

L-IMDINA u HAL SAFI: konklużjonijiet

Il-fehim taż-Żminijiet Mudlama Maltin hu 'xogħol li għadu għaddej' u għad irid isir ħafna xogħol bażiku. Sadanittant wieħed jista' jipprova jasal għal xi konklużjonijiet ibbażati fuq dawn iż-żewġ każijiet:

- L-arkeoloġija qed tindika li Malta kellha ekonomija stabbilita fis-sekli 9 u 10 u ma għaditx minn żmien ta' abbandun wara l-invażjoni tat-870.
- Fl-aħħar tas-seklu 9 l-Mediterran ċentrali ra l-amalgamazzjoni gradwali tar-rotot kummerċjali marittimi Bizantini u Gharab.
- Malta kienet tinsab fin-nofs ta' din l-attività kummerċjali Mediterranja. Fl-**Imdina** naraw numru kbir ta' amfori tat-tip Bizantin kif ukoll oġġetti gglejżjati minn Kostantinopli, flimkien mal-ewwel ċeramika tat-tip Iżlamiku importata.
- Ir-rabtiet ta' Malta mal-Afrika ta' Fuq Musulmana probabbilment bdew qabel il-konkwista attwali tat-870. Bl-istess mod ir-rabtiet mad-dinja Bizantina komplew anke wara t-870. Il-Mediterran ċentrali kien, fi kliem ieħor, spazju ekonomiku wieħed.

Rotot kummerċjali Mediterranji ewlenin bejn l-aħħar tas-seklu 9 (l-ewwel mappa) u l-aħħar tas-seklu 10 (it-tieni mappa)



Prevailing Mediterranean trading networks between the late 9th (Plan 1) and the late 10th centuries (Plan 2)

- F'nofs is-seklu 10 r-rabta mal-kummerċ Bizantin għadha evidenti f'**Hal Safi** rurali, iżda f'forma mnaqqa - tipi ta' amfori min-Nofsinhar tal-Italja huma preżenti iżda mhux dawk Eġej.
- F'nofs is-seklu 10 tidher ukoll it-tradizzjoni tal-Afrika ta' Fuq tal-kazzoli tat-tisjir magħmula bl-idejn, li totalment ħadu post il-kazzoli tat-tip miftuħ Bizantini ta' qabel. Dan juri bidla kulturali sinifikanti fuq il-livell bażiku u l-influwenza dejjem tikber tal-kultura Għarbija/Tuneżina f'Malta.
- Huwa dejjem aktar ċar kif is-suċċess tal-Imdina kien jiddependi parzjalment fuq il-kuntatti kummerċjali marittimi tagħha, iżda wkoll fuq il-hila biex tiżdied il-produttività tal-qalba rurali, f'siti bħal **Hal Safi**. Il-kummerċ u l-agrikoltura kienu marbuta ma' xulxin.
- L-arkeoloġija emergenti tal-perjodu tan-Nofs Bizantin u Malta Iżlamika bikrija mhijjex unika. Sitwazzjonijiet simili huma ddokumentati fi Sqallija għall-istess żmien. Malta ma kinitx territorju iżolat, iżda pjuttost imxiet skont il-pass tal-bidla stabbilit mill-movimenti politiċi u ekonomiċi reġjonali estensivi.
- Sal-aħħar tas-seklu 10 kien hemm rotot ġodda ta' kummerċ li kienu jikkollegaw lill-Eġittu tal-Fatimidi ma' Palermo u Mahdija, filwaqt li qatgħu 'il-barra lil zoni Bizantini. Dan it-tibdil kien ta' bebefiċċju għal Malta għax b'hekk sabet ruħha fiċ-ċentru tar-rotot kummerċjali sinjuri tal-Gharab.

MDINA and SAFI: conclusions

Understanding the Maltese Dark Ages is a 'work in progress' and much groundwork still needs to be done. Meanwhile one can attempt some conclusions based on these two case studies:

- Archaeology indicates that Malta had a well-structured economy in the 9th and 10th centuries, and was not subjected to a long-lasting phase of abandonment after the 870 invasion.
- In the late 9th century the central Mediterranean witnessed the gradual merging of the Byzantine and the Arab maritime trading routes.
- Malta lay in the middle of this Mediterranean trading activity. At Mдина we see large numbers of Byzantine type amphorae as well as glazed wares from Constantinople alongside the first imported Islamic type ceramics.
- Malta's links with Muslim North Africa probably started before the actual conquest of 870. Likewise links with the Byzantine world continued even after 870. The Central Mediterranean was in other words one economic space.

- In the Mid-10th century the link with Byzantine trade is still evident in rural Safi, but in diminished form - South Italian amphora types are present but not the Aegean ones.
- In the Mid-10th century we also see the appearance of the North African tradition of handmade cooking pots, which totally replaced the former Byzantine open casserole types. This signals a significant cultural change at grass root level and the growing influence of Arab/Tunisian culture in Malta.
- It is increasingly clear how the success of Mдина depended partly on its maritime trading contacts, but also on the ability to increase productivity in the rural hinterland, at sites such as Safi. Trade and agriculture were intertwined.
- The emerging archaeology of Mid-Byzantine and early Islamic Malta is not unique. Similar situations are documented in Sicily for the same period. Malta was not an isolated outpost, but rather moved according to the pace of change set by far-reaching regional political and economic movements.
- By the Late 10th century a new triangle of trading routes emerged, connecting Fatimid Egypt to Palermo and Mahdia, while cutting out the Byzantine areas. These changes benefitted Malta greatly, as it now found itself ever more deeply embedded in the highly lucrative Arab trading network.

