

MEGALITHIC MANDALAS OF THE MIDDLE SEA – THE NEOLITHIC BUILDERS OF MALTA AND THEIR BUILDERS

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The prehistory of mankind is no mere prelude to history, rather history is a colourful afterward to the Stone Age

(Richard Rudgley)

When Picasso visited the caves of Lascaux and viewed the remarkable works of the Paleolithic artists of Western Europe, he is said to have remarked "*we have invented nothing!*" Any latter day modern architect visiting the megalithic temple sites of the Maltese Islands would have to arrive at a similar conclusion. For too many years, modern man has refused to credit our ancient ancestors with intellectual qualities and artistic properties over and above the accepted magical and sacred ones, which as evidence demonstrates, these people amply possessed. Too much time has perhaps been spent by archaeologists sampling and studying miniature particles and remnants and not applying enough attention to the sophisticated architectural spatial concepts of the buildings themselves and also to their specific site locations together with the complex engineering techniques utilized in these unique ritual centres of the Neolithic period.

In this paper, as opposed to studying solely the architectural iconographies of these temples, I shall attempt a broader score offering observations arrived at through an overall examination of the architecture of these people in its particular time-space location. Prehistory is said to be separated from history by the advent of the first written documents, although it could equally be stated that the division occurred when man first started to record facts historically. Stuart Piggott claims that the difference takes place with the change from a *non-literate* to a *literate* society (Piggott 1965: 3). Current information on a civilization such as that of Malta during the Neolithic period is therefore only available from the remains of buildings and other surviving artifacts. It is indeed these buildings and

these artifacts which unravel and reveal the social structure and religious beliefs of those times. The debt to prehistory by historical societies must not be overlooked. Let us not forget that our ancestry includes not only the Classical world of Greece, the New Testament, and the whole spectrum of documented history, but also all the rich vocabulary and mythologies of Stone Age magic, and all other long-lost rites and symbols of that age; an age which boasted peaceful co-existence and harboured one of the most successful and structured socio-religious systems of antiquity.

Since the Malta and Gozo edifices consist of a series of stones *defining* internal spaces, they must essentially be read as architecture; in contrast to, for example, the standing stones of Carnac, Callanish or Stonehenge which manifest themselves specifically as a series of monoliths standing *in* space, and which consequently must of necessity be categorized in terms of sculpture. Basing one's premise on the fact that, given the architecture of a civilization, one is able to draw a clear-cut picture of the life styles and patterns of the society which produced it, the following notes, plus some occasional verse, focus not only on the architecture itself, but more so on proposed hypothesis on the cultural matrices of the temple builders, their consequent life-systems and established patterns of existence.

It seems pertinent to first of all ask the question as to how this island civilization emerged and investigate its roots and origins. The provenance of these people seems to have stemmed from the Stentinello culture in Sicily. However, while the initial Malta settlements demonstrate strong parallels and similar pottery typology to the Sicilian settlements, the Maltese Islands' temple culture soon developed into a highly sophisticated and completely independent civilization with no further trace or

evidence of external influence. If the Sicilian hypothesis was in fact a reality, it was perhaps the Maltese Islands' readily available indigenous limestone which allowed the possibility of more permanent and lasting religious shrines which must have attracted the visitors in the first place as the Islands, with minimal top soil, water scarcity and salt air exposure, offered little in terms of practical commodities for a comfortable life style. Both Renfrew (1978: 167) and Trump (1981: 128) refer to Malta's temple building people as having an indigenous origin, although the latter does hint at some external initial influences. Ugolini, writing in the thirties, also favoured a theory of the Island's civilization possessing an entirely self-generative original source. It is well to remember that the Maltese Islands' Megalithic period pre-dates most of the ancient world's major monuments such as the Pyramids, those of Crete and also the standing stones of Stonehenge, and that theories of diffusionist influences from Middle Eastern civilizations as sources of their origin have now long been considered outdated, since new dating systems were adopted. If anything, a reverse diffusionist theory seems more likely to have been the case!

The temples of Malta belong to a period ranging approximately from 3600 - 2500BC. This body of work demonstrates how a people, not yet familiar with the use of metal, were able to design and construct buildings which responded and related to the forces of place, utilizing in their constructions over-sized stone slabs of considerable dimension and putting these together with the use of remarkable technical solutions. In the process, these people produced a civilization which excelled in art and aesthetic expression and also in other non-materialistic values which must have rendered their Neolithic life truly fruitful and meaningful. Their main concern in the building of the vast body of temples seems to have been that of honouring a *fertility* or perhaps *abundance* cult equated to an Earth Mother Goddess divinity, viewing the earth as a living body from which all life stemmed and to which all life returned. The late Marija Gimbutas, a pioneer in bringing the Goddess cult of that time to

wide attention, strongly believed that the many related Earth Goddess civilizations of Europe peacefully co-existed with each other and in the process established a complex living pattern woven in harmony with nature and all its holistic requirements (Gimbutas 1974, 1991, 1999: 55-98). The inhabitants of the Maltese Islands were precursors of man's many attempts to establish spatio-temporal co-ordinates to locate himself within the parameters of the spectrum of the four dimensions in terms of both territorial *and* chronological co-ordinates.

In the Malta temples it is, above all, the sophisticated layout of the built-form which attracts our attention. The translation of the body of the Goddess into a floor plan manifesting a progressive hierarchy of articulated spaces in curved ovular inter-locking shapes provides an interesting origin-theory for the layouts of these centres. This is an architecture of ritual which may well have evolved and been derived from the form and shape of the pregnant goddess as the personification of Mother Earth. According to Evans, however, the sophisticated layouts of the temples developed from earlier or contemporary mono and tri-cellular lobed burial chambers cut into the island's sedimentary rock, such as those found at Xemxija (Evans 1959: 89-91). The small partially rock-hewn Eastern temple at the Tarxien complex provides an interesting example of a tomb-temple-tomb development pattern. The temple model fragment found at Hagar Qim, on the other hand, bears an uncanny resemblance to the Goddess statuette typology. If the original model was the Goddess herself, then this was man's first manifestation of an anthropomorphic approach to architecture. What is certain is that at that time God was a woman and no traces of a Father God are to be found. The Deity definitely came from the earth. The patriarchal Gods from Heaven were to arrive later.

Whatever the origin of the temple built-form, the philosophy of the builders themselves seems to have been centred on the creation of a sequence of internal spaces, utilizing time-resisting giant megaliths put together with a

combination of spiritual and materialistic dedication and a sophisticated and elegant technology, to produce the most remarkable of early man's architectural concepts. The initial development of an *above ground* typology must have then been adopted as the exemplary matrix or paradigm which was later progressively developed into a more sophisticated and complex body of temple structures such as those at Hagar Qim and Tarxien. Man has always fashioned his constructions according to an archetypal blueprint. The Megalithic builders must have first of all, after the selection of the site, indulged in rituals of territorial establishment or taking possession of the sacred site, which ritual was (and still is to this day) but a re-enactment of the primordial act of the creation of the world itself. On these sacred *possessed* sites, ceremonial centres were then developed in complex honeycombed layouts relating to both the physical and symbolic features of their location, while establishing a lasting symbol of title to the land. One must not forget that with the advent of an organized agricultural system and consequent territorial demarcation, territory soon became equated to power.

An in-depth examination of any of the Islands' sites of this period leaves no doubt in one's mind that the builders were definitely *not* a primitive people. Further study of their architecture demonstrates ingenious technologies and methodologies in both construction and spatial organization. Despite the Island's readily available building material, the builders always practiced a philosophy of maximum utilization of minimal resources. Man, ever since the earliest moments of his existence on this planet, has felt that, in relation to the totality of the cosmos, he plays but a small part. Therefore in order to come to terms with forces beyond recognition, he has always directed prayer and made offerings to his gods or pantheon of gods depending on his creed and belief of the moment. It is true to say that the greatest architectural works of all civilizations have been accomplished in religious or allied buildings of worship, reflecting man's respect and fear of the powers of the unknown. It seems that the more difficult survival was, the greater the effort man

would devote to placate his gods. When building for the Divine, man has always attempted to outlast and defy, if not defeat time. Religious buildings, in this concept of resisting temporality, contrast strongly with man's humility and admission to his temporal existence, when building for himself. It is interesting to note that almost no remains of the domestic architecture of the Malta temple builders survive to this day. Skorba is the only site which provides traces of Neolithic human habitats demonstrating that completely different vocabularies and materials were adopted in this typology (Trump 1966). Always, religious architecture has provided, through its expression, a manifestation, in built-form, of man's current understanding of the supernatural and the Divine. In building for his gods man attempts to extend his own limited time by leaving permanent signs of the particular time and space coordinates of his location on this planet.

The builders of the Temples of Malta were members of a farming community that grew staple crops such as wheat and barley and also raised cattle, sheep and goats. Having settled to enjoy the fruits of their tilling and planting toils, they began to gradually understand and glorify the sanctity of their land. Having learnt to husband the earth and establish a fertility cult, a relationship of productive earth to woman was established in the setting up of a Deity and Divinity of fecundity proclaimed as Mother Goddess. The Goddess in their belief became not only the personification of the earth, but also the archetypal image-symbol of the whole human psyche. The relationship between seeds - *death* - placed underground within Mother Earth, returning through re-generation in a different form, as crops - *life*, and man entering the *body space* of the Goddess to emerge re-born on exit, was not a difficult equation for these people to put into meaning and context. From this equation, the reading of time moving in a cyclic pattern as opposed to axial linearity was a conclusion easily arrived at. This provided an innovative breakthrough which was to influence the whole future development of man's understanding of time. Concern with these themes is amply demonstrated by the numerous

carvings and paintings featuring spiral and tree of life patterns. These motifs, besides being read as symbols of cosmic energy, also relate to female breast oculi and to the genital-cleft as the locality of the birth and the origin of life itself. Later, the spiral was read by man as the complex relationship between unity and multiplicity and also as the circuitous passage between mortality and immortality. However, at the period of the Temple Culture, its application to this novel methodology of reading time opened man's initial quest for the study of astronomical phenomena. The spiral's serpentine flowing lines also formulated an equation relating profane time to mythical time. The observation of the movement of heavenly bodies, together with the cycles of the seasons and the moon, were then related to those of woman herself. Concern at the time with the meaning of the sky and man's attempts at establishing a bonding with nature's cyclic patterns provides evidence of an initial human evolutionary pattern in the direction of a multi-layered conception system. From this body of signs and symbols in these mandalic shrines, worthy of particular note are the painted motifs in the underground chambers of the Hypogeum and the later oculi stone carvings of Tarxien. They serve not only as a clear indication of this civilization's awareness that natural manifestations have the property of wave, rhythm, pulsation and vibration, but the Tarxien examples also function as sophisticated space modulators (almost in the sense of gate-keepers) in following the ritual pathway and spatial hierarchy of the inner spaces of the building. The magical sacral etched symbols of this complex must surely be classified among the finest remains of Neolithic art surpassing even the impressive carvings of New Grange and Gavrinis. The tree of life motifs within the Hypogeum caverns are executed in a red-ochre pigment evoking the Goddess' blood and the richness of the productive soil of Mother Earth. This same pigment is utilized in practically all decoration of internal spaces where spiral elements and mythical symbols were applied. It seems that the Goddess, even in her Divinity, retained in evocation woman's continued connection with the flow of blood in all the

paramount activities of female life from puberty, menstruation and loss of virginity to the ultimate pro-creational manifestation of childbirth itself.

This matrifocal civilization (Gimbutas believed it was also a matrilineal society), which had learnt to gather produce from the earth, was quick to become aware of the dependency of its crops on the movement of the heavenly bodies. The motion of the stars, the moon and the earth itself, having initially been used to orientate the position of the temple structures also earmarked the appropriate seasons and times for planting and harvesting. The relationship of these heavenly patterns to woman's productive cycle developed further the Mother Earth-Goddess equation. It may therefore be said that this was a civilization which was both earth-focused and sky-oriented. For this society, the reality of life became a function of the imitation of celestial and terrestrial archetypes. The *astronomical chart* found at Tal-Qadi and the *solar wheel* sherd from Hagar Qim are definite pointers to these people's concern with celestial bodies. Recent studies, by Micallef (1989) and Ventura and Tanti (1990), of the relationship and orientation of the Malta Temples to heavenly bodies and in particular to seasonal astronomical phenomena reveal particularly interesting alignments and relations to both Solstice and Equinox events. Perhaps it is as a result of this earth-sky dependency duality that many of the islands' temple complexes are built in pairs; one standing erect in strong silhouette with stones pointing to the sky, and its neighbour nestled and sheltered within the Earth Goddess' protective folds. Maelee Thomson Foster has recently (1991) produced an in-depth study in relation to the orientation, siting and place-making of these buildings. Perhaps these variant oracles of wisdom were the dual reflections of these peoples' concept of their version of a *sacred city* reflected in the meeting point of the two dividing cosmic regions of a celestial-terrestrial equation. The twin grouping at Ggantija and the Brochtorff Circle in Gozo; Hagar Qim and Mnajdra; Tarxien and the Hypogeum, together with other Malta sites serves to illustrate this pattern and typology. The twin goddesses statuette

recently discovered at the Brochtorff Circle points to, not only the possibility of the existence of an earth-sky Deity, but also to a further development of the concept of duality, be it mother-daughter, twin sister, death-re-generation, youth-maturity, or perhaps even possibly a female-male dyad. The concept of binary combination is also evident in many dual spiral decorations and twin phallic carvings. The latter statuettes (in a minority in relation to those depicting female figures) again demonstrate this civilization's predilection with dyadic relationships. In many of the temple complexes (almost *all* the temples look out towards a south-southwest - southeast direction) the individual units themselves are located in pairs, in a west-east position. It has been suggested that the unit occupying the eastern location manifests the Goddess in her sunrise, *beginning of life* aspect while that on the western side echoes the sunset *end of life* character of the Deity.

One of the most positive attributes of these pre-androcratic people was that they were able to establish a civilization, in the true sense of the word, where and when the human species, in seeking psychic and physical comfort, was not only at one and at peace with its planet and indeed the whole cosmos, but also with its whole brotherhood of mankind. This society consisted of a peace-loving people involved above all with the sovereignty of woman and motherhood, whose weather-beaten, time-ridden masonry testaments reveal no traces or evidence of war mongering. This was a time when science, art and religion were inter-woven together and each was consequently enriched and enhanced through this webbed relationship. Our knowledge of their mystical understanding and symbolic values remains limited, as is our understanding of their intrinsic quality and view of life. We can only look at this awesome civilization through our twentieth century eyes and mind, which, while admittedly rich in scientific and technological knowledge, have a closed myopic vision of spiritual aspects. These discrepancies in contemporary man's attitudes are bound to produce conclusions which limit and distort the true meaning and depth of understanding

of these *longheaded* people's sophisticated pre-literate society and their philosophy. From whatever aspect or discipline we choose to approach and measure the majestic architectural remains of these master builders and the pictures of the life-style which these hand down to us, we can only be overwhelmed and filled with admiration and fascination. Whether we look at these structures as outstanding engineering feats or as highly developed architectural space-concepts, or as sacred worship-places shaped by ritual, or as fine-tuned celestial time-keepers born and derived from forms directed by the Earth's energy lines; from all these view points these man-made manifestations will always feature among humanity's greatest achievements of all time.

Enchanted isle
a travelling pilgrim's shrine
at the crossroads of the Middle Sea
temple for the Goddess of the Earth
oracle of the mantic moon
where sarsen stones of silence
mark thresholds of land and sky
necropolis of hope
lifegiver to the dead.

In the fertile currents of this rock
as woman's mysteries flow in blood
altars of double spirals
carve symbols of time returned
channels of ritual healing
in clairvoyant slumber
a priestess sleeps in trance
in this land of the Cosmic Mother
wisdom comes in dreams.

In the architectural study of these buildings, it is not only the sheer size of the masonry units utilized which attracts our attention. The methods which must have been used in the quarrying of these megaliths together with the means of transportation adopted to convey the cut stones from quarry to building site also raise pertinent questions still to be answered. A possible hypothesis is that the builders took advantage of the natural stratification layering system and *flaked* the natural rock by a process of insertion of some form of elongated lever-tools (probably timber) into the rock fissures and then by lifting detached the stone from its rock-bed. Next came the even more arduous task of moving the oversize

rock (at times weighing up to 40 tons) to the location of the temple, where it was subsequently shaped and worked to fit into the perfectly jointed system of the overall curvilinear wall structures. From evidence of many of the still remaining spherically carved roller stones at Hagar Qim and Tarxien, it may be deduced that the giant slabs, once cut, were moved horizontally onto to these stones and then rolled to the required position on site. The concave cuts in the base of many of the larger standing megaliths, still evidenced at Hagar Qim, seem to indicate that these rollers were used as ball-bearings in the raising of the stones into a vertical position, again adopting the lever-lifting principle. It is interesting to note that in some cases the temple-builders made a clear distinction between the materials utilized for the internal chambers of the temple and those utilized in the construction of the external facades. For the external surfaces at Ggantija it is the harder variety of the island's indigenous rock, the coralline limestone that is utilized in an undressed state, while for the more finely finished internal chambers, it is the softer globigerina layer that is adopted. The use of the harder variety externally also provided excellent weather protective facilities, while the use of the more easily worked variety internally enabled the skilled craftsmen of the time to pit, carve and puncture the wall surfaces with relative ease. At Mnajdra, it is the coralline limestone which is utilized throughout, while at Hagar Qim it is the softer variety which is made use of.

The ultimate focus of interest in examining these complexes, from an architectural view point, will always be that of the roofing system adopted, and much conjecture has been, and will continue to be raised in relation to the material, methods and solutions utilized. The model of the miniature mono-cellular *prototype* found at Tal-Hagrat; the fragments of the other larger model finds; the clear indications of corbelled interiors at most of the better preserved sites; and the scooped-out rock chambers in the subterranean Hypogeum, (where the architectural language of the rock-hewn spaces is clearly based on an above-ground built typology) to my mind, offer

clear indications that the temples were definitely roofed over and that it was a masonry solution that was adopted. Anthony Pace suggests that only the curved apses of the temples were roofed (Pace 1994: 41; 1996: 7). He supports his theory by pointing out that the central axis passage ways were paved in a different manner and were also designed with water drainage systems; also all artifacts utilizing fire seem to have always been placed within these central pathways in order to facilitate ventilation and allow smoke to rise and escape, without entering the covered areas (*pers. comm.* Anthony Pace). The etched drawing of a temple facade in the second temple at Mnajdra (to have an architectural drawing dating back five thousand years is surely unique) also hints towards a stone roofed structure. It is odd that many archaeologists have interpreted the Tal-Hagrat model and the Mnajdra drawing as having a timber roof-structure or even a less permanent brush wood and clay system of covering! (This and the painted town map including the adjacent volcano in one of the shrines at Çatal Hüyük must surely be among the earliest architectural documents of all time.) It seems unlikely that a sophisticated people, utilizing highly complex building techniques, would have resorted to less advanced temporary solutions in other non-permanent materials for the roofing methodology of the temples' interior spaces. The unerring consistency of an architectural language, syntax and grammar, which is evident throughout the whole temple building period, would surely not have been substituted by a less evolved technical solution. The technologies adopted in these orbicular spaces demonstrate that the builders possessed a keen understanding of both the qualities and limitations of masonry construction systems and the whole constantly reveals remarkably well thought-out and intelligent solutions. Stone is imaginatively used throughout for foundations, flooring and wall construction.

The re-constructions of these complexes carried out by the Italian architect Carlo Ceschi, in the thirties, assume a masonry corbelled false-dome roofing system. They

serve to give a good idea of what the temples may have originally looked like but are, unfortunately, over-influenced by the prevailing Fascist architecture of the time.

Many of the stones within the sacred arenas of the temple structures besides having an overlay of ochre pigment are also heavily decorated with a uniform pitting system. This may be looked upon as some ritualistic art-form relating to man entering woman, or even as the evocation of the act of soil tilling. The stone having been extracted from the earth could possibly have been read as part of, or indeed, the Goddess herself. In the smallest of the three temples at Mnajdra, the two outer orthostats display a complex horizontal linear system of pitting marks which could, with imagination, be interpreted as some primordial form of counting system, or recorded observations of heavenly bodies. Certainly, the marks which proceed in straight lines with an uneven spacing system are arranged in series. A Neolithic numerical system? Why not? After all fragments of animal bone with engraved markings dating back to 10,000 BC found in Belgium have been identified as evidence for the existence of a numerical system at that time. In relation to the Mnajdra stones, Frank Ventura once again has fascinating theories. His hypothesis relates the pit marks in both number and series to particular constellations, their location and their precise movement.

The temple builders developed their originally Chthonic fertility buildings in a series of sophisticated interiors which were not to be equalled till more than two and a half thousand years later in the grand spaces of the architecture of Rome. In the rock-hewn Hypogeum, the ultimate maternal womb, the orbicular container aspect is so strong that there is no distinction between the horizontal floor plane, the vertical wall surfaces and the covering roof. Here floor becomes wall, and wall in turn becomes ceiling. The whole must have provided the perfect protected incubation space for oracle consultation and other rituals. The words of Lao Tse, *"the reality of the building does not consist of walls and roof but in the*

space within" and those of Goethe *"architecture should work for the sense of mechanical motion"*, remind us that the whole architectural expression of this period grew from *within* as a concept of enclosure, recalling the cosmic womb, and equating woman to a container-vessel archetype. By traversing these internal spaces one could participate in the whole mystery of birth and life. In the re-enactment of the sexual act one evoked the ritualistic cycle of man's path through life, death and re-generation. Yet the external facades of these buildings, with their horned shaped far-reaching arms, expand outwards to embrace the external temenos; the threshold space which must have functioned as a gathering arena for the community and also as the imperative intermediate demarcation zone between secular and sacred spaces. Every religion demands the necessary gesture of a gradual approach to its sacral arenas; as to come into contact with the sacred unprepared has always been considered dangerous.

The sacred sites of pre-historic Malta feature stones which bridge different erudite disciplines; stones which bring together, in a balanced unity, aspects which man today considers as incompatible opposites. Instead it seems that the temple builders had the vision of viewing these disparate aspects as integral parts essential to form a balanced unitarian whole. We have only to think of *terrestrial* and *celestial*, *intellect* and *emotion*, *science* and *religion*, *symmetry* and *asymmetry*, and *geometric* and *organic*. Each of these thematic concepts are today generally considered as diametrical opposites, yet in this ancient society they appear to have been viewed in a collective unified holistic manner. Closer to the Eastern Yin-Yang concept, this approach to life appears to have provided the society of temple builders with a stability which, to this day, at the dawn of the Third Millennium of Christianity, still eludes us. The cultural world had not yet been compartmentalized into the different departments, but was still viewed as a holistic whole. These people were able to bring together in their art and architecture these diverse elements, in time and with mathematics, all

amalgamated into their particular complex language of symbols. They utilized their multi-layered perceptions to produce focal landmarks for religious and social functions, utilizing a balanced combination and interplay of intuition, rationalism, myth and mystery. Only after the passage of nearly six thousand years is art again able to combine and bring together multi-disciplinarian constituents. Computer technology has now opened the door to a bridge of reconciliation between science and art. Yet, millennia before, on the shores of this island rock, a people flourished who were able to integrate, in a sophisticated entity, an art form which combined elements which later, in the history of mankind, long continued to manifest themselves as distinct dialectical opposites.

These were a people who fully understood that the macrocosm of the universe was the key influence on the microcosm of their own world of existence. What our civilization today has gained in scientific knowledge and technology is, perhaps, counter balanced by what we have lost in our belief in myth and magic. The passage of time in eventually conquering the

myths succeeded only in creating a new myth of rationalism. It is not illogical to assume that the builders of the Malta Temples may have possessed a different form of knowledge to that prevalent at present and during the more recent past. Certainly, our historical and contemporary concept of acquiring knowledge is based on an *accumulative* system; the data of which is then stored and recalled according to need. Perhaps the Temple builders possessed some form of an *inherent* knowledge, a knowledge more akin to the animal kingdom's instinctive properties. These people knew and understood the energy lines of the earth. They responded to terrestrial alignments as they did to celestial body movements. They not only bonded strongly to nature's force lines, but they were able to crystallize in their artistic expression their sophisticated understanding of nature. Because of this understanding and the resultant relationships and equations they lived in harmony with, not only themselves, but also with the planet and its environment, in the process considering themselves but a minimal part of the spectrum of nature.

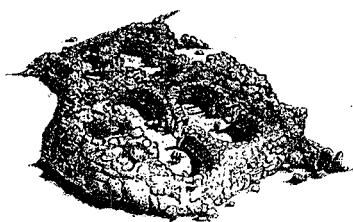
	Sea Rock Island	
Cavern Tomb Temple	Maiden Woman Goddess	Seer Sage Medium
	Sign Omen Oracle	
Seed Plant Crop	Birth Life Death	Corpse Burial Re-Birth
	Tide Time Cycle	
Line Circle Spiral	Day Month Season	Earth Moon Sun
	Planet Cosmos Universe	

The builders of those days gave mythical and sacred significance to particular aspects of the surrounding landscape by reading in them features of the body of the Earth Goddess herself. Thus specific earth orientations and alignments were utilized as guide lines in the siting of these sacred stones. Cleft or breast shaped hills, sacred peaks, springs (water must have been of the greatest importance) and other particular topographical features appear as points of reference in both the placing and aligning of the buildings. These relationships were considered not only as being conducive to the healing and regenerative powers of the site itself, and consequently also to the buildings erected thereon, but also essential and necessary in establishing connections with nature's energy banks. The small temple at Mnajdra and the 90°-changed axis at Hagar Qim focus their eyes on the cleft-shaped island of Filfla. Maybe it was the altar-like bulls' horn shape of this islet rock which provided the original inspiration for the symmetrical treatment of the temple's facade or even for the base structures on which the Sleeping Goddess' statuettes sit. Perhaps the builders were aware of the similarity in form between the bull's head and the female uterus. If indeed they were, there is no doubt that the bull as male, representing the female pro-creational organs would have been a relationship-equation which would have certainly generated attention and interest. This floating horned altar-table must surely have fascinated these people and it obviously functioned not only as a territorial organizer but also as a paramount spatial landmark, an inherent example of space and meaning brought together to read as *place*. To further confirm the importance of these alignments towards this iconic isle, a statue of paired obese Goddesses was placed at the new Hagar Qim doorway to project its enchanted maternal gaze from the mainland's ossified shores, across the salted waters, and fix its focus on the incantatory altar-rock.

These prodigious builders seem to have been able to key into the complex network of both the invisible subterranean and the visual iconographic above-ground energy

lines and were thus able to draw out and establish co-ordinates from them as they also did from the complex patterns of the skies above to establish the location in space and time of their religious gathering spaces. Having worked out that the earth also possessed horizontal energy forces besides the vertical force of gravity, they then proceeded to read these earth lines in a not dissimilar fashion to the Far-Eastern geomantic practice of Feng Shui or the "Ch'i" lines followed in the science of acupuncture; a form of *power* network or *spiritual* engineering. Their belief that man was but a small *part* of nature contrasts strongly with contemporary man's ill-conceived assertion of his dominance over all natural systems. Yet, in what must read as a strange form of anachronism it is evident that in today's world we are a less benevolent people, not only towards our fellow inhabitants, but also in relation to the total pulse-beat and life-pattern of our world. In all the excavations carried out at the various Malta and Gozo sites, there is no evidence of any form of weapons, confirming that this, besides being an ecologically oriented civilization, was also a peace-loving one. In contrast to the civilized world of today, warfare seems to have been less evident in those times than in ours. Certainly, evidence of life at that time strongly points towards a systematic life-style where the defiant arid soil surfaces of these islands were successfully tamed to produce sufficiently abundant crops for a comfortable and fruitful livelihood. With an established and proven fecundity of the earth, the inhabitants were able to dedicate much of their time and toil to the building of a complex series of temples which are today considered to be not only the earliest free-standing monuments in the World, but also form a body of works which must feature as one of man's most fascinating built-form achievements of all time.

Certainly the high priestesses were well versed in art and scientific knowledge together with myth and magic and they practiced their skills so proficiently that they were able to inspire an almost total commitment from what must have been, at the time, but a small community. Renfrew estimates a population of around



Ggantija

by
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eleven thousand (Renfrew 1978: 169). The building process of such complex centres would have entailed, not only long drawn-out time periods of construction, but also mammoth involvement in both organization and manpower. There is no doubt that this commitment must have been born from the essential understanding that what was being put together was of the utmost and vital importance for not only survival in this world, but also on a more elevated plane, as an iconographic platform for the preparation of an expected after-life.

The fact that the Maltese Islands contain more than a score of known sites (approximately forty three actual temples) from this period poses the question as to why a land having a relatively exiguous population, should house so many of these shrines. One hypothesis, besides that of the existence of independent self-sufficient parishes [Renfrew believes the Islands were divided into six co-operative territories amalgamated into an overall theocratic society (1978: 173)], which could be put forward is that the Islands themselves, because of their geographical position in the centre of the Middle Sea, operated as a Sanctuary for the people of the whole basin. Later in time, the island of Delos, which like Malta possessed little or no indigenous riches, also developed into a sanctuary. Mont St. Michel offers a more recent example. It seems that islands with limited ethnic resources turned their efforts into becoming religious shrines or sacred sites. The location of many of the Maltese temple buildings in exposed coastal areas (not the position one would expect to be chosen by an intelligent agrarian society) conjures up images of visiting pilgrims paying homage to the Earth Goddess from their floating sea-faring vessels anchored within viewing distance of the sites. Perhaps, the islands functioned as pre-

historic sacred shrines similar to our latter day Lourdes, Fatima or Medjugorje pilgrimage sites. The possibility that visitors from neighbouring islands, or indeed the main land, came to pay homage to the Goddess and in the process made votive offerings for successful harvests in their land or for the purpose of the healing of personal ailments or indeed for the possibility of fecundity, is one that is not too difficult to imagine. Continuous successful harvests for a stable food supply and production, together with the healing of the sick and pro-creation must also have been essential requirements for our species' survival then, as they are today. Evidence of physically deformed figurines of the time pre-echo the *ex voto* images of Christian shrines. It seems that the caring of the sick and the offerings made for recuperative treatment or in exchange for graces granted point to an understanding and knowledge of some form of pre-historic medical practice, the centre of which may well have been located in Malta. It is evident that this civilization had also mastered sea travel and that its people had access to vessels which could carry visitors from and to nearby lands. It has long been established that the obsidian and flint tools used in the cutting and carving of the local stone megaliths were imported from Lipari and Pantelleria. Coming from an igneous rock formation, they differ radically from the sedimentary limestone strata of the Maltese Islands. These volcanic elements, together with other non-ethnic materials seem also to have been locally in use as decorative jewelry, again indicating that some form of a contemporary sea-trade flow was in existence.

Towards the dawn of the second millennium B.C. the civilization of the temple-builders mysteriously crumbled and disappeared. Evans states that they

vanished “as if by magic” (Evans 1959: 168). Possible reasons may have been repeated droughts, unsuccessful harvests and the consequent lack of belief in the Deity, or more likely an invasion by an external more belligerent patriarchally-orientated sky-God people. The giant Goddess statue at Tarxien and the twin Hagar Qim example, today survive in truncated form. Was their deformation an exorcist rite performed on the female Deity by the incoming society to deliberately eradicate the Earth Goddess' powers? Certainly the civilization which replaced these matriarchal peace-loving people produced a culture more interested in war mongering than in collective building efforts and religious rituals. The new Bronze Age metal-users may have utilized their predecessor's temple spaces but the use they would have put them to would have been far removed from the regenerative functions of the earlier earth-loving people. A long period of stability and civilization was lost not by some cataclysmic natural event, but by an invading people more intent on materialistic and territorial establishments than revering the earth and harvesting her produce; and certainly more interested in the rituals of death and burial than in those of life and the living.

Another possibility for the sudden demise of the temple builders as a civilization is that put forward by Francis Hitching in his book *Earth Magic*. He believes that megalithic knowledge became too complicated to be supported by the power of the mind and body alone. That memory retention was paramount to ancient knowledge is evidenced by Julius Caesar's reference in *De Bello Gallico* to the memory exercises carried out by Druid (as they were then known) High Priests in order not only to retain their complex mystical knowledge but also to prevent these mysteries from being passed on to lesser members of the community. Hitching believes that the then current knowledge-baggage became so complex that because of the people's pre-literate inability to document it, and the failure of the mnemonic system to preserve it, the whole civilization collapsed in chaotic disarray. If this was the case, then it was ironically the beginning of the *accumulative* system of knowledge which

was responsible for the loss of the whole wealth and wisdom of the ancient world's *inherent* knowledge.

While the civilization which built the temples has long passed into oblivion, the stones of the temples remain. From these relics of prehistory and the wisdom of these stones, modern man has much to learn. Man, today has finally become aware that science, despite its progress, has still not provided him with all the answers. As a consequence, the rampant Western materialism of the last years of the Millennium now yields to interests in matters which cannot be codified or understood by scientific knowledge. It therefore seems that *now* is an appropriate time to re-assess and re-value not only the unique qualities, but also the messages and knowledge of the oracular wisdom of our ancestors from this distant past. As man learns again that there is much which he still does not know about, we begin to wonder at the sophisticated spiritual and materialistic sum-total achievements of this early island race. How did ancient man acquire the knowledge to understand the earth, measure the sky and build these technically and artistically precise centres? Our contemporary scientific knowledge may enable us to analyse these structures and draw out conclusions about their iconography. Yet, despite our sophisticated tool-kits, there are still many areas in which no answers are likely to be forthcoming. Was so-called *primitive* man able to pick up sensations through some form of long-lost sensitive antennae?

Megalithic alignments, both terrestrial and celestial, the understanding of the earth spirit and the practice of geomancy, may well have been topics which were part of the now lost *inherent* knowledge baggage of our ancient ancestors. Our civilization is not the only one which has developed sophisticated solutions as answers to its needs. Ironically a civilization which pre-dates us by more than five thousand years seems to have spun a more successful web in the establishment of a successful formula for both a spiritual and materialistic peaceful life-pattern on this planet. By combining instinct and intellect man, at that time,

moved forward in peace with his fellow
brethren and in harmony with nature.
Modern man has still to achieve this!

Stones standing in silence
enclosures for the mother of fertility
metaphors searching for the substance of
eternity.

altar
shrine
sanctuary.

petrified music in rhythmical spirals
masculine symbols in feminine curves
cardinal instants in the evolving path of
man.

oracle
mandala
temple.

precursors of Pythagoras
mergers of science and art
observatories to mark the movements of
this Earth.

sun-dial
time-piece
calendar.

I ask you goddess of this land
where has all this latent knowledge gone
denuded in the choreographic dance of
time
buried in the squandered sands of lost
oblivion.

I pray you Mother of this isle
from your cosmic tomb of never-ending
curves
washed in the primeval blood of sacrificial
earth
exalted by the mystic knowledge in your
veins.

awake these stones once more today
from their tranquil sleep of death
restore the secret of their cults
and embrace again their vast galactic
plan.

ask them that they return anew to man
his harmonious presence in this World
that he may find once more his peace
and learn to love again.

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