Megalithic Temples of Malta
Ħaġar Qim

Eine Foto-Dokumentation von Josef Rahm Otto
Ħaġar Qim (IPA: [hædʒærʔiːm]), is a megalithic temple complex which dates from the Ġgantija phase (c.3600-3200 B.C.). The megalithic complex stands on a hilltop on the southern edge of the island of Malta and lies about 2km south-west of the village of Qrendi. About 500m from Ħaġar Qim, lies the Mnajdra megalithic temple. The surrounding area, which is typical of Mediterranean garrigue and spectacular in its starkness and isolation, is designated as a Heritage Park. In 1992, UNESCO declared Ħaġar Qim, together with other four megalithic structures, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Ħaġar Qim is notable for its finely-smoothed entrance facade. The structure has the largest stone that was ever used in Maltese megalithic temples (weights 57 tonnes and measures 19 feet long by 9 feet tall by 2 feet thick). Pillar altar with plant carvings, two table-altars, "fat lady" statues and the Venus of Malta were excavated for the first time in 1839. Today, they are on display in the National Museum of Archaeology, Valletta.

The ridge upon which the temple complex was built, is capped with soft globigerina limestone. Since this was the only stone available nearby, it was used throughout the construction of this temple. The effects can be seen clearly in the outer southern wall, where the great orthostats are exposed to the sea-winds, with the result that the temple has suffered from severe weathering and surface flaking over the centuries.

The Ħaġar Qim complex is divided into the main temple and other three megalithic structures which stand a few meters away from the main temple — even though one has no identifiable shape.

The Ħaġar Qim temple.

The main temple was build between 3000 and 2500 B.C. It has six large rooms, each of which is connected by an interior passage, most of which has an outside entrance. This entrance passage and first court follow the common Maltese megalithic design. This simple design was however considerably modified. The north-westerly apse was replaced by four enclosures which were independent of each other and reached through a separate entrance.

The forecourt and façade follow the pattern typical of temples across the islands. Particularly noteworthy are the larger orthostats at the corners, which are notched to take the second of the horizontal courses above. Apart from the replacement of a few original blocks which fell, such as the lintel over the main doorway, no restoration has been done.

Beyond the first pair of apses, the temple interior is more firmly screened off than is usual at other temple sites. Visual access seems to have been limited to porthole slabs. The only decorations at this point are a single, displaced sill stone bearing a pair of opposing spirals like those of the Tarxien Temples, and the most attractive of all free-standing altars discovered at temple sites.
The forecourt of Haġar Qim temple.

Through the next doorway, the right-hand apse has a curious setting of low orthostats forming a sort of pan as if intended for the corralling of animals. The left-hand side apse has a high trilithon altar on its left and three on pillar altars, two on the right with another in a small chamber behind. Less an apse than a passage, this gives access to one of the additional chambers. It consists of part of a temple unit, a central court, niche and right apse, tacked closely against the main temple. A low standing pillar stands at the end of the apse. A more complete unit – entrance, court, niche, and one pair of apses, lies to the north, and two simple oval chambers to the west.

In the external enclosing wall, the first orthostat behind the right-hand corner of the façade is one of the largest of any temple. Standing at 6.4m long, it is estimated to weigh close to 20 tonnes (metric tons). The upright menhir stands 5.2m high.

UNESCO World Heritage Site
State Party    Malta
Type    Cultural
Criteria    iv
Reference    132
Region    Europe
Inscription history
Inscription    1980  (4th Session)
Extensions    1992
Megalithic Temples of Malta: ᴻᵃᵍᵃʳ Ṭʰⁱᵐ
and the engravings
scored ornamentation

small lizard on the wall
scored stone
stonewall...

...this is not the original position of the stones
stone with scratched ornaments
stone with scratched ornaments, detail
stone with scratched ornaments, detail

unknown
another stone with scratched ornaments

stone with scratched ornaments, detail
scored stone

scored stone
ancient Orienting point

northward
Engraving of a temple
window in the wall, on the right small holes for attachment

an altar room
scratched ornaments
tempel entry with scratched ornaments
detail tempel entry with scratched ornaments

tempel entry with scratched ornaments
altar room
Tabel on the altar room

table
table
an altar nische
scratched stones

entry
altarroom entry

fragment of a door
altarstone