Exploring the Maltese Prehistoric Temple Culture

papers
presentations
illustrations

EMPTC
Exploring the Maltese Prehistoric Temple Culture - The Conference
25, 26, 27 September 2003, MALTA

Enlightening, Stimulating, Provocative
EMPTC
Introduction

EXPLORING THE MALTESE PREHISTORIC TEMPLE CULTURE

The EMPTC 2003 Conference
24, 25, 26, 27 September 2003
St. James Cavalier Centre for Creativity. Valletta, Malta

organized by:
Linda C. Eneix

EMPTC
was intended as a broad examination of the megalithic monuments of Malta and Gozo from a variety of fields of research in an attempt to fill some of the gaps in understanding who these amazing prehistoric people were and what happened to them.

From its inception, it was the goal of this event to encourage multi-disciplinary input; to facilitate trans-disciplinary exchange of studies as focused on a common interest: identifying and understanding the “temple culture” of the Maltese islands.

If all the questions were clear, and all the answers were obvious, we wouldn’t need a conference.

Our speakers came from many backgrounds: from academics and scientists to published writers.

Perhaps its best introduction is the summary by Dr. David H. Trump found at conclusion of this document.

Assistance with guest accommodation and venue provided by

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Malta Tourism Authority
OPENING CEREMONIES

A selection of OPENING PRESENTATIONS can be found elsewhere on this CD.

His Excellency
Mr. Guido de Marco
President of Malta

Honorable
Mrs. Giovanna DeBono
Minister for Gozo

Honorable
Dr. Frances Zammit Dimech
Minister for Tourism

Honorable
Mr. Jesmond Mugliett
Minister for Youth and the Arts

Ms. Linda C. Eneix
The OTS Foundation

Professor Anthony Bonanno
University of Malta

Mr. Martin Scicluna
Din L’Art Helwa

Prof. Anthony H. B. de Bono
Archeology Society of Malta

Splendid Isolation?
Influences that shaped an Island Culture

Dr. JoAnn Cassar
ICOMOS, Malta

Megalithic sites: ICOMOS concern
for a sustainable long term strategy for their conservation

~ ~ ~

Film Documentary - Suzanne Marie Psaila
The Story of the Hypogeum

Other videos presented at conference sessions produced by and property of:

Granada Television
Team Entertainment
Discovery Communications

CONFERENCE PRESENTERS and TITLES

THE SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Richard Rudgley
Anthony Bonanno  *  Chris Hunt
Patrick Schembri  *  Robert H. Tykot
Full Papers (> are filed alphabetically by author’s last name. Readers may wish to make note of files of greatest interest. Presentations that were not submitted for publication are represented by abstracts on this CD.

Fritz Blakolmer
University of Vienna
(>) Art and Monumentality in Prehistoric Malta, A View From the Aegean

Nicolo Bruno
University of Catania
(>) The Influence of Maltese Temples on Sicilian Funerary Architecture in the Early Bronze Age

Anton Bugeja
University of Malta
(>) On Repetitive Vertical Architectural Elements in the Temple Culture of the Maltese Islands

Francis A Carroll, Katrin Fenech, Anthony Bonanno, Christopher Hunt, Anne M Jones, Patrick J Schembri
a: Department of Geographical & Environmental Sciences, University of Huddersfield; b: Department of Classics & Archaeology, University of Malta; c: Department of Biology, University of Malta
(>) The Past Environment of the Maltese Islands: The Marsa cores

Massimo Cultraro
Istituto per i Beni Archeologici, Sicily
(>) Rethinking the Relationships Between Sicily and the Maltese Islands During the Copper Age: A View From the Aegean Prehistory

Esther Drake - Renwick
University of Newcastle
(>) Can Management Affect the “Outstanding Universal Value” of a Cultural World Heritage Site?

Richard England
Author
(>) When the Land Had More Meaning: Fragments and Fictions

Katerina Kopaka
University of Crete
(>) Gozo of Malta - “Gozo” of Crete: Thoughts on a Twinned Mediterranean Micro-Insular Toponymy and Tradition

Richard Lesure
University of California
(>) Prehistoric Maltese Imagery From a Multi-Continental Comparative Perspective

Ioannis Liritzis
University of the Aegean
(>) Luminescence Dating of Megalithic Monuments
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Joseph Magro Conti
Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna, Malta
Refuge and Prospect: Domestic Aspects and Their Landscape Setting During the Temple Period

Caroline Malone
University of Cambridge
Malta, the Mediterranean and the Role of Prehistoric Art

Joan Marler
California Institute of Integral Studies
Patterns of Interpretation: An Archaeomythological View of the Maltese Temple Culture

Chris Micallef
Author
Investigation and Demonstration of Astronomical Alignments at Mnajdra Temples

Anton Mifsud
St. Luke's Hospital, Malta
Human Remains in the Maltese Stone Age with Atypical Morphology and the Implications

John Robb
Cambridge University
Malta in a Comparative Perspective: Landscapes of Difference

Richard Rudgley
Author
Macrocosm and Microcosm: Thoughts on the Archaic Cosmology of the Maltese Temple Culture

Claudia Sagona
University of Melbourne
Is “Cart Rut” a Misleading Term? Some Comments About Ancient Land Use and Economy in Prehistoric Malta

Simon Stoddart
Magdalene College, Cambridge
Prehistoric Maltese Death Ritual: Lessons from the Brochtorff Circle

Yuri Stoyanov
School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London
The Significance of Spiral Motifs in Maltese Prehistoric Art in the Greater Mediterranean Context: Theories, Controversies, Perspectives

Giuseppe Terranova
Catania University
Maltese Temples and Hypogeism: New Data About the Relationship Between Malta and Sicily During the III and II Millennium BC
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David Trump
Author
(> ) Overseas Connections of the Maltese Temples

Robert H. Tykot
University of South Florida, Tampa
Contributions of Archaeological Science to Understanding Maltese Relations With Other Areas of the Central Mediterranean

Isabelle Vella-Gregory
University of Malta
Beyond Goddesses and Fertility: A Gender Archaeological Approach to the Temple Period

Tim Ward
Author
(> ) Goddesses of Malta: a Male View of the Mother Daughter Cult

Andy Worthington
Author
(> ) Stonehenge, Carnac and Malta: The Creation of an Ancestral Past in the Modern World

Sincere thanks to the generous volunteers who helped bring the EMPTC 2003 conference together

Josette Portelli

Anne Bradley * Claude Gaffiero
Daniela Gusman * Victor and Silvia Gusman
David Mallia * Pauleen Micallef
Claudette Pagano * Jonathan Borg
Richard Storm * Nick Vella
Reuben Grima * Daniel Cilia

and our student ushers

Bernardette Mercieca
Denis Mizzi * Clive Vella

For information about the next EMPTC conference, visit:
http://www.otsf.org/EMPTC-conference.html

or drop a line to:
EMPTC@aol.com
The OTS Foundation

Old Temples Study ...

In the beginning, the OTS letters were part of a corporate evolution and inherited from a travel company. Today, The OTS Foundation is a North American link with the UNESCO World Heritage prehistoric monuments of the Maltese islands. The OTS Foundation Research Center in Florida has served as a resource for films, television and print media in the USA, Canada, Australia and Europe.

The OTS Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)3 corporation registered in Florida, to foster international awareness and understanding of the importance of Malta's prehistoric heritage; and to provide all possible assistance toward preservation of the physical remains for future generations to study and experience.

In 1994 The OTS Foundation operated its first educational program in Malta for the American Institute of Architects. Since then, thousands of visitors have experienced the islands' unique offerings through OTSF. Ongoing Elderhostel courses continue to bring Americans to the Maltese islands. These and other programs help support activities for the benefit of Malta such as:

- Funding for a laboratory for the University of Malta's Department of Classics and Archaeology - with pollen analysis microscope and core retrieval equipment
- Temples Conservation Strategy Meeting of international experts, in cooperation with the Malta Ministry for Education and Culture, and the Museums Department
- Funding for Student Prehistoric Heritage Awareness programs in the schools of Malta, including production of a classroom handbook about the temples
- Creation of the ANCIENT ISLAND Exhibition in Florida, various lecture and cultural exchange programs
- Funding for scientific back-breeding program: WENZU - the Prehistoric Bull Ox
- Free Seminars on the temples and expert-guided Field Trips for Teachers in Malta
- Funding for scientific environmental and human impact study in Malta

... and EMPTC
In the opening session, a number of distinguished speakers, from President de Marco down, spoke on the Maltese prehistoric heritage and the problems of its conservation. Then at the end, two specific examples of the threats, the proposed rubbish dump in a quarry close to Mnajdra and the continuing hostility of the hunting lobby in the islands, were vigorously debated.

Between these, and more particularly relevant to the subject of the Conference, a stimulating and wide range of papers were presented. Some were illustrated by a traditional set of slides, run through a rather temperamental projector, others by several versions of state-of-the-art video equipment, though some of
these were not without their glitches too. Though well behind the
times on this one, I personally felt that some of these latter were
leaving the archaeological content subservient to exploring the
potential of the new techniques.

While naturally concentrating on Malta, papers included to
advantage comparative material from as far afield as the Aran
Islands and Crete, Hadrian's Wall and central Mexico. An
equally wide range of topics and general themes was discussed,
some old, some new. There is insufficient space here to comment
on all of them, so the brief personal selection in no way reflects
on those omitted.

The introductory paper showed that throughout prehistory, the
Maltese of the time were in constant contact with Sicily and
beyond, so their unique achievement in their temple architecture,
statuary and pottery was a matter of choice, not simply the result
of isolation. John Robb took this further by showing that those
achievements were all merely extreme versions of much wider
regional tendencies, though none the less remarkable for that.

Several speakers (Micallef, Albrecht) discussed the astronomical
significance of Mnajdra, making a convincing case for an
alignment on the equinoctial sunrise. But if this was so important
to the builders, why was it not applied in other temples? Possible
solstitial sight lines were also discussed, though rather less
convincingly, and stellar ones even less so, but all at least deserve
exploring.

Isabelle Vella-Gregory considered the issue of gender in the
temple period, lamenting the distortions of feminism. This
sparked a lively discussion on the old controversy of the sex of
the 'fat ladies', a consensus view emerging that this was
deliberately ambiguous, for whatever reason. It was even
suggested that the sockets in the necks of some figurines were to
take interchangeable heads, male or female as appropriate to
immediate circumstance.

Three general themes deserving comment emerged during the
three days, though not specifically voiced until the closing
remarks.

Hardly anything can be categorically proved, or disproved, by
archaeological means, the best that can be achieved being a
balance of probabilities. This is especially so when it comes to
connections between different cultural areas in the past. That
balance can be drastically altered by new discoveries. For
example, a link between the relief spirals in the Tarxien Temples
and those on the grave stele at Mycenae were considered highly
significant, almost axiomatic, until radiocarbon dates ruled them
out completely. If chronologically acceptable links between
adjacent areas like Malta and Sicily have a good chance of
significance, those between Malta and the Aegean for example
(Blakolmer) are at best more problematic.

Secondly, although symbolism was very widely employed, and
highly important, it is always strictly culturally determined, which
makes it extremely difficult to recover from preliterate periods
with any confidence. If red ochre symbolised blood, was it that
of battle or menstruation (gender studies again), or more
generally of life, or purely cosmetic, without further meaning at
all? Spirals can have one of innumerable meanings, or be purely
decorative. The asterisks on the Tal Qadi 'astronomical' slab are
generally taken to signify stars, as they would automatically in
our society, unless in the form d**n or f**k. We have no assurance that they have the same, or indeed any, such meaning here. That may well be so, but only on that balance of probabilities. For a final example, the most widely recognised symbol worldwide is the arrow, but would a society which had never used any weapon other than the sling, blowpipe or AK47 have the least idea of its meaning?

Thirdly, leading on from this, we face the constant danger of over interpretation, of reading more into the evidence than was actually intended by those who left it. Crouched burials are widely referred to as being in the foetal position, and taken to symbolise a return to the womb of Mother Earth, often with the corollary that they there await rebirth. A simpler answer is that the motivation was strictly practical - a crouched burial requires the digging of a much smaller grave pit. Here is surely a case for the application of Occam's 'razor', which stated that where alternative explanations are available, the simpler should always be preferred.

With those provisos in mind, how did the conference members view the road ahead? All were agreed that we need more evidence. Particularly bewailed was the dearth, or near-absence, of settlement sites contemporary with the temples in Malta. Their builders and worshippers must have lived somewhere, the evidence from which would enormously improve our chances of reconstructing life at the time. The recent material from the Xaghra Circle (Stoddart) showed how much more could be learnt from new excavations, though there mainly confined to mortuary practice.

Further analyses are required too, either by techniques already available or by new ones. Obsidian studies (Tykot) have more to tell us. A discrepancy is becoming apparent between the accepted chronologies of Sicily (Terranova, Cultraro, Bruno) and Malta (Trump), which radiocarbon analyses from the former island could soon resolve. Dr Liritzis talked of the exciting possibility of dating temple construction directly, by TL (thermoluminescence). Dr Mifsud offered fascinating evidence of thalassaemia from the Bur Mghez skeletons, with implications for genetic affiliation of the Maltese population. Indeed, molecular biology and DNA analysis could soon produce dramatic solutions to local problems, above all the supposed Tarxien Cemetery invasion, if applied to Maltese material. A poster on pollen from a core at Marsa is another promising development. It showed that there was no obvious change in vegetation during the accumulation of 12m of deposit, though we do not yet have a date for its commencement. Perhaps Salini, where bottom was not reached, might carry the story back before deforestation, and tell us when, and if, that happened.

Even without such analytical techniques, there is plenty of scope for new insights and interpretations, as several papers here have shown (e.g. Sagona, Bugeja, England). One not aired at this meeting has been the study of the Ggantija as an engineering exercise by Dr Daniel Clark. This showed that much less input of effort was required for its construction than is generally believed. In no way would it have put an intolerable strain on its builders' resources.

So this conference has broadened all our horizons, and brought together many scholars who would not otherwise have met, to everyone's mutual advantage. We are all encouraged to go forth to continue our researches and to relate them more closely to
those of our colleagues. I am delighted to report that it is already apparent that *Malta, Prehistory and Temples* will not remain the last word for years to come, as Prof. Bonanno generously suggested at its launch last year. Maltese archaeology is alive and well, and advancing on many fronts, and, with our grateful thanks to Linda Eneix, this OTS conference is patently doing an excellent job of encouraging it.

NOTE: Dr. Trump’s comprehensive book, with photography by Daniel Cilia is available from booksellers in Malta.