



SOPRINTENDENZA
TAL-PATRIMONJU KULTURALI
SUPERINTENDENCE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE



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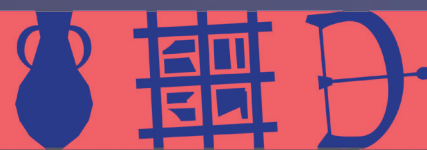


EWROPEJ



TAL-ARKEO

LOGIJA



17th-19th June 2022



SOVRINTENDENZA
TAL-PATRIMONJU KULTURALI

SUPERINTENDENCE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

European Archaeology Days

‘Light the Past’

Oil lamps from Maltese Archaeology

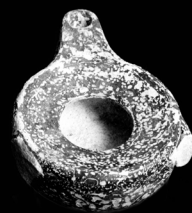
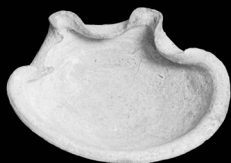
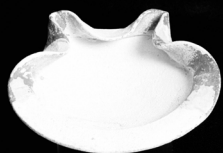






Left: Double spouted lamps (two) found in a Punic-Roman Tomb in Tarxien during excavations in 2020

Right: Double spouted lamps (two) found in a Punic-Roman Tomb in Rabat during excavations in 2020



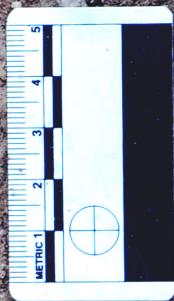
Oil lamps are among the most common and fascinating objects that archaeologists come across during archaeological excavations. In Malta, they are widely found in the countless tombs and catacombs scattered over the Maltese Islands, wherein they had primarily a ritual function. Oil lamps can also be found in domestic spaces as well as temples, where they are usually left as an offering sometimes with a few letters incised on them as a dedication to a divinity. Oil lamps are small objects which function can be different, according to the context they are found in. What remains the same for all oil lamps is that their essential and basic use is that of providing light.

Light has been a necessity throughout human history, forcing communities to create lighting systems for their needs and daily life. The first oil lamps were made by adapting rudimental stones and through time these lamps evolved to more complex shapes. Since its discovery, fire became a crucial component of food consumption, domestic environs, and ritual practices in religious spaces. For all these reasons, human beings developed systems and containers to preserve the flame and use it for all the various aspects of life. The essential components of making a lamp consist of a shallow plate or a bowl as a container, a wick, and the fuel. Around these few elements, oil lamps were easily shaped since Prehistory, adapting their form according to the evolving fashion of society as well as the changing technology,

but always maintaining the same functional parts of the object. Such a development can be seen from the simple round plates with pinched nozzles on one side in Phoenician and Punic contexts, to the closed containers with more elaborated decorations in the Late Roman and Early Medieval periods. In the latter periods the ceramist would almost become an artist by moulding into the clay beautiful decorative motifs that show important beliefs for society or the most representative symbols of the time.

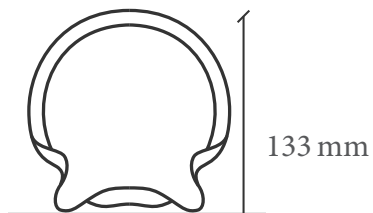
Throughout the past decades and still today, several oil lamps are found and collected from several archaeological sites around Malta and Gozo. These are often carefully treated and recorded as special finds, especially when representing a ritual offering inside a tomb. After their collection, they are then included in the inventory of the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage and stored for future studies as part of the national collection.

Some oil lamps have been selected to feature in this catalogue as part of this year's European Archaeology Days in Malta. They belong to different sites and periods in Maltese history. They show how lamps have changed and evolved from the Phoenician presence more than 2,600 years ago, until the era of the Order of the Knights around 400 years ago.





Left: Oil lamps (three) found in a Late Roman Period Tomb in Marsa during excavations in 2018 as part of the Marsa Junction Project.
Right: The 3 lamps from Marsa once collected from the soil; one is a Roman closed lamp from the 2nd-3rd century AD, and two are African lamps from the 5th-6th century AD



Triq Għajn Qajjet, Rabat (QAJ2015).

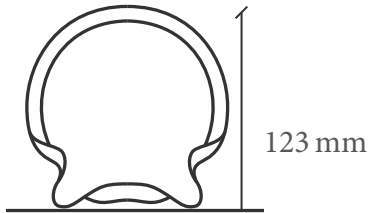
Phoenician double spouted lamp, 8th to 7th century BC.











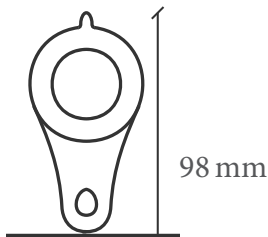
Triq Kola Xara, Rabat (RBT2018).

Punic double spouted lamp with dedicatory inscription, 4th to 2nd century BC.









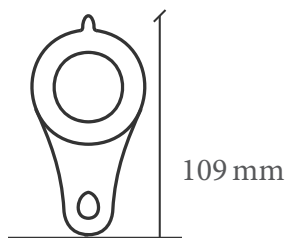
Triq il-Kavallerija, Tarxien (TXN2018).

Hellenistic black slipped lamp, 4th to 3rd century BC.









Marsa Junction, Marsa (MRS2018).

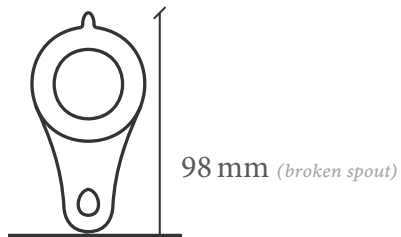
Roman closed lamp, 2nd to 3rd century AD.











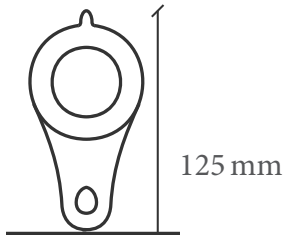
Triq Tal-Barrani, Żejtun (BRR1993).

African lamp with palm tree and floral decoration,
5th century AD.









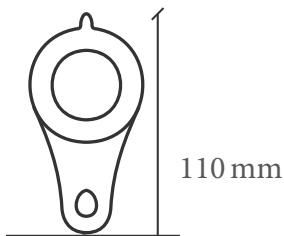
Marsa Junction, Marsa (MRS2018).

African lamp with leaping lion and heart decoration,
6th century AD.









Triq Tal-Barrani, Żejtun (BRR1993).

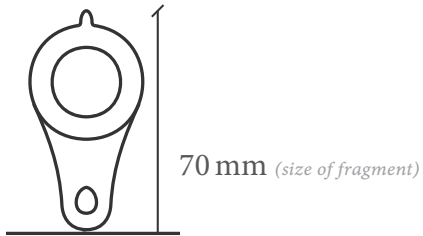
Byzantine lamp with “rosary beads” decoration and a baptismal cross on its base, 7th century AD.





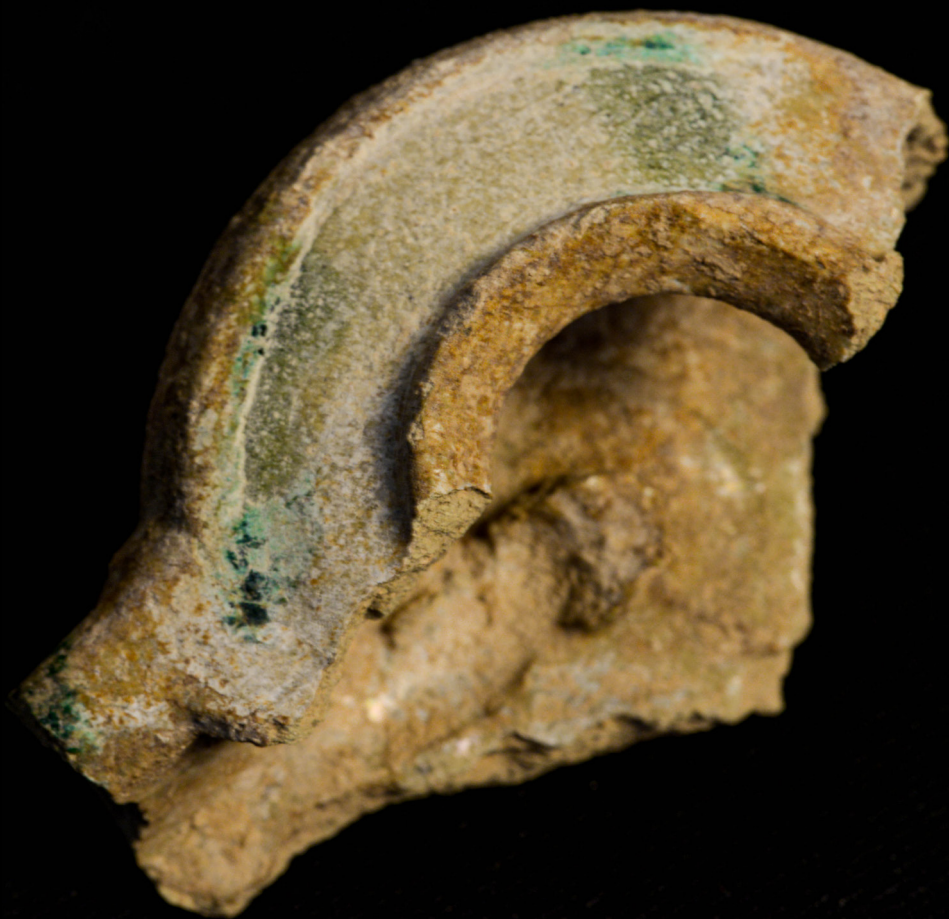






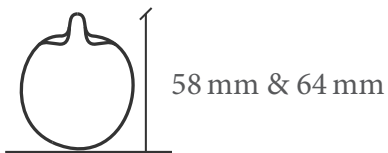
Triq Ġhajj Qajjet, Rabat (GQJ2020).

Islamic glazed lamp fragment, 10th to 11th century
AD.









Triq San Pawl, Valletta (SPV2021).

Knights' period lamps, 16th to 18th century AD.







*“to fulfil the duties of the State in ensuring the protection and accessibility of
Malta’s cultural heritage”*



#JEArcheo