

# Opportunity to view prehistory being unearthed

**Sarah Carabott**

Archaeologists sifting through rubbish dumped by prehistoric people at a temple site in Corradino are giving people the opportunity of a lifetime to see them in action on Monday.

While a couple of decades ago archaeologists would have focused on the temple itself, the team led by Caroline Malone, from Queen's University, Belfast, has for the past three weeks been looking for clues scattered in the soil around it.

Students from the University of Malta are digging through the soil where prehistoric people dumped their litter and finding, among others, pottery fragments and animal bones and molars. This will shed light on the living habits of the island's occupiers 5,000 years ago.

People first settled here about 7,000 years ago and the megalithic temples started being built by 3600BC.

One of the less known temple sites, Kordin III, saw its first main excavation completed by Thomas Ashby in 1909. This temple used to form part of three sites on the Corradino promontory. Unfortunately, the other two suffered damage and the industrial estate was built over them.

Kordin III, managed by *Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna*, consists of two temples, the larger one having a standard three-apse plan, typical of the Ggantija phase. It has a concave facade, with the path to the central area being stone-paved, something that is not found in the other temples in Malta.

The most notable feature in this site is a unique 2.75 metre-long trough in one of the apses. The function of this boat-like object remains a mystery.

Behind the temple-like structures there are some small rooms, which is where Prof. Malone's team is excavating.

"We're looking for the story of this site through time; from 5,000 years ago when the structures that make up this very complex, series of temple-like buildings were in use. The area we're excavating is a series of early rooms with their floor covered in *torba* plaster.

"Around the stones, in the walls and on the thresholds between the various rooms we are finding bits of pottery and lots of animal bones - sheep, pigs and cows.

"These are telling us a great deal about the economy. In particular, they were killing very young lambs and piglets just as summer reached its height, when the fodder was probably very limited. They killed the excess sheep and pigs to keep the grain and the grass for the animals that were kept for the following year," Prof. Malone said.

The scientific documentation of the remains, including bones, pottery and possibly seed and charcoal, was something that was lacking in other excavations,

senior lecturer Nicholas Vella, who is involved in this project, noted.

The team is storing everything found there, including war shrapnel and teacups from the excavation at the beginning of the 20th century as these are all markers of when the site was disturbed.

The excavations form part of a larger five-year project called 'Fragility and sustainability in restricted island environments: adaptation, culture change and collapse in prehistory'.

Prof. Malone is the principal investigator of this European Research Council project which brings together a team from the Queen's University, the University of Cambridge, the Malta campus and the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage and Heritage Malta. On Monday, the team at Corradino will be holding guided tours



Caroline Malone is leading excavations at the Corradino temple site. Photos: Chris Sant Fournier

on the hour between 8am and noon. Visitors can park their car off the site, near St Anthony of Padua church. Kordin III is opposite the Mariam Al-Batool Mosque on Corradino Road.

"It's a one-off opportunity to see archaeology in action. How often has a Maltese temple been excavated in the last 100 years? This is an opportunity not to be missed," Prof. Malone added.



University of Malta senior lecturer Nicholas Vella next to a curious 2.75 metre-long trough.



Prehistoric litter will shed light on prehistoric habits.



People can watch University of Malta archaeology students in action on Monday.