

MALTA

Hal Saflieni Hypogaeum

Brief description

The Hypogaeum is an enormous subterranean structure excavated c. 2500 B.C., using cyclopean rigging to lift huge blocks of coralline limestone. Perhaps originally a sanctuary, it became a necropolis in prehistoric times.

1. Introduction

Year of Inscription 1980

Agency responsible for site management

- Ministry for Tourism and Culture, Heritage Malta, Superintendence for Cultural Heritage

2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria C (iii)

- Change to criteria proposed by the State Party : additional criteria C (i), (iii)

Justification provided by the State Party

The Hal Saflieni Hypogaeum is unique among the prehistoric temples of Malta and Gozo and the megalithic monuments of Europe and the Mediterranean due to the fact that it was rock-cut below ground level and carved in imitation of the built structures of the period. In many ways, the imitation architecture of the Hypogaeum surpasses that of the other contemporary buildings in perfection and sophistication, pointing to the skill and aesthetic sense of the prehistoric inhabitants who excavated it in the rock without the use of metal tools. Its definite association with belief in the supernatural, possibly summed up in the idea of a deity with power over life and death, must have found a unique form of expression from the fact of its situation below ground, giving the labyrinth of dark chambers and passages a level of mystique superior to that of the above-ground temples.

As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

Owing to the quality of its architecture and its remarkable state of preservation, the hypogaeum of Hal Saflieni constitutes one of the essential prehistoric monuments of our world heritage.

ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

- 1) That the nominated property be included on the World Heritage List.
- 2) That all of the administrative and technical measures, as expressed by M. Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, Director General of UNESCO in his Call for the Protection of the Historical Monuments and Sites of Malta, be taken to check the deterioration of the painted decoration.

Committee Decision

The Committee made no statement.

- Statement of Significance does not adequately define the outstanding universal value of the site
- Proposal for text has been made by State Party
- Additional criteria proposed by the State Party: C (i), (iii)
- UNESCO official description of the site should be changed. State Party has provided suggestion

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

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

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained

3. Protection

Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- The Malta Environment and Planning Authority has scheduled the area of the Hal Saflieni Hypogaeum as a Site of Archaeological Importance
- The protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective

4. Management

Use of site/property

- Visitor attraction

Management /Administrative Body

- No formal steering group. Steering groups are project-based
- Site manager 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:

- 1. Environmental monitoring of the site has been intensified since 2004. 2. Preparations are being made for the condition mapping of the site. 3. Ticket booking and purchasing system are being complemented by an on-line booking facility. 4. Number of tour guides at the site has recently been increased making more efficient use of the staff employed on a full-time basis at the site. 5. New multilingual audio-guides are being procured

5. Management Plan

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

6. Financial Resources

Financial situation

- Annual for staff funding World Heritage Fund: during the design of the Hypogeum Conservation project, a grant from the World Heritage Fund provided assistance-in-kind in expertise help develop the project concept. During the implementation it also permitted the procurement of some components of the monitoring equipment.
- Funding is sufficient

7. Staffing Levels

- number of staff: 5

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

- Very good: interpretation
- Good: conservation, management, promotion, education, visitor management
- Specialised conservation skills and expertise are accessed via contracting of conservation specialists external to Heritage Malta such as the consultation services of a Conservation Scientist from the University of Malta
- Staffing resources not adequate. The greater part of existing staff consists of unskilled watchmen, etc. while only few staff members have had a specialised formation.

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

- Training is available at the University of Malta and Heritage Malta - Bigħi which incorporates

an Institute for Conservation and Management of Cultural Heritage

9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics available (tickets sold) 2004
- Visitor facilities: a reception area; an introductory exhibition about the site; sanitary facilities and lockers. In addition there is an introductory multi-lingual audio visual presentation and guided tours of the site
- Visitor needs: Catering and retail facilities as well as improved interpretation facilities such as audio guides and booklets about the site in various languages

10. Scientific Studies

- Monitoring exercises; monitoring of air temperature and relative humidity. In 2002 the distribution of algae was documented together with the presence of water droplets and formation of pools. As from 2004 the relative humidity and temperature within various chambers of the site have been monitored more intensively with digital data-logging equipment
- Condition Surveys: as part of the Hypogeum Project between 1990 and 2000, water samples from droplets and pools mentioned above were collected and analysed. An extensive geological/hydro geological survey of both the Hypogeum and the surrounding area was carried out in 1992. A detailed study and mapping of biological infestation within the site was conducted in 1982. In 1986 samples of these organisms were collected from the Upper and Middle Levels to identify the organisms present. This eventually led to the selection of which biocides could be used for disinfestations of the whole site
- Archaeological Surveys: between 1990 and 1992 an archaeological excavation and survey was carried out in the Upper Level of the site
- Other: a positive identification of the material of the painted decorations was carried out
- Monitoring and Condition surveys described in 12.03 led to the comprehensive characterisation of the state of conservation of the Hypogeum, together with a short-listing of the causes of deterioration and the elaboration of an extensive programme for its conservation. These studies therefore allowed the definition of a microclimate suitable for the conservation of the site, as well as the establishment of maximum visitor numbers to the site

- The ongoing monitoring and the condition survey which will be undertaken shortly will guide the upgrading and fine-tuning of the environmental control system at the site.
- The archaeological survey of the upper level brought about a better understanding of the original entrance area of the site and has contributed to the interpretation and accessibility of the site for visitors.
- In addition the analysis of the pigment used for the painted decorations will inform any eventual treatment of the site. Identification and study of infesting biological organisms as well as any changes in their type and distribution over time will inform any necessary treatment as well as ideal environment to prevent their spread. Changes in distribution of these organisms are also an indicator of changes in the environment within the underground chambers

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, local authorities
- Need for the development of educational programmes and organisation of open days at the sites encouraging the local community's participation
- An essay competition for school children is being organised to commemorate the 25th anniversary of inscription
- Web site available
- Local participation: Complimentary visits for all residents in the neighbourhood were organised as part of the re-opening of the site to the public in 2000. Dialogue is maintained with residents of housing units overlying parts of the site, and maintenance works to prevent water intrusion are conducted in collaboration with them

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- World Heritage Bureau sessions: 19th (1995)

- World Heritage Bureau sessions: 14th (1990); 18th (1994); 19th (1995)

Conservation interventions

- Extensive preventive conservation interventions
A number of studies were conducted at the site so as to understand its state of conservation, the factors causing its deterioration and the measures required to preserve it, which have mostly been implemented
- Archaeological excavations were carried out within the Upper Level of the site between 1990 and 1992. This was conducted during three fieldwork sessions and led to an improved understanding of the Hypogeum's layout within the Upper Level
- In addition, between 1990 and 2000 a new entrance area was built over the site. This also acts as a buffer zone between the site and the outside environment reducing drastic changes to the environment within the site. In addition an air conditioning system was installed so as to control the environment within the site. A controlled lighting system was also installed. From 2000 on the visitor numbers to the site have been limited to 70 persons per day
- Present state of conservation: adequate

Threats and Risks to site

- The main threats to the preservation of the Hypogeum are those posed by fluctuating temperature and relative humidity levels within the site, water infiltration and infestations by biological organisms
- Specific issues if mentioned: presence of calcifying cyanobacteria and other micro-organisms
- Emergency measures taken: The relative humidity and temperature at the site are being monitored continuously and this data will guide the upgrading and fine-tuning of the air handling units for the site

13. Monitoring

- Formal monitoring programme for the environmental factors
- Measures taken/planned (see above)

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status; access to expertise; promotion of sites

- Strengths of management: Consolidation of management framework; excavation of new areas of the site; creation of new high-quality visitor facilities; legally enshrined protection of buffer zones; studies of conservation threats; elimination of key conservation threats; environmental control for the preservation of the site
- Weaknesses of management: the vulnerability of the intrinsic properties of the stone materials within the underground environment

Future actions:

- Continued conservation monitoring; upgrading of the air handling units at the site; detailed documentation of the state of preservation