

In the same type of rock in which one finds the cart ruts one can also occasionally come across pairs of adjacent pans in the rock surface. In each pair one pan has the bottom at a higher level than that of the other, and a hole in the common partition connects them. This makes us assume that they were used for some process in which something was placed in the higher container, and a liquid subsequently flowed down into the lower one. These structures are old, possibly also prehistoric, but they are difficult to date in isolation, and may equally be more recent than one expects. Although they are man-made they appear to have started as naturally occurring ready-made eroded holes in the rock and later modified or adapted by hand.

At first sight they appear to fall entirely under the scrutiny of archaeologists, but there is such a thing as industrial archaeology, which is more compatible with our concerns, and which does not limit itself to prehistoric industries but also covers the investigation and recording of trades and crafts of the recent past.

I was stimulated to write this short communication after reading an article by Carol J. Jaccarini and Maurice Cauchi in *Melita Historica*⁽¹⁾ describing similar enigmatic pans at Mgarr ix-Xini, Gozo, and made reference to a set at il-Misqa of Mnajdra. Apart from these, I have seen a few sets in other localities, two or three of them on the rocks of Wardija, Malta, and photographed one of the latter sets in 1970.

In the above-mentioned article the authors rightly pointed out that if the pans were to be used just for separating a solid from a liquid, one pan would have sufficed, but there being two meant that the resultant liquid was retained and not allowed to waste. They therefore suggested several possible uses: pressing of grapes or olives, or dyeing of flax or fabrics. Although everything is possible, the probabilities are low, mainly because all these processes normally need more working space, a commodity these pans do not offer.

On consulting three or four resident countryfolk at Wardija in the 1970s, the older ones said that the pans were once used for the production of soft cheese (*gbejniet*), They never saw it done, but their elders appear to have passed down the idea.

It is not improbable that these troughs were used for producing *ġbejniet*, because here the space needed was not as large as required for processing wine and dyes. The milk and added renin (or rennet) could have been placed in the higher pan, with the intervening hole plugged up, until it curdled, forming a consistent curd (*baqta*), separated from the straw-coloured liquid or whey (*xorrox*)⁽²⁾. The curd was later collected to form the soft cheese, and the whey was also retained. Our ancestors lived in poverty and nothing went to waste. Whey was often mixed with household foods and animal feeds, and some fishermen used it mixed with cheese-based bait, as that for the saddled bream (*kaħli*).

1. JACCARINI, CAROL J. & CAUCHI, MAURICE The Enigmatic Rock-cut Pans of Mġarr ix-Xini *Melita Historica* XII No.4 (1999) p.419-444
2. LANFRANCO, GUIDO Halib, Ġbejniet u Rkotta *L-Immara* No. 18 (1994) p.5 and photo of a set of Wardija (18-V-1970) on p.9.

