Summary. The assumption of a long-term overlapping or co-existence of cultures there has been confirmed by a very small inscription which came to my attention during research for my doctoral thesis ‘From Expansion to Isolation. A study on the development of the Phoenician–Punic culture on the islands of Malta and Gozo’. Pottery chronology and the use of epigraphy and palaeography illustrate that at a time when Malta and Gozo had long been under Roman rule, the harmonious co-existence of the Punic, Greek and Roman cultures was manifested in one vessel and in one inscription. The Maltese archipelago assumes a special status owing to its isolation. There is hardly any comparable area of 246 sq km in which the phenomenon of cultural overlapping and cultural parallels can be found in such density.

Punic Jar J 82, with inscription: A piece of information about Roman–Punic everyday life

In the course of writing my doctoral thesis concerning the Phoenician–Punic period in Malta, I was honoured to be given permission by the Curator of the museum of the historical complex of St Agatha in Rabat, Father Victor Camilleri, to spend some time in the museum and the very impressive catacombs. Since I had developed a special interest in Phoenician epigraphy during my study of Oriental Archaeology, I also spent some while with the pottery objects in order to study the Phoenician–Punic graffiti and also Greek letters which sometimes existed only in marginal traces. My interest was caught by a completely preserved jug with an unusual inscription.

Father Camilleri said that this jug had already been dated, since Dr González (1996) had written a doctoral thesis about the pottery from St Agatha, but that so far nobody had shown an interest in researching the inscription. The strange inscription on the jug comprised only one word, and I was not naïve enough to think that this single word would be so sensational that the entire history of Malta would have to be rewritten. But, at least, it was an opportunity to research something ‘new’.1

1 I obtained the research rights for this jug.
As for the previous history of this jug, little information could be obtained. The collection to which this jug belonged had been kept in containers under the library of the convent until the 1980s and had then been catalogued and exhibited in the museum.²

Dr C. Sagona of the University of Melbourne, who had also worked at St Agatha in the course of writing her new book on Phoenician–Punic objects in private collections (Sagona 2003), told me that little was known about the site where J 82 was discovered but that most probably the jug was connected to a burial as it was still completely preserved. As a whole, only very few pottery objects at St Agatha give an indication of their origins. Dr Sagona believes that J 82 may have been part of the De Piro collection that was apparently given to the convent of St Agatha.³

Dr Gonzàlez (1996, 69) gives a very good description of the clay and the shape. In addition, Dr Sagona gave me further information about J 82, even though the shades of clay do not match to the last detail.⁴

A FEW PALAEOGRAPHIC REMARKS

The letters are approximately 3.5 cm in size and arranged in a slightly curved manner, as can be seen in Figure 2. The script resembles a Latin italic ancient script.⁵ There exists no similar comparable material from Malta. The assumption that this inscription with the later dating is Latin italic seems reasonable.

Consultation of the relevant literature revealed the following:

1. P corresponds to the form common at that time (Cagnat 1914, 25).
2/3. E and L (Fig. 3) form an interesting ligature but since there exist E/L in such a ligature (Cagnat 1914, 24) and L/E also in this form, even though it is read EL, it is very likely that the spelling on J 82 is EL, although I have not found any further evidence.
4. A – an open A is common in all bent and straight variations.
5/6. GO (Fig. 4) again is a common, yet strange, combination of the letters G and O. There exists adequate evidence for the O that is open at the top but the ligature GO appears only rarely. One reference was found in a list of ligatures (Cagnat 1914, 25).
7. N comes in a common form.
8. I is absolutely clear.
9. A is a somewhat strange example of the open A. However, as this part of the inscription is situated on the curve of the shoulder it may have been difficult to scratch, on an uneven surface, a correct A that was probably to form a ligature with the subsequent I.
9/10. A I (Fig. 5) might be the Greek form of a dative, i.e. -ɑi – the jug belongs to Pelagonia. This would not have been uncommon during the New Punic period in Malta, when Punic, Greek and Latin were well intermixed.

² Information given by the Curator of the Museum.
³ E-mail information of 27 November 2003 from Dr C. Sagona, University of Melbourne, Australia.
⁴ E-mail of 27 November 03 from Dr C. Sagona: ‘J 82. Jug or pitcher with inscription on the shoulder; round mouth with ovoid sectioned handle rising slightly above the rim where it is attached, it spans down to the shoulder, small groove at the juncture of neck and shoulder, neck bulges slightly, broad shoulders narrow toward the flat and untidily made base; wheel-ribbed interior. Green-cream slip 10YR 8/4, over reddish yellow fabric 7.5YR 7/6, fine white and black inclusions in the paste with some voids at the surface, Dm of rim 17 cm, H 33.3 cm, Dm of base 13.8 cm.’
⁵ Personal conversation with Professor Dr Taeubner, Institute of Ancient History, University of Vienna, December 2003.
Figure 1.
J 82 (González 1996, 69).6

---

6 Sagona 2000, 96, note 4: ‘One large jug in St. Agatha’s Museum, Rabat, inv. no. J 82, has a detailed inscription scratched on the shoulder, see González 1996, 69 no. 114. This jug falls late in the Punic repertoire, c.100 BC to c. AD 50. Punic potter’s marks of any sort number less than five out of the hundreds of vessels examined in the National and private collections in Malta. Stamp seals under the handles of Phase IV amphorae are the only other markings observed.’
A PUNIC JUG FROM THE MUSEUM OF ST AGATHA, RABAT, MALTA

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5
As for the noun Pelagonia, it is interesting to note that the radicals \textit{plg} – if considered to be the root of the word, which is probably the case since the other letters are only endings that may be seen as decorative trimmings – have very similar meanings in the Semitic languages, such as Assyrian, Aramaic, Hebrew and Phoenician, as well as in Greek and Latin, where they mean sea, water, channel, copiousness and abundance on the one hand, and district or tribal affiliation on the other hand.

The second Greek meaning (Gemoll 1965, 588), even in a poetic sense – copiousness, abundance, would allow the assumption that it was some sort of water jug. The whitish calciferous concretions on the inside and the outside of the jug may be either part of the clay itself or, if it is a water jug, calcium deposits left by the water.

However, water deposits are quite common on Punic pottery found in tombs, since many tombs have been exposed to rainwater and humidity, and the Maltese soil contains much lime which has been redeposited in the interior of many tombs. It is thus possible that the jug was exposed to moisture over a long period in the original burial.\(^7\)

A further question is whether the inscription identifies the subject of the burial, a certain Pelagonia. Pitcher J 82 is an appropriate size for a cinerary urn, used to hold a cremation. However, this is unlikely, as jars rather than jugs were usually used as urns. In Malta, this type of jar burial has been discovered in seven of several hundred graves (Sagona 2002, 264). I conclude therefore that jug J 82 did not serve as a cinerary urn, but as a useful donation in the afterlife of the deceased Pelagonia.

Sagona (2000, 96, note 4) also points out that ‘Punic potter’s marks of any sort number less than five out of the hundreds of vessels examined in the National and private collections in Malta. Stamp seals under the handles of Phase IV amphorae are the only other markings observed.’ It seems to be very unlikely that the name that covers half of the jug is a potter’s mark, as they are usually rather small and found mostly under the handles.

It is only a single word, yet it has certain interesting aspects. The vessel is dated to the late Punic period when Malta had long been under Roman power, i.e. after 218 BC. On this late Punic vessel, after firing, a Latin italic graffito has been scratched, with a name in what is likely to be the Greek dative. The name Pelagonius is not actually otherwise attested in Latin onomastics, although Pelagon, taken from the Greek equivalent or from Pelagonios, is found.

We cannot completely discount the possibility that Pelagonius is here an ethnic, identifying a person from one of the four districts into which Macedonia was subdivided in 167 BC. The distance between Macedonian Pelagonia and Malta is not a problem, given the mobility of Romans and their subjects in the second century BC Mediterranean. We may note that Stephanus of Byzantium identifies a district in Sicily as Pelagonia and gives the ethnic Pelagoniaios, but since he is the only source for the fact, this is less likely to help identify the Pelagonia of jug J 82.

In my opinion, even in the absence of other evidence for the name in its feminine form, the nine attestations of the name Pelagon make it a plausible hypothesis that we are dealing with a woman on Malta who bore the name Pelagonia.

\(^7\) E-mail discussion with Dr P. Gonzàlez of 28 May 2004.
NOTES ON PELAGONIA AND PELAGON

Pelagones, Pelagonia

People and district in northern Macedonia (Oberhummer RE 19, 243–5):

The city of Pelagonia:
Liv. XXXI 28,5 angustiae ad Pelagoniam and 34,6 fauces Pelagoniae.
Liv. XLV 29,9 Herakleia. Macedonia 167 BC subdivided into four districts.
Strabo VII 326–7, 331.

Tribus: Maecia (Kubitschek 1889, 243).

Roman military inscriptions: IG X (Epirus, Macedonia, Thracia, Scythia Minor), 8 2, 2 (Macedonia Septentrionalis).

Pelagonia in Sicily


Pelag(o)n as a slave and freedman name, Solin 1971, vol. II, 592.

Julius Pelago, a eunuch who in AD 62 was placed by Nero in charge of the detachment of the praetorian guard sent to Asia to murder Rubellius Plautus (Tac., Ann. XIV 59; PIR I 455). He seems to be identical with Pelagon apeleutheros kai epitropos [libertus Augusti et procurator], who had the Temple of the Dioscuri in Naples finished at his own expense and consecrated, IG XIV 714 = IGRom 429.

See also Dessau 1926, 436; Stein RE 19, 242.

There are nine attestations of Pelagon as a masculine proper name: Kayssner RE 19, 242; Berve RE 19, 243.

ABBREVIATIONS

ANCES Ancient Near Eastern Studies
BAR British Archaeological Reports/International Series
IG Inscriptiones Graecae (Berlin 1873 f.)
Medarch Mediterranean Archaeology Australian and New Zealand Journal for the Archaeology of the Mediterranean World
PIR Prosopographia imperii Romani (2nd edn) (1993 ff.)
RE Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft

REFERENCES

Sagona, C. 2003: Punic Antiquities of Malta and other ancient artefacts held in ecclesiastic and private Collections (Leuven, ANES, Supplement Series 10).

8 www.bbaw.de/forschung/ig/ectypa/6insulae1, 22 October 2003.