

OUR COUNTRY

Going back to our pre-historic time is not as easy as one thinks. Teaching the Cubs about their ancient temples is a very important issue. At the time this book was written, the Mnajdra temples were vandalized and we felt that appreciation for our heritage should be taught to the Cubs. Therefore, we are putting some information about some places which we listed in the Cub Book. Obviously, there are many pre-historic sites around Malta and Gozo, so feel free to take the Cubs to any pre-historic site.

Għar Dalam

Għar Dalam, or the 'Cave of Darkness', gives its name to the first phase of Maltese prehistory (5000 - 4500BC). The cave was one of the earliest sites used by Neolithic man who crossed to the Maltese islands from Sicily around 5000BC. Even more remarkable than the evidence of prehistoric man was the discovery of thousands of fossilised animal bones.

The cave was discovered in 1865 by an Italo-German palaeontologist. Excavations revealed that the floor of the cave has five different layers. In the lower layers were enormous quantities of fossilised bones, tusks and teeth belonging to extinct species - such as dwarf elephants and dwarf hippopotami - along with red deer, brown bears, wolves, foxes and giant swans. In the upper layers archaeologists found flint tools, slingstones and pottery which had been decorated with the rippled edge of seashells or by pointed sticks or bones.



Long before archaeologists took any interest in this site, the remains of other prehistoric animals had been discovered elsewhere on the islands. In the distant past local Maltese believed they were the bones of giants who were supposed to have built the island's megalithic temples.

The Għar Dalam cave is a wide, low tunnel which cuts 140m into the coralline limestone.

Visitors can walk 80m into the cave, aided by electric lighting, and there are useful explanations of what was discovered where. On the cave bed you can still see layers of bone deposits.

At the entrance to the site a small museum displays a fascinating collection of teeth, tusks and bones from the thousands of animals found here. Interesting reconstructions show the size of extinct species such as the dwarf elephant.



Hagar Qim

The name Hagar Qim means “standing stones”, and was the name given to a group of large megalithic stones protruding out of an earth mound. It is place surrounded by mystery and often referred, in former times to be of Phoenician origin. Standing on a rocky plateau a mile away from the village, the site stands gracefully overlooking the sea as if protecting the village of Qrendi.

The Hagar Qim monument consists of a series of buildings of the type of the other Maltese megalithic structures. A side forecourt lies in front of a high retaining wall, through which a passage flanked by two sets of deep apses on either side, runs through the middle of the building. The entrance of the temple faces south-east and is made of six large slabs on end, three on each side of the gateway.

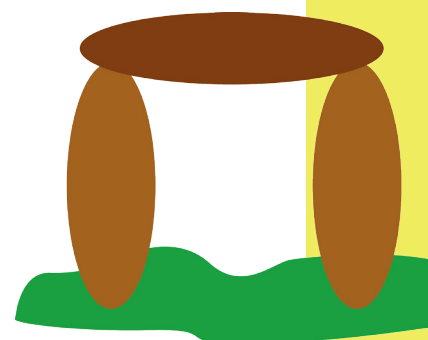
The central area is paved with well-set smooth blocks and along the walls are low stone altars originally decorated with pitmarks, now mostly obliterated.

Important objects, now shown in Valletta at the Archeological Museum, were discovered in this court in 1839. These include the obese stone (or fat lady) known all over the world, a stone altar with deep carvings representing a plant on each of the four sides and a stone slab with spirals in relief.

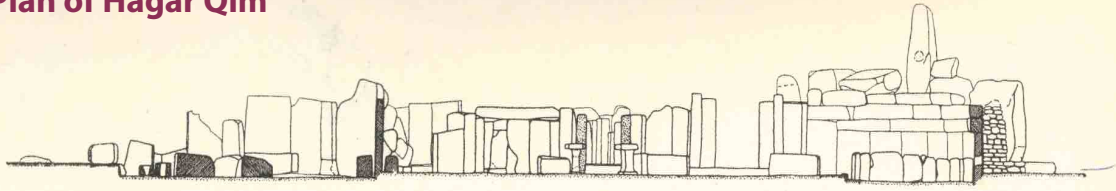
Stone balls of different sizes may be seen alongside the walls of this and of other similar buildings. These were the rollers used for the transport of the huge stone blocks.

Ground plan of Hagar Qim

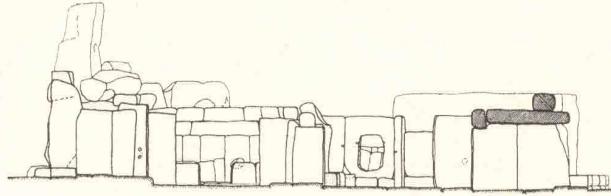
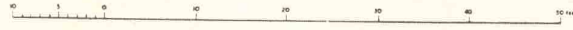
1. Altar with plant decoration
2. Stone slab with special decoration
3. Malta Venus
4. Mushroom-like altars
5. Several statuettes found here in 1945
6. Cylindrical pillar
7. Remains of carved figures
8. Highest monolith
9. Biggest stone used on the temple



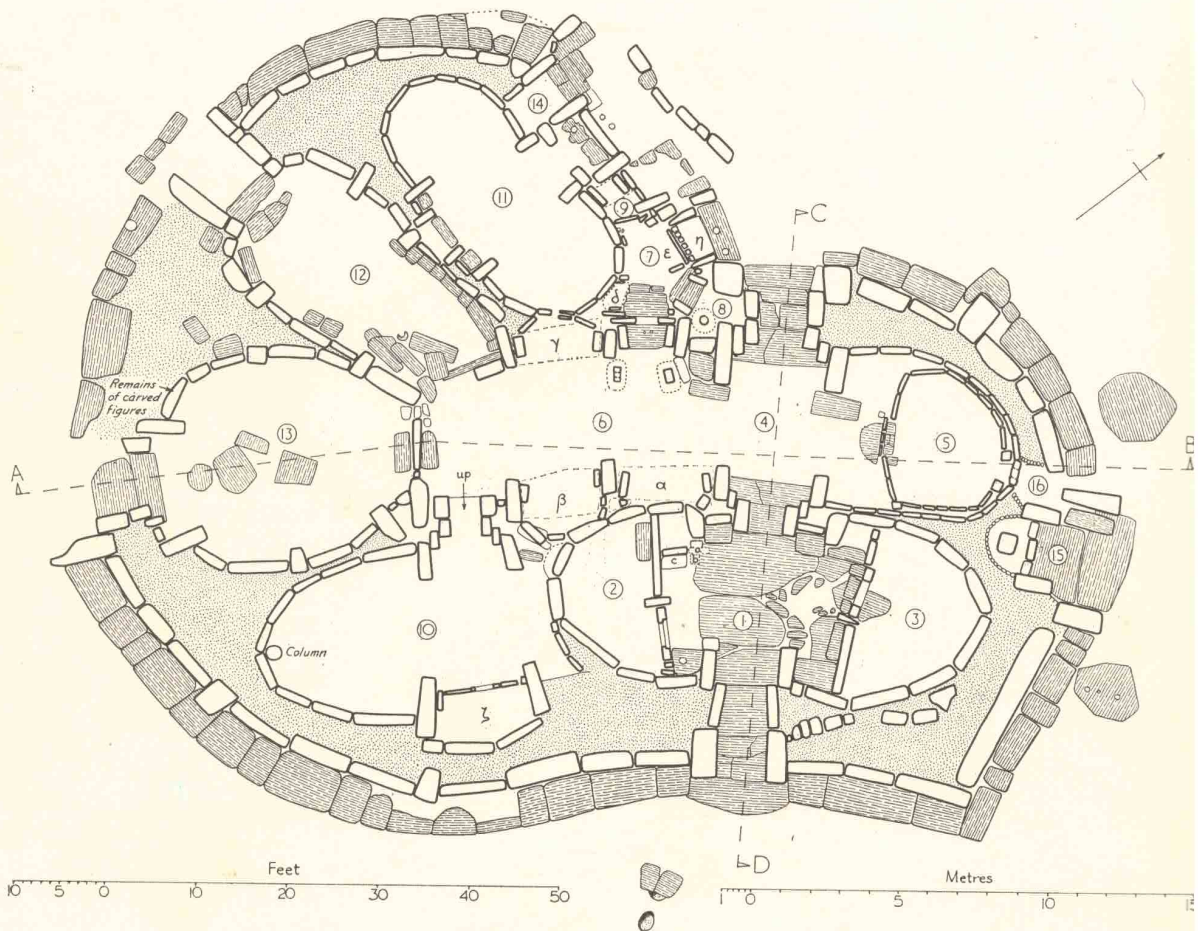
Ground Plan of Hagar Qim



SECTION A B

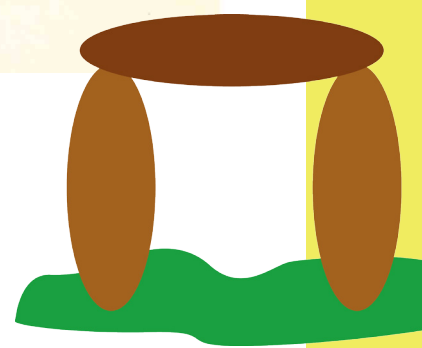


SECTION C D



Plan 18A. Hagar Qim Temples: main building.

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Mnajdra

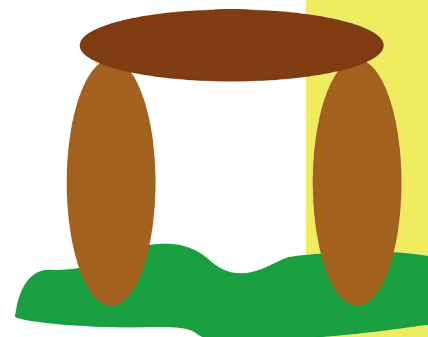
This is another megalithic temple which dates from about the end of the third millennium B.C. and stands about 500mtrs to the west of Hagar Qim. Mnajdra is built close to the edge of the promontory facing the blue sea and the islet of Filfla.

Mnajdra is mostly built of semi-crystalline rock, which is heavy and hard. This is the reason for its rugged appearance. On the other hand, the polished slabs and blocks that are rubbed smooth and decorated, are of globigerina limestone brought down from Hagar Qim.

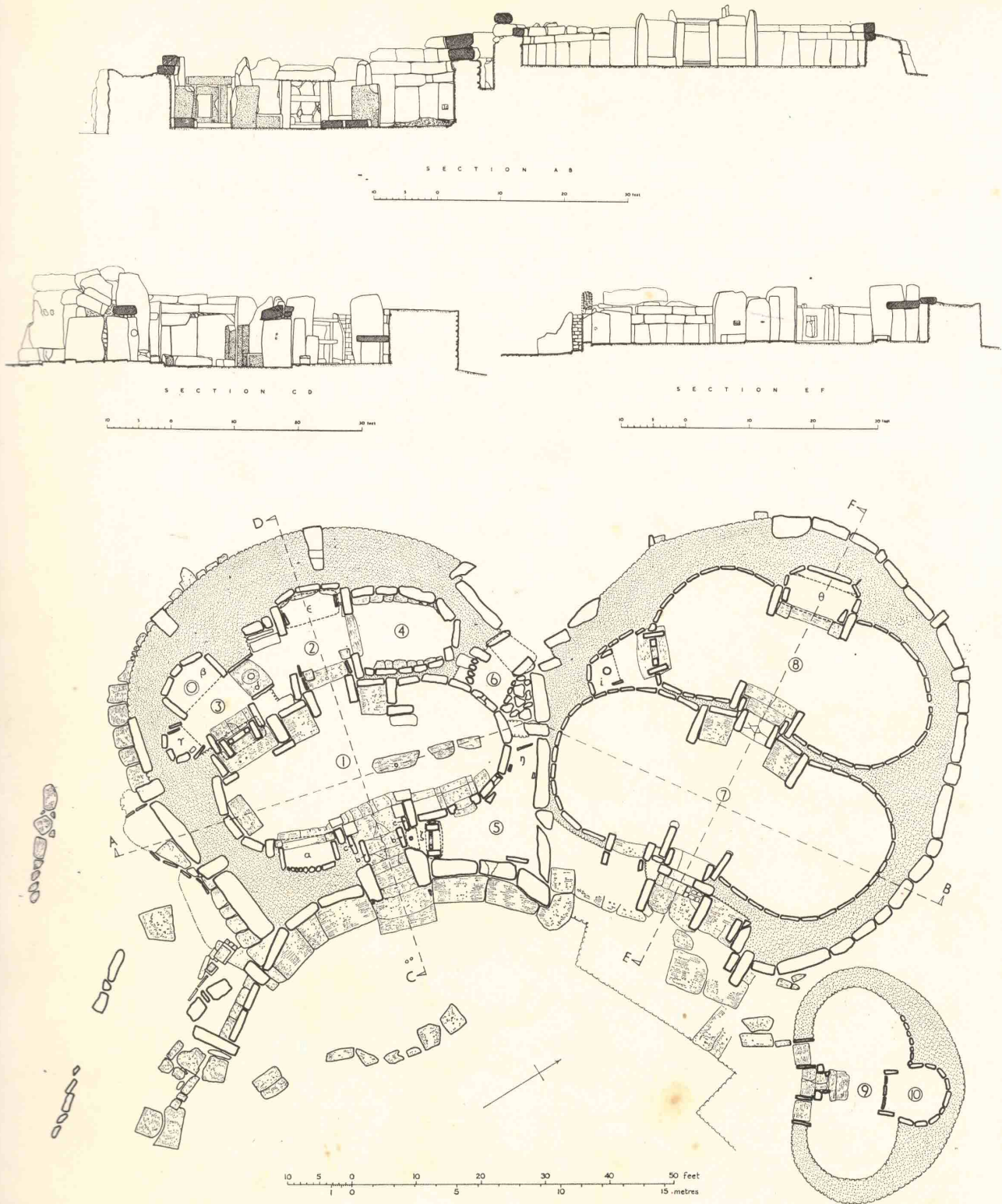
Mnajdra consists of two buildings at different levels, one at a higher level looking south-east, the other lower one looking due east. The two groups of temples were partly domed over and partly open to the sky. The apses were undoubtedly vaulted by the process known as corbelling, that is by making each course of masonry project inwards a little beyond the one below it. The corbelled vault is the most primitive kind of vault known. The passages were made of vertical slabs over which large blocks were laid horizontally. The courts and the yards were uncovered, the burning of sacrificial offerings taking place in these open spaces.

Ground plan of Mnajdra

1. Recess with pitmarks
2. Holes to the oracle chambers
3. Entrance to an oracle chamber
4. Pillar Altar
5. Temple Relief
6. Pillar Altar

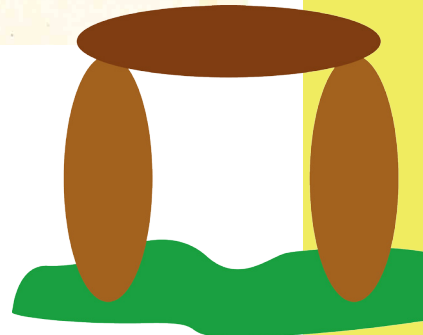


Ground plan of Mnajdra



Plan 20A. Mnajdra Temples.

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Hypogeum

The Discovery of the Monument

The Hypogeum came to light in 1902 when a block of houses was being built in what is now Hal-Saflieni Street. Whilst digging a shaft for a water tank, a cave about 3.5mtrs under the road surface was accidentally broken into and the astonished workmen entered a labyrinth.

The term Hypogeum, from the Greek Ipogaion, is usually applied to any underground construction including vaults, chambers etc dug in the solid rock. The Hypogeum consists, in fact, of a system of underground caves, passages, staircases etc cut at different levels in the limestone.

Objects Discovered in the Hypogeum

Human skeletons: skulls, jawbones, vertebrae and other human bones give a fair idea of the number of people who were buried in the caves in Neolithic times.

Stone Objects: Mortars, querns, sling-stones, conical and hemispherical stones were numerous. Implements used to dig out the cave includes polished stone axes, stone scrapers, flint chips, chert scrapers and hard stone mallets.

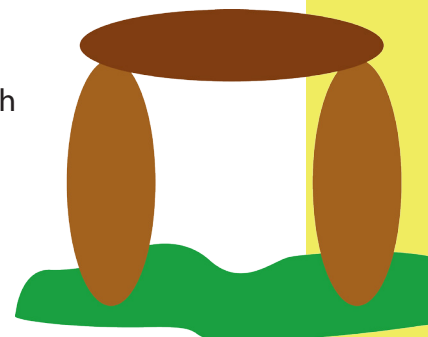
Personal Ornaments: The dead were, evidently, interred with their personal objects of decoration. Beads made from shells, amulets made out of drilled fossil teeth of animals and of hard stones; pendants of agate and jadeites, typical of neolithic civilization. No metals were found within the Hypogeum.

Pottery: The pottery is peculiar to these islands at that period. The vases are exceedingly graceful in shape and made of refined clay well worked and very well baked. Judging by the pottery alone, the people who lived in Malta at the time when the Hypogeum was in use, had already reached a high standard of culture, the best, probably attained in Neolithic times in the Mediterranean basin.



Visiting the Hypogeum

This temple was recently restored and recognized by the UNISECO as a world heritage site. Only a group of 10 people at any time can visit the structure with a maximum of 50 a day. Therefore visiting the Hypogeum needs bookings in advance.



Neolithic Temples

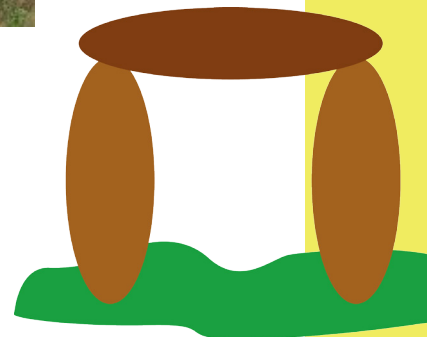
The Tarxien group of Neolithic temples is of the same type of other similar buildings both in Malta and the sister island, Gozo. They are all made of a series of parallel semi-circular apses connected to well-built passages. The apses were, very probably, covered by domes made of corbelled ashlar masonry. They all have a semi-circular fore-court and were originally confined by a high wall of monoliths that in many cases have survived to our days.

The first temple is solidly built with large stones, some of which are roughly dressed. The walls are laid with great accuracy, and the temple is very imposing in its simplicity. The second temple is more elaborately constructed, the walls being finished with greater care, some of the standing slabs being decorated with flat raised spirals. In one of the chambers, two bulls and a sow, symbols of strength and fertility, are cut in low relief on one of the walls. The third temple shows a carelessly-built frame but has most of the standing stones richly decorated with carved patterns.

Although built in the Stone-Age, the three temples belong to three different periods. Evidently, when the first temple became insufficient for their requirements, the people added a second one to the west of it and, later one, a third on to the south.

It is probable that, being contiguous, the three temples were used contemporaneously. There is no obstacle to free communication between the three of them. What is of greater significance, is that the pottery shards found within the three buildings, both above and below floor level, are all of the same type, being similar in all characteristics to the well-known Neolithic pottery collected in the other Maltese prehistoric sites.

To describe this temple in detail is difficult as it is one of the biggest we have. Therefore, a visit to this temple requires some research on your part.



Ġgantija

It is evident that in Neolithic times Gozo was not culturally more primitive than the main island in culture. The huge monument of Ġgantija is seen towering on the high plateau to the east of the village of Xagħra. Ġgantija was the first of the Maltese prehistoric monuments to be cleared of earth and debris. Excavation started in 1827 by Colonel Otto Beyer who was Officer in Charge of the island.

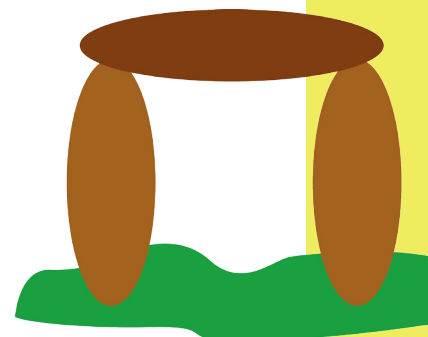
The ruins consist of two buildings, similar in type, each containing two elliptical areas connected by a short corridor, and ending in a semicircular apse. The two buildings face south-east, and have separate entrances. The arrangement recalls that of Mnajdra, but the whole structure is on a larger scale. At one point, a boundary wall 6 metres high is still standing, but here and there the original high walls gave way and encumber the areas of the temple.

The southern building is the more extensive of the two. A large elliptical slab serves the purpose of a threshold, the doorway being formed of three magnificent slabs, of which only the vertical ones remain.

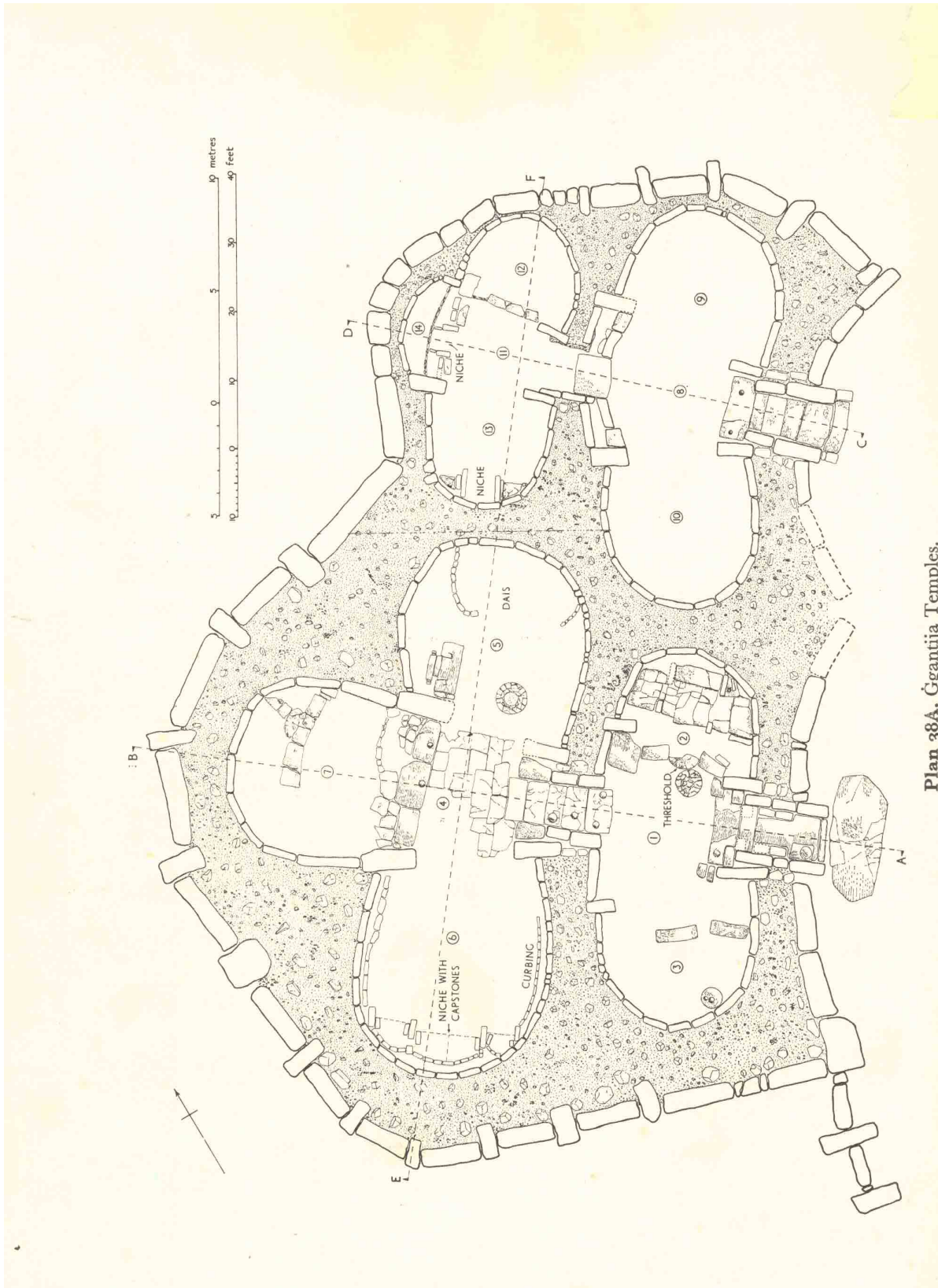
The common boundary wall of the temples is made of huge hard stone blocks in the 'long-and short' technique. Between the entrances of the two temples the façade has crumbled.

Ground Plan of Ġgantija

1. Great threshold slab
2. Purification block
- 3,4,10 Libation holes temple
- 5,11 Fireplaces
- 6,7,8 Decorated blocks temple
- 9 Oracle hole
- 12 Niche Altars
- 13 Main Altar
- A,B,C,D,E ApSES of the southern
- F,G,H,I Barren apses of the northern
- J Central niche with altar

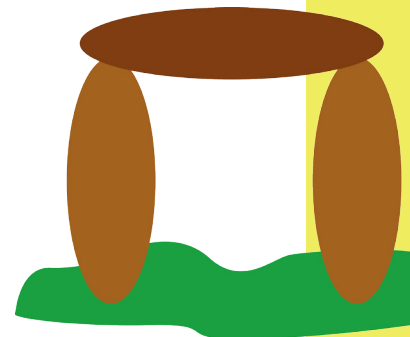


Ground Plan of Ġgantija



Plan 38A. Ġgantija Temples.

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ACTIVITY FACT SHEET



Activity: Visit a prehistoric temple



Objective: Getting closer to the roots of our history by visiting the temples.



Time: 2 hours



Outline: The Cubs are foreign archaeologists visiting sites in Malta. They were sent by their local Archaeology Institute to prepare a report about Historic sites in Malta.

After the visit to the Temples, the Arrow Group can prepare a chart or presentation together, and present it to the rest of the Pack. (You can create a rotation system, where each new Bronze Arrow Group goes to a different Temple site, so that presentations about the same temple are not repeated over the course of 4 years.)



Equipment: Water, Note Book, Pen, Camera



Place: Pre-historic Temple



Group Size: Bronze Arrow



3rd Parties: (Can be done as a joint activity)

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ACTIVITY FACT SHEET



During the Activity:

Social – Discussing together during the visit. Presenting their report to the rest of the Pack

Physical – Arriving on location after a short walk (rather than being dropped off exactly on location) and walking around in the Temple itself.

Intellectual – The Cubs will be learning about Malta's history and our ancestors.

Creative – Help the cubs get into the symbolic framework. In addition allow the cubs to express themselves through the chart/report/presentation.

Emotional – The Cubs will see how many sacrifices our ancestors made not just to live, but to practice their religion. Explore with them the emotions this brings out in them: e.g. feelings of awe, wonder, pride, patriotic, etc.

Spiritual – A visit to pre-historic sites can make the Cubs feel as part of a story that is still being written. Ask them to think if the story that will be written about them will be a positive one.

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