

# MALTA

## Megalithic Temples of Malta

### Brief description

Seven megalithic temples are found on the islands of Malta and Gozo, each the result of an individual development. The two temples of Ggantija on the island of Gozo are notable for their gigantic Bronze Age structures. On the island of Malta, the temples of Hagar Qin, Mnajdra and Tarxien are unique architectural masterpieces, given the limited resources available to their builders. The Ta'Hagrat and Skorba complexes show how the tradition of temple-building was handed down in Malta.

### 1. Introduction

**Year(s) of Inscription** 1980, 1992

#### Agency responsible for site management

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### 2. Statement of Significance

**Inscription Criteria** C(iv)

- Change to criteria proposed : additional criteria C (i)

#### Justification provided by the State Party

(1979): The Ggantija temples are one of the best, and certainly the highest, preserved megalithic complexes in the Maltese Islands. They constitute a masterpiece of the constructional and architectural skills of the prehistoric inhabitants and exemplify the developments in temple building throughout nearly a millennium ending about 2200 B.C.

Their uniqueness in European and Mediterranean prehistory, which they share with the many other temples in both Malta and Gozo, derives from the fact that beyond the shores of the Maltese Islands contemporary megalithic buildings were [differently] planned and were primarily meant for funerary purposes.

(1991): The megalithic temples of the Maltese islands are claimed to be the most impressive monuments of European prehistory. They are not only remarkable because of their originality, complexity and striking massive proportions, but even more because of the considerable technical skill required in their construction. These temples were until recently dated to the third millennium B.C. but their chronology has now been radically revised following the calibration of radiocarbon dates (Bristle-cone Pine scale). This new chronology considerably pushes back the conventional radiocarbon dates for Maltese prehistory and implies that the temples are the earliest free-standing stone monuments in the world, already under construction around the mid-fourth millennium.

The creative ability, technical organisation, and mobilisation of manpower needed for the planning and erection of these great temples imply that their builders were specialised architects and mastercraftsmen thoroughly familiar with the potential of their raw materials and the skills required in the transportation, dressing and manoeuvring of the huge limestone slabs into position. The monumental structures they bequeathed to the cultural heritage of mankind are extraordinary engineering feats and conceptions of architectural forms which, in their awe-inspiring grandeur, achieve a rational, balanced, and powerful solidity both in plan and elevation.

#### As provided in ICOMOS/IUCN evaluation

(1980): The ensemble of Ggantija which serves as a point of archaeological reference - the "Ggantija Phase" (ca. 3000 to ca. 2200 B.C.) is one of the most important periods of the Maltese Bronze Age. The complex structure of the cultural group of Ggantija, the excellent state of preservation of its materials - hard chalky coralline and the more tender globigerina limestone - make it an excellent testament of megalithic prehistoric art.

The monument, qualifying for inclusion under criterion (iv), and constituting the most characteristic example of a structure representing a major development in the cultural, as well as artistic and technological domains, should be included on the list.

This nomination would exclude, however, the inclusion of later proposals concerning the analogous sites of Tarxien, Hagar Qim, and Mnajdra.

(1992): Hagar Qim and Mnajdra, although in the same tradition as the Ggantija temples, are in no

way duplicates of them. Each of these complexes is the result of a separate individual development, differing greatly in plan and articulation, as well as in constructional techniques, from the Ggantija and from each other. Both illustrate the full mastery of the use of globigerina limestone for orthostats and for the regular courses of corbelling above in the interiors, in contrast to the rough boulders used in Ggantija South. [...] The same considerations hold for the Tarxien complex, except that it is considerably less well preserved than the others. It too is the product of an individual development and displays some architectural features not found elsewhere. [...] Both Ta' Hagra and Skorba are significant mainly in terms of the information they provide about the development of the temple tradition in Malta. They are both essential to the proper understanding of the great masterpieces.

COMMENTS: In its comments on the original nomination of Ggantija in 1980, ICOMOS was of the opinion that "this nomination would exclude, however, the inclusion of later proposals concerning the analogous sites of Tarxien, Hagar Qim, and Mnajdra". The present ICOMOS Bureau does not understand the reasoning behind this view, with which it is not in agreement. It has taken the advice of Professor John Evans, former Director of the Institute of Archaeology, University of London, who is recognized as the world expert on the prehistory of Malta, and who supports the extension of the World Heritage Site to cover this additional group of monuments.

ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION: That the existing cultural property (The Temples of Ggantija - included under cultural criterion (iv)) be extended to cover the five nominated prehistoric temples on the island of Malta and be retitled "Megalithic temples of Malta".

### Committee Decision

Bureau (1992): The bureau, recognizing the exceptional universal value of these monuments recommended that they will be inscribed on the World Heritage List, but returned the nomination dossier to the competent Maltese authorities allow them, in consultation with ICOMOS, to reformulate the proposal so that all the Megalithic monuments of the Maltese archipelago are included under the same title.

Session (1992): The Committee decided to extend the existing cultural property, the Temples of Ggantija, to include the five prehistoric temples situated on the islands of Malta and Gozo and to

rename the site as "The Megalithic Temples of Malta".

- Proposal for text has been made by State Party
- UNESCO official description of site should be changed: State Party has provided suggestion

### Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site inadequate
- Buffer zone: adequate

### Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained

## 3. Protection

### Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- No specific arrangements
- The protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective
- Actions taken: a new perimeter security system is being installed around Hagar Qim and Mnajdra. Drystone walling around Ggantija is also being maintained

## 4. Management

### Use of site/property

- Visitor attraction, national park, rural landscape

### Management /Administrative Body

- A formal steering group; project management teams which include members from various public and private organisations
- Coordinator on full-time basis
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: national
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

### Actions proposed:

- In-house training of staff

## 5. Management Plan

- No current management plan
- Management plan under preparation
- Timeframe: 06/2006

## 6. Financial Resources

### Financial situation

- Government subvention for Heritage Malta
- Takings from visitor entrance tickets

- WHF: emergency assistance was granted by the WH Committee during its 22nd session.
- EU Pre-accession Funds, European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), EU Solidarity Funds
- World Monuments Fund, Bank of Valletta, Vodafone Foundation
- Funding is insufficient

### 7. Staffing Levels

- number of staff: 27

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Very good: interpretation
- Good: management, promotion, visitor management
- Average: conservation
- Other professional staff: specialised conservation skills and expertise are accessed via contracting of conservation and documentation specialists external to Heritage Malta
- Staff resources inadequate. The greater part of existing staff consists of unskilled watchmen, while only few staff members have had a specialised formation

### 8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- Scientific institutions: the University of Malta and Heritage Malta - Bigħi which incorporates an Institute for Conservation and Management of Cultural Heritage. In addition the Scientific Committee for the Conservation of the Megalithic Temples, which was appointed by the Minister for Tourism and Culture, has brought together individuals trained in various areas of expertise in support of the conservation of these sites. In addition there is also considerable skill transfer from ISACs who are conducting Environmental Monitoring at Hagar Qim and Mnajdra

### 9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: not provided
- Visitor facilities: parking facilities, ticketing and visitor orientation, sanitary facilities, on-site information panels, timber walkways to facilitate movement and protect the site

- Visitor needs: all sites require additional information, catering facilities and improved sanitary facilities. A visitors' centre is being planned.

### 10. Scientific Studies

- An extensive list of studies related to the value of the site; monitoring exercises; archaeological surveys; visitor management; structural condition surveys
- Material available on websites

### 11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- An adequate number of signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem used on publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: visitors, businesses, local authorities
- Development of educational programmes, organisation of open days at the sites encouraging the local community's participation, further media coverage of projects related to the World Heritage sites, as well as increased public consultation related to these projects
- Regular guided tours, guide books
- Web site available by Heritage Malta
- Local participation: meetings with local councils of the localities. Activities are also being planned for school children at these localities

### 12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

#### Reactive monitoring reports

- World Heritage Bureau sessions: 16th (1992); 19th (1995); 25th (2001)
- World Heritage Committee sessions: 16th (1992); 18th (1994); 19th (1995); 28th (2004); 29th (2005)

#### Conservation interventions

- Conservation interventions for technical restoration projects, visitor management
- Present state of conservation: needs more resources

#### Threats and Risks to site

- Environmental, visitor/tourism pressures
- Specific issues if mentioned: the main threats for these sites are a combination of natural and anthropogenic causes of deterioration.

In addition, large numbers of visitors at any one time within these sites also lead to wearing of megalith and floor surfaces

- Emergency measures taken: studies aimed at a better understanding of the effect environmental conditions have on the deterioration/preservation of these sites. Environmental monitoring is in place at Tarxien, Hagar Qim, and shortly at Mnajdra Temples. A conservation plan and research agenda are currently being drawn up by the Scientific Committee for the Conservation of the Megalithic Temples

### ***13. Monitoring***

- Formal monitoring programme. Environmental monitoring is currently being carried out

### ***14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions***

- Main benefits of WH status: access to expertise; promotion of sites
- Strengths of management: consolidation of management framework; extension of protected areas; legally enshrined protection of buffer zones; studies of conservation threats
- Weaknesses of management: the vulnerability of the intrinsic properties of the stone materials and structure of the temple sites; conflicting land uses

#### **Future actions:**

- Continued conservation monitoring; protective sheltering of some sites to slow down their rate of deterioration; implementation of a conservation plan; implementation of a management plan