineffective way these cultural-education visits were carried out during the 1990s, with no on-site education resources or interpretation available to highlight the importance of these sites which were meant to be covered by the syllabus. Such concerns were flagged by Maltese scholar Ronald G. Sultana in his 2012 edited book *Yesterday's Schools: Readings in Maltese Educational History* where he argues that 'educational History in Malta is still in its infancy' and that his book 'represents an attempt to move one step forward' in this field (Sultana 2001: xvi).

Figure 7.3 – The four 4000 year-old crocodile displayed in the central hall of the St. Agatha Museum in Rabat (source: A.L. McMichael)

Exposing school teachers to heritage educational resources, particularly to primary resources, has been the endeavour of a number of pedagogists (Petri 2004:73). In her

keynote speech at the 2006 EUROCLIO[37] conference in Malta, Yosanne Vella, an academic in the pedagogy of history at the University of Malta, explained how in the 1990s, there had been efforts in developing education resources, most of which came in the form of worksheets, for school children to use during site visits (Vella 2006:1). An example of the latter were the series of worksheets entitled *Żjara* (or 'Visit' in English) produced by Malta's Ministry of Education. Such resources were a step forward to Malta's primary education sector and the study of archaeology among young students; however, the tasks set in these worksheets and the chronological order in which these had to be completed, pupils were required to have adequate knowledge of the historical or archaeological sites prior to the visits. At the time when these worksheets were published, site visits conducted by schools were only intended as a follow-up to class-based information. Therefore, if a student was not able to follow on a specific subject or did not understand the explanation provided by the teacher in class then there were few prospects that he/she could complete the worksheet onsite. In this regard the framework by which these worksheets were developed were inadequate to the educational system as well as the heritage infrastructure and programmes provided at the time by the Ministry of Education as well as by the Museums department (Vella 2006:2).

In view of the lacunae characterising history (and archaeology) teaching in primary education in Malta, an Action Research project was launched in 2006 in an effort to create teaching resources with the intention of helping educators improve the student learning while offering better teaching programmes (Vella 2006:3). This meant setting new targets and developing new concepts as learning objectives in order to teach history topics at primary level in an effective way and convey the right skills to young students. The research activities proposed for this project were based upon a theoretical framework called 'New History', with its foundations mainly rooted in the agency of teaching rather than the content itself (Phillips 1998). One of the main objectives of this project, entitled *Teaching History Skills and the Use of History Teaching Resources on Historical Sites,* was to develop a programme where the teaching was

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[37] EUROCLIO is a European network of History educators – see http://euroclio.eu/association/

actually carried out in heritage hubs and museums rather than in the usual way – the classroom.

The educational material developed within this project was mainly based on different workbooks aimed at educators and students; notable were ones focusing on the medieval building known as The Inquisitors Place located in Vittoriosa (an historical coastal city), the Prehistoric temples located in Tarxien (a village set in the southern Maltese region) and the Roman Domus located in Rabat. The tasks proposed in these workbooks centred on key skills, notably observation, analysis and analytical writing skills. In addition, the workbook reserves specific sections for sketching – this, Vella argues, is an important aspect in early education in cultural heritage where the creativity of young students must play an important role in their learning process. Furthermore, sketching and drawing are viewed as important, particularly with regard to documenting archaeological artefacts and features – hence if this conglomerate of aspects are integrated and thought out in a creative way, the learning experience of young students is enhanced (Vella 2006:4-5).

This Action Research project was a step forward in trying to bridge together pedagogy at primary education level and archaeology in Malta; however, as happens with a number of externally funded projects, once the financial resources end, the legacy these are meant to leave are suddenly disrupted by the lack of strategy in planning their sustainability and continuation. Vella duly expresses her disappointment about this situation and explains how, despite having completed the education material on Malta's Roman Domus, there was no money left to publish these sources and distribute them to schools. This archaeological site, the author argues, could have been used to explore the concept of time through exercises and activities on chronology. In her conclusion Vella notes the possibility of making the material available electronically on the History Teacher's Association (Malta) website; however, my attempt to find these resources did not yield any results and the only evidence left of these workbooks and worksheets, apart from their reference in the journal *The Redland Papers* published in 2004, is a couple of residual printed versions on the shelves of Vella's office.

This Action Research project not only aimed to increase education resources for students on Maltese history and archaeology but also sought to train educators to transform their passive method of teaching into a more effective way of delivering subjects which, despite being integral part to academic curriculum, was normally addressed as extra-curricular subjects. What legacy did this project leave? Below I offer a detailed review of the current education resources and analyse the content in relation to the informal guidelines set by Vella in her endeavour to create effective educational resources in heritage education at primary level.

7.3.1   Educational resources in Archaeology at primary level

I conducted a detailed review of the current education resources for primary schoolchildren. My method was very straightforward and included a preliminary search on the website of Malta's main cultural heritage operators, followed by further verification with key persons responsible for cultural heritage education, such as Education Officers and Curators. The main objective was to trace developments and improvements achieved over recent years – not only with regard to the quantity and variety of educational resources but also the quality of their content. I was particularly interested in the span of time starting in 2004, the year when Vella attempted to introduce educational resources and approaches in all Maltese Primary schools but failed due to insufficient funds and the reluctance of governmental institutions to keep funding this.

The result of my review demonstrates that educational resources for primary school in Malta come mainly in the form of electronic worksheets. Mostly these are easily downloadable from three different online portals. The organisations or institutions which provide such educational tools are: Heritage Malta; The Saint Agatha Historical Complex; and the Education Department within the Maltese Ministry of Education. The outcome of this exercise is presented in a matrix (Table 7.1) where further comparative analysis can be made in terms of topics and periods covered as well as the type of tasks presented to pupils. This matrix also serves as a catalogue which takes stock of all available resources thus making the different worksheets and workbooks easily

identifiable according to topic and content. The matrix is composed of five columns: the first column lists the organisation name providing these educational resources; the second indicates the type of resource (e.g. worksheet, workbook, interactive games, etc.); the third gives the link to the online portals; the fourth column lists the topic/subject or period covered; and the last field is of a more qualitative nature and presents a number of indicators which describe the overall content. The following is the glossary of indicators:

(i)   Wordy – The worksheet/workbook is mostly composed of words.

(ii)   Sketching – The content includes parts where students are asked to sketch an artefact, a feature or anything related to topic being covered.

(iii)   Q&A – The worksheet/workbook include parts which ask direct questions to students. The tasks require certain knowledge which is previously acquired during class or on-site explanation.

(iv)   Visual – The worksheets/workbook include a considerable number of pictures, photos and illustrations which make it easier for the students to follow.

(v)   Games - The worksheets/workbook are mainly composed of educational games such as crossword, match-the-words, spot the differences, etc.

(vi)   Colouring - The worksheets/workbook involve colouring in of objects.

(vii)   Crafts - The worksheets/workbook involve creating simple crafts related to the period being covered.

(viii) Role-play - The worksheets/workbook include activities where students are asked to play a historical role.

(ix)   Group works - The worksheets/workbook include activities where students are asked to work in a group in order to complete a specific exercise.

Organisation/ Institution	Type of educational resource	Accessible from	Subject	Type of content

Heritage Malta	Book (*L-Ewwel 35,000 Sena ta' Hajti*)	Sold at Heritage Malta's sites and museums	Maltese Archaeology and History (general) – Written in Maltese and targeted for students aged eight to ten	-Visual -Wordy
Heritage Malta	Worksheet	http://heritagemalta.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/HQP-Patrimonito-asks-EN-011.pdf	Prehistory – First settlers Temple construction	-Q&A
Heritage Malta	Worksheet	http://heritagemalta.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/HQP-Patrimonito-invites-you-to-be-an-Architect1.pdf	Prehistory – Temple architecture	-Sketching
Heritage Malta	Worksheet	http://heritagemalta.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/HQP-Patrimonito-invites-you-to-be-an-Archaeologist1.pdf	Prehistory – Temples	-Games
Heritage Malta	Worksheet	http://heritagemalta.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/HQP-Patrimonito-invites-you-to-be-an-Artist1.pdf	Prehistory – Temples	-Colouring
Heritage Malta	Worksheet	http://heritagemalta.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Hagar-Qim-ENG.pdf	Prehistory – Temples	-Q&A -Sketching
Heritage Malta	Worksheet	http://heritagemalta.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/NMA-01.pdf	Prehistory – Animals	-Sketching -Colouring
Heritage Malta	Worksheet	http://heritagemalta.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/NMA-02.pdf	World's Ancient History –	-Visual -Game

			Important ancient monuments	
Heritage Malta	Worksheet	http://heritagemalta.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/NMA-03.pdf	Prehistory – Temple construction	-Visual -Sketching
Heritage Malta	Worksheet	http://heritagemalta.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/NMA-04.pdf	Prehistory – Artefacts and temples	-Game
Heritage Malta	Worksheet	http://heritagemalta.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/NMA-05.pdf	Prehistory – General	-Game
Heritage Malta	Worksheet	http://heritagemalta.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/NMA-06.pdf	Prehistory – Pottery	-Sketching
Heritage Malta	Worksheet	http://heritagemalta.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/NMA-07.pdf	Prehistory – Temple construction	-Game
Heritage Malta	Worksheet	http://heritagemalta.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/NMA-08.pdf	Prehistory – Art	-Colouring
Heritage Malta	Worksheet	http://heritagemalta.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/NMA-09.pdf	Prehistory-Architecture	-Sketching -Q&A
Heritage Malta	Worksheet	http://heritagemalta.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/NMA-10.pdf	Prehistory – Temple construction	-Game
Heritage Malta	Worksheet	http://heritagemalta.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Tarxien-Temples-Worksheets.pdf	Prehistory – Art Concept of time	-Visual
Heritage Malta	Worksheet	http://heritagemalta.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Domvs-Romana-Worksheets.pdf	Roman – Lifestyle Architecture Art Design Clothes	-Visual -Sketching -Colouring - Role play -Q&A
Heritage Malta	Worksheet	http://heritagemalta.org/wp-	Pleistocene & Prehistory –	-Wordy

		content/uploads/2012/07/ghar-dalam.pdf	Geology Environment Ice Age	
Heritage Malta	Workbook	http://heritagemalta.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Ta-Hagrat-Skorba-Temples-Worksheet.pdf	Prehistory – Excavation Temples Food	- Visual -Games
Ministry of Education	Worksheet	http://primarysocialstudies.skola.edu.mt/schoolnet/year-5/S521-postijiet-qima-tul-snin.pdf	Places of worship – Temples Catacombs Cathedrals	-Wordy -Q&A
Ministry of Education	Worksheet	http://primarysocialstudies.skola.edu.mt/schoolnet/year-5/S522-postijiet-qima-ordni-kronolgika.pdf	Chronology and use – Temples Catacombs Cathedrals	-Q&A
Ministry of Education	Worksheet	http://primarysocialstudies.skola.edu.mt/schoolnet/year-6/S611-qk-wk-preistorja-l-ewwel-nies-f-malta.pdf	Difference between BC and AD – First settlers Lifestyle	-Q&A -Sketching
Saint Agatha Historical Complex	Worksheet	http://stagathamalta.com/SAgatha%20Catacombs%20-%20Booklet.pdf	Early Christianity – Burial Art Rituals	-Q&A -Sketching

Table 7.1 – Matrix of educational resources in Archaeology available for primary school children in Malta

There are currently 24 educational resources available on Maltese archaeology at primary education level. A closer look at the results demonstrates that 72% (or 17 out of 24) of these resources deal with Maltese Prehistory; 4% (1 out of 24) presents a general overview of Malta's ancient history; 8% (2 out of 24) focus on Roman Malta and early Christianity; 4% (1 out of 24) looks into the World's ancient history and its important monuments; 4% (1 out of 24) invites young students to explore Malta's places of worship throughout different periods, from prehistory to the early modern period;

and 8% (2 out of 24) of these educational resources are intended to explain the concepts of chronology.

As regards the type of content of these educational resources, it is noticeable that just 4% of the available resources propose role play – this is mainly featured in the Roman Domus worksheet where pupils dress-up as ancient Romans by wearing a toga. 17% of the worksheets (4 out of 24) include tasks which are related to colouring while 38% include sections where students are asked to sketch a feature, an artefact or to reconstruct parts of a prehistoric temple. 29% of the resources contain elementary games such as 'crosswords', 'match-the-words' and 'spot the differences between two pictures', while 33% consist of a question-and-answer structure with limited pictures to support the content. 25% of the worksheets and workbooks include colourful visuals, often cartoon-like pictures related to the topic being discussed, whereas 13% of the resources present a wordy structure without offering the opportunity to pupils to express their creativity and creative thinking.
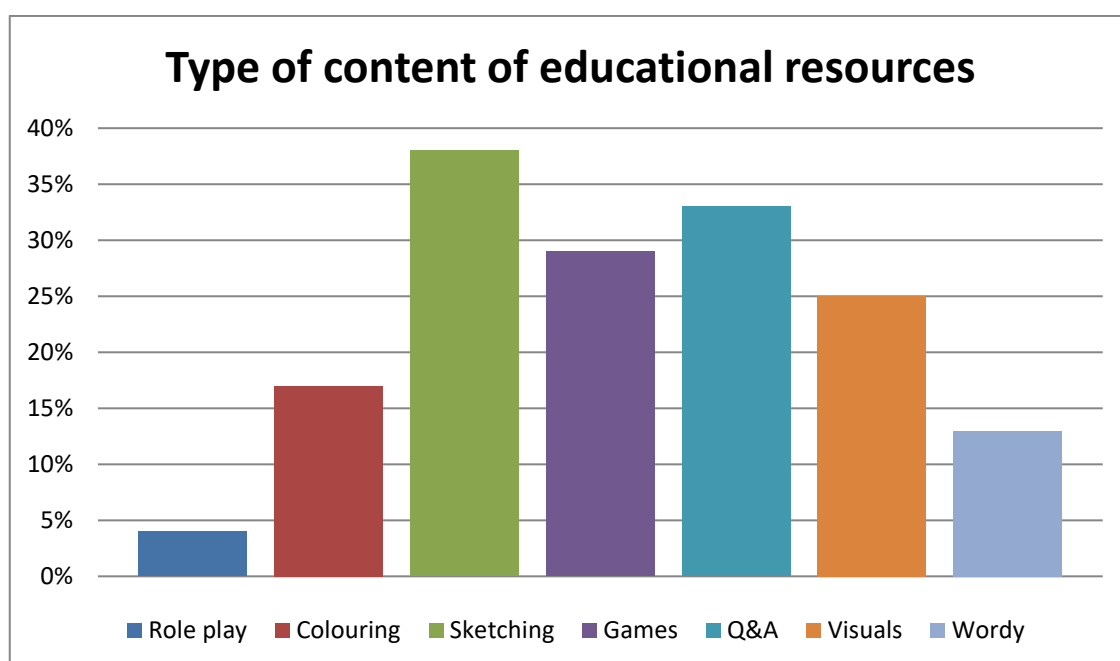
Figure 7.4 – Graph showing the type of content of the available educational resources

Thus 'sketching' is a prominent element in the resources. This is a positive result since this activity is considered to be 'an intuitive interaction technique for children,

particularly for those at a young age' (Paulson *et al*. 2008: 1). 'Games' and 'visuals' are also among the most preferred components of worksheets and workbooks. A less positive result was obtained for resources which focus on a question-and-answer structure – this method follows the same concept of passive knowledge transfer which often limits students' creativity and engagement to the subject matter, thus making this activity often ineffective (Vella 2006). Another negative result comes with respect to the limited use of role-play – research on the impacts of role-play education among young students shows that such activity emphasises social realism rather than the transformative quality of play while it focuses on specific curriculum subjects rather than the qualities that the 'children bring to bear on it' (Rogers and Evans 2008: 2).

It has to be noted that a top-down approach was used to carry out this review of educational resources where the criteria set as main indicators were identified from specific literature, which discusses the do's and don'ts in developing educational resources (e.g. Toumasis 1995; Short *et al*. 2000; Spires *et al*. 2011; Taslidere 2013). This study was primarily based on a theoretical framework seeking to explore the effects of a lack of academic research on a specific subject, notably early Christian and Roman heritage, for the primary educational resources available in Malta. The audit has also drawn on Heritage Interpretation to learn more about national strategies to teach themes related to history and archaeology.

In order to counterbalance the research bias which might have been created by this top-down approach, I conducted a study among primary school teachers. As suggested by Krogstrup (2003), criteria or indicators can be corroborated and refined on the basis of consultation with 'street-level bureaucrats' (in this case, teachers) – this may also lead to the development of further research indicators (2003: 4-5). The fact that primary educators are not involved in the curriculum development often leads teachers to face inadequate education strategies which may work in principle but not in practice (Marouska Farrugia, pers. comm., 1st December 2016). The semi-structured survey employed with the sample of primary teachers aimed also to shed light on the gaps which, according to educators, hinder proper heritage education to primary school children. In order to see if such perception is still predominant among educators in

Malta, a semi-structured survey was conducted. The next section links the results of the audit with the outcome of the teacher survey, which I carried out in two primary schools.

7.3.2 Exploring attitudes towards teaching Archaeology at primary level: a case study in Maltese early Christian archaeology

Teachers play a core role in providing young students with quality education (International Bureau of Education 2000). Accordingly, authorities in this sector must constantly seek the feedback of educators in an effort to keep education systems up-to-date and to thus offer the best educational experience to students. Regrettably, this is not always the case as, generally, teachers are only considered as 'recipients' of a curriculum rather than its co-creators. In his article 'The "voice of the teacher" in curriculum development: a voice crying in the wilderness?', Arend Carl puts forward two arguments, notably that the function of educators in the curriculum design is only limited to the implementation of tasks set by 'education specialists' – this top-down approach often affects teachers in their obtaining a sense of ownership of the curriculum. The second statement of teachers as partners in the process of curriculum change where the education specialists must capitalise on the teachers' knowledge and experience before actually implementing 'desk-based' decisions. Therefore, 'teachers should be given the opportunity to make an input during the initial curriculum development processes' (Carl 2005: 223).

My exercise should be considered a first step in providing a voice to the foundations of the education sector, at least on topics related to Malta's heritage and which, as previously argued, do not benefit from the same level-playing field as other core subjects such as maths, English or sciences. In this regard, the survey design integrates a number of aspects which provide the opportunity to a number of educators to express their concerns while share their ideas on how teaching and learning archaeology topics at primary level can improve. In addition the survey explores teachers' perceptions of the current state of play of on-site heritage activities and educational resources.

The participants chosen for the semi-structured survey came from two different church schools. The decision to conduct this study in non-government education institutions was due to the extreme bureaucratic procedures within the management structures of state education, notably in obtaining research approval from the Education Department as well as other endorsements (including College Principals followed by Head of Schools). In contrast, the approval for manning a survey at Church schools was quicker since the only approval required was from the delegate for Catholic education in Malta (refer to letter of approval in Appendix VIII). Importantly, both Church schools and state schools follow the exact same curriculum published by the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, National Curriculum Framework 2012). As this exercise was not intended to draw any comparison between state and non-state primary education institutions and their style of teaching history and archaeology but rather to explore perceptions, so the sample chosen is considered to be homogenous to subjects under research. Nine teachers, three from the Minor Seminary College in Rabat, and six from the Convent of the Sacred Heart School in St Julian's were approached to participate. Semi-structured questionnaires were employed via a face-to-face method. Three out of 15 questions in this survey were left open-ended and therefore the survey approach characterised by the personal interaction between myself and the participants allowed for more in-depth replies driven by the unstructured nature of specific parts of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts, namely: (i) demographics, (ii) educational resources related to Malta's early Christian heritage, and (iii) a personal evaluation of the corresponding resources. The replies obtained from the participants were tabulated for analysis. Below I outline the core data generated.

7.3.2.1   Demographics

Age and Gender (Q1 and Q2 of the questionnaire)

The participants were all females aged between 25 and 39 years old. This fits well with statistics issued by the National Statistics Office in 2010 which demonstrate that more than 80% of the teaching staff at primary level in Malta are female (Debono 2010).

Teaching Experience (Q.3 of the questionnaire)
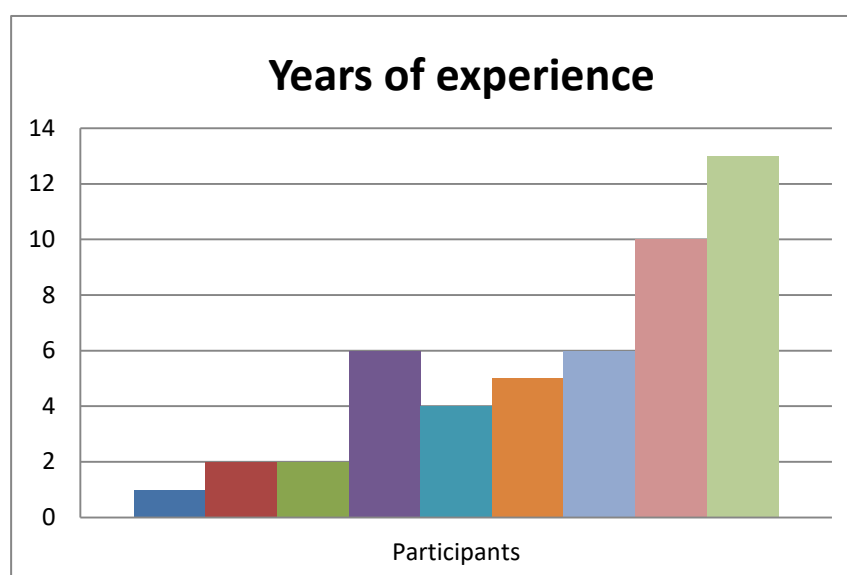
*Figure 7.5 – Graph showing the years of teaching experience
of participants*

The teaching experience of the participants ranged from one year to thirteen years. More than half of the teachers had more than four years of experience; this means that these participants experienced a change in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) at least once during their career.

7.3.2.2 Educational resources

The subjects under which early Christian heritage is taught

Question 5 of the survey asked participants to indicate under which subject they teach Malta's early Christian heritage. 56% (or five out of nine teachers) said they cover the topic as part of Religion while 33% (three out of nine) explained that the early Christian heritage features in different subjects, notably in Historic Environment, which is taught

as part of the social studies curriculum, as well as in the Religion class– therefore these participants indicated both religion and history. 11% (one out of nine) teach this topic during the history lessons only to avoid overlap. This result confirms the preliminary review conducted on Malta's NCF discussed in the beginning of this chapter and which demonstrated topic fragmentation, notably how history and archaeology topics are included under different topics and how makes it susceptible to overlap. Despite the majority of educators interviewed preferring to teach history and archaeology as part of a single subject to avoid confusing their students, there are still some teachers who follow the NCF guidelines, thus covering these topics under different subjects.
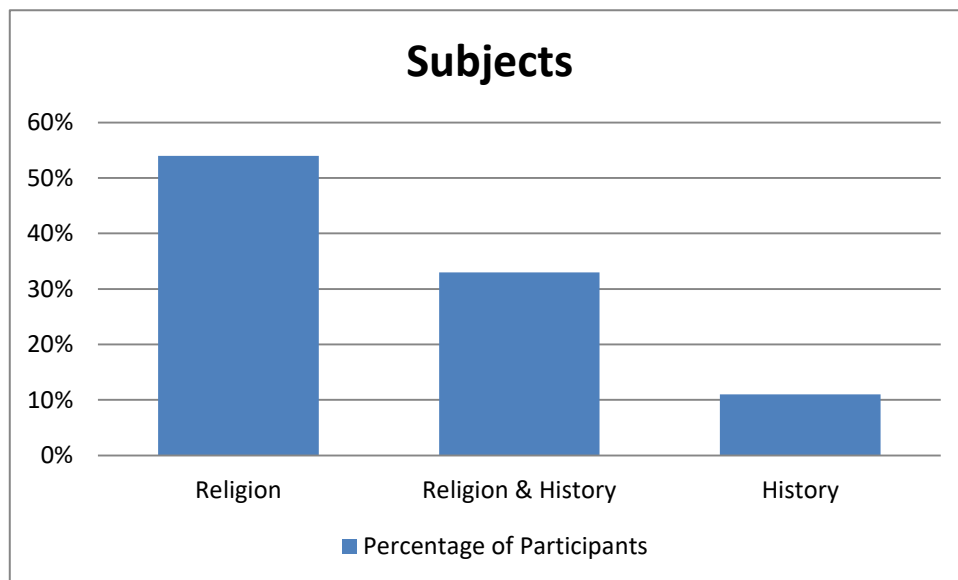
Figure 7.6 – Graph showing the different subjects under which early Christian heritage is taught

School visits at early Christian heritage sites (Catacombs)

The majority of the respondents (89%) said that they organise a school visit to one Maltese catacomb in Rabat after covering the topic during class lessons. Only 11% (one out of nine) answered that students were not taken for a site-visit due to the limited time available and a backlog in the delivery of lessons of the core subjects. Contrary, almost all participants engaged in site visits as a 'powerful and positive teaching tool that help enhance the social, personal and emotional development of all learners' while

adding extra depth to pupils' and students' learning and experience' (NCCL, National Centre for Citizenship and the Law 2015, para 1). In addition, if supported by adequate on-site educational resources and programmes, heritage site visits expose students to kinaesthetic learning, that is, the action of absorbing knowledge through various actions, some of which have been included above as indicators in the audit of the educational resources (e.g. sketching, role-play, colouring, etc.).
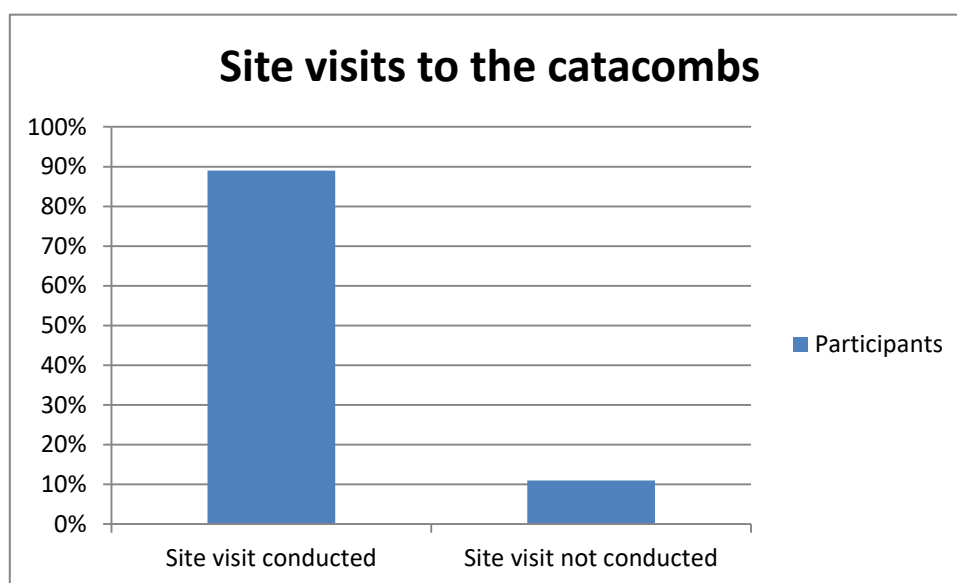
Figure 7.7 – Graph illustrating the site visits conducted at the catacombs

Assistance by heritage professionals during the site visit

One of the questions of the survey sought to discover if participants have utilised heritage site officers or other professionals during their visits. The question gave five options, namely: (i) guide, (ii) site officer, (iii) curator, (iv) other, and (v) no assistance was given. 56% of the respondents claimed that they asked a site officer to show students around the site – this, however, was subject to availability and depended on other school bookings, with the service made on a first-come-first-served basis. 44% of the participants explained that they often submit a request to be guided by a professional guide in order to have someone on-hand who is not only well-informed about the site but also experienced in guiding individuals through the passages of the catacombs.
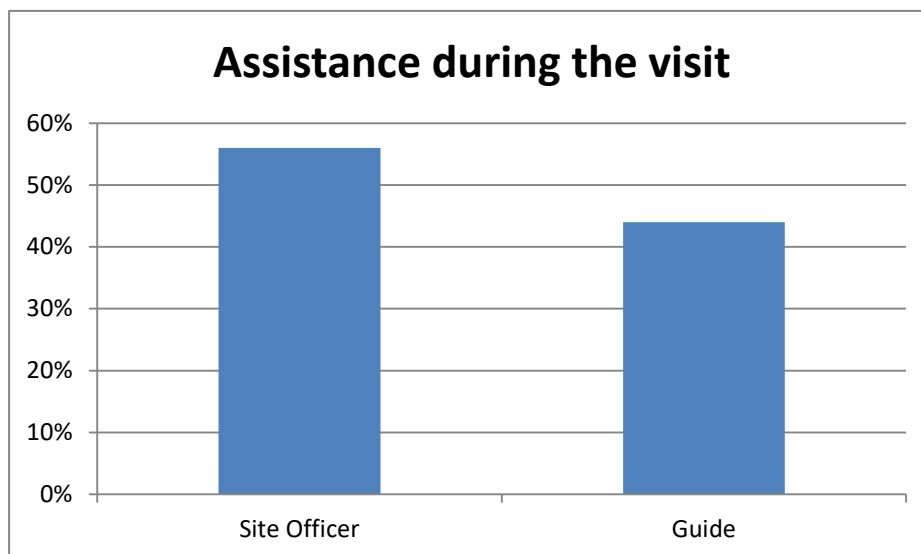
Figure 7.8 – Graph depicting the assistance provided by heritage employees

7.3.2.3   *Personal evaluation of the corresponding resources*

Quality of Information provided by Site Officers/Guides/Curators

This section of the questionnaire was perhaps the most important since it reflects one of the main objectives of this exercise, namely to allow teachers to reflect on the current situation of primary heritage education. Therefore, I asked educators to rate the information which was provided to their students by the guide, site officer or curator during the educational visit. The majority of the respondents (67%) viewed the overall information as good; a small number (11%) replied that the on-site information delivered by the heritage employee was fairly good, while a higher percentage (22%) claimed that the way students were informed could have been better. It is important to point out that no respondent rated the information as very good. In order to increase the relevance of questions like this, the participants were later asked to elaborate on their answers by providing further suggestions – results from this are analysed separately below since the answers given here were more qualitative in nature.

Quality of Information provided by Guide or Site Officer
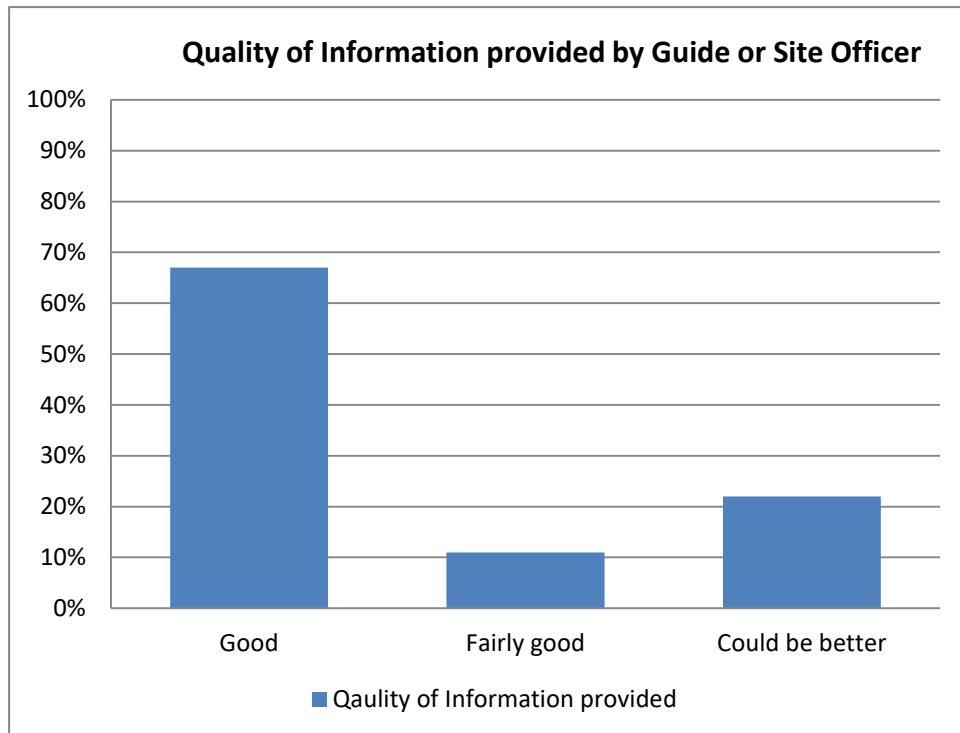
Figure 7.9 – Graph showing rating of the quality of information provided by Guide or Site Officer

Teacher preparation before the site visit

One of the best practices in the teaching profession is to prepare lessons plans ahead of the curricular activities, be it for class sessions or educational outings (NCF Malta 2012). In view of this, site visits must not be regarded as a platform for recreation time or extra-curricular activities where students are left unguided on their formation during such events. In order to explore if and how educators prepare themselves before a site visit, the questionnaire asked the participants if they tend to prepare any worksheets or other material before the outing and if they do so, what the main objectives of these educational materials are. A majority of the respondents (56%) claimed that they do not prepare any material before to be used during or after the outing but simply covered the topic in normal classes ahead of the visit. 44% said that they prepared worksheets which could be used during or after the site visits. The main objectives of these school-generated worksheets are (i) for assessment purposes only (these are based on Q&A)

and (ii) to adapt the one-size-fits-all information provided by the guide or site-officer during the site-visit.
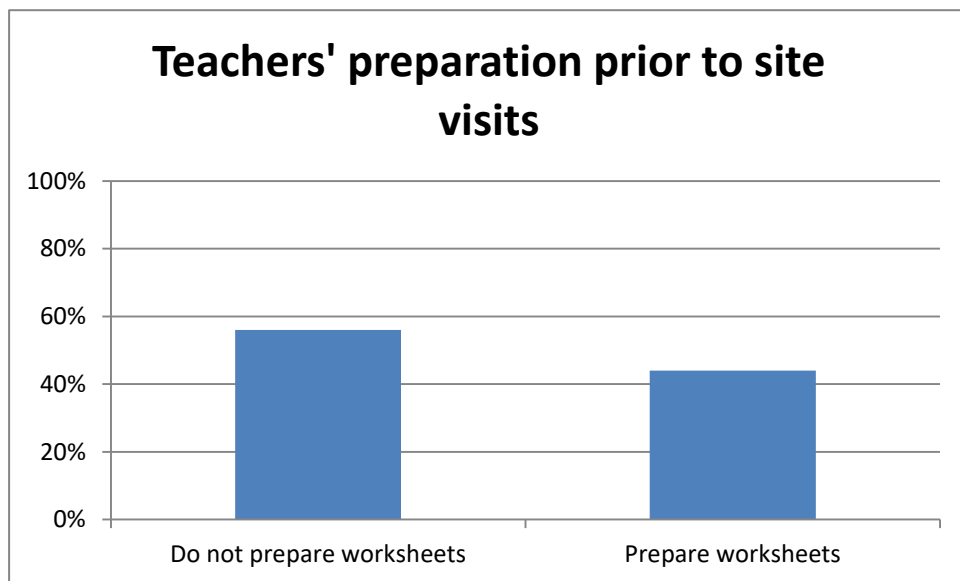
Figure 7.10 – Graph recording teachers' preparation prior to site visit

Ready-available educational resources for primary school students

A review on the readily-available resources has already been discussed; however, the evaluation of this material was undertaken according to a number of criteria set in academic literature. This survey included a question that asked respondents how often they search for available educational resources prior to a site visit and, if they do so, what is their evaluation of the respective contents from their viewpoint as education practitioners. 44% of the participants claimed that they never search for educational resources whereas the rest (56%) do search for relevant material, notably from the Education Department and Heritage Malta.
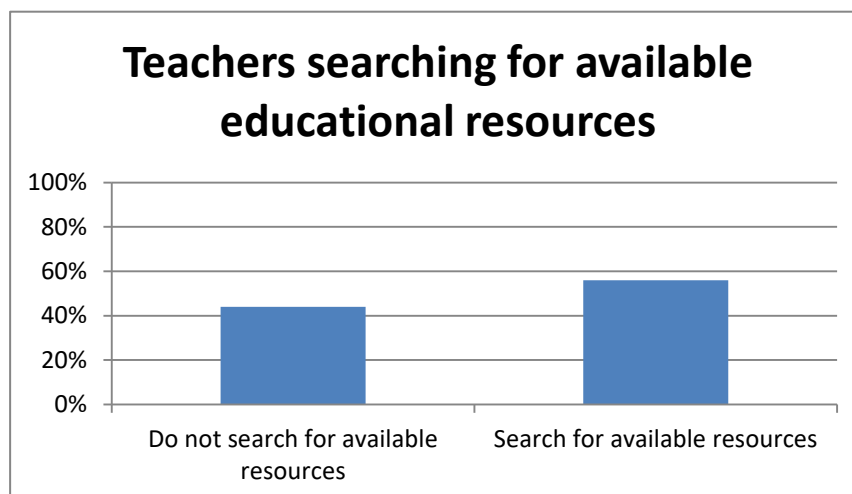
Figure 7.11 – Graph reporting teachers' research for educational resources

Teachers' suggestions on specific resources or tasks that contribute to primary heritage education

This section of the questionnaire was mainly qualitative and asked respondents what, according to their personal views and drawing on their teaching experience, specific actions could be taken in order to make teaching history and archaeology at primary schools more effective. The suggestions made were:

(a) Development of a virtual tour narrated and scripted in a child-friendly manner;

(b) Production of new video clips by the Education Department as currently the few currently available discuss only the prehistoric sites; in addition these were poorly produced which makes it difficult for primary school children to follow;

(c) Development of interactive games, which are currently not available regarding Maltese archaeology and history;

(d) Standard power-point presentations on different heritage topics. Teachers can develop this in collaboration with professionals - e.g. an archaeologist - in order to ensure information being delivered to students is accurate;

(e) More cultural visits from professionals such as curators and archaeologists who are well informed on the subject matter;

(f) The development of child-friendly website where students can follow up on their site visit from their home;

(g) The development of trans-media concept in heritage topics where young students are engaged with the help of web platform which directly link to the post-site visit activities;

(h) Provide an information pack to children with photos and a small gift which is related to the site – this will help pupils to remember the outing and also entice the families to revisit the site together with their children.

It is important to highlight here that some of the suggestions made by the teachers, notably on the provision of interactive games, are already being implemented by the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage. A section of their website is dedicated to online interactive games (e.g. the Jigsaw puzzle of one of Malta's prehistoric temples, Match-the-pair and Tetris[38]), but unfortunately, the functionality of this application leaves much to be desired. Nevertheless, the idea and concept put forward by Malta's Superintendence of Cultural Heritage are to be commended, particularly because the aspect of outreach and education is not a core objective of their role.

An overall suggestion from most of the participants at the end of the semi-structured interview was about the social studies primary curriculum. Here respondents stressed that unless there are major amendments to the curriculum in terms of structure and content, there will be no improvement in how the subjects of archaeology and history at primary level are covered. This is because of the non-chronological order in which the subject is supposed to be taught and which is confusing young students who are already find it difficult to understand the concept of time, let alone in trying to understand a timeline which spans many hundreds of years.

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[38] The Superintendence web portal offers three online games which can be access from the following link - http://www.culturalheritage.gov.mt/page.asp?p=21156&l=1

7.3.4   Key findings

The research exercise discussed above on the audit of the current available educational resources in the teaching of archaeology and history in primary education, and the questionnaire on the educators' perceptions of current trends in teaching such topics, has generated important information that can be summarised into two main outcomes. The first key finding from the audit confirmed the staggering imbalance between the presentation and interpretation of different ancient Maltese periods, notably Prehistory and Roman. As discussed in Chapter Two, this considerable inequity that characterised academic research throughout the late 20th and 21st has certainly hindered how the Education Department within Malta's Ministry of Education as well as Malta's government agency responsible for the operation of cultural heritage sites develop educational resources for children. The lack of research and interest among scholars on the Roman period in Malta has contributed at large to the lacunae within the curriculum structures.

The second key finding was the current lack of adequate educational resources for teachers, as well as the unstructured way the National Curriculum asks educators to teach archaeology and history – this included, but was not limited to, the support available from the operators in heritage. The longer-term effects of these gaps are not yet known; however, having envisaged the shortcomings of the results from the above research exercises, my thesis has included *a priori* a preliminary study on possible impacts on the interest of tertiary students reading for a university degree in archaeology[39] and the probability of these students specialising in topics which are given less exposure at primary level. In view of this, the following section presents the results of a survey carried out with second year archaeology students at the University of Malta to explore their awareness and interest in Maltese Roman archaeology.

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[39] The University of Malta is the only Higher Education institution which offers courses related to Maltese Archaeology and Ancient History. These courses include topics on Roman, Palaeochristian and Medieval Malta (http://www.um.edu.mt/arts/programme/UBAHARCFT-2015-6-O)

7.4   Exploring University of Malta Archaeology Students' Attitudes towards Maltese Archaeology Topics: A Case Study in Maltese Early Christian Archaeology

Chapter Three presented a brief historical overview on the setting up of the University of Malta's Department of Classics and Archaeology in 1987 (Section 3.2). This aimed to highlight the collective efforts made by Maltese scholars in establishing national higher educational standards in the field of classics and archaeology, which would prepare prospective archaeologists with adequate academic training. The same department nowadays offers two first cycle degrees, namely Bachelor in Arts (General) and Bachelor in Art (Honours). Both courses offer a solid background in the core topics in archaeology, such as Archaeological Theory, and Archaeological Fieldwork, as well as other important subjects, e.g. Scientific Applications in Archaeology, and Palaeochristian and Byzantine Archaeology (University of Malta, Department of Classics and Archaeology, 2016).

Keeping abreast of the latest research and academic achievements in archaeology, particularly in the international sphere, is key for exposing undergraduate students to a culture of academic collaboration with different local and foreign institutions, knowledge-sharing and networking. In this regard, the Department of Classics and Archaeology at the University of Malta works to identify the right academic qualities among its staff, as well as foreign higher education institutions, so as to provide focus to each study-unit. This department capitalises on the knowledge of foreign visiting academics, who, from time to time, present seminars and carry out external examination activities in order to meet international standards.

The Archaeology degree at the University of Malta is particularly designed to prepare prospective graduates to work in different heritage sectors, both public and private, in areas which include: cultural heritage management or curatorship; rescue excavation and archaeology monitoring; and research assistance with the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage. Students are also introduced to the latest computer technologies, which are nowadays an indispensable component in the work of heritage specialists, (for example the Geographical Information Systems and Computer Aided Design

software)[40]. By the end of their second year, archaeology students would have normally chosen their area of specialisation, which may often reflect the subject of their dissertation (Nicholas Vella, pers. comm., 29 May 2015).

Below I present a survey conducted with archaeology students to explore the avenues that these students are more likely to take in researching specific archaeological periods. Here I administered a semi-structured questionnaire (see Appendix V) among second and final year students, composed of 21 questions divided into two sections – the first consisted of multiple-choice questions addressing subjects ranging from the reason behind enrolling in archaeology to the students' areas of interest. For the latter, participants were asked if the specific study-units characterising their interest met their expectations. The second part of the survey focused on Palaeochristian/Late Antique archaeology and the participants' possible interest in this subject. Here, most questions were left open-ended so as to obtain relevant data on the students' engagement on this subject, notably if they have registered for the Palaeochristian and Medieval Archaeology course (since this is not a compulsory module) and if they are aware of the current archaeological research being undertaken (locally) in this area. Finally, the questionnaire asked if participants would consider doing their dissertation on early Christian archaeology and, if so, under which specific theme.

There were nine participants, all registered with the Department of Classics and Archaeology in the year 2014/2015. This number of participants vis-à-vis the total number of archaeology students who graduated in BA Archaeology since 1987 is too small to be representative[41] of the overall students interests over a period of three decades and therefore, in order to support the data obtained in this semi-structured questionnaire, a review of all the dissertations related to local or foreign early Christianity and late Roman archaeology topics submitted in the last 30 years to the

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[40] This information was taken from the departmental website which can be accessed from this link http://www.um.edu.mt/arts/classics-archaeo

[41] Despite several requests made to the University of Malta to provide the exact number of Archaeology graduates since the 1987, no reply was received; however, a rough estimate has been calculated at 210 individuals. The estimation was achieved reviewing the names of graduates which were published on the Times of Malta newspapers and via other colleagues whom I worked with and who graduated in Archaeology from this University of Malta.

University of Malta Archaeology Department was undertaken. This enriches the qualitative data obtained from the current students with a more empirical approach. Below I summarise the relevant data obtained from the students and provide a table listing these relevant dissertations submitted since the 1980s, before my analysis of the consolidated data.

Reason for choosing an Archaeology degree

Until a decade ago, there was a strong perception among the higher education community that the majority of students who read archaeology at universities do not have aspirations to work within the sector and that they study this subject simply to obtain a Bachelor's degree. The debate surrounding the study of archaeology at tertiary education was mainly about employment and how unlikely it was for graduates to work in the cultural heritage sector once they finish. As a former archaeology student, I still remember the first meeting with the head of the Department of Classics and Archaeology held on 4th October 2004 as part of the University of Malta Freshers Week, when he opened his welcome speech by advising the cohort not to expect to find work if studying archaeology and suggested taking this together with history and aiming instead for the primary or secondary teaching profession. This approach and perception towards the study of archaeology started to change in 2003 and 2004 when more opportunities for rescue archaeology based on monitoring of construction works by private developers gave an instant boost to this field. In addition, a number of European projects related to cultural heritage were being awarded to Malta's heritage operators – this increased the probability for archaeology graduates to be employed in this sector, and it stimulated more students to take this topic.

 The first questions in this survey asked why students had decided to study archaeology at tertiary level. The majority of the respondents (78%) said that this was because they were interested in this subject while the rest (22%) claimed that they did so because of job opportunities in this field. This latter figure may indicate that prospective students are not being made fully aware of the current need to increase the workforce within this sector, particularly in the provision of archaeological services due to the

requirements being set by Malta's Planning Authority, notably the requirement for a developer to engage a *qualified* archaeologist to constantly monitor construction works near an archaeological sensitive area (known as the 'archaeological buffer zone') particularly during soil removal and rock-cutting[42].
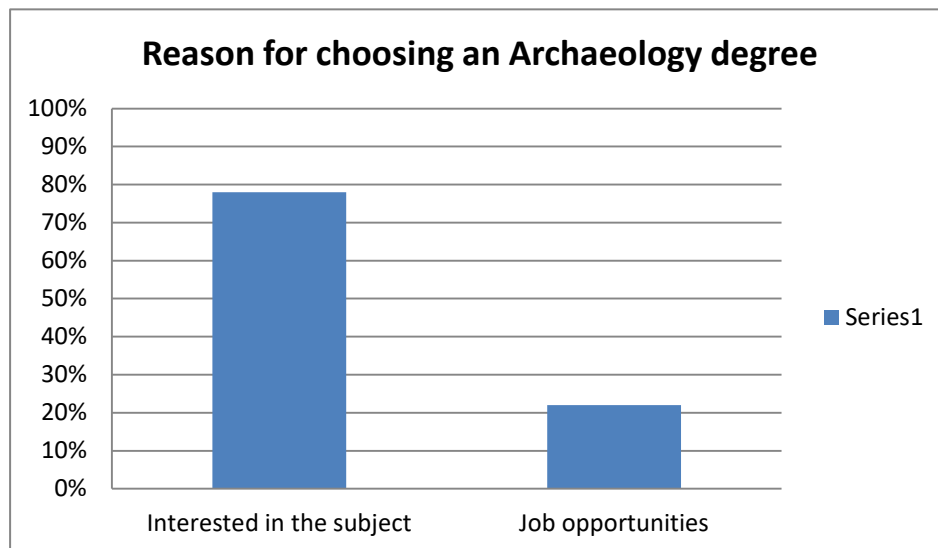
Figure 7.12 – Graph showing the reason why students chose Archaeology

Students' preferred topic

When participants were asked to indicated which archaeology topic they preferred, the majority of the respondents (56%) chose prehistory. This was followed by 33% who indicated Phoenician and Punic archaeology while the rest (11%) chose Roman archaeology. The preference for prehistory was primarily based on the fact that the lack of literary resources adds to the mystery and challenges of this period. With regards to period preference, a main reason was the amount of material culture that these ancient communities generated. Noticeably, no respondent chose Medieval archaeology as their preferred topic.

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[42] The SCH publishes a list of approved archaeologists who can provide archaeological services under its supervision. The current number of service providers amounts to 27 registered archaeologists, five of whom offer their services on a part-time basis.
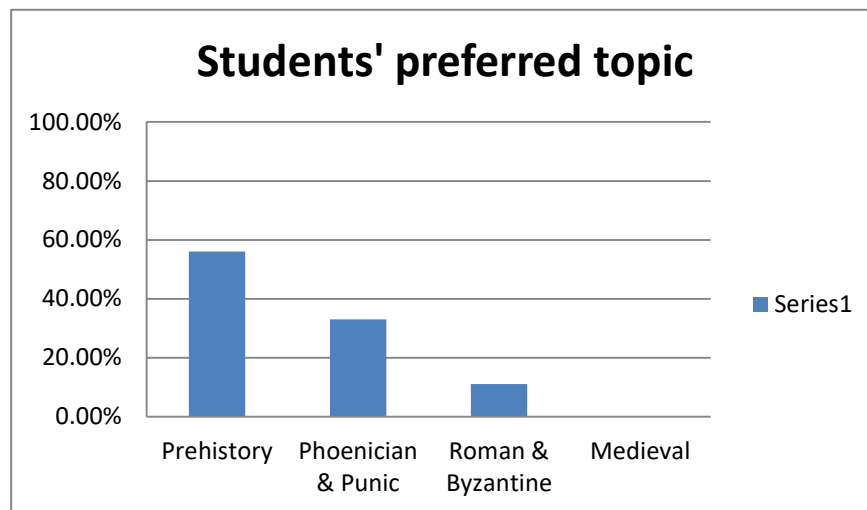
Figure 7.13 – Graph showing the students' preferred topic in Archaeology

The study of early Christian archaeology as part of the Archaeology degree

The results obtained from respondents in the second part of the survey demonstrated that the majority of second and third year students (78%) followed the course in Palaeochristian and Medieval Archaeology. Participants confirmed that site-visits carried out in Rabat catacombs were mandatory for students registered to this study-unit. All students explained that they had had the opportunity to access catacombs which are not yet open to the public, such as the *Abatija tad-Dejr* Catacombs; however they also visited catacombs which are famous among tourists, such as Saint Paul's. Respondents were asked to share their thoughts about those catacombs which are accessible to the public and their presentation. All replies indicated an overall positive assessment with room for major improvements. Below are some of the sample replies submitted on the presentation of catacombs to the general public:

Respondent A - They are presented well. However, whilst working at SPC I was fortunate enough to be onsite while it was being used to film the audio-visual of the visitors' centre. At that moment SPC was beautifully decorated with detailed film props including skeletons, wrapped bodies, pottery representative of the period, and other artefacts. This made me understand the site even more. Even the

tourists attending at the time were delighted with such detailed representations. Unfortunately these props were removed.

Respondent B - The sites would have been very difficult to interpret without prior knowledge of the period, but the sites are very informative with regards to religion and rituals.

Respondent C – I think an adequate job was done at Saint Paul's Catacombs; however, it would be better if (there was) more effort to rehabilitate other dilapidated catacombs such as Abatija tad-Dejr so as to make the public aware of these unique sites.

Students were also asked to indicate if they knew about any current research being carried out at the time of this survey. The majority of students (89%) were not aware of any excavation or post-excavation works on catacombs. Only one respondent was aware of works at a number of Jewish catacombs within Saint Paul's complex; in fact this student was among the volunteers who helped in the excavations.

When students were asked if they were interested in doing their dissertation on Malta's early Christian and Roman past, the majority (89%) stated that they would rather choose prehistory or other subjects such as ancient Near Eastern archaeology. I should note that, when this questionnaire was administered, most students had already submitted their dissertation proposal. Only one respondent said that while he was not doing his undergraduate dissertation on Malta's early Christian archaeology, he would consider carrying out research on the ''*Domus ecclesiae, particularly the Art within them and their Architectural style''* at postgraduate level.

Review of the dissertations submitted to the Department of Classics and Archaeology

As explained earlier, in order to compensate for the small sample of the survey of archaeology students, a review of the dissertations related to Malta's early Christian and Roman archaeology submitted since 1987 was carried out. Table 7.2 presents the

data gathered following a detailed search at the Melitensia Library of the University of Malta as well as the online university library[43].

Name of student	Title of dissertation	Date submitted
Therese Ellul	Melita : Roman monuments in Malta	1996
George Azzopardi	The administrative and political set-up of the Maltese Islands in Roman times.	1999
Katya Stroud	Abbatija tad-Dejr : an uncertain future : conservation of archaeological sites with special reference to the Abbatija tad-Dejr hypogea, Rabat, Malta.	1999
Antonio Caselli	Mosaics, paintings in stone : a study on the iconography, techniques and use of the Maltese mosaics, with reference to the development of mosaics in Hellenistic and Roman times.	2002
David Cardona	From field stones to ashlars : a study of the development in size and shape of building stone in the Maltese Islands.	2003
Dennis Mizzi	The archaeology of buildings : an in-depth case study on the building techniques at Tas-Silg.	2004
Ruby Jean Cutajar	Conservation of mosaics : a conservation proposal for the site of Għajn Tuffieħa .	2008
David Cardona	Roman buildings in Malta and their decoration	2010
Maxine Anastasi	Coarse and fine wares : A contextual meaning of pottery in late Punic and Roman Malta	2010
Abigail Zammit	Survival of Punic culture during the Roman period : Malta and other central Mediterranean islands	2011

Table 7.2 – List of dissertation on Roman and early Christian Malta submitted since 1987 at the University of Malta

The information gathered from the semi-structured survey carried out with second and third-year students, together with the data obtained on dissertation topics demonstrate how Roman and Palaeochristian archaeology are rarely considered of primary interest among undergraduate and postgraduate students. This is very evident when comparing this to the other topics chosen by students as their primary area of research, notably the prehistoric period. Of course, there is nothing wrong in having the majority of archaeology students focusing only on one specific area of study; however, it is surely

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[43] The University of Malta online library catalogue is accessed at - https://www.um.edu.mt/library/hydi/ Users must be registered either as students or as employees in order to be able have access.

in the University department's interest to strike a balance between the different subjects being researched among students in an effort to cover, at least, all Malta's archaeological periods, from Prehistoric to Phoenician to Islamic and Medieval. Enticing, or rather guiding, archaeology students to explore new topics which are rarely or never addressed might be a first step in improving the current situation. It is hoped that the results obtained from a more balanced research will positively affect the National Curriculum Framework which will draw on the available archaeological information and address the lacunae which, according to my survey of primary educators, currently make the teaching of archaeology topics under the social studies primary curriculum ineffective.

7.5   Conclusion

The above research exercise aimed to explore if, and how, the lacunae in archaeology education at primary and tertiary level in Malta, notably the lack of learning resources at primary education level and the lack of research interest in specific topics among university students are directly linked, and if these factors can hinder (i) the appreciation which schoolchildren and university students are encouraged to develop about specific topics in archaeology and (ii) the degree of interest of both educators and students towards cultural heritage. The results demonstrate that the lack of academic interest in specific archaeology topics may in fact reflect the way the primary curriculum is shaped. One may also argue that the imbalance in the topics taught at primary level can affect how students choose their later line of specialisation. My arguments can evolve into a more complex discourse, particularly regarding which level of education (i.e. primary or tertiary) is more likely to influence the other when dealing with archaeology and heritage. Indeed, this topic deserves more in-depth assessment, not only from a heritage point of view but also from education specialists.

In addition, the research design adopted here could be refined in order to obtain more information by using a larger sample over a longer period of time – this will allow for a sustainable strategy which would hopefully give positive results in the longer term. It is worth pointing out that in 2012 Heritage Malta employees embarked on a pilot study as

part of the Archaeotur Project (see Section 4.3). In an attempt to bridge the gaps between the primary education sector and the educational resources offered by Heritage Malta. The outcome was an education strategy that was sadly never published or implemented. The core components of this draft Education Plan was built on eight different themes which draw on the framework of the NCF for primary education, namely (i) respect and promote Maltese culture and heritage, (ii) moral and spiritual development, (iii) develop intercultural competence and appreciate their heritage within the Mediterranean, European and global contexts, (iv) languages, (v) sciences – including mathematics, (vi) citizenship education, (vii) technology education, and (viii) arts education.

A thematic and integrated approach was intended to draw on the core components and skills into various relevant learning experiences. Assessment procedures had to include the recording and reporting of expressive and performing ambits in various art forms. All topics taught at primary level can be integrated within the context of this educational plan; however, the two main components that can benefit from the integration of archaeology topics, notably Malta's early Christian sites, are the citizenship education and the technology components. Here students can recognise interrelationships between people, their cultures, contexts and landscape while exploring and investigating their immediate past and present, thus beginning to understand the importance of collecting evidence. Other skills include developing observation and recording abilities. This will also allow young students to collate, examine and test data to draw simple conclusions. As observed, teaching the concept of time to young students is among the most challenging tasks for educators – therefore the integration of archaeology together with hands-on activities can help students to develop the basic concepts of chronology, empathy, cause and effect, as well as change and continuity. Indeed, this educational plan could be an interim tool to the primary education sector which addresses the current issues within the social studies curriculum, at least until education specialists are able to attain the right information about the missing links which can only be provided by continuous research in all Maltese archaeology periods.

Overall, the evidence presented in this chapter clearly shows that more work is required to reach a satisfactory level of synergy and collaboration between the different levels of education sectors in Malta, and particularly between the primary and the tertiary sectors. More intensive research could contribute to the upgrade of Malta's heritage education strategy. This is to be considered as a 'strong medium for the reinforcement of knowledge about Malta's cultural heritage and for shaping future civic and culturally-minded citizens who will strive to support and contribute to programmes that protect, conserve, regenerate and present cultural heritage to the highest levels' (Cassar 2012:16). In this regard, it is essential that students are guided into the desired frame of mind from a younger age, but also through their educational studies up to tertiary level. Best practices in heritage interpretation could be the mediating factor between the different education sectors. Heritage interpretation as a field of study is based on a framework where the same heritage information is conveyed in different ways to different audiences so as to offer the same level of engagement at all ages. Accordingly, heritage interpretation constitutes an important educational element in the pedagogy of archaeology as it could be one of the core components in attaining a balance in the topics researched among university students.

In sum, primary education and academia should form partners in promoting the importance of Malta's past and in explaining the significance heritage possesses today. This can only be achieved if a nation's heritage is more fully researched and disseminated. This will also help to guarantee heritage sustainability in Malta which, after all, plays a key role in the islands' identity and its tourism appeal.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION: LEARNING FROM THE PAST TO SHAPE THE FUTURE

8.1   Introduction

Cultural heritage professionals, notably archaeologists and curators, often claim the sole authority in interpreting and presenting the material they discover and manage (Skeates 2000:89). This attitude, often perceived as authoritarian, can affect the cooperation between these heritage professionals and other institutions considered to be important stakeholders in this field of study, such as tourism authorities and educational institutions (Potter and Chabot 1997:52). This thesis has discussed Malta's catacombs as a core component of Maltese archaeology and evaluated their management and interpretation to generate a complete picture of their potential role - educational, recreational, academic and social. The methodology that I have employed was specifically designed to explore the origins of a universal problem which often sees archaeologists taking the blame for not conveying the importance of heritage and for not using the right tools to reach a wider audience (Stone 2004:219). This thesis proposed a way in addressing this issue by utilising a review model (HIRMOTHEA) to identify the origins of the problems which afflict the public presentation of a nation's heritage.

This last chapter is the key link which collates together and consolidates the data generated at micro level and into a bigger picture. The combining of the information obtained and presented here answers the main research angle of this thesis which questioned the current *modus operandi* of Malta's heritage sector when interpreting and presenting archaeology, particularly with regard to early Christian heritage, and its effects on visitors' perceptions and take-up. Section 8.2 will provide a summary of the main findings and relate these to the follow-up research questions posed throughout this thesis. Section 8.3 cites the limitations and problems encountered during this doctoral research and suggests different ways to improve the methodologies of future

studies when addressing similar subjects. Finally, Section 8.4 will use the key findings to discuss the application of the HIRMOTHEA model. This last part will also draw on the results obtained from the review to propose short and long-term strategies for the heritage stakeholders to improve the interpretation and presentation of Malta's archaeology.

8.2 The Research Questions and Key Findings

8.2.1 Cultural Heritage and Politics

Nationalist archaeology in Malta was the primary cause in promoting extensive studies on specific ancient sites, notably Neolithic temples. Sadly the stress placed on this period led to the neglect of other important heritage, such as the late Roman and Byzantine periods. This practice is based on the strategies developed by politicians in order to justify claims on territories, as well as cultural and social practices. The problem with this type of archaeology is not only related to the skewed research generated by a single research focus, but is also directly linked to the issue of misinterpretation of archaeological evidence to legitimise these claims (Skeates 2000:90).

The employment of nationalist archaeology in the Maltese islands, distinctly during the pre-independence period, was not based on misinterpretation of information, but rather on the obsession on Prehistory and the attempt to confirm Malta's endemic identity – one which was not related to the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Byzantines, Muslims, the Order of St. John or the British. This endeavour, managed by the political groups who campaigned against the islands' colonisations left a number of important sites dilapidated for decades. Politics, however, was not the only cause affecting Maltese heritage. In fact, other elements such as the lack of scientific approach in the archaeological field and the black market of ancient artefacts, particularly before the enactment of national legislation protecting the islands' heritage, contributed to a complete void in the presentation and management of the same sites.

The change in the socio-political situation following Malta's decolonisation from Britain (i.e. post 1964) saw a number of archaeologist working together to revive the awareness

on Maltese catacombs. Despite the evidence presented in Chapter Two demonstrates that archaeologist did well in trying to compensate for years of heritage neglect, Malta's heritage sector was not yet prepared to properly cater to visitors (at least until the 1970's). This was particularly due to the fact that the type of research conducted was more intended for documentation and cataloguing rather than addressing questions on how archaeological sites can speak of the social aspect of ancient communities – a topic which can provide more interesting material for the scope of public interpretation and presentation of Malta's early Christian heritage.

8.2.2   The effects of insularity on cultural heritage research

Notwithstanding Malta's geographical setting, the islands were never isolated from foreign influences, particularly in terms of culture, technology and knowledge. Since antiquity, the Maltese community has been rather resilient to the different foreign currents and adapted to various external cultures until it was able to capitalise on thousands of years of colonialism to rule itself and shape its own future (Cassar 2004:102). Maltese archaeology has been no exception. In Chapter Three I centred my argument on how local archaeologists benefitted from the knowledge of foreign scholars, who studied Malta as their main research subject, to increase their expertise in this field. This chapter considered especially three Maltese archaeologists working on Malta's early Christian heritage, namely Camilleri, Borg, and Buhagiar.

Chapter Three discussed how Victor Camilleri helped British archaeologist John Evans excavate Saint Agatha's Catacombs as part of a British survey to evaluate the damage caused by World War II. Camilleri's meticulous observation on Evans systematic research was key to his long-term research strategy on Saint Agatha's Catacombs. In fact, Camilleri's 20-year endeavour led to the opening of the site and the setting up of the first museum on Maltese catacombs in the mid-1970s. Saint Agatha's Catacombs, which later became to be known as the Saint Agatha Historical Complex, offered a new experience where tourists, school children, local people, and researchers could learn about a multitude of topics ranging from Roman history, to the history of art, conservation, biology, anatomy, museology, and much more. This experience and knowledge acquired by Camilleri, particularly from foreign researchers such as Evans

and Ferrua, modelled the approach by which he managed and presented the site to a wide range of visitors.

However, it is not only the physical accessibility factor which gives credit to Camilleri's work but also the methods of interpretation used, which were not always conventional. During my late archival research at the library of the Saint Agatha museum, I found a number of scripts produced by Camilleri based on a dialogue between, what seemed to be, Roman characters living in late antique Malta. Following informal communication with a number of members of his confraternity, it transpired that there was a time when Camilleri produced historical theatrical productions aimed at locals in a community theatre (Saint Agatha Auditorium) which was located some 50 meters away from the museum and catacombs (Dominic Borg, pers. comm., 26 October 2016). Sadly, I was not able to gather further information on such events; however, if future research yields further evidence on this aspect of Camilleri's work, this will surely be ground-breaking, as it would help to shed light on how other media, in this case the theatre, were used for presenting and interpreting heritage to the local community. The evidence presented so far still indicates that Saint Agatha Historical Complex was indeed one of the earliest heritage interpretation centres on the islands, one which was a point of reference to future curators and served as a model for heritage interpretation in museums and sites during the 1980s. All this was also the result of the work carried out by Vincent Borg, who was the first Maltese to obtain an academic qualification in early Christian archaeology and who has consecutively passed on his knowledge and experience to other students, such as Mario Buhagiar who continued to work on the footsteps of Camilleri and Borg and took the work of both archaeologists to a standard academic level.

8.2.3   Following international guidelines

Modern archaeology is 'a broad church' which encompasses different strands – this includes heritage interpretation (Renfrew and Bahn 2004:16). This sub-field is dynamic and frequently characterised by continuous advancement which sees technology as a direct contributor to this change (Frost 2005:246). The discussion presented in Chapter

Four was based on the evaluation of two archaeological projects which included three Maltese catacombs, namely that at Saint Paul's Catacombs, Saint Augustine's Catacombs and the Ta' Bistra Catacombs. The objectives of these projects were intended to restore the sites and offer a modern interpretation centre to enhance the experience of visitors. The review of these projects was conducted in light of the review carried out on the ICOMOS Charter for the Presentation and Interpretation of Cultural Heritage as well as on other academic literature (e.g. Tilde 1957) which offers clear guidelines to heritage professionals responsible for setting up interpretation programmes on or off site. The component related to the use of technology in heritage presentation and research was discussed in the context of its contribution towards a better heritage experience; however, this was not a predominant factor which determined the validity and quality of these projects.

Other elements assessed were the quality of the content being presented and managed. The results obtained demonstrate that the experience offered at these archaeological sites is up to international standards, notably because the project was backed by a multidisciplinary approach which took into consideration aspects such as proper excavation, accessibility, education and recreation. This analysis was carried out from a top-down approach and was based on scientific literature without initial input of key stakeholders e.g. tourists, school-teachers and local people. The latter were, however, questioned at a later stage and the results obtained offered good grounds for a comparative analysis, i.e. one which explores what is conventional according to official standards and recommendations on the one hand, and what is, in fact, being envisaged and requested by the consumers on the other. Despite the efforts of the heritage professionals, dialogue and consultation is still lacking in this sector. The 'consumers' and stakeholders of heritage are regularly asked to share their experience and opinion about a site or a museum, either through feedback forms or surveys, after their visit; however, the audience is almost never questioned, at least locally, on how they would themselves set up a visitors' centre or about what interpretation methods to use before the actual restoration of heritage infrastructure. Once again the authoritarian and top-down approach used in similar matters can contribute to widen the gap between heritage professionals and their 'clients'.

The ICOMOS Charter for the Presentation and Interpretation of Cultural Heritage, which pre-defines the rules before heritage managers set up interpretation programmes, does indeed offer a good starting point and also refers to the term 'consultation' in clause 7.1; however, this does not explain who the consulting parties should be. On the one hand, curators working in the field of fine arts seem to understand this as referring to 'public consultation' and therefore they are more likely to conduct this exercise with different stakeholders (Knutson 2002:5). Two concrete examples are: MUŻA – Malta's National Museum of Fine Arts, which will open in 2018 and has the local community and tourists as the co-creators of its structure (Sandro Debono, pers. comm., 2 February 2016); and the Plains Art Museum in Fargo, which in 2011 launched the project *'You Like This: A Democratic Approach to the Museum Collection'* based on a survey asking the community which art they wanted the museum to exhibit and how (Plains Art Museum 2012). On the other hand, a number of curators in the cultural heritage field, including those working with the local operators, seem to bypass or rather interpret the term 'consultation' as an activity that is only carried out between professionals in this field. Despite the fact that the research teams' activities meet international standards, these lacked one important element, namely the bottom-up approach which may have contributed to the 'democratisation' of the interpretation centres and co-creation of methods of presentation which would perhaps have, in the longer term, suited a wider audience.

8.2.4   Tourism services and their moderating role in cultural heritage

Chapter Five started with the premise that tourism in Malta grew over the years to become a key contributor to local cultural heritage and that as a result of this growth the Maltese catacombs were transformed into heritage and touristic attractions. For many years, the arguments about tourism and archaeology were centred on the impacts of tourists on the conservation of archaeological sites. Less attention has been devoted to other important aspects which are, likewise, central to this topic, notably the quality of the overall service provided by operators who offer archaeological tourism services such as tourist literature. It is often considered unconventional that research in

archaeology deals with the subject of tourism in so much detail; however, a number of elements – such as (i) the information on local archaeology provided by licensed tourist guides always being considered as correct, with archaeologists rarely questioning its validity, modes and standards; and (ii) the quality of the content on archaeology in tourist literature is not regularly assessed and reviewed – have led this research to overcome the conventional topics and seek alternative view-points from which scholars can tackle this subject.

A pivotal aspect of this chapter was to involve tourist guides. These individuals are considered as ambassadors, or rather moderators, of Malta's heritage and therefore were a central focus. In addition, I considered other information media which tourists likely use when searching for information about Maltese catacombs, notably guide books. Here a review of the tourist literature revealed that the overall information on catacombs provided by the majority of the guidebooks is useful; however, in certain cases, this was not very well structured and, as a result, readers could be easily confused or misinformed. The major issue which stems from this study was the exponential increase in web platforms used by tourists as online travel guides. The concern here is not the concept of online guides *per se* but rather the problem of lack of control over the validity and correctness of the content uploaded by online communities, which, at the time of writing this thesis, is not regulated or monitored.

The second part of Chapter Five discussed a survey conducted on tourist guides, their knowledge and perception of Malta's early Christian heritage. My results indicated that the subject of early Christian hypogea is not very popular among tourists despite most participants being mostly knowledgeable, but not necessarily up-to-date, on the latest information about catacombs. The analysis hinted that the lack of interest, particularly on early Christian heritage, may be the reason why tourist guides lag behind up-to-date knowledge on specific archaeology topics.

One important finding shows that tourist guides are not involved or consulted in matters relating to heritage tourism when local heritage professionals are engaged in setting up new interpretation and presentation facilities aimed at tourists. Guides acknowledged that they are not archaeologists but insisted that no other professional knows the

tourists and their expectations as they do, since they spend most of their time with these subjects. Therefore, this puts tourist guides in the right position to provide useful insights to curators and heritage managers in their endeavour to offer a lasting heritage experience via different interpretation and presentation methods. It must be pointed out, however, that at no point did tourist guides identify attempts to reach out to heritage professionals to improve the current situation. A change in approach from heritage professionals towards involving tourist guides and more 'proactiveness' on the part of the guides may therefore be beneficial to the overall heritage interpretation and presentation sector, particularly on early Christian catacombs.

8.2.5   Conveying clear messages

Presenting correct and clear information to visitors at archaeological sites should be the ultimate goal of heritage professionals. According to UNESCO, these messages, whether captioned or communicated verbally, must be designed in a way to create change (2013:3). Chapter Six was based on two surveys which explored visitors' overall experience and engagement at Maltese catacombs and shedding light on how the work of heritage supporting staff such as gallery site officers contributed to the visitors' experience.

The results indicated that the messages presented at the catacombs are not clear enough to prompt all visitors to understand the key features of these sites. In fact, the first survey, which assessed visitors' take-up after touring the catacombs, revealed that only 40% of participants, identified as 'Special Cultural Tourists', i.e. those individuals particularly interested in visiting heritage sites, were able to point out specific features related to late Roman hypogea. None of the other participants, who were either 'General Cultural Tourists' or occasional visitors, could identify or even refer to general aspects of the catacombs.

Heritage sites and museums often standardise their ways of presenting and interpreting artefacts (Serrell 1996:1). My study, however, demonstrates that a 'one-size-fits-all' method is not effective for the majority of visitors at Maltese catacombs. Curators often generate the same type of information for everyone, except for primary schoolchildren,

who are regularly assisted by education or gallery site officers who act as 'facilitators'. The evidence presented here also seems to indicate that the content is intended for 'specialised' heritage visitors and does not consider the engagement of those who 'stumble' across catacombs and still decided to visit.

One might argue that it is not the aim of the 'general' tourists to acquire any specific knowledge on Malta's early Christian heritage, and that such visits are conducted on the basis of mere curiosity; however, it should be reminded that curiosity was a determinant factor which led to the development of archaeology and heritage (Miller *et al.* 1980:710). Therefore, institutions responsible for the operations of Maltese archaeological sites are duty-bound to pass on clear messages to everyone without presuming that all consumers of heritage, whether intentional or occasional, can comprehend what might be perceived as uncomplicated by curators and archaeologists. If these institutions do not have the resources to cater to a wide spectrum of visitors, this research suggests that the least they can do is to provide a clear mission statement whereby visitors are informed on what to expect at an archaeological site.

Conceivably, the most important information obtained from the study in Chapter Six was the identification of the main factor affecting visitor satisfaction at catacombs. The data here demonstrated that individual visitors at catacombs would have preferred the visit be conducted with a guide or gallery site officer, rather than with the help of audio-guides, digital information panel and other modern technologies. For those visitors who participated in the survey, the best experience was the one where a dedicated guide led their visit. This outcome also supports the link made in this thesis between the knowledge of tourist guides and the overall experience offered by the heritage sector.

8.2.6 *A new strategy for the pedagogy of Archaeology at primary education level*

Archaeology at the primary education level is often given little importance due to the prioritisation of other academic subjects, such as mathematics and native languages. Furthermore, the lack of information among teachers on this topic contributes to the ever-growing perception of 'archaeology as a "luxury" subject of little relevance to

today's society' (Skeates 2000:116). Chapter Seven traced the development of Malta's pedagogical strategies of archaeology at the primary education level and the current state of play. The data obtained were collected from a number of sources, namely: an analysis of previous and current national academic curriculum; a review of the educational resource available for schoolchildren; and a questionnaire delivered to primary school teachers. In addition, this chapter used this information to explore the effects of archaeology teaching at primary schools on research at higher education institutions. For the latter, a questionnaire to second and third year University of Malta students reading Archaeology was administered.

The primary education sector in Malta has had a great leap forward with regard to the teaching of archaeology and history, both from the practical side (e.g. introducing compulsory site visits as part of the curriculum), but also on a level related to pedagogical research (e.g. the setting up of the Department of History Education at the University of Malta). Yet, this study shows that there is still a long way to go to improve the current standards. Three important aspects characterise the gaps which are hindering schoolchildren from properly engaging with this subject, namely: a fragmentary curriculum; no clear vision in the design of educational resources; and lack of involvement of school teachers in the overall design of the curriculum. The combination of these three factors seems to be linked to the type of specialisation that prospective archaeology students choose at university level, i.e. the subjects covered in considerable detail at primary level, notably prehistory, are more likely to be chosen as the areas of interest at tertiary level. My argument here is that the research conducted by tertiary, postgraduate and eventually research students, is essential to formulate parts of the social studies curriculum which covers Maltese archaeology topics. Besides, if a number of topics are not addressed at this level (e.g. Maltese catacombs), the likelihood is that these will not be given due importance at the primary level. Therefore, providing a good solid research framework - one not focused heavily on prehistory but covering other important periods - will consequently create a balance in a cycle where what goes around at primary education comes around at tertiary level.

Synergy and collaboration between the primary and tertiary education sectors are key to obtaining a sustainable heritage education. Academic research should address the insufficient information found in the National Curriculum thus offering a 'strong medium for the reinforcement of knowledge about Malta's cultural heritage and for shaping future civic and culturally-minded citizens who will strive to support and contribute to programmes that protect, conserved, regenerate and present cultural heritage to the highest levels' (Cassar 2012:15). This strategy would put schoolchildren in a position to understand better and appreciate Maltese archaeology through their educational studies up to tertiary level where the proper interpretation of local heritage will be the catalyst in the pedagogy of archaeology. This would, in the long run, contribute to heritage sustainability in Malta which is fundamental for the identity of the community as well as the tourism sector.

8.3   Limitations and Struggles

Notwithstanding the efforts made to employ an efficient and effective methodology, my research did face a number of set-backs which were out of my control. For example, the non-directive interviews presented in Chapter Three on local scholars generated important new data; however, this exercise did not always go as planned and its completion was far from straightforward, mainly due to the elderly age of two subjects, who, despite their willingness to participate, were often restricted from completing full interview sessions (in fact a number of sessions had to be conducted over the phone). Another struggle was to keep discussions in line with the topic without addressing other subjects, which were of little or no relevance to this doctoral research. In addition, Camilleri passed away a few months after completion of the interviews and therefore any further questions or clarifications could not be obtained from the primary resource but had to be triangulated either with third parties or unpublished notes, which were not always useful.

This thesis could have gained more on the engagement and cooperation of tourist guides. An introductory email was sent to all licensed guides explaining the aims of this study and inviting all recipients to fill out the questionnaire which was embedded in the

same email; but, sadly, the Malta Tourist Guides Association considered the contents of the survey as an undertaking which could be seen to seek to criticise the work of its members. This misunderstanding led the Association to take defensive measures which included a notification advising all tourist guides not to participate in this research. Following a number of clarifications with the President of the Association, the situation was resolved and clarifications were sent to all members. Nonetheless, this event seemed to have impacted upon 50% of the guides who still did not respond to the invitation. Other reasons for declining may have been technical in nature. In fact, there were instances where, either due to lack of IT skills or limited internet network, a number of guides did not complete the survey. It is worth noting, however, that the online questionnaire was only an alternative method of distributing the questionnaire following a series of unsuccessful attempts to organise an open information session to all licensed tourist guides.

One notable limitation was related to the approach used to enrol gallery site officers (GSOs) working at Heritage Malta. These had initial reservations on their participation due to fear that their responses would be used outside the framework of this research. The invitation to participate in the survey was channelled through the employer, i.e. the chief executive officer of Heritage Malta, who following approval, suggested his employees contribute towards this study. This direct instruction from the senior management seemingly caused concerns among GSOs, who thought that the outcome of this exercise would affect their employment. In addition, these employees believed that declining participation would have put them in bad light with their management, the researcher and their colleagues. These concerns could have been avoided if initial communication was directed to prospective participants prior to liaison with the senior management. In this way I would have had the opportunity to explain the scope of my study in a more informal way while highlighting the rights (e.g. complete anonymity) of research participants. Despite an initial attempt to do this, formal advice was given by executive members to first send the request through the Human Resource Department.

The methodology in Chapter Six focused on semi-structured interviews which explored visitors' experiences at Maltese catacombs, particularly regarding on-site heritage interpretation facilities. This methodology was suitable for the purpose of this research

and the sample was not representative of the total number of inbound tourists; as a result, it was difficult to make any statistical generalisations for the whole tourist population. The study surveyed those tourists who visited catacombs in Rabat during the time of fieldwork and therefore sample was relatively small when compared to the total number of tourists visiting the area of study.

Among the limitations of this study was also the fact that the research conducted on education and archaeology, notably with the primary sector, was the most dynamic in terms of curriculum changes. The design of the questionnaire was only aimed at those educators who covered the subject of early Christian heritage – this was originally taught in year Six; however, by the time the survey was to be launched, it had to be redesigned due to the change in the year this subject started being delivered. As a result, I had to wait for several months before administering the survey. This was essential in order to allow those participants who were going to teach this subject for the first time to conduct at least two site visits with pupils before providing their replies. This delayed the data collection for this particular exercise by a full year.

In discussing the above limitations, it can be observed that, despite the problems encountered, these issues were not detrimental to the overall quality and conclusions of this doctoral research. The resilience of identifying alternative solutions, often in a short period of time, was key to keeping the momentum of the research going and respecting the same timeframes.

8.4   Conclusion: Implementing the Review Model

The scope of my research was to explore the modes of presentation and interpretation of Malta's early Christian heritage from its inception to modern times; however, the overall message that this thesis wanted to convey was generally rooted in a new democratic and holistic approach towards heritage interpretation. This was done by

taking stock of important aspects, which, either directly or indirectly, have an effect on the overall heritage product. Four important pillars were identified as key components in this study, namely tourism, heritage, education and academia. The hypothesis was based on these four elements which served as distinctive attributes for HIRMOTHEA – a review model designed to assess the quality of these four components, both individually and as combination of elements, to reveal the corresponding effects that these have on the overall heritage interpretation. I would argue that this model is particularly useful to heritage operators who should be responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of their product (de la Torre 2002:3). The framework of this research can also serve as catalyst for the four sectors to develop the necessary collaborations – an important element that has not yet been actualised. My review model has in particular uncovered notable deficiencies in two sectors – Education and Tourism. The current deficit could be addressed with straightforward strategies which will not require considerable funding. Substantial investment, however, will be required in the long term particularly if the concerns discussed here are not addressed in the near future.

Future research can capitalise on my study to propose concrete solutions whereby the education and tourism sectors can obtain a strong(er) voice in the design and upgrading of the heritage interpretation across the board. Academics and curators can also contribute at grassroots level where they should involve themselves in tasks that bring them closer to the community, such as the updating of heritage information on online portals (e.g. during Edit-a-thons organised by cultural organisations) and outreach activities with key stakeholders of heritage, including primary educators and tourist guides. Other topics which may contribute to the field of interpretation are: return on investments; economic benefits; and the communities' well-being in fostering proper heritage interpretation (some research in this regard has already taken place – e.g. Cernea 2001:33; Hodder 2010:861). Researchers must make every effort to use their concepts and models and apply these in a practical way and in a wider context, as was hopefully done in this thesis. Dialogue among practitioners in different fields of study is key to a comprehensive heritage interpretation since only in this way can researchers fully define heritage and all of its many important components.

APPENDICES

Appendix I - Questionnaire to Tour Guides and the relevance of information they convey on Maltese Catacombs

Appendix II – Questionnaire to cultural heritage employees working at early Christian sites in Malta

Appendix III – Questionnaire on Visitor Experiences at Two Major Catacomb Complexes in Rabat Malta

Appendix I

Questionnaire to Tour Guides and the relevance of information they convey on Maltese Catacombs

Good morning / good afternoon. I am Glen Farrugia, a PhD student at Leicester University. I am currently carrying out research about visitor experiences at the catacombs. The survey will not take longer than 15 minutes. May I ask you a few questions?

There are no known risks related with this research project other than possible discomfort with the following:

- You will be asked to be honest when answering questions.
- You will be asked questions about professional experiences as a tourist guide.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. All data will be stored securely and will be made available only to those individuals conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

Your identity will not be revealed in any publications that result from this study.

You can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. You also do not have to answer individual questions you don't want to answer. Your name will not be attached to the questionnaire and I will ensure that your participation remains confidential.

Participant's declaration

I have read this consent form and am giving the opportunity to the researcher to ask questions. I hereby grant permission to use the information I provide as data in the above mentioned research project, knowing that it will be kept confidential and without use of my name.

_____   _____

Participant signature   Date

_____   _____

Researcher Signature   Date

Demographics

Q1.   Gender

Male	1
Female	2

Q2.   How old are you?: _____

25-39	1
40-45	2
55-64	3

Q3.   Are you a full time tour guide?

| Yes | 1 |
| No | 2 |

Q5.   For how long have you been guiding in catacombs?

For 1 yr or less	1
1-5 yrs	2
5-10 yrs	3
10 yrs +	4

Q6.   From which institute did you get training as Tourist Guide?

_____

Q7.   Can you mention some of the modules covered during this training?

_____

Q8.   Were you assessed for your Historical/Archaeological knowledge during training? If yes, how?

_____

Q9.   Did you have specific lectures on Maltese archaeology?

_____

Q10.   How often do you check for new literature on Maltese archaeology?

_____

Q11.   What type of information do you think tourists look for during guided tours in archaeological sites?

Generic	1
Specific	2
Academic	3
All of the above	4

Q12.   How often do you conduct guided tours for groups who visit Malta specifically for its archaeology?

Frequently	1
Quite frequently	2
Infrequently	3
Rarely	4

Q13.   How often do you conduct guided tours for groups who visit Malta specifically for its early Christian archaeology?

frequently	1
Quite frequently	2
Infrequently	3
Rarely	4

Q14.   Do you think many tourists who visit Malta nowadays are more interested in its archaeology rather than other aspects of Maltese Islands?

Yes	1
No	2

Q15.   If the answer for the previous question is yes, what do you think has led to this new in interest in archaeology?

_____

Q16.   Do you think travel agents do well in promoting Maltese archaeology?

_____

Q17. How often do you get requests from local organisations to give guided tours to a Maltese audience?

_____

Q18.   How do you rate the information that is being given by guides to the tourist on the Catacombs?

_____

Q19.   How do you rate the information on the site information panels?

_____

Q20.   How do you rate the audio tour guide?

_____

Q21.   If you had to change something in the way catacombs are currently presented to the public what would it be?

_____

Q22.   How might you rate the service of the Cultural Heritage Agency that operate these sites?

Excellent	1
Good	2
Satisfactory	3
Poor	4

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND HELPFUL COMMENTS

Appendix II

Questionnaire to cultural heritage employees working at early Christian sites in Malta

Good morning / good afternoon. I am Glen Farrugia, a PhD student at Leicester University (UK). I am currently carrying out research about visitor experiences at Malta's catacombs, but am keen to hear of how cultural heritage employees view and understand these specific sites. The survey will not take longer than 15 minutes.

There are no known risks related with this research project other than possible discomfort with the following:

- You will be asked to be honest when answering questions.
- You will be asked questions about professional experiences as a cultural heritage employee.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. All data will be stored securely and will be made available only to those individuals conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

Your identity will not be revealed in any publications that result from this study.

You can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. You also do not have to answer individual questions you don't want to answer. Your name will not be attached to the questionnaire and I will ensure that your participation remains confidential.

Participant's declaration

I have read this consent form and am giving the opportunity to the researcher to ask questions. I hereby grant permission to use the information I provide as data in the above mentioned research project, knowing that it will be kept confidential and without use of my name.

_____   _____

Participant signature   Date

_____   _____

Researcher Signature   Date

Demographics

Q1.   Gender

Male	1
Female	2

Q2.   How old are you?: _____

25-39	1
40-45	2
55-64	3

Q3.   For how long have you been working in a job connected with the catacombs or cultural heritage ?

For 1 yr or less	1
1-5 yrs	2
5-10 yrs	3
10 yrs +	4

Q4.   Was it you choice to work in the heritage of the catacombs?

Yes	1	**Go to Q5**
No	2	**Go to Q6**

Q5.   What fascinates you most about these sites?

_____

Q6.   Were you assessed for your Historical/Archaeological knowledge on catacombs before being assigned to this site? If yes, how?

_____

Q7.   Were you provided with specific information/bibliography or courses on Maltese catacombs before you started working onsite?

_____

Q8.   How often do you check for new literature on Maltese catacombs?

_____

Q9.   How often do visitors ask for more (e.g. published) information on catacombs?

Always	1
sometimes	2
never	3

Q10.   How would you rate the type of information the visitors ask about the catacombs?

Generic	1
Specific	2

Q11.   Were you always able to provide the visitors with a correct answer for their questions?

Yes	1
No	2

Q12.   Do you conduct guided tours with school children?

Yes	1
No	2

Q13.   What type of information do you provide to school children?

General	1
Specific	2

Q13a.   Do school teachers ask in advance for any specific information?

Yes	1
No	2

Please say what these requests might consist of:

_____

Q14.　　Do you know if the school groups which come to visit the catacombs cover this topic in their classroom lessons?

Yes	1
No	2

Q15.　　If you had to make any suggestions which you think would increase your knowledge of these sites, what would these be?

_____

Q16. Can you please answer the following questions related to the Maltese catacombs?

1	In which periods were the catacombs used?	The late Roman & Byzantine period	Medieval period
2	Which groups of people used/were buried in the catacombs?	Christians, Jewish and Pagans	Only Christians
3	The catacombs were dug out by the	Fossores	Aedificatores?
4	Where exactly were the catacombs dug?	Outside the city walls	Underneath the city
5	How many catacombs are there in Malta?		
6	Mention the types of tombs which are found in Maltese catacombs		
7	Mention two predominant features which are found specifically in Maltese catacombs		

8	Mention two types of artefact that have been recovered in Maltese catacombs		
9	Mention two activities – apart from burial – which took place inside the catacombs		
10	Mention two types of iconographic reliefs found in the catacombs		
11	Can you name any two archaeologists who studied Maltese catacombs in the early 20th century?		
12	Can you name any current scholars of the catacombs?		
13	Which academic publications do you know of and would most recommend?		
14	Name two aspects of heritage management of the catacombs that you think work **really well**		
15	Name two aspects of heritage management of the catacombs that you think could be improved in some way		

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND HELPFUL COMMENTS

Appendix III

Questionnaire on Visitor Experiences at Two Major Catacomb Complexes in Rabat Malta

Good morning / good afternoon! I, Glen Farrugia a PhD student at Leicester University, am currently carrying out research about visitor experiences at Malta's catacombs, looking to find out more about why you are visiting these sites and what you might 'take away' from your experience here. The survey will not take longer than 15 minutes. May I ask you some questions?

There are no known risks related with this research project other than possible discomfort with the following:

- You will be asked to be honest when answering questions.

- You will be asked questions about your heritage experience at this site.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. All data will be stored securely and will be made available only to those individuals conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

Your identity will not be revealed in any publications that result from this study.

You can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. You also do not have to answer individual questions you don't want to answer. Your name will not be attached to the questionnaire and I will ensure that your participation remains confidential.

Participant's declaration

I have read this consent form and am giving the opportunity to the researcher to ask questions. I hereby grant permission to use the information I provide as data in the above mentioned research project, knowing that it will be kept confidential and without use of my name.

_____   _____
Participant signature   Date
_____   _____
Researcher Signature   Date

☐

LOCAL VISITOR

☐

FOREIGN VISITOR

Demographics

Q1.   Gender

Male	1
Female	2

Q2.   How old are you?: _____

16-24	1
25-39	2
40-54	3
55-64	4
65+	6

Q3.   What is your occupation?

CODE:_____

1	Professional / Managerial
2	Business Owner
3	Public Officer (e.g. teacher, academic, museums)
4	Clerks/Executives/Administration Staff
5	Skilled/Unskilled Workers
6	Student/Apprentice
7	Housewife
8	Pensioner

Q4.   Where do you come from? _____

Q5.   If not Maltese, What was the purpose of your trip to Malta?

Maltese	**GO TO Q13 AND TICK LOCAL VISITOR BOX**	
Leisure		1
Work / business		2
Education		3
Visiting friends / relatives		4
Religious		5
Other (**SPECIFY**):		

Q6.   How many people (approximately) are you travelling with? _____

Q7.   Do you have any special interest in any of the following?

Archaeological sites	1
Museums	2
Fortifications	3
Churches	4
Historic houses	5
Landscape	6
None	98

Q8.   Which of the following statements best describes your situation?

You are visiting this site on your own	1
You are visiting this site with a tour guide as part of an excursion	2
You have hired a guide specifically for this site	3
Other (**SPECIFY**)	

Q9.   How did you arrive at this locality?

Public Transport	1
Taxi	2
Rented Car	3
On foot	4
By bicycle	5
Private coach/minibus	6
Hop on Hop Off bus	7
Other (**SPECIFY**):	

Q10A.   Is this your first time visiting the catacombs? _____

Yes	1	**GO TO Q11**
No	2	**GO TO Q10B**

Q10B.   How many times have you visited the catacombs before?

Twice	1
3 times	2
4 times	3
5 times	4

More than 5 times	5
Don't know	9

Q11.   What drew you to re-visit the catacombs?

Interest in culture / traditions	1	
Curiosity	2	
Part of a tour package	3	
Leisure / entertainment	4	**GO TO Q12**
Work / business	5	
Education	6	
Other (**SPECIFY**):		

Q12.   Was the visit to the catacombs originally included in your 'to-do list' when you were planning your trip to Malta?

Yes	1
No	2

Q13.   What were the sources of information you have used to find out about these catacombs

Word-of-mouth, other travellers	1
Street Promoters	2
Hotel staff	3
Guide book	4
Facebook	5
Twitter	6
Travel groups / chat rooms	7
Trip Advisor	8
Malta Tourism Authority	9
Heritage Malta	10
Local council website	11
Other (**SPECIFY**):	

Q14.   How long will you be staying in this locality?

Less than 1 hour	1
Between 1 to 3 hours	2
Between 4 to 6 hours (half day)	3
More than 6 hours (full day)	4
More than one day	5
Don't know	9

Q15A   Please indicate whether you had **heard of** the following sites before coming to Malta? (read from table below)

Q15B.   Which sites you **have visited** in this or surrounding locality / localities? Are there any others?

Q15C.   Please indicate which other sites in this or surrounding locality / localities you would be **interested** in visiting during your stay? Are there any others?

Q15D.   Which site in this or surrounding area/s you shall be **visiting next** today? Are there any others?

SITE	Q15A	Q15B	Q15C	Q15D
St. Paul's Catacombs	1	1	1	1
St. Paul's Grotto	2	2	2	2
St. Agatha's catacombs	3	3	3	3
St. Catald Catacombs	4	4	4	4
OTHERS				
Ta' Bistra Catacombs	5	5	5	5
Others **(SPECIFY)**		_____	_____	_____

Q16.   Are there any sites in the area you want to visit but which are not accessible to you?

Yes	1	**GO TO Q17**
No	2	**GO TO Q18**
Don't know	9	

Q17.   Can you kindly specify which sites are not accessible for you?

WRITE IN:

_____

Q18.   Do you feel that the area of Rabat has clear direction / information signs so you can easily find the sites you want to visit?

Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	9

Q19.   On a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 means very good and 4 means not good at all how would you rate the following aspects of the Catacombs in Rabat Malta:

A	Overall/general experience at (**INSERT NAME OF SITE**)	1	2	3	4	9
B	Accessibility within the site	1	2	3	4	9
C	Information boards, audio visuals, guide books	1	2	3	4	5

Q20A.   What especially made your visit to this site a good one?

_____

Q20B.   What made your visit to this site NOT a good one?

_____

Q21A.   What especially is good about the visitors' facilities?

_____

Q21B.   What is poor about the visitors' facilities?

_____

Q22.   What problems exist in terms of accessibility within the site?

_____

Q23.   How easy or difficult was it to find and reach the catacombs?

Very easy	1
Rather easy	2
Rather difficult	3
Very difficult	4

Q24.   Was your visit guided by one of the following? (If none go to Qxx)

Professional Tour Guide	1
Gallery Site Officer	2
Audio Guide	3

Q25.   How informative were the guides?

Very informative	1
Useful	2
Poor	3

Q26.   If you had to re-visit this site would you prefer some other means of site explanation?

No	1
Yes	2
If Yes, specify which type	1 2 3

	other

Q27. Can you highlight three things that impressed you most about the catacombs?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Q28. How would you rate this particular site interest-wise?

Very interesting	1
Rather interesting	2
Reasonable	3
Boring	4

Q29. How likely are you to recommend other travellers to visit the catacombs? Please answer on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 means you would **definitely** recommend and 4means that you would definitely **NOT** recommend.

Definitely recommend	1	**GO TO**
	2	**Q30A**
	3	**GO TO**
Definitely would NOT recommend	4	**Q30B**

Q30A. Can you please mention the main reason why you would recommend this site?

_____

Don't know	99

Q30B. Can you please mention the main reason why you would NOT recommend this site?

_____

Don't know	99

Q31. What aspects of the catacombs fascinate you most?

Their antiquity	1
Their design	2
Their religious significance	3
Being able to go inside them?	4
Their mode of construction	5
Their academic study	6

Q32. Now that you have visited the Maltese catacombs and have been provided with the available information (i.e. from a tour guide/ audio guide/ onsite information panels/ brochure/ guidebooks) how would you summarise this as a learning experience? Do you feel

Strong informed	1
Fairly well informed	2
Confused	3
Not Sure	4

Q33. Finally, would you like to make any further suggestions regarding the catacombs? For example, in terms of accessibility, information facilities or other?

_____

MANY THANKS FOR YOUR TIME AND COMMENTS!

Questionnaire to primary school teachers who cover the topic of early Christianity in Malta

Good morning / good afternoon. I, Glen Farrugia, a PhD student at Leicester University (UK), am currently carrying out research about visitor experiences at Malta's early Christian catacombs, but am keen in hearing how primary teachers who cover this topic as part of their school syllabus view and understand these specific sites in light of primary schoolchildren's cultural and educational development. The questionnaire will not take longer than 15 minutes.

This questionnaire has been granted ethical approval as per letter with reference *gf69-a9bd*. There are no known risks related with this research project other than possible discomfort with the following:

- You will be asked to be honest when answering questions.
- You will be asked questions about your professional experiences when conducting heritage visits with your students.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. All data will be stored securely and will be made available only to those individuals conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

Your identity will not be revealed in any publications that result from this study.

You can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. You also do not have to answer individual questions you don't want to answer. Your name will not be attached to the questionnaire and I will ensure that your participation remains confidential.

Participant's declaration

I have read this consent form and am giving the opportunity to the researcher to ask questions. I hereby grant permission to use the information I provide as data in the above mentioned research project, knowing that it will be kept confidential and without use of my name.

_____   _____
Participant signature   Date
_____   _____
Researcher Signature   Date

Demographics

Q1.   Gender

Male	1
Female	2

Q2.   How old are you?: _____

23-39	1
40-45	2
55-64	3

Q3.   How long have you been teaching at primary school level?

_____

Q4.   Do you cover the topic related to Malta's early Christian Heritage during classes?

Yes	1
No	2
Not always	Specify below

_____

Q5.   Under which subject do you teach this topic?

_____

Q6.   Do you conduct school visits to the catacombs? If yes, when?

		Before covering the topic	After covering the topic
Yes	1		
No	2		

Q6a.   If yes, would you visit just one or more than one catacomb?

_____

Q7.   Are you assisted by professional people during these visits? i.e. do you use a local tour guide or ask a site officer or curator to help describe and understand the site?

		Guides	Site Officers	Curators	Other – specify below
Yes	1				
No	2				

_____

Q8.   How would you rate the information given to school children during the visit either from tour guides or form information boards at the catacombs?

Very good	1
Good	2
Fairly good	3
Could be better	4
Poor	5

Q9.   Do you or your colleagues prepare any worksheets for these visits?

Yes	1
No	2

If **yes**, what are the main targets that you aim for in these worksheets?

_____

Q10.   Have you ever tried to search for online resources on this topic? If yes, was the information you found useful for primary school children?

Yes	1	Useful	Fairly useful	Not Useful
No	2			

Q11.   What types of resources would you suggest to help you teach this topic to primary school children?

_____

Q12.   Would you consider integrating other subjects and/or topics during the site visits to engage primary school children on this specific topic?

Yes	1	**Go to 13**
No	2	**Go to 14**

Q13.   Which subject or subjects do you think will fit most with this topic?

_____

Q14.   What, in your opinion, do the children learn most about the catacombs by visiting them?

      (e.g. Scale, space, design, antiquity, religion, death, history?)

_____

Q15.   Would you like to make any further comments or suggestions?

_____

MANY THANKS FOR YOUR TIME AND COMMENTS!

Questionnaire to University of Malta students reading for an undergraduate degree in Archaeology

Good morning / good afternoon. I, Glen Farrugia, a PhD student in Archaeology at Leicester University (UK), am currently carrying out research about visitor experiences at Malta's catacombs, and I am keen to hear of the study opportunities and interests that Archaeology students have about the early Christian period on Malta. This self-administered questionnaire will not take longer than 10 minutes. May I kindly ask you to answer a few questions?

There are no known risks related with this research project other than possible discomfort with the following:

- You will be asked to be honest when answering questions.
- You will be asked questions about your academic interest in Maltese early Christian archaeology in Malta.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. All data will be stored securely and will be made available only to those individuals conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

Your identity will not be revealed in any publications that result from this study.

You can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. You also do not have to answer individual questions you don't want to answer. Your name will not be attached to the questionnaire and I will ensure that your participation remains confidential.

Participant's declaration

I have read this consent form and am giving the opportunity to the researcher to ask questions. I hereby grant permission to use the information I provide as data in the above mentioned research project, knowing that it will be kept confidential and without use of my name.

_____   _____
Participant signature   Date
_____   _____
Researcher Signature   Date

Demographics

Q1.   Gender

Male	1
Female	2

Q2.   How old are you?: _____

18-24	1
25-40	2
40+	3

Q3.   What subjects did you study at post-secondary level?

_____

Q4.   Why did you choose to study archaeology at undergraduate level?

Job opportunities	1
Interest in the subject	2
Other	Specify below

Q5.   Which aspects of Maltese archaeology do you find the most interesting?

_____

Q6.   Which of the following periods of Maltese archaeology do you prefer and why?

Prehistory	1
Bronze Age	2
Phoenician & Punic	3
Roman & Byzantine	4
Medieval	5

Q7.   What fascinates you most about this period/these periods?

_____

Q8.   Are you following or have you followed a specific module on the preferred period?

| Yes | 1 | GO TO Q10 |
| No | 2 | GO TO Q9 |

Q9.   Do you know if a specific course is being delivered on this subject?

Yes there is	1	GO TO Q10
No there is not	2	GO TO Q12
Don't know	3	

Q10.   As a student, how would you rate the structure of this specific period-based course/module?

Very interesting	1	GO TO Q12
Rather interesting	2	
Reasonable	3	GO TO Q11
Poor	4	
Don't know	5	GO TO Q12

Q11.   What aspects or subject elements of this course/module are the most interesting and why?

_____

Q12.   Have you been able to follow a course on Palaeochristian and Byzantine archaeology?

Yes	1	GO TO Q13
No	2	GO TO Q16

Q13.   How would you rate the structure of this specific course?

Very interesting	1
Rather interesting	2
Reasonable	3
Poor	4
Don't know	5

Q14.   Did you conduct visits to related archaeological sites during the course/module?

Yes	1
No	2

Q15.   Which visits did you make – to what sites?

_____

Q16. Did you visit any catacombs? Briefly describe which ones and what you gained from the visit(s)

_____

Q17.   What are your views about how these sites are presented to the public?

_____

Q18.   Do these sites provide enough academic information, in your view?

_____

Q19.   Are you aware of any current archaeological work which is being conducted in Malta on this subject?

Yes	1
No	2

Q20.   Do you know of any local fieldwork opportunities which could help you acquire hands on experience on this topic?

Yes	1
No	2

If so, can you indicate which one/ones?

_____

Q21.   Would you consider doing your dissertation on Palaeochristian and Byzantine archaeology?

Yes	1
No	2

If so, what theme of study might you be keen to pursue?

_____

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND HELPFUL COMMENTS

![University of Leicester logo] RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW

Section I: Project Details

1. Project title:	Messages Presented and Messages Taken: Exploring Tourist and Native Perceptions of Malta's Early Christian Heritage
Statement of Research Purpose	The purpose of this research is to (i) increase research interest among Maltese and foreign scholars and university students in on catacombs; (iii) esure that heritage and tourism operators are aware of what is going on in the field of early Christian archaeology; (iv) engage school children and educators in the National cultural heritage, particularly in early Christian archaeology; and (v) assist tour guides and authors of tourist publications to convey and present the correct information to their clients.
Project Aims/ Research questions:	This research will address the following questions: 1. In what ways is Maltese early Christian archaeology being presented? 2. What gaps exist in the dissemination of data on early Christian archaeology here? 3. Which research activities are currently being carried out which can contribute to public presentation and interpretation of the Maltese catacombs? 4. What do foreign and local visitors have to say on the presentation and interpretation of the Maltese early Christian archaeology? 5. How are tourists and tourist guides kept up-to-date with new findings? 6. Are local visitors and foreign visitors seeking or being provided with different information? 7. To what degree does current research contribute to Archaeological Tourism in Malta? 8. What is being done by the Cultural Heritage regulator and operators in Malta to deliver the best cultural heritage product to tourist, local visitors and students? 9. What else can be done to improve the sustainability of Maltese archaeological tourism? 10. How far do museums respond to all the above issues?

Proposed methods:	The method which will be employed for this research is a mixed method. The quantitative sections will include structured and Semi-structured interviews. Different surveys have been developed to target specific respondents, these include; (i) employees in the cultural heritage sector, (ii) primary school teachers, (iii) tourists (iv) tour guides and (v) archaeology (university) students. For (i) A semi-structured twenty minute interview will be conducted with eight employees at the Gallery Site Officer's office of two different archaeological site, namely; St Paul's catacombs and St Agatha's catacombs in Rabat, Malta For (ii) The survey will be sent via email to twenty teachers working at the Convent of the Sacred Heart Junior School For (iii) Structured interviews will be conducted with visitors (foreign and local) just after their visit to the catacombs For (iv) The survey will be sent via email to one hundred licensed tour guide For (v) A semi structure twenty minute interview with second and third year archaeology students at the University of Malta
Method of recruiting research participants	For the heritage employees and teachers survey, an introductory letter will be sent to the Senior Curators of the sites and the Director of school respectively to inform them about my research and the intention to conduct interviews with their employees. The letter will include a request to provide me with the names and work email of all prospective participants who want to partake in this study. With regards to visitors and tour guides, the former will be picked up randomly from the area of study/archaeological sites, while a number of tour guides will be chosen from the official Tourists Guides list published by the Malta Tourism Authority: http://www.mta.com.mt/page.aspx?id=291For the archaeology student survey, twenty students will be picked up randomly from the University of Malta Archaeology centre.
Criteria for selecting research participants	The criteria used for selecting the participants are the following: For the Heritage sector employees: these must have worked in early Christian sites for at least 6 months; For teachers: participants must have taught a grade six class for at leat a year in Malta; For tourists guide: guides who will be selected to partake in this research must have a valid guiding license and have at least two years experience in this sector; For visitors: participants must have visited at least one catacomb in the Rabat area; For University students: second year students reading archaeology.
Estimated number of Participants	The total number of participants is 250. These are divided as follows:- 100 tour guides- 20 pr

Estimated start date	01/04/2014
Estimated end date	30/06/2014
Will the study involve recruitment of participants from outside the UK?	If yes, please indicate from which country(s). Considering that this study is built around foreign and local visitors, it is envisaged that the countries of origin of the participants include Malta and other countries around the world. It is not the scope of this thesis to conduct research on specific nationalities. A sample which is balanced in respect of the nationalities of the participants will be sought.

Section II: Applicant Details

2. Name of researchers (applicant):	a) GLEN FARRUGIA b) c) d) e)
2b. Department:	Archaeology & Ancient History
3. Status:	DL Research
4. Email addresses:	a) gf69@le.ac.uk b) c) d) e)

5a. Contact addresses:	a) 1. 'Atlantis' Triq il-Gibjun, Ghaxaq, Malta
	b)
	c)
	d)
	e)

Section III: For Students Only

6. Module name and number or MA/MPhil/PhD course and department:	Archaeology Research DL
7. Module leader's/Supervisor's name:	NA
8. Email address:	rmt12@le.ac.uk
9. Contact address:	The Centre for Historical ArchaeologyUniversity of LeicesterUniversity RoadLeicester LE1 7

Section IV: All Research Applicants

Please outline below whether or not your research raises any particular ethical issues and how you plan to address these issues.

No ethical issues are foreseen for this study.

Are you using a Participant Information and Informed Consent Form?

If YES, please paste copy form at the end of this application.   NO

Have you considered the risks associate with this project?   YES

Now proceed to the Research Ethics Checklist…………….. Section V

Section V: Research Ethics Checklist

Please answer each question by ticking the appropriate box:

YES   NO

1.	Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent? (e.g. children, people with learning disabilities, your own students).	NO
2.	Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited? (e.g. students at school, members of self-help group, residents of nursing home).	NO
3.	Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time? (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places).	NO
4.	Will the study involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use)?	NO
5.	Are drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins) to be administered to the study participants or will the study involve invasive,	NO

intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind?	
6. Will blood or tissue samples be obtained from participants?	NO
7. Is pain or more than mild discomfort likely to result from the study?	NO
8. Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?	NO
9. Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing?	NO
10. Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?	NO
11. Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS?	NO
12. Does this research entail beyond minimal risk of disturbance to the environment) If yes, please explain how you will minimize this risk under section IV above).	NO
13. Have you gained the appropriate permissions to carry out this research (to obtain data, access to sites etc)?	YES
14. Measures have been taken to ensure confidentiality, privacy and data protection where appropriate.	YES

If you have answered 'yes' to any of the questions 1-12 or 'no' to questions 13-14, please return to section IV. All Research Applicants' and ensure that you have described in detail how you plan to deal with the ethical issues raised by your research. This does not mean that you cannot do the research only that your proposal raises significant ethical issues which will need careful consideration and formal approval by the Department's Research Ethics Officer **prior to you commencing your research**. If you answered 'yes' to question 11, you will also have to submit an application to the appropriate external health authority ethics committee. Any significant change in the question, design or conduct over the course of the research should be notified to the Module Tutor and may require a new application for ethics approval.

Declaration

Please note any significant change in the question, design or conduct over the course of the research should be notified to the Departmental Ethics Officer and may require a new

application for ethics approval.

   I have read the University of Leicester Code of Research Ethics. - YES

The information in the form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it. - YES

I understand that all conditions apply to any co-applicants and researchers involved in the study, and it is my responsibility to ensure they abide by them. - YES

Appendix VII – Research Ethics Review Approval

University of Leicester Ethics Review Sign Off Document

University of Leicester

To: **GLEN FARRUGIA**

Subject: Ethical Application Ref: **gf69-a9bd**

(Please quote this ref on all correspondence)

02/06/2014 14:22:42

Archaeology & Ancient History

Project Title: **Messages Presented and Messages Taken: Exploring Tourist and Native Perceptions of Malta's Early Christian Heritage**

Thank you for submitting your application which has been considered.

This study has been given ethical approval, subject to any conditions quoted in the attached notes.

Any significant departure from the programme of research as outlined in the application for research ethics approval (such as changes in methodological approach, large delays in commencement of research, additional forms of data collection or major expansions in sample size) must be reported to your Departmental Research Ethics Officer.

Approval is given on the understanding that the University Research Ethics Code of Practice and other research ethics guidelines and protocols will be compiled with

- http://www2.le.ac.uk/institution/committees/research-ethics/code-of-practice

- http://www.le.ac.uk/safety/

The following is a record of correspondence notes from your application **gf69-a9bd.** Please ensure that any proviso notes have been adhered to:-

Apr 26 2014 10:38AM   In view of the type of locations in which this exercise is going to take place, it was felt that there was no need to submit a Risk Assassment Form.

May 9 2014 10:21AM   Dear Glen

Thank you for the ethics application and apologies for the delayed responses - your request arrived while I was away for two weeks. Please could you send to me (by email) your five attachments as these have got scrambled in the upload. I also have a few questions pertaining to your application:

- The "estimated number of participants" section is incomplete
- You note that no ethical issues are forseen in the study. However, you need to enable participants to withdraw from the study should they wish to do so (this can be timebound). You also need to explain what personal information you will be capturing, how this is going to be used/presented, and how this will be stored. This needs to be explicity articulated to each participant (I appreciate this may have been included in the scrambled documents). This information should be included as part of the Participant Information and Informed Consent sections at the beginning of each questionnaire.
- Your start date is 25 days before you submitted the application. Please note that you should not commence the research until approval has been provided by the Ethics Officer.

Get back in touch if you have further queries

Cheers

Richard

May 26 2014 7:48PM   amended as requested

--- END OF NOTES ---

Appendix VIII – Approval to carry out research in Maltese Church Schools

MALTESE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE

Secretariat for Catholic Education

The Head
Sacred Heart College (Jr)
St Paul's Missionary College (Jr)

3ʳᵈ June, 2015

Chevalier Glen Farrugia currently reading for a Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Leicester, requests permission to conduct questionnaires with primary school teachers at the above mentioned schools.

The Secretariat for Catholic Education finds no objection for Chevalier Glen Farrugia to carry out the stated exercise subject to adhering to the policies and directives of the schools concerned.

Rev Dr. Charles Mallia
Delegate for Catholic Education

Secretariat for Catholic Education, 16, The Mall, Floriana, FRN 1472. Tel: 27790060
E-mail: charles.mallia@maltadiocese.org

312

Appendix IX – Approval to carry out research with University of Malta Archaeology Students

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
L-Università ta' Malta

Glen Farrugia <glen.farrugia@um.edu.mt>

Re: PhD
1 message

Nicholas C. Vella <nicholas.vella@um.edu.mt>   29 May 2015 at 13:35
To: Glen Farrugia <glen.farrugia@um.edu.mt>

Dear Glen,

By all means - I can forward this to all students.I like the questionnaire. But first years will not have followed anything on the subject - do we include them anyway?

Nick

On 29 May 2015 at 11:18, Glen Farrugia <glen.farrugia@um.edu.mt> wrote:
Dear Dr Vella,

hope all is well.

I need your help and advise on the following matter. I am about to start collecting data for one of my chapters and was wondering whether you find any objections if I distribute the attached questionnaire to your students. The necessary ethics approval has already been granted by my alma mater (as per attached letter), however I will need your blessing as HOD in order to proceed. I would also appreciate if you could go through the questionnaire - which is pretty much straight forward - and tell me what you think or if you would add anything else. I humbly belief that this short survey may contribute to your department as well.

I thank you in advance for your help

glen

Glen Farrugia

Appendix X – Approval to carry out research with visitors at St. Paul's Catacombs

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
L-Università ta' Malta

Glen Farrugia <glen.farrugia@um.edu.mt>

RE: request for permission to distribute questionnaires to visitors at St Paul's catacombs following the event 'Mortem - A Roman's Last Journey'
1 message

Gambin Kenneth J at Heritage Malta <kenneth.j.gambin@gov.mt>   20 February 2016 at 08:43
To: Glen Farrugia <glen.farrugia@um.edu.mt>, Sant Alan Mario at Heritage Malta <alan-mario.sant@gov.mt>
Cc: Cardona David at Heritage Malta <david.cardona@gov.mt>

No objection

Kenneth

From: Glen Farrugia [mailto:glen.farrugia@um.edu.mt]
Sent: Saturday, February 20, 2016 8:35 AM
To: Sant Alan Mario at Heritage Malta
Cc: Gambin Kenneth J at Heritage Malta; Cardona David at Heritage Malta
Subject: RE: request for permission to distribute questionnaires to visitors at St Paul's catacombs following the event 'Mortem - A Roman's Last Journey'

Dear Mr Sant,

RE: request for permission to distribute questionnaires to visitors at St Paul's catacombs following the event 'Mortem - A Roman's Last Journey'

I trust my email finds you well.

I am writing to request your kind approval in order to distribute questionnaires to visitors at St Paul's catacombs after the event 'Mortem - A Roman's last journey'. This exercise, which is directly related to my doctoral studies at the University of Leicester, is intended to confirm the hypothesis that cultural heritage investment affects the visitors experience in a positive way. Even though this exercise may not seem innovative, it will help us gathering data about the visitors experience following conservation and give us the opportunity to compare the outcome with the data gathered during the 2012. I am attaching the questionnaire for your perusal. A copy of the data analysis will be provided to Heritage Malta.

While thanking you in advance for your cooperation, an early reply would be greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

Glen

314

Appendix XI – Approval to carry out research with Heritage Employees

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
L-Università ta' Malta

Glen Farrugia <glen.farrugia@um.edu.mt>

RE: request for permission to distribute questionnaires to front office personnel placed at St Paul's catacombs and Ta' Bistra catacombs
1 message

Sant Alan Mario at Heritage Malta <alan-mario.sant@gov.mt>   29 May 2015 at 12:44
To: Glen Farrugia <glen.farrugia@um.edu.mt>
Cc: Cardona David at Heritage Malta <david.cardona@gov.mt>, Gambin Kenneth J at Heritage Malta
<kenneth.j.gambin@gov.mt>, Bezzina Ivan at Heritage Malta <ivan.bezzina@gov.mt>

Dear Glen,

As Heritage Malta we find no objection. Please liaise with Mr Ivan Bezzina in copy redistribution and logistics.

Regards

Alan

From: Glen Farrugia [mailto:glen.farrugia@um.edu.mt]
Sent: Friday, May 29, 2015 12:03 PM
To: Sant Alan Mario at Heritage Malta
Cc: Cardona David at Heritage Malta; Gambin Kenneth J at Heritage Malta
Subject: RE: request for permission to distribute questionnaires to front office personnel placed at St Paul's
catacombs and Ta' Bistra catacombs

Dear Mr Sant,

RE: request for permission to distribute questionnaires to front office clerks ad GSOs in virtue of a doctoral research.

I trust my email finds you well.

By way of introduction, my name is Glen Farrugia, a researcher in the field of early Christian Cultural Heritage. I am currently conducting my PhD at the University of Leicester on cultural heritage management. To this end, I have drafted a brief questionnaire, to which I have obtained ethical approval as per letter attached, in order to analyse how the cultural heritage employees - mainly front office clerks and Gallery Site Officers - view and understand specific archaeological sites . Therefore, I kindly request your permission to distribute the questionnaires to HM employees working at St Paul's catacombs and Ta' Bistra catacombs. I am attaching the ethics approval letter for your perusal.

While thanking you in advance for your cooperation, an early reply would be greatly appreciated.

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