

**IDENTIFICATION**

<b><u>Nomination</u></b>	:	Megalithic temples of Malta
<b><u>Location</u></b>	:	The island of Malta
<b><u>State Party</u></b>	:	Malta
<b><u>Date</u></b>	:	20 May 1991

**DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY**

Professor Lord Renfrew (Cambridge University), one of the leading prehistorians of the present day, has described the group of Megalithic temples on the islands of Malta and Gozo as "the oldest free-standing monuments in the world". They are, moreover, remarkable for their diversity of form and decoration.

The Ggantija temple complex on the island of Gozo, which is already on the World Heritage List, and which serves as a point of archaeological reference (the Ggantija Phase, c 3000 to c 2200 BC), is one of the most important periods of the Malta Bronze Age. It is also the best preserved of all the monuments in the Maltese archipelago.

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. Each complex has to be ranked as a unique architectural masterpiece which would be immensely impressive at any date, given the very limited resources of the builders, but is quite staggering when taken with the extraordinarily early dates now attributed to them.

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. It is also unique in the wealth of elaborate carved ornament found there (though all this has unfortunately had to be removed from the site for protection), and the lower half of an extraordinary colossal stone figure. Another point is that because it is the only one of the monuments of this scale that has been regularly excavated and reported on much more is known about what kind of use was made of it than of the others. The elaborate rituals to which the temples are testimony are a very remarkable manifestation of the human spirit, especially on a remote island at such an early date.

Ta' Hagraat offers the best preserved example of a temple with the early trefoil plan, plus the poorly preserved remains of what is assumed to be

the earliest type of all. The former, though on a much smaller scale than the monuments considered above, would be considered remarkable for its date if they were not available for comparison. Its chief importance is as evidence of the development of the tradition, rather than in its own right, and this applies even more so, of course, to the smaller and earlier unit.

Both Ta' Hagraat 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".

ICOMOS, October 1992