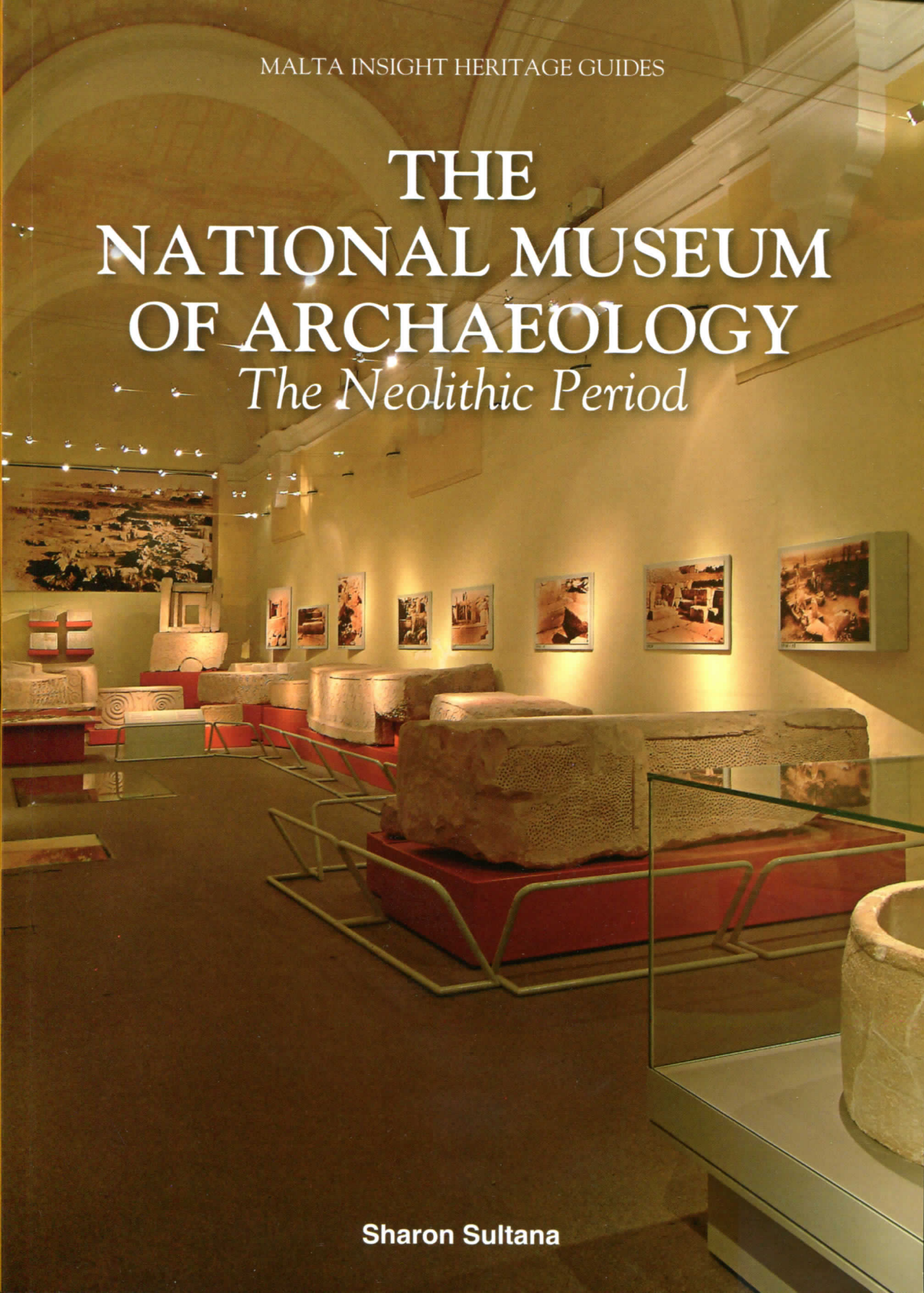


MALTA INSIGHT HERITAGE GUIDES

# THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY

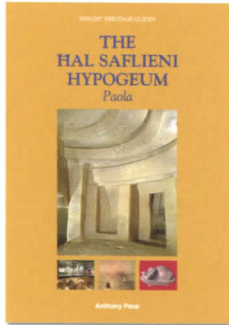
*The Neolithic Period*



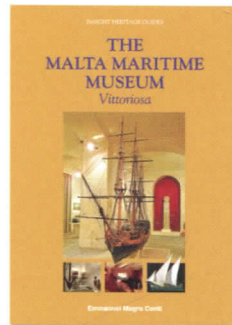
Sharon Sultana

## MALTA INSIGHT HERITAGE GUIDES

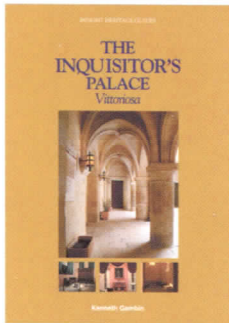
This series of historical guides is produced with the aim to give insight into aspects of Malta's rich history and heritage. Each book is published in association with the relative heritage agency or foundation. Proceeds from the sale of this series are devolved towards the preservation of these sites. Each book is designed to tackle one specific topic in easy every day language, with the aid of diagrams, illustrations and photography in full colour.



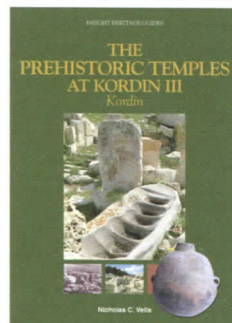
A small but intensive guide into one of the marvels of Malta's prehistory – the underground temple of Hal Saflieni. Today this unique prehistoric temple is the centrepiece of Maltese cultural heritage. 99932-39-93-3



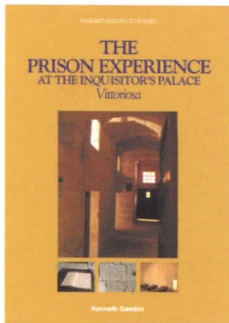
The Malta Maritime Museum aims at illustrating Malta's maritime history from ancient times to the present day through the constant search for, identification, and acquisition of artefacts related to the museum's mission. 99932-7-075-X



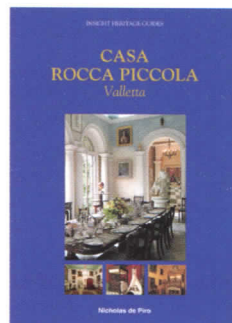
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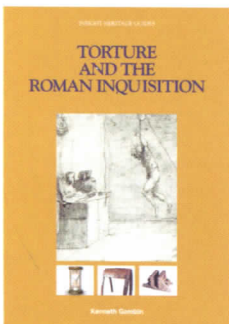
The book describes one of the lesser prehistoric sites in Malta and attempts to describe not only the site but the background into temple building, and the times when it was built. 99932-39-87-9



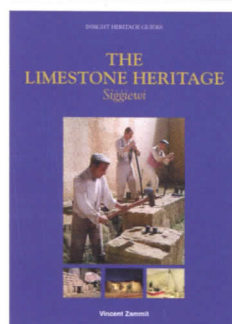
The book tries to take a practical view of human relations in a religious prison. By delving into the original documents, the guidebook tries to dispel many of the unfounded prejudices, legends and conjectures that have coloured the real nature of the Inquisition. 99932-7-000-8



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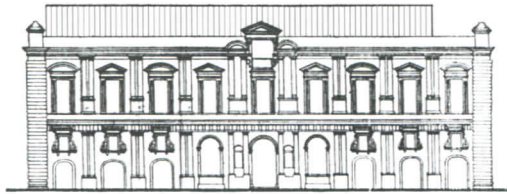
MALTA INSIGHT HERITAGE GUIDES

THE  
NATIONAL MUSEUM  
OF ARCHAEOLOGY

*Valletta*

· The Neolithic Period ·

*Dedicated to the commitment of  
Capt. Charles Zammit (1912-2006)*



SHARON SULTANA

PHOTOGRAPHY  
DANIEL CILIA



**HERITAGE BOOKS**  
IN ASSOCIATION WITH

 Heritage Malta

# HOW TO GET TO THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY

The Museum is situated on the main street of Valletta.

It is easily reached by foot and is found on Republic Street just as you enter Valletta through the Main Gate. The Auberge de Provence is the building just after the second cross road (Melita Street).

**National Museum of Archaeology**  
Auberge de Provence  
Republic Street  
Valletta VLT 04  
Tel: 2122 1623  
[www.heritagemalta.org](http://www.heritagemalta.org)



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## THE AUBERGE DE PROVENCE



The National Museum of Archaeology is housed in one of the most stylish Baroque buildings still distinguishable in Valletta, more precisely at the Auberge de Provence, in Republic Street. This building, originally built for the Provençal

Knights of the Order of St John, dates back to 1571. When compared to other auberges, it has the most advanced design, representing some of the finest Baroque architecture in Malta, thus reflecting the style used throughout Europe at that time. The

façade is imprinted with Mannerist characteristics usually associated with the famous local architect Gerolamo Cassar and, since all auberges and important buildings in Valletta were assigned to be built under his direction, we can deduce that the Auberge de Provence is also his in design.

The finest room in this building is undoubtedly the Grand Salon. Located on the upper floor, it was used for the knights' business discussions. It was also used as a refectory and banqueting hall, where the knights dined, seated at long tables according to seniority. This room is one of the noblest rooms in Malta. Its size and richly-painted walls add to the individuality of its wooden beam roof with coffered panels between the beams.

Various tenants inhabited this building between 1798, when the Order was expelled from Malta, and 1826, when parts and, later on, all the auberge was given to the Malta Union Club on a lease. This lease, which should have expired in 2002, was terminated on 12 August 1955 when the auberge was assigned to house Malta's National Museum.

The museum at the Auberge de Provence was officially inaugurated in

January 1958 by Ms Agatha Barbara – then Minister of Education. At that time, under the direction of Capt. Charles G. Zammit (Sir Themistocles Zammit's son), the museum consisted of the Fine Arts collection on the first floor and the Archaeology section on the ground floor. However, in 1974, it was deemed necessary to separate the two collections to allow growth and development, and the Fine Arts section was moved to the Admiralty House in South Street, Valletta. Malta's National Museum was then renamed The National Museum of Archaeology.

The present permanent display of the Neolithic period is found on the ground floor. All the artefacts on display are the original ones which were excavated from the various temples and sites in Malta and Gozo. Since 1958, many changes have been made to improve the way that the exhibits are displayed. The display showcases are climate-controlled and in line with current conservation standards. This measure, among others, ensures a safe environment for the collection. The National Museum of Archaeology also hosts a number of temporary exhibitions which are at times displayed in the Grand Salon.





A photograph of the lobby area of the National Museum of Archaeology. The space is grand and classical, featuring high ceilings with arched windows and doorways. In the foreground, a large, ornate glass display case is visible. To the left, the Italian and European Union flags are displayed on a stand. In the background, a reception desk and a staircase are visible. The overall atmosphere is one of historical grandeur.

# NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY

## VISITING THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY

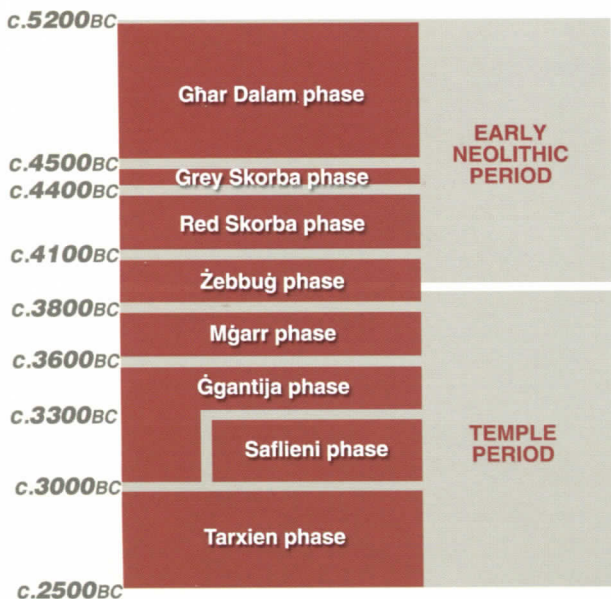
On entering the National Museum of Archaeology, one can immediately admire the richly decorated ceiling of the lobby area. This allegorical decoration has been attributed to Nicolò Nasoni (1691-1769). Richly painted and decorated, the main focus is the central panel. The main figure, holding a sword and a shield has been interpreted as representing 'Religion'. The visible parts of the shield show parts of the eight-pointed cross, which is characteristic of the Order of St John. A number of medallions surrounding this centrepiece depict various Biblical narratives.





## MALTA'S FIRST SETTLERS

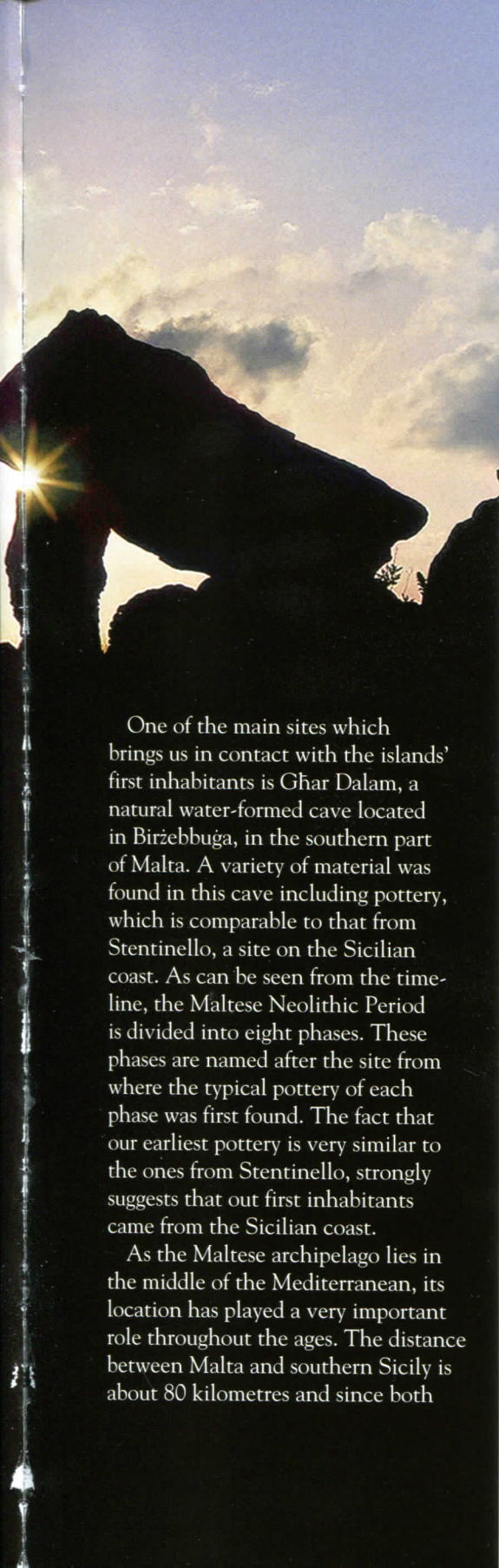
### Neolithic Period Chronological Table



The evidence of Malta's first inhabitants dates back to *circa* 5200 BC. This period, the Early Neolithic, along with the successive Temple Period, forms part of the Maltese Neolithic Period which ends at *circa* 2500 BC. With no written records for this span of time and with an abundance of prehistoric remains that one finds on our islands, interpretation is very subjective and open to discussion.

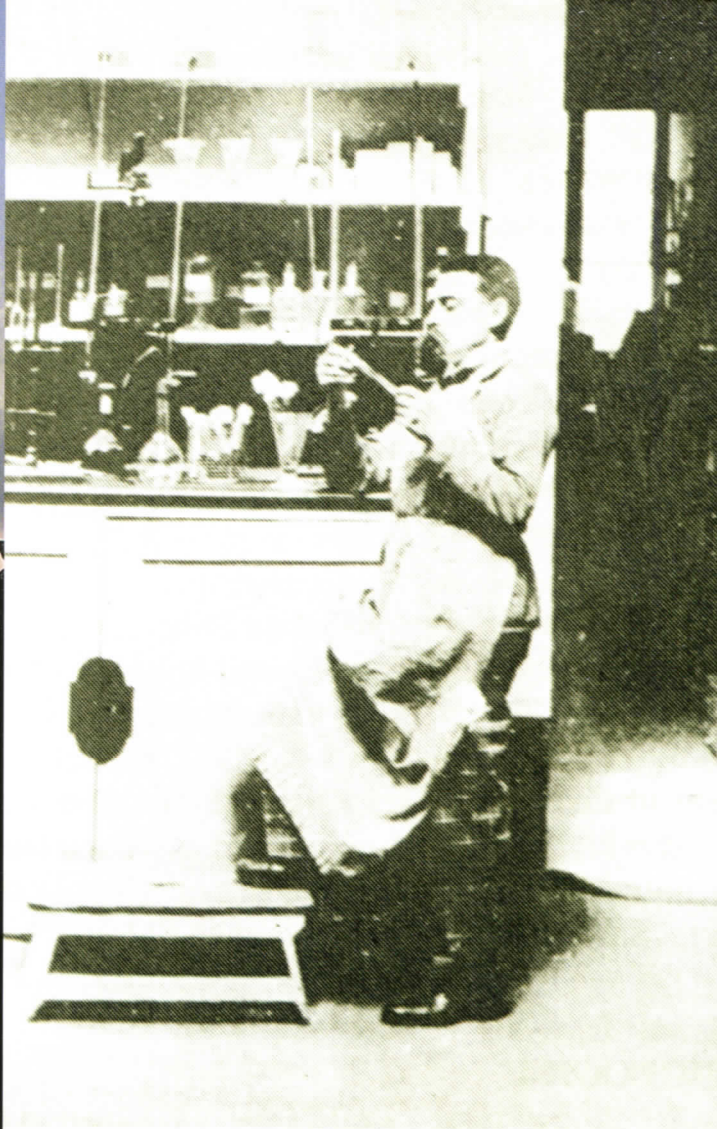
During the Early Neolithic Period, the human population was made up of farmers, succeeding their predecessors who were hunters and food gatherers. As the families grew and the land lost its fertility, the farmers ventured on to new pastures where they could nurture their future generations. Malta must have provided the perfect setting for them to develop their material culture, while still maintaining some contact with their homeland, as some imported artefacts attest.





One of the main sites which brings us in contact with the islands' first inhabitants is Għar Dalam, a natural water-formed cave located in Birżebbuġa, in the southern part of Malta. A variety of material was found in this cave including pottery, which is comparable to that from Stentinello, a site on the Sicilian coast. As can be seen from the timeline, the Maltese Neolithic Period is divided into eight phases. These phases are named after the site from where the typical pottery of each phase was first found. The fact that our earliest pottery is very similar to the ones from Stentinello, strongly suggests that our first inhabitants came from the Sicilian coast.

As the Maltese archipelago lies in the middle of the Mediterranean, its location has played a very important role throughout the ages. The distance between Malta and southern Sicily is about 80 kilometres and since both



## SIR THEMISTOCLES ZAMMIT

Sir Temi Zammit, as he is better-known in Malta, was one of the key persons who worked very hard to promote Maltese archaeology during times when it was very hard to do so, mainly owing to lack of public interest. A doctor by profession, he was instrumental in discovering how the virus which caused undulant fever, which is also referred to as 'Maltese fever', was transmitted. He was the first Curator of The Museum, and in 1922 became the Director of the Museums Department, a position he retained until his demise in 1935. In 1930, His Majesty King George V had bestowed upon him the title of Sir.



Malta and Gozo can be seen on a clear day from Cape Passero (the south-eastern corner of Sicily), it is not accidental that the colonization of the Maltese islands occurred from neighbouring Sicily. We can assume they used a sea vessel, though no remains for these primary vessels have been found. The crossing, which could be achieved in one day, brought over families, their domestic animals, and also other necessities needed to migrate to an uninhabited island. Moreover, such journeys brought to our islands the culture of these first settlers, which evolved into something quite unique and unparalleled.

The first Maltese quickly spread over Malta and Gozo, as we have a number of sites in different areas of the islands in which the 'Ghar Dalam' type pottery was found. During the earlier phases, these first settlers must have been clustered in groups, probably made of extended families that were self-supportive. The absence of weapons makes us believe they were peaceful people who, later, during the Temple Period, pooled their resources to originate the wonderful megalithic structures which have withstood the test of time and can still be

admired nowadays. These megalithic monuments are attributed as being the oldest free-standing monuments in the world and have been listed by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites.

From the evidence, or at times lack of it, we can say that these first settlers probably made use of natural caves for dwellings since, apart from the hut remains at Skorba, nothing has yet been found that could be termed as Neolithic houses. However, their first homes could have also been mainly made of perishable materials, such as wood. Carbonized grains of barley, club wheat, emmer wheat, and lentils, which were found at Skorba, give us direct evidence of the types of crops they grew. Moreover, the number of querns which were found during various excavations suggest the grinding of flour. Studies on the bones excavated from the Xaghra Stone Circle attest to low levels of tooth decay and no signs of malnutrition. The near future should see the conduction of DNA tests on bones, which could prove to be highly informative and shed more light on these people's physical characteristics.

Ghar Dalam Cave



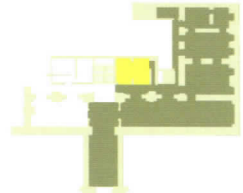




**Room 1**

The first room is dedicated to the earlier Neolithic periods, from the Ghar Dalam Phase, dating to *circa* 5200 BC to the Żebbuġ Phase which ends at *circa* 3800 BC. The artefacts displayed in this room span the Ghar Dalam, Grey Skorba, Red Skorba, and Żebbuġ phases. Each phase has distinct pottery characteristics that distinguish it. On the other hand, other artefacts, such as implements and ornamental objects, remain practically the same throughout the Neolithic phases.

Showcase 1 displays three animal heads, the earliest animal representations. They bear characteristic decorations of the Ghar Dalam Phase and were probably parts of handles. One is immediately drawn to the artistic techniques involved in producing such decorative styles.



**Animal heads, Showcase 1: Material: Clay  
Provenance: Ghar Dalam; Ghar Dalam; Skorba.**



**Imported ware,  
Showcase 3:  
Material: Clay  
Provenance: Serra  
d'Alto, Trefontane-  
Palikè, Diana, and  
Trefontane-Palikè**

**Obsidian core,  
Showcase 3:  
Material: Obsidian,  
Provenance: Skorba**



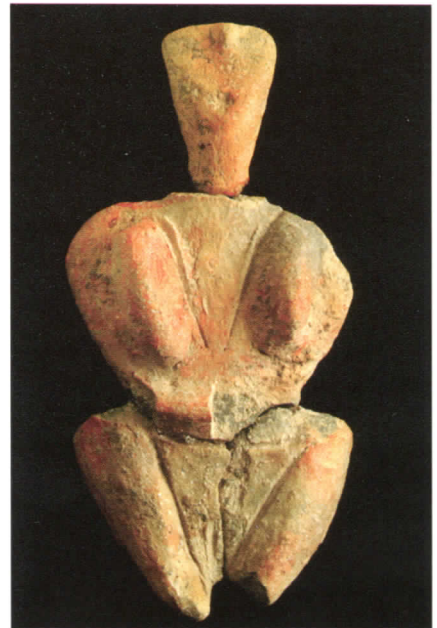
**Right:  
Skorba figurine,  
Showcase 5:  
Material: Clay  
Provenance: Skorba**

Showcase 2 contains artefacts mainly from Skorba and Għar Dalam dating to the Għar Dalam Phase. Besides the pottery (refer to pottery typology table on page 12) there are a variety of implements such as slingstones, flint, chert, pebbles, obsidian, and bone points. These implements and many others similar to them were used throughout the Neolithic Period to produce artistic decorations on pottery vessels, figurines, and stone blocks which adorned the temples. Other artefacts which were probably used as decorative items, such as pendants or necklaces, were made of greenstone, an imported material, and a variety of shell, bone, and worked stone.

Showcase 3 displays a small variety of artefacts excavated from Skorba and date to the hundred years' span of the Grey Skorba Phase. Of significant importance are the two large obsidian cores from which blades could be knapped. In this same showcase we have four sherds which were imported from Sicily. From left to right, these pottery sherds were imported from the following sites: Serra D'Alto; Trefontane- Palikè, Diana, and Trefontane-Palikè. If one looks closely at the third sherd, the one from the Diana site in Sicily, the resemblance with the Maltese Red Skorba ware is very evident.

Showcase 4 displays artefacts which were also excavated from Skorba but belong to the next phase: the Red Skorba Phase (4400-4100 BC). The name reflects the red-slipped pottery found in the stratigraphic layer of this phase. Apart from the pottery vessels (refer to page 12) and the variety of implements, we have what could possibly be a spindle whorl, displayed on the top shelf, left corner. Whorls were used for spinning fibres to produce cloth.

Showcase 5 displays the earliest local representations of the human figure. They are all Red Skorba Phase figurines and are made of clay







**Žebbuġ stone head,  
Showcase 6:  
Material: Stone,  
Provenance: Ta'  
Trapna, Žebbuġ**

with the exception of the largest one that is made of stone. Their characteristics are the triangular forms which make up the various body parts. Representations of the human figure reached their climax during the Temple Period, albeit with different characteristics. The ones displayed in this showcase can be safely attributed as appertaining to the female sex.


**Showcase 6** presents us the successive Žebbuġ Phase, 4100-3800 BC. Two particular artefacts in this showcase are the statue-menhir and the lump of red ochre. The statue-menhir, a carved stone representing a human head, was excavated in close association with a tomb. It could have

possibly been placed at the entrance of the tomb to ward off evil spirits or to serve as a tombstone to mark such a burial place. Red ochre was mainly used as a decorative material on a variety of media. Ochre is a natural iron oxide which is not a local resource and was thus imported. It occurs in red or yellow pigments but the red pigment is what was more abundantly used locally. It was used as powder and sprinkled over the corpse upon burial. Red ochre is recognized world-wide as representing blood and therefore life. In this context, it probably represented life after death. Ochre was also used on pottery as decoration and in monumental architecture such as adorning the Ħal Saflieni Hypogeum chambers.



**Ochre, Showcase 6:  
Material: Ochre  
Provenance: unknown**



Phase	Date	Description	Shapes	Example
Ghar Dalam	5200 4500 BC	<p>Very similar to the Sicilian ware found in Stentinello. There are two types of ware:</p> <p>a) Thin fine ware – grey or brown/black in colour. <i>Decoration</i>: Incised rows, some of which still have white inlay in the incisions.</p> <p>b) Thick ware – <i>Decoration</i>: less refined incisions or simple finger pinching marks</p>	Shapes vary but mainly globular jars with round bases and some small deep bowls. Handle shapes varied	
Grey Skorba	4500 4400 BC	Grey in colour as the name implies and <i>undecorated</i> . A clear development from the Ghar Dalam ware. Distinguishable by fine white speckles in the clay (possibly ground limestone / shell)	Open bowls; round-bottomed dippers; some short pedestals	
Red Skorba	4400 4100 BC	Same ware as Grey Skorba but covered in a brilliant red slip. The red slip was made by dipping the vessel in a mixture of clay and water, in this case coloured in red, before firing. This produced a smooth surface since it closed the clay pores. <i>Decorated</i> with incised C or S shapes	Larger carinated bowls with flat bases. A characteristic of this phase is the ladle	
Žebbuġ	4100 3500 BC	<p>A friable yellow coloured ware. <i>Decorated</i> by incisions probably filled with white paste. Incisions separated the neck from the body of the vessel. First interpretations of schematic human representations. Sometimes red lines are painted on a cream slip.</p> <p>Different from previous types. Influx of new people or possibly new tradition through contact with communities outside the islands. This phase marks the start of the Temple Period</p>	Simple ovoid jars. Single-handled cups and two handled jars	

## IMPLEMENTS

Most of the implements used during the Neolithic Period are noticeably made of a variety of stone as the term Neolithic (New Stone Age) implies. One must, however, keep in mind that other materials were probably used in conjunction with these tools, such as wood and other perishable supplies. The archaeological evidence shows us that flint, chert, obsidian, and the local geological stones; globigerina and coralline limestone were used frequently. Flint and chert made interesting tools that were probably also used to cut straw, as the lustrous marks on them suggest. The appearance of such characteristic polished flint and stone is generally associated with the introduction of cereal cultivation, animal domestication, and, in Europe, with the earliest manufacture of pottery. Although chert (grey yellow in colour) and limestone are local resources, both flint and obsidian are imported. Chert has similar chemical characteristics to flint but is of an inferior quality, whereas flint and obsidian produce sharper edges. Flint was probably brought over from the



nearest source which is the Monti Iblei region in southeast Sicily.

Obsidian is a black shiny volcanic glass which, when knapped, produces very sharp edges. It is translucent and two varieties were found at Malta. Chemical analyses show that the obsidian was imported from Lipari and Pantelleria, two islands off Sicily. Excavated obsidian is usually found in the form of small blades and their sharp edges indicate that they were used as cutting objects, such as knife blades. Obsidian was not widely diffused as a resource

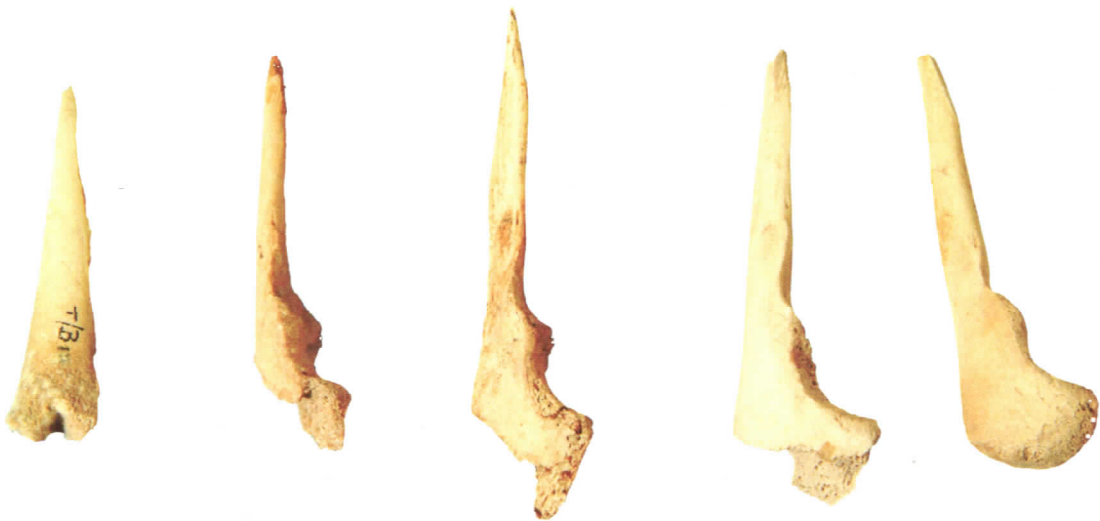
**Flint and chert blades showcase: various, Material: flint/chert, Provenance: various**

## POTTERY

The main component needed to make pottery is clay, a resource which is found locally. The Maltese Blue Clay, though it varies in colour, does not require any preparation, but the addition of water and some ground organic substances, such as stone or sand, increases its resistivity to heat. In prehistory, pottery was hand-made, since the wheel was introduced later by the Phoenicians. Decoration was made either before or after firing, depending on the type of decoration required, and firing took place in kilns at a temperature that would reach 700°C. Changes in pottery styles can denote an immigration of a new culture, not necessarily replacing the existing people but influencing its culture. Clay was not just used to produce various sizes and shapes of vessels but also a variety of human and animal representations.







**Bone points**  
 showcase: various,  
 Material: bone,  
 Provenance: various

in the central Mediterranean, and its presence on the islands must have been significant. The fact that both flint and obsidian flakes were utilized frequently during the Neolithic Period proves that contact with mainland Italy and Sicily was maintained. The regularity of these visits is not known but since these implements were found throughout the phases, from the Għar Dalam Phase to the Tarxien Phase, we can say that these trips were not infrequent. Such trips could have been the basis of some sort of trade, whereby materials were exchanged.

The amount of worked bone found indicates that this material was also used to produce a variety of tools. It was most probably used to incise the decoration on pottery, stone, and also for sewing cloth. Although we have no evidence of clothing, we can presume that they used animal skins to supply them with materials. These skins were probably sewn together with bone tools using vegetable fibres such as flax or linen. Spindle whorls, some of which are on display, are also evidence that some type of yarn fabrication took place.



## DECORATIVE ORNAMENTS

There are a number of artefacts on display which suggest they were worn as pendants, mainly due to the holes from where they could be hung. Shell and greenstone were used extensively as ornaments. Shell was easy to acquire considering the small distances between the shores and the various sites. On the other hand, greenstone is not indigenous and was imported. These pendants could have either served as purely decorative, like necklaces nowadays, as a talisman, or as part of some sort of ritual.





## BURIAL PRACTICES



Left: Rock-cut tomb at Xemxija

Bottom: Replica of a simple rock-cut tomb that can be seen at the Museum (Room 1)

During the Neolithic Period, throughout the central Mediterranean, the deceased were buried in underground rock-cut tombs. At the National Museum of Archaeology, one can see a replica of a simple rock-cut tomb which is cross-sectioned to show how the deceased were inhumed. These tombs were made by digging a vertical shaft into the ground. When the desired depth was reached, a chamber, roughly oval in shape, was dug from the foot of the shaft. These types of tombs, which started being used locally at around 4100 BC, continued to be used till the end of the Temple Period, c. 2500 BC.

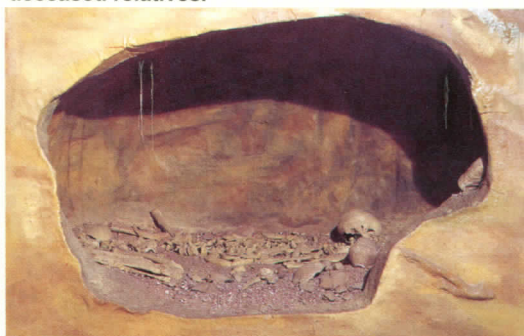
The body was placed inside the chamber along with decorated pots, ornaments, and possibly other goods, of which no records were found due to their perishable nature. The positioning of the body varied but a common one was that of a crouched position. It is usually associated with the foetal position thus suggesting rebirth. The body was then sprinkled over with red ochre, attested by the 'red soil' that was unearthed from such tombs. In two instances, a carved stone representing a stylized human head was found at the entrance of the chamber of the tomb. One was found at Ta' Trapna, Żebbuġ; the other at Xaghra Stone Circle in Gozo.

After the burial, the tomb was sealed with a detachable stone slab. When the need for another interment arose, the bones of the previous burials were pushed to one side to make space. At times, this was carried out in a systematic way so that long bones were placed with each other, and skulls grouped together. In this manner, such a restricted space could be reutilized to hold numerous burials. Thus, apart from being collective-burial chambers, these places also served as ossuaries. Such tombs, which could have been used by immediate family members or by the community, were more difficult to dig up

than simple earth tombs, which were probably used before 4100 BC. Considering the tools available at that time, digging into the rock must have been a task justified only by the respect for their dead relatives.

Since their inception, simple chamber rock-cut tombs gradually developed into more complex underground burial sites as can be seen at Xemxija tombs which date to the Mġarr Phase (3800-3600 BC) a complex of seven tombs on the hill. During the Ġgantija and Safflieni phases (3600-3000 BC) rock-cut tombs became even more complex and some parallels have been drawn between their architecture and the plans of the above-ground temples. The subsequent Tarxien Phase (3000-2500 BC), saw these tombs enlarged to accommodate more burials. They were embellished in a manner as to echo the above-ground artistic achievements of that period.

These rock-cut tombs reach their climax in the Maltese islands with the impressive examples of the Hal Safflieni Hypogeum and the Xaghra Stone Circle. The evidence we have of these resting places for the dead show that an extraordinary amount of time and human resources were invested to provide the final resting place for deceased relatives.





## THE HAL SAFLIENI HYPOGEUM

The Hal Saflieni Hypogeum, which is within walking distance from Tarxien Temples, has three underground levels. The pottery finds date from the Żebbuġ Phase to the end of the Temple Period; for this span of time, this underground monument served as a cemetery for about 7,000 people, as the bone evidence proves.

A number of artefacts were found during the excavations, amongst which pottery, personal ornaments, alabaster, and stone statuettes, but the most illustrious one is the 'Sleeping Lady', which is displayed reverently in Room 5.

In 1980 UNESCO added the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum to its list of World Heritage Sites. One of the criteria for being enlisted in such a prestigious list is that 'it bears a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a civilization or cultural tradition which has disappeared'. (UNESCO 1994:7)

*Please note that tickets for the Hypogeum have to be booked in advance, for entrance is restricted to only ten people at hourly intervals, due to conservation purposes. In the corridor leading to Room 2 there is a model of this unique underground monument.*





## XAGHRA STONE CIRCLE

The Xaghra Stone Circle is found in Gozo and is presently closed to the public. It is close to Ġgantija, in the same manner that the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum is in the vicinity of the Tarxien Temples.

The Xaghra Stone Circle consisted of a series of natural caves and was used during the same period of time as the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum, i.e. between 4000 and 2500 BC. Bone evidence gives us a figure of *circa* 800 burials. Recent scientific excavations have shed light on the burial practices carried out on the Maltese islands in the Neolithic Period. The discovered human remains were preserved and excavated in a manner as to enable us to gather more knowledge about funerary practices in the Neolithic Period. A puppy found buried with two children, a mother holding a new-born baby in her arms, and other instances, illustrate the intimate aspects of their lives. Samples of bones are currently being studied and results will provide a greater understanding



of the life these communities lived. The publication of the results of the excavations which were carried out between 1987 and 1994 will definitely shed more light on burial practices and other aspects of the Temple Period.

The key artefacts excavated from this site are the cache of nine stone figurines and the twin seated figurine.

However, there were many other interesting artefacts which were unearthed, such as human statuettes which fall under the category of the 'fat figures'. Quantities of red ochre were unearthed and over 700 beads, hundreds of stone objects, miniature axes, and V-perforated buttons were found accompanying the buried.



XAGHRA STONE CIRCLE

## Room 2

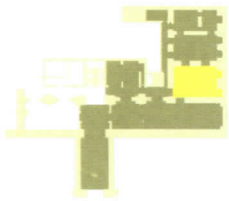
In Room 2, which is divided into two sections, we are introduced to the magnificent architectural monuments of the Temple Period. The first section helps us understand the architecture of these Neolithic megalithic structures, usually referred to as temples. Until the 1880s, scholars attested that these temples dated to the Phoenician Period. This was probably due to the fact that no similar buildings in the Mediterranean could be remotely compared to these megalithic structures. Albert Mayr (1868-1924), a German scholar, interpreted and analysed the sites holistically and established that they are older than and different from the Phoenician culture. Pottery identification dates these temples to c. 4000-2500 BC, nowadays known as the Temple Period. These temples, which are considered to be the world's first free-standing stone monuments, are also listed in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

What stimulated these people to build these magnificent monuments is, and will probably remain, unknown. The reason, however, must have been

one of great importance and their monumental sizes suggest that they were not built for domestic use. The way these temples are built, with a largish forecourt before entering the temple, suggests that some communal activities were held there. These activities could be numerous and variable in their functions. Weddings, processions, singing, dancing, preaching, and public announcements could have been amongst the functions carried out in the forecourt. For such events, only written records would have been of help.

It is very evident that the temples were carefully planned before being built with a stability to last for generations. One just has to see the imposing concave façades and the symmetrical use of apsidal spaces to realize how meticulously the planning stage must have been carried out.

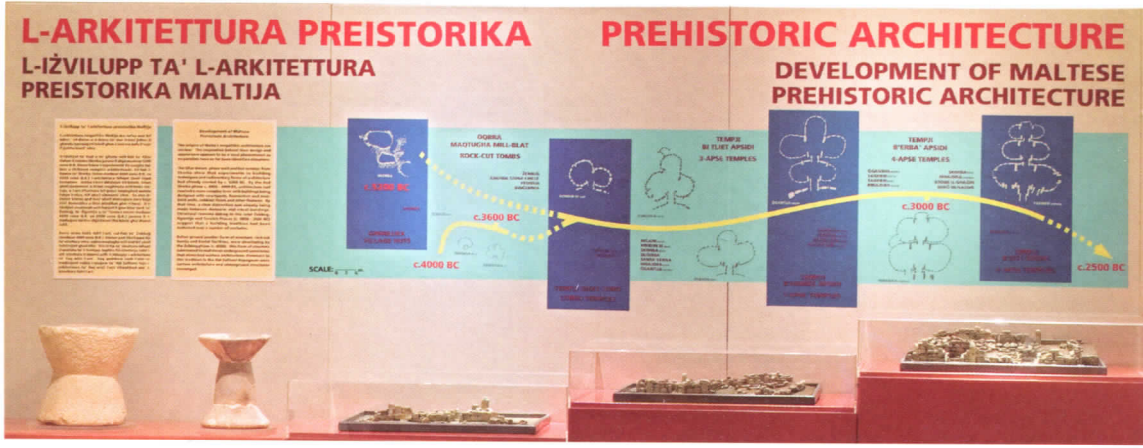
**Showcase 7** displays a small number of stone and pottery artefacts which attest to the planning phases of these monumental buildings. The top left-hand corner artefact, which was found at Tarxien temples, shows fragments



**Mnajdra Temple**







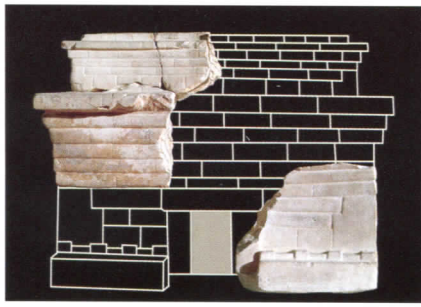
of a temple façade. Its bottom right corner can be matched to the existing remains at Ħaġar Qim but we cannot compare the top left-hand part which has not survived at any of the temples. Other artefacts in this showcase show plans of apses and scratched façades. One particular stone object, on the right-hand side, shows a number of rectangular rooms. This is very strange indeed as this is the only instance when we encounter rectangular plans during the Neolithic times. On the backdrop of the showcase there is a copy of the carving, found at Mnajdra, which also shows a temple structure.

To the left of this showcase there are three temple models, namely, (from right to left) Ġgantija, Mnajdra, and Ħaġar Qim. Taking a look at the plan of these temples, resemblance to the underground burial chambers, like the Xemxija tombs, can be discerned. It has also been suggested that the temple plans echo the figure of the so-called 'fat figures'. However, only the 4-apsed temple resembles these statues, and so we cannot say that these temples were built to replicate their form. Aesthetic principles were also given their due importance as even the location of these temples was well selected. Examples of this are Ħaġar

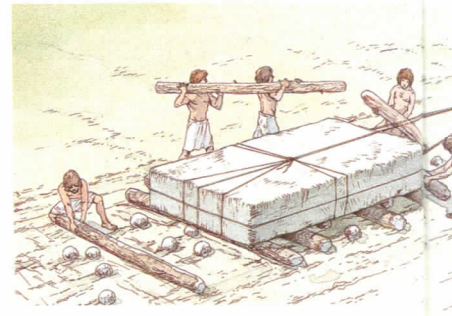
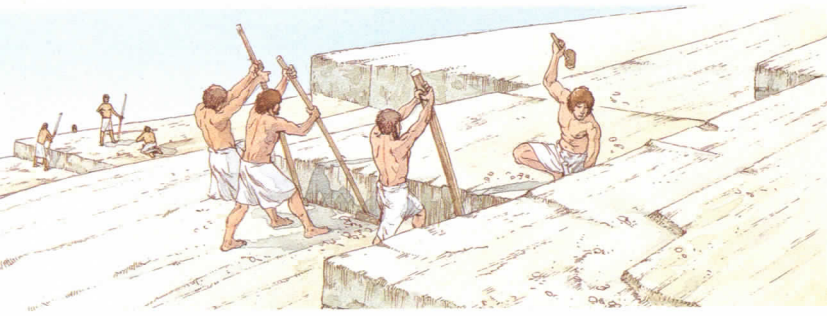
Qim and Mnajdra, which have breathtaking views, even nowadays.

Next to the temple models are two stone hour-glass shaped objects found at Tarxien which were probably used as small sacrificial altars. We have no evidence whatsoever of human sacrifice in the Neolithic Period and no evidence of human burials was found inside the temples during the Temple Period. Inhumation was restricted to the underground burial sites such as the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum. The only evidence we have of human cremation in the Tarxien Temples dates to the Tarxien Cemetery Period, in the Bronze Age.

We have quite a number of large stone blocks which adorn the various temples. The one excavated at Xrobb l-Għaġin, has decoration in the form of pitting. This stone block was the lintel of a niche and was supported by a pair of pillars 30 centimetres high.



**Temple facade model, Showcase 7:**  
**Material:** stone  
**Provenance:** Tarxien temple



**Temple-building techniques in an artistic reconstruction. From left, quarrying the stone, transporting it, and adding timbers to support the roof**

Showcase 8 contains implements made of various materials all coming from Tarxien or Mgarr temples. The artefact on the left was probably part of a hammer. The hole in the middle suggests that it had a handle fixed in it, probably made of wood. The other three stone objects on the right could have served the same purpose. The middle section of this showcase holds a number of bone points, flint, chert, and obsidian, all tools used for finer details.

On top of Showcase 8 there is a particular stone, excavated from Tarxien Temples, the shape of which suggests that, whatever its use, it was probably handled by two people. It could have been used as a grinding tool or possibly also as a weight.

A number of experiments have been carried out to figure how these temples were built during a time when the tools were mainly made of stone or wood, since metal was not yet available. All the temples are built with two types of local stone; the globigerina limestone or the coralline limestone. The process started with quarrying the stone, then transporting it on site. Some blocks had to be carried for quite a distance and in some cases, for example at Ġgantija, up a slope. Rollers made of stone and logs were probably placed under the stone blocks, which were then manually pulled by ropes, possibly with the aid of animals. Big stone balls, such as the ones displayed in

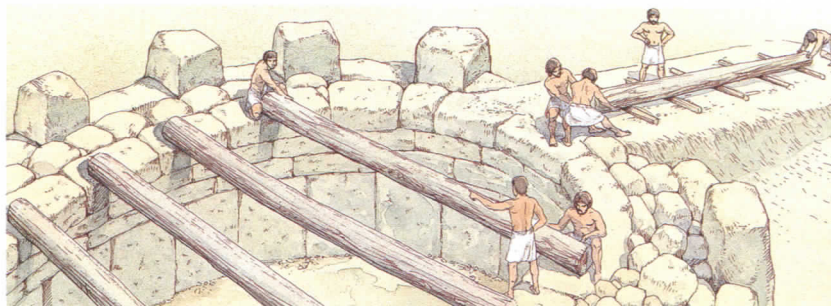
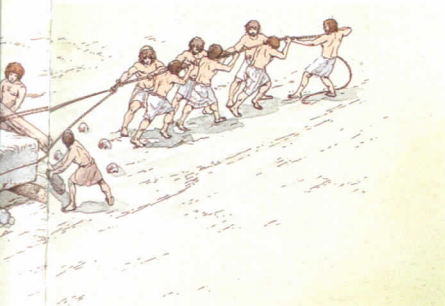
**Stone rollers**

*Material: stone*

*Provenance: various*







this room, were found in temples and it has been suggested that they were used in the transporting process. However, they were also found inside the Hypogeum, where no need for such stone rollers was needed since all the interior architecture is carved out of the rock.

Once the megaliths were brought on site, it has been suggested that a ramp made of earth was made. The stone block would then be rolled on the ramp and manoeuvred to fall in its place. The stone was probably adjusted by means of levers, as the notches on the bases of some stone blocks show. The earth ramp would then be dismantled and remounted to accommodate the next block. Co-ordination and organization must have played an important role since the transportation and erection of massive stone blocks, which are evidently very heavy, is no easy task.

Next to these stone rollers, one can see another stone block this time coming from Bugibba temple and decorated with spiral motifs.

To its right there are a number a stones made of Globigerina limestone which have a distinct shape. The smallest one, enclosed on a stand, has particular features. It has five incised vertical parallel lines running from the tip of the object and ending with a horizontal line at mid-body of the stone. The front part of the stone has red pigment.

**Showcase 9** shows a small model of a temple façade carved in stone. This example, coming from Ta' Hāgrat temple, Mġarr, is the key artefact quoted in discussions as to whether the temples were roofed over. This stone carving clearly shows that this building was roofed over partially with corbelled stones, then with horizontal slabs. It also shows a trilithon entrance, typical of a temple façade. Nowadays none of the temples have roofs and the reasons could be various. It could be that perishable material such as wood was used, or that the roof stones were reutilized in successive periods, when the temples were no longer being used.

**Conical Stone**  
**Material:** stone  
**Provenance:** Tarxien temple



Right: Details of the roof at the 'holy of holies' at the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum



Below: 'Floral' altar, Showcase 10

*Material:* stone  
*Provenance:* Haġar Qim

Bottom: Temple model, Showcase 9

*Material:* stone  
*Provenance:* Ta' Haġrat, Mgarr



A representation of a roof is shown at the 'Holy of Holies' inside the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum.

The reasons why we think that these megalithic structures were roofed over are numerous. We have evidence to show us that some of the interior megaliths were plastered and so the roofs would have protected these decorations. The stone blocks, or altars as are commonly called, which are currently displayed in Room 6 at the National Museum of Archaeology, were in a good state of preservation

upon excavation. Replicas of these stone blocks were made, using the same type of stone and placed in the same locations as found within the temple. These replicas have weathered a lot after 30 years, whereas the Tarxien Temples were used for at least 500 years. On the other hand, it can be said that weathered stone blocks could have been replaced by new ones during the time when the temples were in use.

**Showcase 10** displays an altar excavated from Haġar Qim and carved from one block of globigerina limestone. The pairs opposite each other have an identical design but slightly different from the other pair. The decoration shows a type of plant growing in a pot. Its concave top suggests that it could have served as a recipient and it could have been used for animal sacrifices.

The inner section of Room 2 displays a number of different-sized artefacts featuring animals. We have bone remains and artistic representations of domestic animals such as sheep, goats,





and cattle, dating to the Neolithic Period. The economy of these first settlers was based on mixed farming, thus utilizing crops and domestic animals for their daily needs. The advantage of agriculture is that it enables people to store supplies for drier months, thus guaranteeing a continuous supply of food. Consequentially they could settle down in one place for longer periods. Hunting and food gathering, which was mainly used by their ancestors as their main sources of livelihood was probably still made partial use of, and we can also suppose that they exploited the islands' marine food resource – fish.

In **Showcase 11** there are a number of sherds and a reconstructed plate which display animal motifs. The top right sherd shows a clear rendition of two bulls. The incised lines are filled with red ochre. The bulls depicted here, as in the Tarxien stone blocks, represent the humped type. In this same showcase, of particular interest, is a reconstructed shallow plate, the interior of which is decorated with scratched representations of quadrupeds, of which some are bulls. These scratched lines, were filled with white paste, and then covered with red ochre.



On the wall of this room, we can see two copies of the original stone blocks, which are still in situ at the side chamber of Tarxien temples. They both show reliefs of bulls. On one of the original stone blocks, one can also see a sow with fourteen suckling piglets. These reliefs are usually interpreted as fertility images since the bull is normally associated with male virility. On the other hand, the sow is interpreted as the female counterpart, especially since it is shown with its newly-born piglets.

Right below these casts are two original stone friezes which were also found at Tarxien temples. The top one shows four sheep, and two animals in front, a ram and a pig. This stone is not complete and thus this animal 'procession' could have been larger. The stone below it has two rows of eleven sheep.



**Sherd with bull representation, Showcase 11**  
**Material:** ceramic  
**Provenance:** Tarxien temple



**Stone friezes depicting animal processions**  
**Material:** stone  
**Provenance:** Tarxien temple



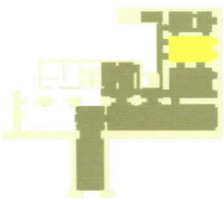
Fish representations from Bugibba stone block

Showcase 12 is full of artistic renderings which feature various animals, birds, and fish, which have been crafted out of a variety of media; stone, alabaster, ceramic, and shell. We cannot say what they were used for, although some were probably worn as amulets since they have drilled holes. Such amulets come in the form of sitting birds and other animals which look like cattle. In this showcase there are also a number of figures which are not so easily recognizable.

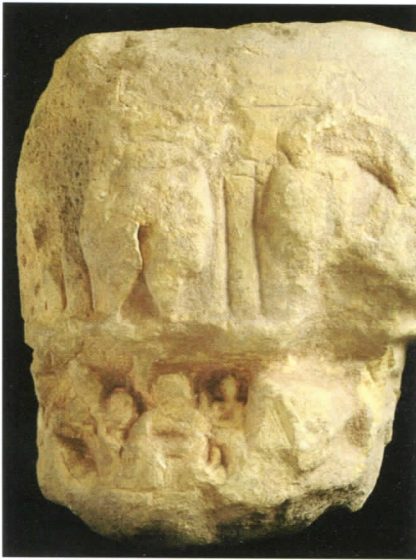
Before moving on to Room 3, we find another stone block, this time depicting four fish. This was found at the Bugibba temple, the remains of which are unfortunately integrated within a hotel. This temple was close to the sea and this link must have had a particular meaning. This place would have been very appropriate for a shrine which was probably used by fishermen.

Room 3 is dedicated to human representations. During the later Temple Period, the artistic creativity shown via the human representations is remarkable. Since such human representations are so abundant, and were mainly found inside the

temples, the conclusion that these statues formed part of a ritual is quite plausible. These statues, which vary in size (from 4mm to 2.7m) and shape, were given various attributes throughout the years and most were linked to a fertility cult. They have been called, amongst other terms, Mother Goddesses, Fat Ladies, Deities, and Priests. It is, however, important to point out that most of these statues are asexual, and this calls for a re-evaluation of these given names. The fact that most of them are corpulent is in itself an indication of how these people perceived their 'deity'. Corpulence was, up to some years ago, widely conceived as a sign of good health and fertility. Fertility for these communities was a very important factor, since it meant continuation of life, the same life which depended on agriculture and animal husbandry. So these human representations could have represented deities to whom sacrifices were carried out in return for good harvests of crops and healthy life. Although most of them are asexual, there are some statues which are clearly female, such as the 'Venus of Malta' and the 'Sleeping Lady'. What is surely evident is that these human renderings are great artistic merits to the artists who carved them out of the stone or moulded them







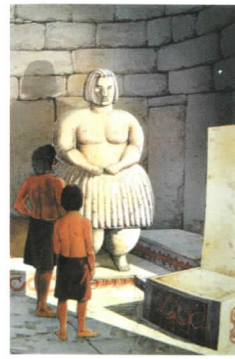
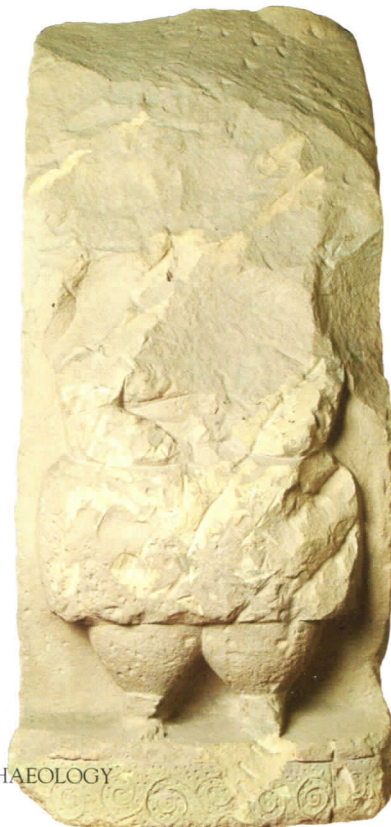
from clay. The attention that is given to certain details is extraordinary, even more so in the two masterpieces just mentioned.

This room is dominated by the colossal incomplete stone statue found at Tarxien temples which, if complete, would have stood at nearly 3 metres high. It is the largest statue ever found and it seems that this was the 'deity' to whom the temple was dedicated since it occupied a prominent position in the temple. Close to it were the 'sacrificial' altar and a number of stone blocks, which are now in Room 6. The rest of the statue was never found and it is probable that its missing part was hacked by local farmers when ploughing the soil before the temple was excavated. It is important to note that these temples were buried under the soil until they were excavated in 1915.

Another large statue was discovered at Tas-Silġ temple, Marsaxlokk. Although this statue has been heavily damaged, we can see from the remains that it would have had the same corpulent shape that the other statues have.

Showcase 13 has two fragments of statues which were excavated from Tarxien temples. They both represent the lower parts of a seated figure. The one on the right-hand side is of particular interest, since a closer look at its left side shows other carvings. Two figures of the corpulent type are outlined and recessed beneath them are other smaller figures. Whether they represented children, people being given divine protection, or possibly deities of lesser importance, are just some hypotheses.

Showcase 14 is dedicated to the larger human stone representations which were found at Haġar Qim. They range in height from 50 to 75cm. Immediately evident is the repeated corpulence which recurs in the Temple Period statuary. Thickset from the waist down, their buttocks and thighs are rendered in outsized proportions. A particular feature is



**Top:** An artistic impression of how the Tarxien colossal figure could have looked

**Above:** Photo of the Tarxien colossal statue *in situ* during the excavations

**Top left:** Fragment of a figurine, Showcase 13, **Material:** stone **Provenance:** Tarxien temple

**Tas-Silġ statue**  
**Material:** stone  
**Provenance:** Tas-Silġ

**Large standing statue,**  
**Showcase 14**  
**Material:** stone  
**Provenance:** Haġar  
 Qim



**Seated statues,**  
**Showcase 15**  
**Material:** stone  
**Provenance:** Haġar  
 Qim



**'Pregnant' figure,**  
**Showcase 18**  
**Material:** Clay  
**Provenance:** Tarxien  
 temple



that most of the standing statues have the same arm position; their left arm resting on the folds of their waist, while the right arm is by their right side. There are only a few exceptions to this. Whether or not all the statues were made by the same group of artists

is difficult to tell, as it is also very difficult to ascertain whether this arm position had a significant meaning.

**Showcase 15** exhibits the seated versions of these corpulent figures. Since they are sitting down, the emphasis on their bulky buttocks and thighs is even more obvious. They are shown with their feet tucked under them. A noticeable feature is that all these sizeable statues are headless. Instead of the head there is a hollow indicating that such statues were purposely carved to have interchangeable heads. Not many heads of the right proportions have been found and it could be that they were made of a perishable material, such as wood. Four of the statues from Haġar Qim were found in a cache under a step leading to the one-apsed annexe. They could have been placed there by the faithful for safe-keeping





or they could have been used for some type of cult. A closer look at the middle one in the front row will reveal the end of a pigtail carved on the back.

**Showcase 16** brings together a collection of human heads from various sites. They are mainly made of stone or clay, with the exception of a small one made of alabaster (bottom shelf, middle, front) and a head carved out of dripstone (top shelf, far right).

**Showcase 17** The largest statue in this showcase was found headless in a small pit in the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum. In the same pit, two



**Far left:**  
Alabaster figures  
Showcase 17  
**Material:** alabaster  
**Provenance:**  
Hal Saflieni

**Left:**  
Large standing statue  
Showcase 17  
**Material:** Stone  
**Provenance:**  
Hagar Qim

limestone heads were found, one of which, displayed in the showcase opposite, fits perfectly in the neck socket. In this showcase one can also see two translucent alabaster figurines which were also found at the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum. These two alabaster figurines must have had quite an important significance since the material was imported and not so frequently excavated. The shorter one of the two seems to be a miniature of the bottom-right large Hagar Qim statue which is displayed in Showcase 14.

**Showcase 18** This showcase shows a variety of human representations, some incomplete. They could have been made to represent human ailments and were probably offered as votives with the expectation of a healing consequence. This ritual is still carried out nowadays in some of the local churches, where people leave something connected with their disease or disability in a particular room. If their ailment is healed, offerings are then made to the church. One artefact, coming from Tarxien Temples shows a female with one



**Embracing couple**  
Showcase 18  
**Material:** clay  
**Provenance:**  
Tarxien temple

**Bottom left:**  
Statue in fragments,  
Head, Showcase 16  
**Material:** stone  
**Provenance:**  
Hal Saflieni

**Body, Showcase 17**  
**Material:** stone  
**Provenance:**  
Hal Saflieni

**Shrine with phalli**  
**Showcase 19**  
**Material:** stone  
**Provenance:** Tarxien temple

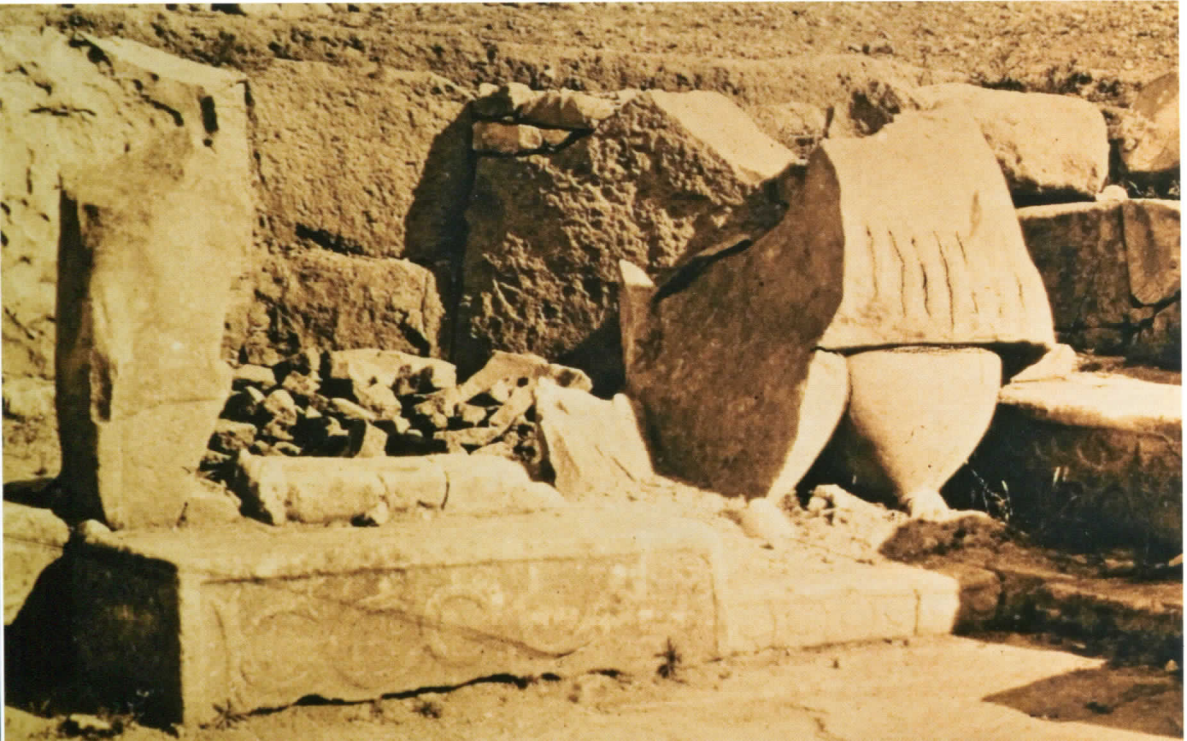


hand pointing to its genitalia. Small pieces of white shell are stuck in various parts of the body. Some say that the lines on the back represent the months of pregnancy while others state that they represent the ribs, a condition caused by a pathological disease. Within this showcase there

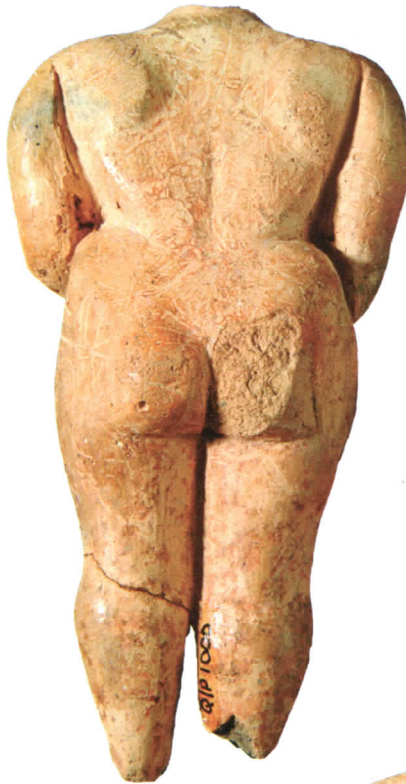
**Photo taken during the excavations at Tarxien showing the menhir close to the colossal statue**

are also other human representations which are easier to identify. One such example is the 'kissing' or 'embracing' couple, also from Tarxien Temples. This knob of clay is worked in such a manner as to show two people with their arms embracing each other. Fine incised lines characterize the hair.

**Showcase 19** This showcase presents us with a number of objects which are thought to have a phallic symbolism. So, whereas the other statues were in the past considered to be 'Mother goddesses' or 'Earth mothers', here we have the symbolic male counterparts. There is the possibility that both sexes were venerated contemporarily. Walking along the outer wall at Haġar Qim, one can see a stone triangle and pillar in front of each other. At Tarxien temples, a menhir was found close to the Tarxien colossal statue. Its top part, like that of the colossal statue was lost. Unfortunately during the excavations, this menhir was moved from its original location and it is only from excavation photos that we





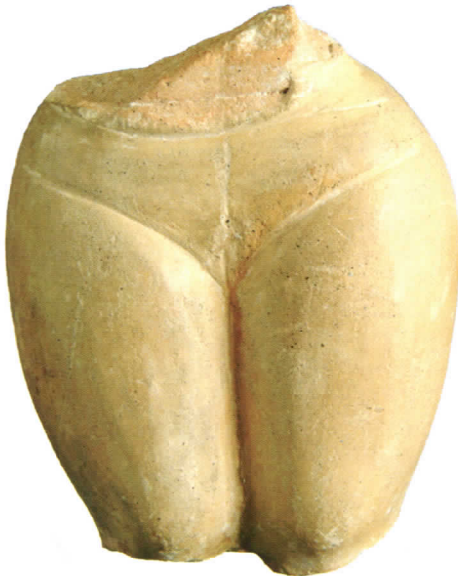


**Venus of Malta (verso and recto)**  
**Showcase 20**  
**Material: clay**  
**Provenance: Haġar Qim**

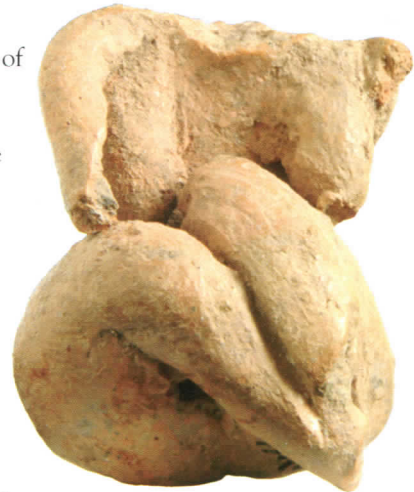
can see this. These phallic symbols probably formed part of a ritual. Some of these phallic carvings are associated with architectural elements such as the one shown in these pictures. Although most of them show one phallus, there are others

which are grouped. Some of these stone carvings have pitted decoration, which was widely used in temple decorating.

**Seated figure**  
**Showcase 20**  
**Material: clay**  
**Provenance: Tarxien temple**

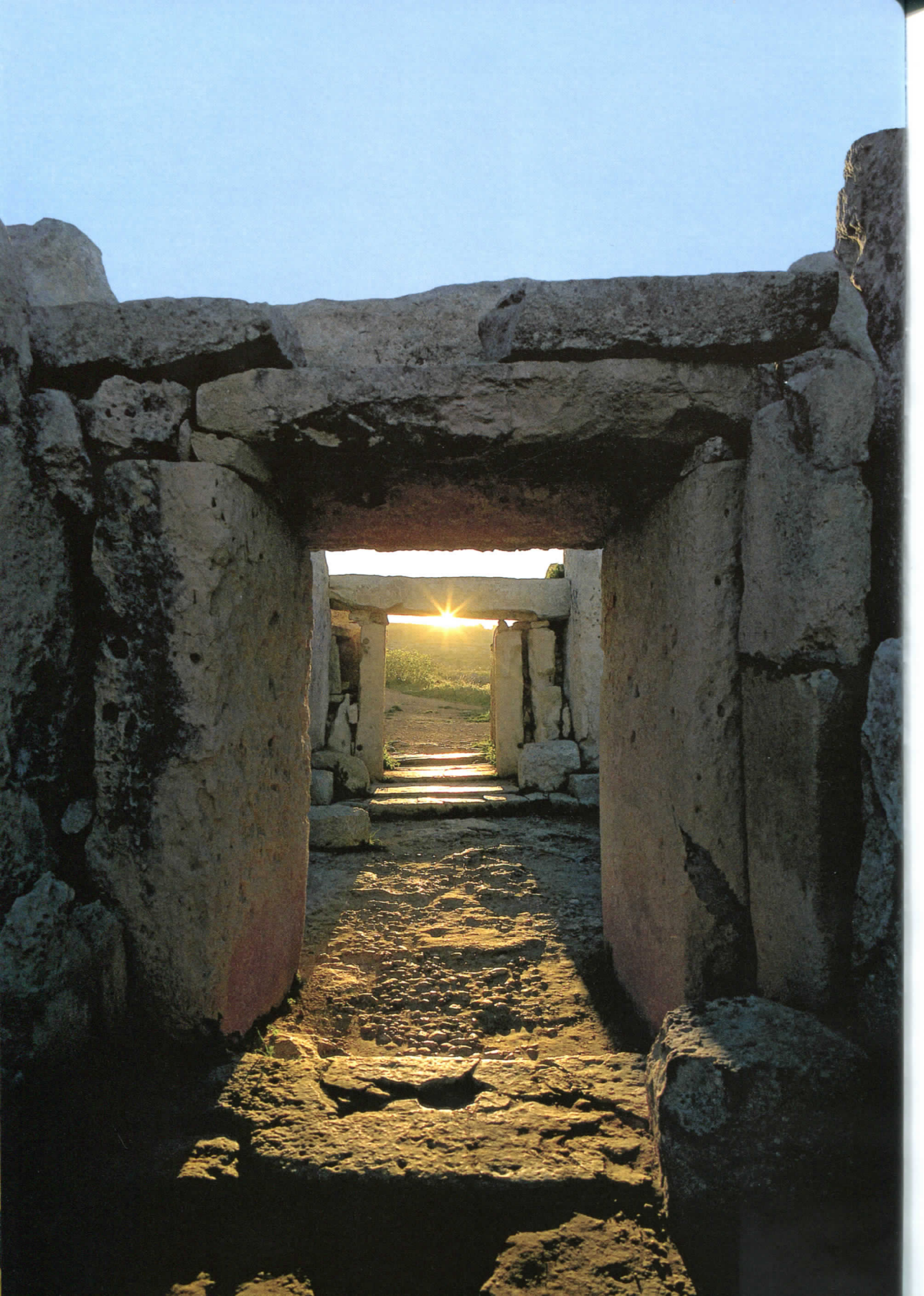


**Showcase 20** One of the masterpieces in this museum is the Venus of Malta which was found at Haġar Qim. The proportions of this masterwork are so natural and the attention given to minute details such as the back and shoulder muscles, confirms that the artisan who produced such a magnificent work of art was a professional. The statuette is undoubtedly female and does not fall within the same group of corpulent figures. The same goes for the other two small female representations which are housed in the same showcase and which were found at the Hypogeum (l.h.s) and at Tarxien (r.h.s.).



**Left:**  
**Lower fragment of female statue**  
**Showcase 20**  
**Material: clay**  
**Provenance: Hal Saflieni**



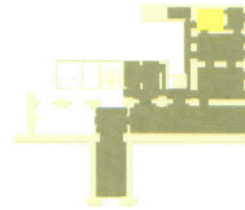




## ROOM 4

This room has four showcases showing a sample of pottery from the Temple Period, implements, personal ornaments, and also artefacts that are usually termed as 'unusual'.

Showcase 21 presents numerous artefacts which are quite unique and as such pose a dilemma as to what they actually represent. On the right-hand side of the showcase is a broken stone which was found at Tal-Qadi, Burmarrad, showing five sections separated by incised lines. Four of these sections have star-like incisions, whereas the middle one has a semi-circular incision which could represent the moon. Studies have been conducted to show that the temples were built according to the astronomical movements of stars, sun, and moon. The two temples which are mentioned most in association with temple orientation are Haġar Qim and Mnajdra. At the Mnajdra South temple, at the equinoxes (that is on 21 March and 21 September),



**Sherd with 'solar wheel' design**  
**Showcase 21**  
*Material:* clay  
*Provenance:* Haġar Qim



**Incised pebble**  
**Showcase 21**  
*Material:* pebble  
*Provenance:* Tarxien temple

one can see the sun rising right through the middle of the doorway. At the solstices (21 December and 21 June) the rays of the rising sun, hit the periphery of a standing block showing a narrow beam of light, on the left-hand block in the summer solstice and on the right-hand block in the winter solstice. In the small Mnajdra temple, the temple on the right-hand side of the façade, there are two vertical stone blocks, each with rows of drilled holes. Experts attest that these stones served to mark the interval of days between the risings of the stars.

The sherd in front of this stone slab is usually described as the 'solar wheel' owing to its incisions which resemble those of a sun's ray on the outside and wheel spokes on the inner part. In the front row there is a black bead, found at Tarxien temples, with gold inlay and a gem in the middle.



**Gold inlaid cylinder**  
**Showcase 21**  
*Material:* dark green stone  
*Provenance:* Tarxien temple



**Stone slab**  
**Showcase 21**  
*Material:* stone  
*Provenance:* Tal-Qadi

A very smooth pebble, displayed right next to it bears the same incisions. To date we have no evidence what this sign is meant to represent.

Showcase 22 shows a variety of artefacts made from different materials but which have one thing

in common. These were, along with many others, used as implements to carve and decorate all the artistic representations which are displayed in this Museum, at the temples, and in many other sites all over Malta and Gozo.

**Showcase 23** shows a variety of vessels which vary in size and shape. They belong to the Temple Period and are later than the ones mentioned in the first parts of this book. These pottery vessels belong to the Mġarr, Ġgantija, Saflieni, and Tarxien Phases. The Mġarr Phase is a continuation of the Żebbuġ Phase pottery but now the incisions are broader and filled with white paste which was occasionally covered with red ochre. This phase seems to be a transition period between the Żebbuġ and the Ġgantija Phases, since the

pottery finds are far less abundant than other phases. The Ġgantija Phase gives us pottery which has lightly-scratched lines, some of which are still covered in red ochre. It is probable that these lines were made only to provide a base for the red ochre to adhere to. The Saflieni Phase is characterized by a new decorative motif, curved double lines, with vertical lines in between. Like the Mġarr Phase, this seems to be another transitional phase paving the way for the rich Tarxien Phase, which gives us a variety of new shapes, including the amphorae, which vary in size.

**Showcase 24** displays a variety of faience, shell, and stone beads which were used as personal ornaments. Stone and greenstone pendants were also used to complement. As mentioned earlier, greenstone is not a local resource and was thus imported. These could have been used as personal ornaments, charms, or as part of a ritual. There are also circular artefacts made of shell with two perforated holes on one side. It has been suggested that these were some form of buttons. Such items were also found in burials, so it could be deduced that they formed part of clothing, for which we have no evidence due to the perishable nature of material used.

**Necklace**  
**Showcase 24**  
**Material:** shell and bone  
**Provenance:** various



**Amphorae**  
**Showcase 23**  
**Material:** clay  
**Provenance:** Tarxien temple



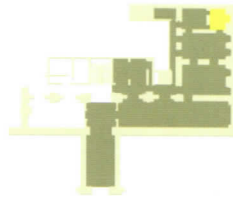


**Greenstone pendants**  
**Showcase 24**  
*Material: greenstone*  
*Provenance: various*

**Room 5**

**Showcase 25** is one of the most sought since it displays the Sleeping Lady. This clay figurine, which was discovered at the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum, represents a woman in a very natural sleeping position. She is naked from the waist upwards, but the lower part of her body is covered with a skirt, which gives the impression of being embroidered. Next to the

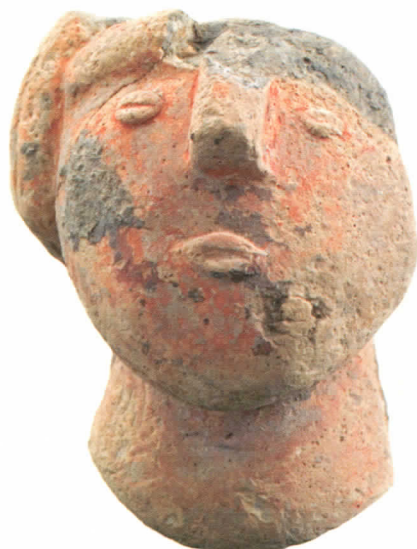
showcase is a panel which illustrates the base of the statuette. This base was rendered with extreme detail and one is immediately drawn to the high level of craftsmanship necessary to produce such a masterpiece. A number of hypotheses surround this statuette, the most common ones being that it was a personification of death or that it represented a deity during rituals.



**Showcase 25:**  
**'Sleeping Lady'**  
*Material: clay*  
*Provenance:*  
**Hal Saflieni**

## CLOTHING AND FACIAL CHARACTERISTICS

From these statues we can gather that their clothing consisted mainly of skirts which covered the lower part of the body. This does not automatically indicate that the statues represented are female. Roman males wore skirts and Scots still do on special occasions. All the other statues which do not have this skirt are completely naked. With regards to the face, a distinct feature is the almond-shaped eyes which can clearly be seen in the selection of heads shown in Showcase 16. Another noticeable aspect is the hairstyle. Almost all the hair that can be seen in the head carvings is shown in a short bob style. Some exceptions show long hair in the form of plaits or pony tails such as can be seen in a head (showcase 16) and a statue in showcase 15.





**Showcase 26** displays two artefacts also from Hal Saflieni Hypogeum. One represents a human figure facing downwards on a bed. Its head and neck are broken off, but just like the Sleeping Lady, is naked to the waist and has a skirt. The other artefact is made of stone and looks like a fish on a bed, however, it could be an incomplete statue. Even the beds of these two artefacts were rendered in the same manner as that of the Sleeping Lady.

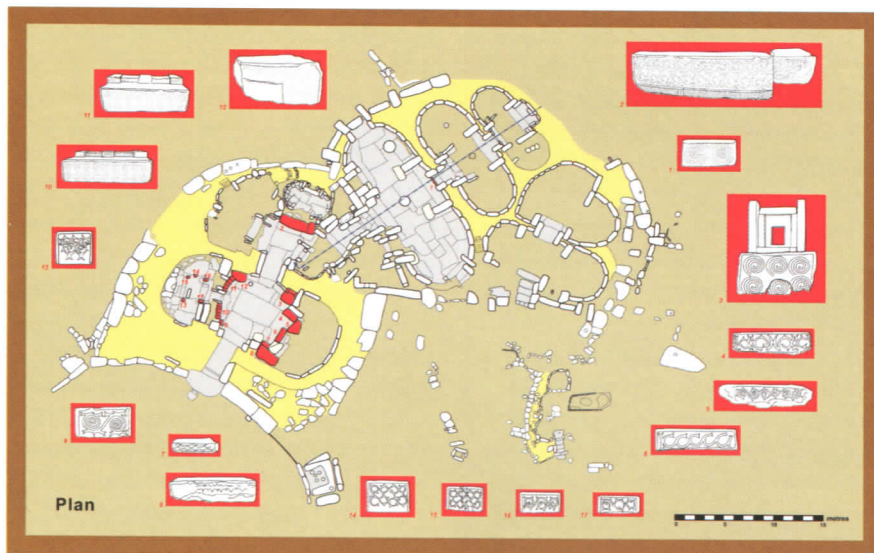
### Room 6

This hall is mainly adorned with a number of stone blocks and altars from the Tarxien temples. Though similar stone blocks and altars were also found in the other temples, the



Tarxien temples, being the latest of these megalithic structures, boast the most decorative and quantitative of these decorative designs. A plan of the temples has been reproduced and the blocks are marked to show their original place in the temples. This way one can envisage the location that the stone blocks originally occupied in the temples. They were brought over to the National Museum of Archaeology so as to minimize their deterioration and accurate copies were made and placed in the temple. At first glance, immediately evident is the massiveness of most of them, and the complex spiral decorations. These stone blocks added elaborate decoration to the temples' already artistic achievements.

The main decorations are pitting and spirals. Pitting is considered to be the earliest form of decoration whereas the spirals come in a variety of designs. It is important to point out that no two stone blocks are decorated in the same manner. At times the spirals are bordered and this brings out the decorated reliefs more prominently. We can only speculate





as to the meaning of these artistic representations. One must not forget that all these stone carvings were carried out with the same limited tools which were mentioned earlier on, such as bone points, flint/ chert blades, and stone tools, possibly with the help of other perishable materials such as wood.

The spirals, on the other hand, are a bit more complex and one must note the precision with which such decorations were made. Spirals are recognized world-wide as the symbol of eternity, everlasting life, and continuity, amongst others. It is also possible that the spirals, which sometimes tend to look floral, were just abstract motifs for decoration. Spirals also featured on pottery and, whatever their meaning, they served as a communication medium which also gave a social identity.

Such decorations, whether purely aesthetic or meaningful, were carefully perceived in a manner that some were discarded to make space for other, newer ones. It has been noted that some stone blocks were reutilized and

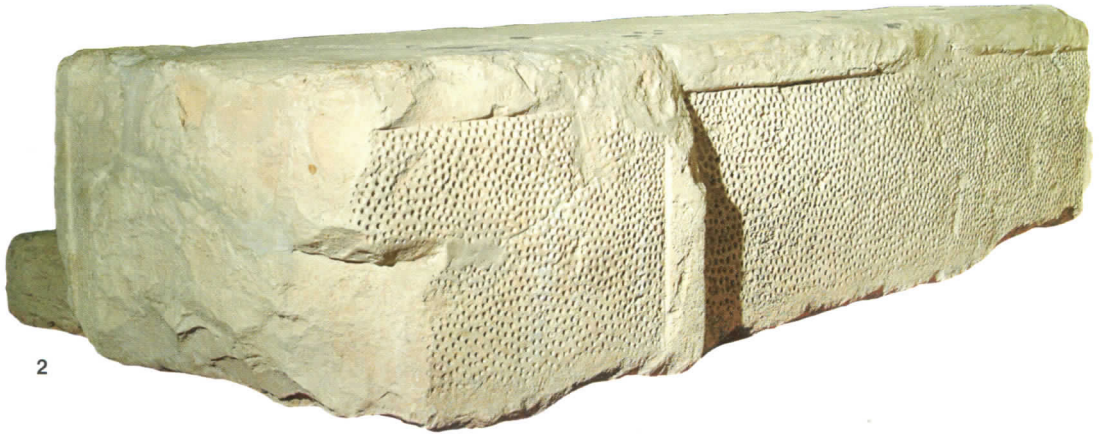
re-decorated. We can compare this to how we sometimes move furniture around in our homes or change furnishings. Two blocks in particular attest to this.

**1.** Shows the largest stone block, possibly used as an altar. If one notices the decoration, the bottom strip, which is more protruding than the rest of the stone, is decorated with pitting. Looking at the original photo of when this block was excavated, it is evident that this lower part was below the flooring, thus only the upper part of the stone was visible. In all probability, the whole stone was originally decorated with pitting. Needing to change the decoration and possibly also the location of the stone, the temple people hacked away the upper part, leaving only the bottom pitting, which they eventually buried. They then re-decorated the rest with spirals.

**2 & 3** show the same stone block but decorated differently on both sides. Upon excavation it was found with the diamond-shaped decoration facing outwards. Upon its removal to be brought over to the national Museum of Archaeology, it was noted that on the other side it had a pitted decoration which suggested that this stone must have been reutilized.

Some of these stone blocks were probably used as altars. The large





'sacrificial' altar found at the farthest right-hand corner of the hall, gives us ample evidence to corroborate such a practice. This altar, which was situated close to the Tarxien colossal stone figure, is made up of a trilithon structure, which very much resembles the temples' entrances. This trilithon arrangement is flanked by two upright stones. Inside the trilithon there is a window-like opening. In front of this assemblage is a big block of stone with a semi-circular removable plug on the middle front part. This big stone is hollow at the back and it was found stuffed with domestic animal bones. The hole in the front, upon

removal of the stone plug, contained a long flint blade (the first item found, therefore the last item placed), animal bones, shells, pot sherds, a bone spatula, and flint flakes. This is one of the main finds that prompt archaeologists to attest that animal sacrifice was one of the rituals that took place inside the temples. Apart from this, quantities of animal bones were found in the temples. The complete lack of human bones inside the same temples, on the other hand, suggests that no human sacrifices took place.

Other stone blocks, although varying in dimensions, probably acted



**Altar**  
**Material:**  
 stone  
**Provenance:**  
 Tarxien temple



In this hall one will notice a glass floor panel with architecture beneath it. These remains were discovered in 1996 when works were being carried out to refurbish the museum. An excavation was carried out and beneath the glass panel one can see a stairway which led to Carls Street. This stairwell formed part of the original sixteenth-century building which was, a century later, partially demolished.

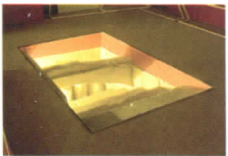
Before exiting this room there is a stone block on the right-hand side which was found at Haġar Qim. This stone block was found behind the floral stone altar which is displayed in Room 2.

Showcase 27 depicts a large stone cup. This restored cup was also found at Haġar Qim and it probably served as a receptacle or for storage.

Walking out of the Lobby area, we come across

two large rectangular vertical stone blocks which were unearthed from Tarxien temples and the two large pottery vessels from the same temple. The spirals on these two screens are shown in relief on a pitted background. The precision of these spirals almost gives us the impression that the designs were measured before being carved.

On either side of the hall there are two large ceramic bowls. On the right-hand side, there is a carinated bowl with volute decorations. It has four pairs of tunnel handles, which are too small for human fingers. In all probability, rope was inserted



**Floor glass panel showing parts of the original 16th-century building**

as screens. These screens were used to bar access to certain areas within the temple, which were probably reserved to a limited number of people. Although some were quite large, like the two which are currently placed in the lobby area, and acted as physical barriers, others were probably used as a symbolic deterrent.







fig leaves and in all probability they were used to line the mould for this bowl so that the clay would not adhere to the mould. A vessel of this size was definitely made in a mould, or it would otherwise collapse. The fig leaves thus left their mark on the clay vessel, leaving us with evidence of how this particular bowl was made.

**Large ceramic carinated bowl**  
**Showcase 29**  
*Material:* clay  
*Provenance:* Tarxien temple

inside these handles and served as an extension to the handles themselves. Three of these tunnel handles are made up of two holes, whereas the fourth one has three holes. The ceramic bowl on the left has pellet decoration. This type of decoration was made by applying pellets of clay to the body of the bowl before firing. A close inspection to the bottom part of this bowl shows some incised markings. These are markings of



**Left: Detail of restored bowl**

**Below: Restored bowl**  
**Showcase 28**  
*Material:* clay  
*Provenance:* Tarxien temple



The end of the Temple Period with all its glorious artefacts, statues, and monuments, does not pave the way to a continuation of culture, like we saw during the various phases of the early Neolithic Period. After the temple Period there is a complete break and the following phase, the Bronze Age, is so different, in pottery, figurines, and also the very limited use of the magnificent megalithic structures, that such evidence suggests a complete change in culture, possibly also of people. The new arrivals brought with them a new culture and thus a new phase – the Bronze Age, aptly named throughout the world for the introduction during this period of bronze and copper. Most of the temples stopped being used altogether or, in the case of Tarxien, used in a different manner.

A number of reasons could be attributed to the end of the Temple Period; epidemic plague, drought, famine, but it is very difficult with the evidence we have to give a factual reason for these people's abandonment. These people, who have left us such outstanding monuments, seem to have disappeared as mysteriously as their culture had appeared.

As we have seen, during the Neolithic Period in Malta, especially

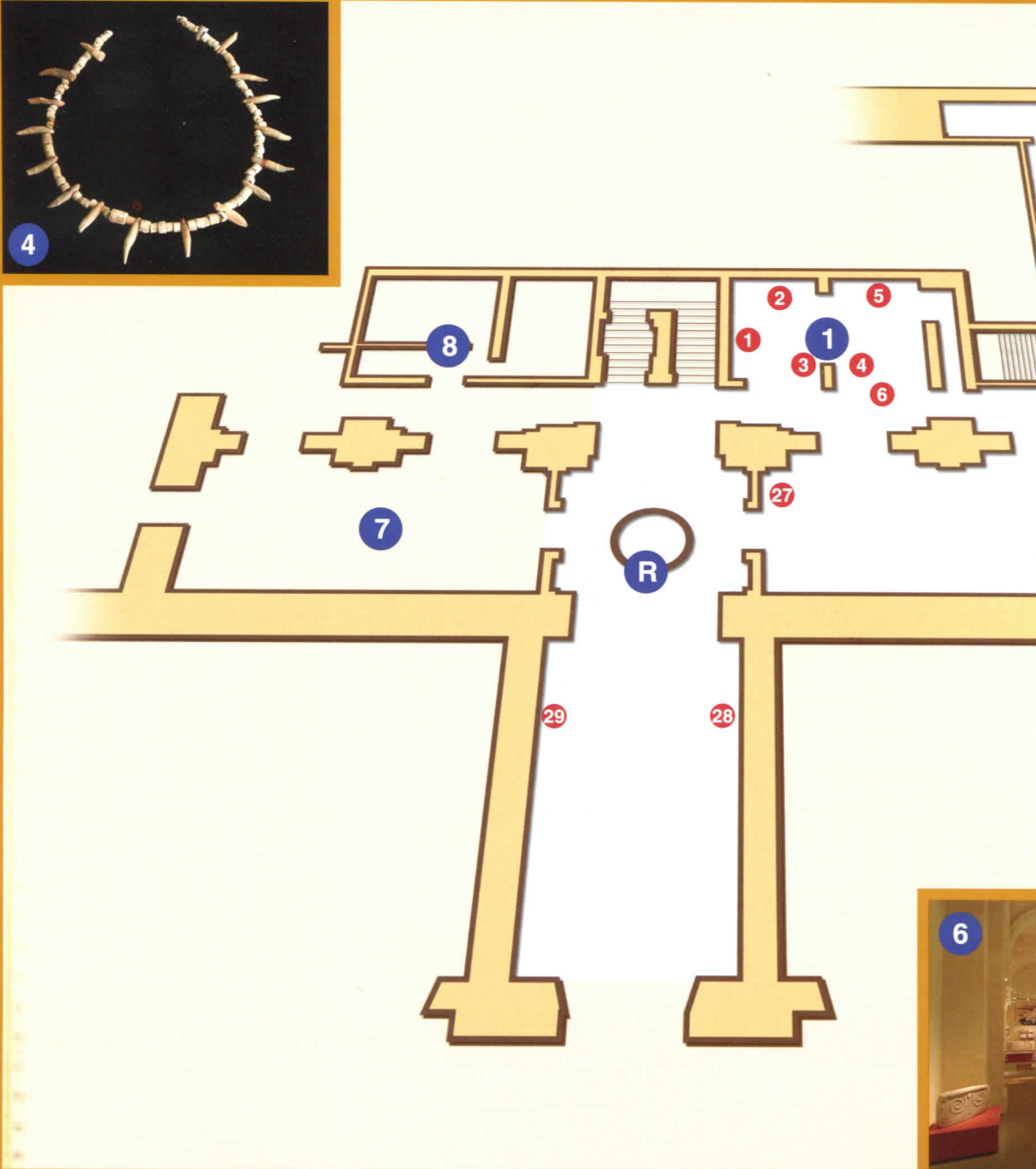
during the Temple Period, there was a cultural and artistic development that turned out to be unique to the Maltese islands. We have gone through the megalithic architecture, pottery styles and human representations amongst others, which are all identity tags of the people who settled on our small but prestigiously geographically positioned islands.

It is immediately evident, that although the Maltese islands are small (314 sq km) and their resources were, and are still, very limited, the Neolithic remains are very abundant. The limitation of resources did not hinder our ancestors from leaving us with a grandiose inheritance. It is now our duty to make sure that such a unique legacy is preserved for the enjoyment of all future generations.

The aim of this guide book is to familiarize the visitor with the Maltese Neolithic Period and to introduce the numerous sites which are scattered all over Malta and Gozo. All efforts have been made to give an overview of what was possibly going on during the Neolithic Period in Malta, but no description can give justice to all the sites which have to be visited to be fully appreciated.





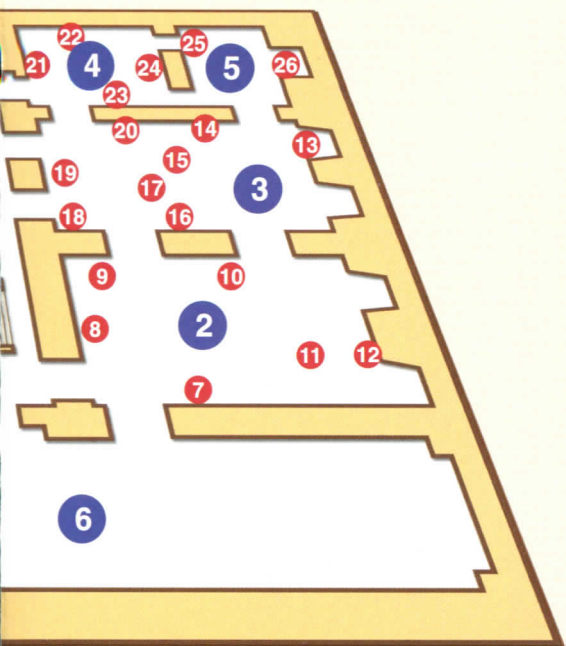




# The National Museum of Archaeology

R Ticket counter

1. Room 1
2. Room 2
3. Room 3
4. Room 4
5. Room 5
6. Room 6
7. Museum Shop
8. Rest Rooms





## GLOSSARY

**artefact** a man-made object

**carination** a sharp break in curve of a vessel's profile, resulting in a projecting angle

**corbelling** a technique for roofing stone chambers. The upper parts of the wall partially overlap the ones below until the stones eventually meet or leave only a small gap.

**Early Neolithic period in Malta** 5200-4100 BC

**Ġgantija phase** 3600-3000 BC

**Ghar Dalam phase** 5200-4500 BC

**Grey Skorba phase** 4500-4400 BC

**inhumation** the practice of burying the dead

**knapping** the skill of breaking flakes of various sizes from flint, chert or obsidian cores

**megalithic** built of large stones

**menhir** a single vertical standing stone usually large in size

**Mġarr phase** 3800-3600 BC

**Neolithic period in Malta** 5200-2500 BC

**quern** a grinding stone

**Red Skorba phase** 4400-4100 BC

**Safflieni phase** 3300-3000 BC

**sherd** a broken fragment of pottery

**slip** a thin layer of fine clay applied to the clay vessel before firing. This is done by dipping the pot in a thick liquid mixture of clay and water

**spiral** an artistic motif consisting of a curve of constantly increasing diameter

**Tarxien phase** 3000-2500 BC

**Temple period** 4000-2500 BC

**trilithon** a structure consisting of two upright stones with a third placed horizontally on them

**typology** the study of the shape of artefacts

**Żebbuġ phase** 4100-3800 BC

### Acknowledgements

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THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY IS HOUSED IN ONE OF THE MOST STYLISH BAROQUE BUILDINGS STILL DISTINGUISHABLE IN VALETTA, MORE PRECISELY AT THE AUBERGE DE PROVENCE, IN REPUBLIC STREET. THE GROUND FLOOR HOSTS ARTEFACTS FROM MALTA'S UNIQUE NEOLITHIC PERIOD, WHICH SPANS FROM THE GHAR DALAM PHASE TO THE TARXIEN PHASE. ARTEFACTS OF PARTICULAR DISTINCTION ARE THE 'SLEEPING LADY' AND THE 'VENUS OF MALTA'. THE DISPLAY INCLUDES NUMEROUS ARTEFACTS USED AS IMPLEMENTS, HUMAN AND ANIMAL FIGURINES, AS WELL AS PERSONAL DECORATIVE ITEMS. A NUMBER OF MONUMENTAL ARCHITECTURAL ALTARS ILLUMINATE THE ART OF THE ANCIENT PREHISTORIC CRAFTSMEN.



Heritage Malta