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Kathryn Rountree

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## RE-INVENTING MALTA'S NEOLITHIC TEMPLES: CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATIONS AND AGENDAS

KATHRYN ROUNTREE

*Massey University, New Zealand*

This paper explores the different ways in which Malta's neolithic temples have been interpreted, contested and appropriated by different local and foreign interest groups: those working in the tourist industry, intellectuals and Maltese nationalists, hunters, archaeologists, artists, and participants in the global Goddess movement. The different perspectives are set against "traditional" popular interpretations of the temples. A particular focus of enquiry is the Maltese response to the foreign Goddess pilgrims who have been visiting the sites in increasing numbers over the last decade: do Maltese feel their past is being appropriated, colonized, or commoditized by these visitors? The paper argues that all interpretations or "inventions" of Malta's neolithic past, whether competing or colluding, can be seen to be governed by the particular social, political, religious or economic agendas of their creators.

I awoke on my first morning in Malta, and on many subsequent mornings, to the local Dominican church bells clanging out the hymn "To be a Pilgrim".<sup>1</sup> It was a striking reminder both of the immense importance of Christianity in the lives of Maltese,<sup>2</sup> and of the proposition that several millennia before Christ Malta was a destination for religious pilgrims from around the Mediterranean indicated by its numerous megalithic temples. Built a millennium before Egypt's pyramids and fifteen hundred years before Stonehenge, the temples have been hailed by archaeologists as "the most impressive monuments of European prehistory" (Gouder 1996: 13) and the "earliest free-standing monuments of stone in the world" (Renfrew 1973: 161) which "should be included among the seven wonders of the prehistoric world" (Bonanno 1997: 11). A Maltese tourist video presentation, "Sacred Island", begins by suggesting that "people from all over the Mediterranean came to worship here since before the dawn of civilization".<sup>3</sup>

The notion of Malta as a destination for pilgrims also has a contemporary relevance because over the past ten to fifteen years a new group of foreign pilgrims, who trace their spiritual heritage to a prehistoric age when, they say, a Great Goddess was the pre-eminent divinity for European communities, has begun visiting the temples. For these visitors Malta's neolithic temples are evidence that the islands, located midway between north Africa and southern Europe, were once likely to have been "a sacred centre of influence" (Baring and Cashford 1991: 101), and visiting them is seen as a way of reconnecting spiritually with these times. In a sense, the temples function as mammoth mnemonic devices, the hard evidence of an imagined ("remembered") past, where boundaries between memory, imagination and invention dissolve.<sup>4</sup> These pilgrims, who are mostly American but also include Canadian, British, European and Australasian women, belong to the feminist spiritual movement known globally as "the Goddess movement".<sup>5</sup> In terms of their spiritual or religious identity they belong to an "imagined community" (Anderson 1991; Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 37), free of

temporal or territorial constraints, comprising an eclectic assemblage of past and present “Goddess-worshipping” peoples.

My purpose for undertaking fieldwork in Malta was to gain an understanding of the meanings attributed to the neolithic temples by Maltese people themselves, and to discover how they felt about the Goddess pilgrims who have been visiting the temples in increasing numbers annually. Claims have frequently been made, in particular by some feminist scholars and archaeologists, that modern Goddess worshippers appropriate and reconstruct the past for contemporary social, political and religious purposes (Brown 1993; Conkey and Tringham 1995; 1998; Meskell 1995; 1998; Rountree 2001). In the light of such accusations I was particularly interested in finding out whether Maltese felt that their past was being appropriated, colonized or commoditized by these visitors.

It has, of course, been argued that any construction of the past, one’s own or anyone else’s, is governed by the particular contemporary agenda—social, political, religious, economic—of its creators (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Lowenthal 1985; 1997; Gathercole and Lowenthal 1990; Bender 1993; Sant Cassia 1999). Any interpretation of the past is a social product which has more to do with the historical moment in which it is produced than the period to which it refers: “The past we conjure up is largely an artifact of the present” (Lowenthal 1985: xvi). Whatever we can or cannot know about “what life was really like” in Malta 5000 years ago, it is very clear that all representations of this past are inevitably interested and political, and inevitably differently empowered.<sup>6</sup>

This paper explores the different ways in which Malta’s neolithic temples have been and are being interpreted, contested and appropriated by different groups. I discovered in Malta a considerable range of voices and interpretations in relation to the temples, some competing, some co-existing equably or colluding, all governed by particular agendas, values and discursive contexts. Some interpretations are ignorant of or ignore others; others are engaged in a dance, which is at times mutually antagonistic and at other times an artfully managed symbiosis. The range of voices includes antiquarians, historians and archaeologists, those working within the tourist industry, hunters (who call themselves “environmentalists”), artists, intellectuals and Maltese nationalists, and women belonging to the Goddess movement. Most of these groups contain both Maltese and non-Maltese voices. The ways in which the temples, as texts of the past, have been interpreted and re-employed symbolically is not determined by group affiliation and cannot be located on a simple indigenous/foreign trajectory. Amongst archaeologists, for example, there are violently opposing views, and these views cross cut the local/foreign divide. As well as these specific interest groups, whose members comprise only a small proportion of Maltese, there is the great majority of Maltese people, all of whom grow up knowing about the temples, but most of whose voices are never heard.

Bender’s (1993) comprehensive and excellent work on Stonehenge, in which she traces the physical and interpretive construction, reconstruction and appropriation of the site since the first “Ur” henge was built around 2800 BC, is pertinent for this study, and aspects have provided a fascinating comparison with Malta. Bender (1993: 15) shows how Stonehenge has been ideologically and politically contested by a variety of voices “all mobilizing different histories and differentially empowered” belonging to people who have engaged with the site and landscape in quite different ways. Some of the kinds of voices which have contested Stonehenge have also been present in Malta, although the contestation which has surrounded Malta’s temples has usually, with dramatic exceptions, been less vehement and more covert. As with Stonehenge, the appropriation of Malta’s temple sites by different groups can be traced to the prehistoric period.

## THE TEMPLES

Until very recently, archaeological opinion held that Malta was first settled by neolithic farmers from Sicily around 7000 years ago (Trump 1990: 20; Bonanno 1997: 4). However new evidence suggests that this date should perhaps be pushed back to 15,000–18,000 BP, and it now seems that the first Maltese may have lived by gathering wild fruit and hunting Ice Age game (Mifsud and Ventura 1999; Frendo 1999: 28). The building of megalithic temples, of which there are at least twenty-three,<sup>7</sup> began about 5600 years ago, and was carried out by neolithic communities, possibly following the arrival of new immigrants from Sicily (Bonanno 1997: 11). The temples were often built in groups of two or three and are distributed fairly uniformly throughout the islands. The best-known complexes (those which tourists pay to visit) are Mnajdra, Hagar Qim and Tarxien on the large island of Malta, and Ggantija on the smaller island of Gozo.

The temples, with their distinctive rounded chambers, were constructed of huge, locally quarried limestone blocks weighing from twenty to forty tons. The earliest had three chambers and were clover-shaped, while the later and better known had five or more chambers, which from an aerial view, resemble an ample human body (see Fig. 1). Many local people told me that the temples are shaped like the body of the prehistoric “fertility Goddess” or “Mother Goddess”, and foreign Goddess pilgrims enthusiastically embrace this interpretation. It is supported, they claim, by the fact that many statues of the presumed deity have been found in the temples, the shape of the statues echoing the rounded architecture (see Fig. 2). Local and many foreign archaeologists, however, scorn this interpretation, stressing that temple architecture passed through a number of phases, the anthropomorphic shape being only one (see below).

The internal walls of the early temples were built of rubble masonry and were probably originally plastered and painted, while later temples were constructed entirely of orthostatic blocks.<sup>8</sup> Some are decorated with fine relief carvings, often in friezes, depicting variations of spiral designs and animals, including goats, sheep, pigs, fish and a horned bull. Temple structures include altars, benches, hearths, and what are taken to be oracle holes and libation holes. The sites have yielded a range of pottery, some animal bones (presumed to result from

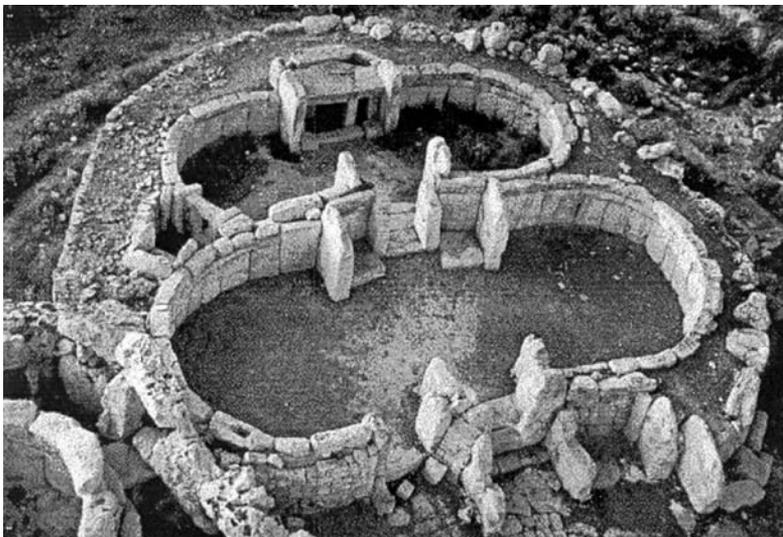


FIGURE 1 Middle Mnajdra temple. One of a complex which lies 500 m down hillside from Hagar Qim temple overlooking the sea. Around 3100 BC.



FIGURE 2 Limestone statue with socket for insertion of separately worked head. One of several in this style found in Hagar Qim temple (3500–3000 BC). Dimensions: 23.5 × 21.6 × 29.7 cm. *Courtesy of National Museum of Archaeology, Malta.*

sacrifices), a number of limestone anthropomorphic statuettes with very rounded limbs and hips, some wearing pleated skirts, and many smaller stone, clay and alabaster figurines, some of which are distinctively female, and some of which have no clearly defined sex. Inside one temple at Tarxien, there was also the lower half of a monumental statue of an ample-bodied, skirted figure, which is estimated to have originally stood two metres high (Fig. 3). Prior to the discovery of this site in 1914, the top half of this statue was quarried away by farmers trying to clear their fields of huge stones.

Although none of the temples is now roofed, there are indications from the inward sloping of the upper parts of walls, and from the discovery of a tiny model of a temple, that they had

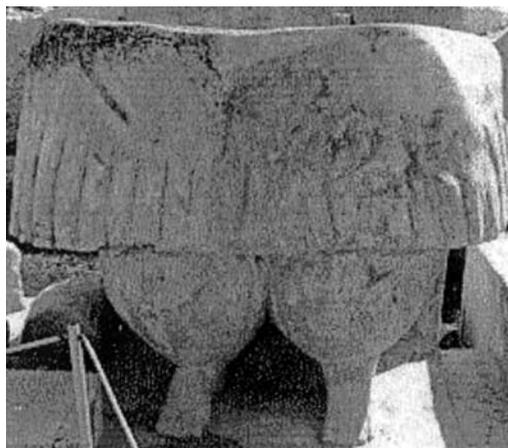


FIGURE 3 Lower half of megalithic statue, presumed to have originally stood about 2 m high. South Temple, Tarxien. Around 3100 BC. *Courtesy of National Museum of Archaeology, Malta.*

arched roofs probably of corbelled or over-sailed stone slabs.<sup>9</sup> The interiors of temples are relatively small, and it is thought that they were used mostly by religious specialists and officials, with larger congregations of the community taking place outdoors on the paved courtyards in front of temples.

As well as these above ground complexes, there are two hypogeia, one on Malta and one on Gozo, which functioned as underground tombs and temples. The one on Malta at Hal Saflieni is a unique and beautiful structure on three levels hewn from solid limestone. It is a labyrinth of passageways, stairs and rounded chambers with domed ceilings, some of which are painted with an elaborate spiral design in red ochre. The secondary burial remains of an estimated 6000–7000 people<sup>10</sup> were discovered, along with personal ornaments, pottery, and figurines.<sup>11</sup>

## BRONZE AGE APPROPRIATION

The Temple Period in Malta reached its climax 5000–4500 BP, after which it mysteriously disappeared, leading to several millennia of decay and ruination for most sites, and the appropriation and re-use of others by new immigrants. The most common reasons given for the disappearance of the Temple Culture are the over-exploitation and eventual exhaustion of the natural resources, compounded by years of drought which forced the population to leave the island (Bonanno 1997: 52). Other explanations have suggested that the people did not leave, but were wiped out by fierce invaders (Evans 1959: 168; Conti 1999: 199).

Whatever the causes of the temple-builders' demise, the archaeological evidence indicates that around 4500 BP a new people, Bronze Age warriors, arrived in Malta. They appropriated Tarxien temples, the most extensive and highly decorated neolithic complex, and converted them into a cemetery for cremation burials which included, along with beads and several terracotta figurines, daggers and axes presumed to have been used "as percussion weapons to slash skulls and chop limbs" (Conti 1999: 200). The religious beliefs of these people are not known. A group of highly stylised terracotta figurines, two at least obviously female, are stylistically very different from the neolithic figurines (Bonanno 1997: 52).<sup>12</sup> Thus, following its use as a place of worship for at least 500 years (5000–4500 BP), presumably of the female deity represented by the megalithic sculpture found on the site (Fig. 3), Tarxien was re-employed as an incineration cemetery by foreign invaders with different religious beliefs, the site's sacrality retained but very differently expressed.

Another site appropriated and re-used by this new Bronze Age people is the hypogeum at Xaghra on the island of Gozo. Interestingly, while the neolithic use of this site is thought to have been exclusively for collective inhumation burials, and linked to religious observances at nearby Ggantija temples, during the Bronze Age the site appears to have been used for non-sacred purposes, thus reversing the pattern at Tarxien (Bonanno 1999).

The most interesting site on Malta in terms of successive religious re-use by incoming peoples is Tas-Silg, located on a prominent hill overlooking the bay of Marsaxlokk (Bonanno 1999). Five thousand years ago a neolithic temple was built, which later formed the nucleus of a Phoenician temple, and later again the basis of a Hellenistic and Roman temple. Today the site overlooks the small Roman Catholic Church of "Our Lady of the Snows" (Madonna Tas-Silg). In his discussion of Tas-Silg, Vella (1986) traces continuity in the worship of a female divinity who is re-named by successive peoples over the millennia—first the neolithic Mother Goddess, later Astarte by the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians, and then Juno by the Romans. It is perhaps unsurprising that the Catholic church is dedicated to the Madonna (as indeed are numerous churches in Malta).

## THE TEMPLES TODAY: POPULAR DISCOURSE

Until the twentieth century and the systematic scientific excavation of sites, Malta's unique and abundant neolithic remains were something of an enigma. One of the earliest accounts, published by Gian Francesco Abela in 1647, suggested that the temples were built by cyclopean giants (it later turned out that the "giant's" skulls had belonged to a species of dwarf elephant) (Mifsud and Ventura 1999: 3). It was not until the turn of the twentieth century that archaeologists began attributing the temples to a prehistoric culture (Grima 1998: 34). Even today, the nature of the society and culture which produced the temples is far from well known, and this leads both to vagueness and to spirited contestation over their proper interpretation. Such contestation, however, tends to be present only amongst those individuals and groups with a special interest in the temples; the majority of Maltese are unaware of it.

I talked with many people in Malta about the temples in an effort to understand their contemporary meanings and importance. Apart from middle-class and educated people and those with a special interest in the temples, such as members of the local Prehistoric Society, tour guides and heritage enthusiasts, it became clear that most Maltese, while proud that Malta is home to such remarkable sites, see the temples as primarily things that tourists are interested in. Most have little knowledge about or personal interest in the temples: their value is seen as primarily commercial (in relation to the tourist industry) and historical. Knowledge about the temples is thought to reside in experts at the Museum of Archaeology or the University, or in books. It seems that people grow up with a sense of the temples as being an essential, taken-for-granted part of the Maltese landscape and their general cultural heritage, but for most it is a vague sense, unthought out and unthought about.

People's relative lack of interest in the temples contrasts sharply with their fierce pride in and knowledge about other historic buildings, especially particular churches and other structures built during the period when the Knights of St. John ruled Malta.<sup>13</sup> Their lack of personal interest in the temples also contrasts sharply with the deeply emotional way in which visiting Goddess pilgrims enthuse about the temples.

While little is known about the temples, what is known is presented consistently. According to popular discourse, the temples were the focus for worship of the pre-eminent deity of that distant time, a Mother Goddess or fertility Goddess responsible for the fertility of crops, animals and human communities. The anthropomorphic statues found in temples, commonly called "Fat Ladies" (see Fig. 2), are widely considered to be representations of this Goddess, and the temples' rounded shapes echo the contours of her ample body.<sup>14</sup> On Gozo, legend declares that the temple of Ggantija was built by a Sansuna, a superwoman or giantess, who transported the stones on her head from one side of the island to the other, sustained by broad beans and honey (Bezzina 1991: 9; Veen 1994: 9). During visits to the temples and in informal conversations on social occasions I was occasionally told other fragments of information: about the likelihood that animal sacrifices were made to propitiate the deity; that people came to the temples to consult an oracle or to seek healing or possibly fertility magic; that the temples were used in Solstice celebrations indicated by the alignment of the stones; that only priests (no one spoke of priestesses) habitually entered the temples while the general populace gathered outside.

The myth about the Giantess, and remembered wisps of learning gleaned during school visits to the temples, constitute most people's knowledge of the temples. Most seemed to have little sense of a felt connection—ancestral or cultural (and certainly not religious)—with the temple-builders. Two Maltese academics explained to me that this was because so little is known about the original cultural context in which the temples and statues were meaningful; there is nothing for people today to identify with. The temples constitute the

remains of a past, which can scarcely be imagined, let alone identified with. Another Maltese woman told me: “We need to understand the past before we can recreate it, redefine it, re-animate it. It’s so old that it’s very difficult to know”.

Explaining the absence of interest in antiquities in nineteenth century paintings of Malta, Sant Cassia (1993: 358) states that the neolithic temples “*never became a symbol of nationhood* in the same way as Greek temples did, at least for a long time” (italics in original). Rather “‘nationhood’ in Malta in the popular nineteenth century imagination and to a certain extent even nowadays, began with *Christianity and literacy*”. For Maltese the arrival of St. Paul on the island in 60 AD following his shipwreck en route to Rome marked not only the beginning of their “history”, but also their designation as a “chosen people”. “[B]ecause Christianity has been taken to be one of the most potent symbols of ethnicity,” writes Sant Cassia, “it acted as a barrier to a fuller identification with, and understanding of the pre-Christian period. . . . [T]he ruins are mute testimonies of an unknown past with very little connection to contemporary realities” (1993: 359). In this vein, a Maltese student told me: “We see the link with the Maltese of the time of the Knights of St. John *because they were Christians like us*, but somehow the link is lost throughout the millennia it took between us and the people of the Temple Period” (my emphasis). Perhaps it should be unsurprising that the majority of devout Maltese Catholics sense little or no connection with the pagan Goddess-worshippers of 5000 years ago.

It is not only that most Maltese have themselves chosen not to identify with their neolithic past. Grima (1998: 39), another Maltese scholar, argues that the “otherness” of the past has been reinforced by a “long history of exclusion”. During “the early nineteenth century the people actively interested in these sites were almost exclusively foreign and primarily British”. (Malta was a British colony from 1800 until 1964.) For Maltese, Grima claims, the conclusion has been that “it is the foreigner who can relate to these stones and make them speak” (1998: 39).

I was frequently reminded of this while doing fieldwork. I saw replicas of Goddess statues in only a few Maltese homes,<sup>15</sup> yet I knew that visiting Goddess pilgrims buy and carry them home by the suitcase-full. When I asked the proprietor of a tourist shop who bought the large (weighing about twelve kilograms) replicas of neolithic Goddesses, he replied that it is mostly Germans who buy them and take them home as hand luggage. Government offices and some local businesses were starting to purchase them, but with respect to the Maltese public in general: “We don’t know what we’ve got”.

And yet, while the temples and their associated artefacts have no contemporary religious importance for most Maltese, they have been and are extremely important, particularly for some middle-class people, and particularly around and since the end of the colonial era, as symbols of Maltese identity. Sparked by Maltese independence and by the broader global questing of the period, the 1960s saw an intellectual and artistic renaissance in Malta, along with a questing for self-understanding, roots and identity. Academics, artists, philosophers, musicians, writers, historians, scientists and linguists were all exploring what it meant to be Maltese, and the temples were employed as symbols of an essentially Maltese identity.<sup>16</sup> One man explained to me: “The temples *are* sacred, but not in a religious sense, in a nationalistic sense. The stones are the most ancient things in our landscape. We realize that our Malteseness is projected into the past via the temples”. Students I spoke with, children of parents who grew up during the 1960s, emphasized that the temples were part of their heritage and historical identity. They grew up learning poems which romanticized the temples (especially those of Gorg Pisani, such as “Il-Ggantija T’Ghawdex” and “F’Hajar Qim”),<sup>17</sup> engendered patriotic pride, and “formed a part of our national consciousness”. But they also acknowledged that while the temples were co-opted as symbols to support the

artistic revival and nationalistic agenda of the post-independence era, “the populace” were probably much less aware of this essentially middle-class project.

## HUNTERS

Grima (1998: 41) has argued that the communities which lie closest to the temples located in rural settings, like Hagar Qim and Mnajdra, “perceive them as nodes of foreign activity which may even be perceived as intrusive”. The government’s proposal to create an extensive archaeological park surrounding Hagar Qim and Mnajdra on the beautiful, less-developed southern coast of Malta has been unpopular amongst local people because it would appropriate land used traditionally by them for bird-trapping and hunting. Grima describes how the anger of some apparently exploded on the night of the general election of 26 October 1996 when the facade and interior of the southern Mnajdra temple were sprayed with two-foot high graffiti which included the name of Malta’s Green party (with which the hunters are associated), “ambjent” (the Maltese word for environment), and “RTO” (an abbreviation of “Reservato” used in the countryside to mark where a hunting or trapping concession has been rented out). Grima (1998: 42) interprets the vandalism to the temple as “a perverse but eloquent cry of dispossession” from those who see an intrusive state as “the direct successor of a foreign colonial power”. For many local people in the neighbourhood of Hagar Qim and Mnajdra the temples have become symbols of the established order rather than a proud national heritage, and thus for the vandals they became “useful metonyms of protest”. Four years later the temples still bear their message. The hunters’ resentment is directed against tourism in general and state institutions; it is doubtful whether they are aware of the Goddess pilgrims who form only a very small proportion of foreign tourists.

Lowenthal (1997) gives many examples of peoples who feel distanced from and dispossessed of their heritage by outsiders. In Sicily, Malta’s closest neighbour, near Syracuse, “the faceless, limbless stumps of a dozen statues of the goddess Cybele, hacked to pieces by a peasant tired of tourists trampling his onions, attest the danger presented by a people that feels that its past doesn’t belong to it” (Lowenthal 1997: 22).

## GODDESS PILGRIMS

Alongside a fairly widespread Maltese nonchalance about the temples and their eagerness to identify nationally as Christian, there is the parallel phenomenon of foreign women rejecting their Christian heritages and avidly seeking a return to a Goddess-centred spirituality and to ancient sites in exotic locations which they see as connected with Goddess-worship. Each year sizable numbers, though not droves, as individuals and in groups, make the sacred pilgrimage to Malta’s temples (as well as to other “Goddess sites” like Avebury, Bath, Delphi, Knossos, Syracuse, and so on). “Goddess tours” from North America and Europe are organized by a number of independent operators (all of whom are foreign except for one who is half Maltese and half American).<sup>18</sup> An internationally distributed newspaper called *Goddessing Regenerated*, a forum for interviews, articles, poetry, art, reviews, letters and information about “Goddess events” worldwide, is edited by an American woman living part-time in Malta.

These visitors to Malta avidly embrace the popular Maltese discourse regarding the temples, elaborating it and creating a detailed, coherent and confident narrative which constructs ancient Maltese society as peaceful, earth-honouring, matrifocal and egalitarian.

Here, for example, is how neolithic Malta is represented in Donna Read's 1989 film *Goddess Remembered*:<sup>19</sup>

Seven thousand years ago, the first raising of crops was done with hand tools, probably by women, for we know that women developed agriculture and the domestication of animals. Their clay houses have been washed away, but their temples remain. . . curved and rounded, carved out of the monumental stone in the shape of their female deity. The sick found comfort in the temples. It was the place of healing, the place of community. It was also the place of the oracle where one could hear the voice of the priestess, an ancient healer who gave prediction and counsel.

Gimbutas (1999: 98), beloved in Goddess circles for her extensive archaeological research on European goddesses, declares that in Malta's temples rituals connected with birth, death and regeneration were carried out by a society in which "women's activities took on sacred meaning".

Pilgrims to the temples often enthuse about their experiences, relating epiphanal moments and their sense of "coming home" to matrifocal roots. One woman, on her return, wrote:

I tried to imagine what meaning they [the "Goddess" statues] might have carried in their own time, but faced with these extraordinary fat figures, I found myself unable to be objective at all. They simply delighted me. Their size moved me. They filled me with a joy in the beauty of my own body that I have never felt before. I am not a very large woman, nevertheless, the issue of fat has negatively affected my image of myself. . . Standing in front of the glass case in that dusky museum was an epiphany: the Goddess revealed to me in my own body. Visiting Hagar Qim, I needed nothing more than the present. I did not see the temples as remnants or ruins from the past but as contemporary sacred space. I lay down against the curved wall, fitted my body within their warm contours, and felt utterly connected to the past, present and future in the great cycle of being. The shift in perception I experienced remains. I believe there are certain configurations on earth that correspond to the dreamscapes we carry within. These landscapes hold particular messages, portents and lessons for us if we pay attention. Certainly for me, Malta is such a place.<sup>20</sup>

I have read and been told a number of similar stories of deeply emotional experiences in the temples: of awe, healing, empowerment, transformation, and spiritual revelation. The temples and statues seem to evoke a huge nostalgia in these women for what they believe they have lost in modern industrialized, patriarchal society: the "primitive", the "natural" and a high social value placed on women. They kindle and apparently satisfy a nostalgic desire for solidity, simplicity, connection with the earth, an ancient spiritual heritage, all of which are felt to have been lost within contemporary Western societies. If, as MacCannell (1976) claims, the tourist can be seen "as a contemporary pilgrim fleeing the superficiality, instability, and inauthenticity of modern society in quest of 'authenticity'" (Boissevain 1996a: 2), this is much *more* true of tourists who have sympathies with the Goddess movement. Similarly more true is Greenwood's (1989: 184) claim that for middle-class tourists, the "thirst for cultural authenticity" is "a recognition of the supposed cultural impoverishment that has accompanied economic success and world domination". The reasons Lowenthal (1997: 6) gives for the burgeoning growth of the heritage crusade more generally probably also apply to the Goddess pilgrims: a sense of isolation and dislocation of self from family, neighbourhood, nation and "even oneself from one's former selves", along with dismay at the pace of technological change and the loss and neglect of natural landscapes.

There is no doubt that neolithic Malta has been incorporated into a feminist utopian myth, and that those in the Goddess movement are not bothered, unlike Maltese, about the paucity of knowable "facts" about neolithic society. One of the movement's best-loved and oft-quoted maxims, from *The Guérillères* by Monique Wittig (1972: 95), is "Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent". The invention of a matrifocal Golden Age is considered a justifiable means to achieve a future where women are (again) equal with men, based on the assumption that if you can imagine a better past, it should be easier to imagine, and create, a better future (Passman 1993). Thus the Goddess movement delightedly draws on and embellishes popular Maltese discourse about neolithic religion for contemporary spiritual purposes, and a much larger social and political feminist agenda. However, while Maltese

popular discourse heavily emphasizes the fertile and maternal aspects of the “Mother Goddess”, as one might expect in a strongly Roman Catholic society, not to mention one which is still comparatively patriarchal, the foreign pilgrims associate the ancient Goddess with a more nebulous female power which is not restricted to procreative power. While they are intent on sacralizing and celebrating the female body, many would be wary of embracing as essentialist construction of the sacred feminine (or the human feminine) which emphasizes female nurturance.

The Goddess movement’s appropriation of the past for contemporary purposes has, of course, been strongly criticized by some feminist anthropologists, archaeologists and other scholars on a number of counts: for misrepresenting history and prehistory, for misrepresenting ancient goddesses, for appropriating and colonizing the pasts of indigenous peoples, and, misguidedly in my view, for embracing a damaging, essentializing view of “woman” (Rountree 1999; 2001).<sup>21</sup> Scholarly criticism of the movement has been vehement: how do Maltese people themselves feel about it?

## **MALTESE RESPONSE TO THE GODDESS MOVEMENT**

In short, despite Malta’s great attraction for the Goddess pilgrims, most Maltese have never heard of the movement. There is no local variant, although there are a few Maltese women, mostly artists and those interested in exploring a variety of spiritual traditions, who are interested to varying degrees in Goddess worship, imagery and symbols. I met only a handful of individuals, men as well as women, who said their personal spirituality was deeply connected with the temples and the sacred landscape in which they stand. But these individuals were emphatically averse to seeing the past in terms of a contemporary feminist political agenda and considered the evocation of a gendered or politicized spirituality as misrepresenting the past. One man said that he was perfectly well aware of the spiritual value of the temples, and was “very willing to lean over backwards and actually feel the vibrations myself”, but to equate them with a “great feminist movement” was going too far and irritated him.

But such individuals, who sense a spiritual connection to the temples and are aware of the Goddess movement’s interests and agendas in Malta, are rare. When I initially raised the issue of Malta’s past being appropriated by foreign Goddess enthusiasts, even amongst academics and university students, most people had no idea what I was talking about. Of those I met who knew about the movement, many were bemused (and some a little amused), some did not care and could not see what the problem might be, and some were flattered and even grateful that Malta should attract such admiring attention. Relatively very few expressed indignation, suspicion or anger; when they did this was usually because they felt foreigners were reaping financial benefits (which rightfully belonged to Maltese) from tourism in relation to the temples.

When I asked Maltese students how Maltese felt about foreigners enthusing over the temples, one young man said:

I think it is a good idea, because finally we are appreciating what we have. These temples were built seven to five thousand years ago, but there has been more damage to them in the past fifty years than in any other fifty years since they’ve been built. This is simply because of lack of awareness, lack of care, lack of interest on the part of [Maltese] people and governments. There has been no prevention whatsoever of damage posed to them. At this rate, in another fifty years time, we won’t have any temples any more. So, unfortunately, we need someone from abroad coming in and telling us: “This is what you have. Take care of it!” for us to realize. I mean, it’s very stupid, but if that’s the way it has to be, the most important thing is that the temples actually remain there, you know?

Another young man, while not disagreeing that foreigners have played an important, active role in drawing attention to the urgent need to conserve the temples, pointed out that most of the damage done to the temples has actually resulted from an excess of tourists. I asked the students whether it bothered them that foreigners were coming to Malta and claiming to feel a spiritual link to the Maltese past; did they feel their past was being appropriated by non-Maltese? Even after I talked about other examples of indigenous people's indignation and protest about Goddess enthusiasts' appropriation of their spiritual beliefs, traditions, sites and/or other aspects of their cultural property (e.g. Native American, Maori), none of the Maltese students I spoke with could understand why they or any other people should have a problem. They said:

If Maltese people have so little interest. . .

Why should we [mind]? I don't think we should assume that just because the temples are here and were built by Maltese people, that we have the spiritual rights over everybody else who might feel a link with them. In the same way, we might feel a link with Machu Picu or with other spiritual sacred places of other cultures. After all, they are World Heritage sites; they belong to not only Maltese, and they should be protected. This is what I am saying.

And another thing, there is this theory that Malta was not much of an inhabited island, but more of a shrine, like Lourdes. Pilgrims going to it, and going back again.

I asked about the replicas of Goddess statues foreigners are so keen on owning: Did that seem odd to them?

Not really. I mean. . .if it forms part of their spirituality.

Exactly. It doesn't form a central part of ours, so we don't.

For them it's part of their religion. For us it's something historical. It still is important, but not spiritually maybe.

And I'm sure that they most probably know more about the temples and the history and how those people lived.

I know whole groups of people who would think it's absolutely absurd to think of the Fat Lady as a Goddess. There's just God and the Virgin Mary.

(Q) What do they think she is then?  
Nationally, something Maltese.

The consensus in this group was that if some foreigners wish to construct an imagined spiritual link with Malta's temples, fine; this takes nothing away from Maltese, and the activism of foreign enthusiasts in relation to temple conservation may well help save them. On the whole, popular Maltese interpretations of the temples have co-existed comfortably alongside those of the Goddess pilgrims, although the latter's spiritual and political agendas in relation to the temples are unknown to most people, and do not concern most of those who do know. In general there seemed to be a colonized mentality in relation to the whole subject of the temples, a passive acknowledgement that "the foreigner knows best" and cares most, and has taken-for-granted rights.

Recently, however, there have been grumblings about the commoditization of the temples by at least one increasingly high profile Goddess tour operator. "She is building her own business on Malta's temples", I was told. Such a commercial agenda may be coming to be seen as competing, though probably not significantly, with what is the most important local agenda in relation to the temples: making money.<sup>22</sup>

## RE-INVENTING MNAJDRA

A project designed recently by this American tour operator has provoked an animated response from Maltese. During 1999 this woman, who has been leading North American tour groups to Malta for several years and who has been active and vociferous in helping promote and conserve Malta's neolithic heritage,<sup>23</sup> developed a proposal to build a replica of Mnajdra temple, along with a "neolithic village", in Sarasota, Florida. The "open air museum and discovery center" would "make prehistoric Malta a living experience, much like a theme park with re-enactors in period costumes" (*The Times of Malta*, 1 June 1999). The park is intended to be self-financing, with any remaining revenue being put towards the conservation of the "real temples back in Malta". The University of Malta, the University of Florence and the University of South Florida were to be approached to lend support to the project.

Maltese response to this plan has ranged from outrage to gratitude, from reluctant but pragmatic accommodation of the idea, to the astute recognition of a lucrative business opportunity. Writing in *The Times of Malta* on 11 June 1999, Conrad Thake deplored the project as a Disney-inspired farce which "runs roughshod over our millennia-old heritage":

To build a sham replica of a world monument over seven thousand years old<sup>24</sup> in an entirely different geographical and cultural context. . . represents in my view the ultimate in pastiche and tasteless kitsch. . . This replica initiative makes a mockery of all that Mnajdra stands for. Instead of stone megaliths weighing a few tons, one would presume the mock-up to be made up of some hollow expanded polystyrene blocks.

In Thake's view the appropriation of Mnajdra is all the more of a blow when the "authentic" monuments are in dire need of conservation. In his view the would-be creator of a replica "would be doing a far greater service to our country by investing its energies and dollars in a more productive venture such as funding a scientific study to safeguard Hagar Qim and Mnajdra". Several other Maltese I spoke to shared Thake's scepticism.

On the other hand, replying to Thake in *The Times* on 18 June 1999, Vanessa Macdonald chided Thake for his easily-offended sensibilities and ungracious rejection of the Florida project. At least, she said, the "idea puts Mnajdra on the [global] map", increasing Malta's opportunities for tourism and the temple's chance of attracting international concern for its plight:

I do not know if Mr Thake knows the lady behind this project. It is his loss, as apart from the fact that she is luminously beautiful, she has also worked ceaselessly (and thanklessly, it seems) to promote the temples in the US, lecturing, passing on information by internet, collecting money, organising awareness campaigns in schools here. The idea is that if we are unable or unwilling to care for our temples ourselves, then at least the rest of the world can care enough about them to force us to look after them.

While there is an ambivalence about tourism in relation to the temples, common to these responses and to those of the students I spoke with was the acknowledgement that Malta's temples have been neglected locally and urgently require a massive conservation effort with which foreigners are more than welcome to assist. This is very much a middle class response.

When I asked a museum curator how he felt about the Mnajdra replica, he said that following a negative initial response, he had concluded that if the Florida replica provided an accessible, cheap means for Americans to experience a "Maltese temple", at least the real temples might suffer a little less damage from tourists tracking through the sites. He saw his role as curatorial rather than proprietorial: his over-riding priority was to conserve the sites, not to engage in "unwinable battles offshore".

A pragmatic response of a different kind came from a Maltese craftsman who makes a living producing replicas of Maltese Goddess statues for the tourist market. Upon hearing of the proposed replica he dispatched a letter to the project's originator offering his services to build the Florida imitation from stone rather than the proposed polystyrene. In this case the local and foreign agendas to commoditize the temples came together; the Maltese craftsman

was eager to cooperate in Mnajdra's appropriation by Americans in the interests of a personal business opportunity.

## TOURISM

No one today disputes that the temples are at risk, and that the deterioration of their condition is accelerating. Stormy weather in November 1998, as it had on other occasions, caused some of the megalithic stones at Hagar Qim to topple, and since 1999 public access to parts of the temple has been restricted. Tourists, activity at neighbouring quarries, and vandals have also contributed to the sites' deterioration. Temple conservation meetings have been held in Malta with representatives attending from UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS and the Getty Conservation Institute, but so far little has been done. This seems astonishing given that, apart from their huge and unique value as archaeological sites, the temples are a crucial component of heritage or historical tourism in Malta, and tourism is fundamental to the nation's economy.<sup>25</sup> In an article on tourism in Malta, Black (1996: 128) reports British tourists' comment that the temple sites lack "development", and she agrees: "[C]ompared to equivalent sites elsewhere there have been only limited efforts to 'organize' the heritage they represent". There is no on-site interpretation at Hagar Qim, Mnajdra or Tarxien; the sites are simply fenced, one Maltese pound is collected at the entrance, and tourists are virtually free to explore the sites unmanaged.<sup>26</sup> Although the primary value of the temples in most Maltese people's eyes is economic, their on-going value as commodities appears to be at risk. The notable exception to this picture is the Hal Saflieni hypogeum, which re-opened to the public in August 2000 after being closed for nine years during which extensive conservation work costing 400,000 Maltese pounds<sup>27</sup> was carried out.

In the academic literature on tourism, much has been written about how the commoditization of culture for the tourist industry "in effect robs people of the very meanings by which they organize their lives" and "is a violation of the people's cultural rights" (Greenwood 1989: 179).<sup>28</sup> In the case of Malta's temples, however, it is not commoditization for the tourist market which has distanced people from their cultural heritage, although this has undoubtedly increased it. As Sant Cassia (1993) and Grima (1998) have shown, local people have long felt alienated from the sites, partly as a result of their strong identification with Christianity and partly as a result of centuries of foreigners' interest within a colonial context. Ironically it is tourism which is now providing a link for some Maltese to learn about and engage frequently with the sites. The trainee tour guides who gave me a comprehensive and enthusiastic tour of the temples and another archaeological site were amongst the most knowledgeable and passionate about the sites I encountered.<sup>29</sup>

Tour guides, who are trained at Malta's Institute of Tourism Studies, aim to structure "the tourist's experience through an evocative, captivating narrative" which helps the tourist imagine the past more vividly (Mitchell 1996: 214). A group of trainee guides I talked with were adept at presenting this kind of narrative which drew heavily on the popular interpretation of the temples, including frequent mention of a neolithic "fertility cult" and "fertility Goddess". However, the link made in popular discourse between the rounded shape of the temples and the rounded shape of the "Goddess" statues found therein is no longer an unproblematic component of the tour guide's narrative. Archaeologists are telling them that the anthropomorphic shape of some temples is simply one phase of Maltese temple development, which began with a single egg-shaped chamber. Indeed, even the "fertility Goddess" seems to be at risk, an experienced tour guide told me, as a result of doubt cast by archaeologists because of the absence of breasts on the rounded, stylized figures (see Fig. 2). (There are, however, a number of figurines, such as the famous "Venus of Malta" (Fig. 4) and



FIGURE 4 Popularly known as “Venus of Malta”, clay figurine from Hagar Qim temple. 3500–3000 BC Height: 13 cm. *Courtesy of National Museum of Archaeology, Malta.*

“Sleeping Lady” (Fig. 5), which have ample breasts. None of the figurines or statues found in any of the temples has identifiably male characteristics.)

Thus, in terms of constructing a narrative for tourists, tour guides are currently caught between the popular interpretation and an increasingly divergent archaeological discourse concerning the temples. In January 2000 I was told by a lecturer from ITS that now archaeologists are not convinced that the “temples” are, in fact, temples. This is borne out in

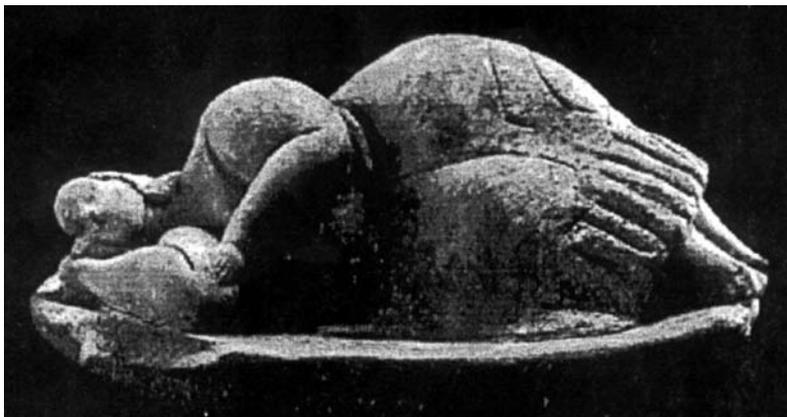


FIGURE 5 Popularly known as “The Sleeping Lady”, clay figurine with traces of red colouring on couch. Hal Saflieni hypogeum (3300–3000 BC). Length: 12.2 cm. *Courtesy of National Museum of Archaeology, Malta.*

a recent brochure put out by The National Museum of Archaeology which describes Hagar Qim, Mnajdra and Tarxien as “examples of a complex form of architecture” and “impressive megalithic buildings [which] may have served as important focal points for the different communities of the islands”. Nowhere are the structures referred to as “temples”, and nowhere are the figurines found in the temples referred to as “Goddesses”; rather they are “some of the finest examples of prehistoric art in the Mediterranean”.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

Nor in the extensive, handsomely renovated display (opened April 1998) of neolithic material in the National Museum of Archaeology is there any mention of a “fertility Goddess”. Indeed the term “goddess” (lower case “g”) is used once only in the display in connection with the “Sleeping Lady” figurine (Fig. 5), and it is placed in inverted commas, presumably to indicate that this is a popular interpretation of the figure. Ironically the word “fertility” is also used once only in the museum display, in the panel alongside a solitary case of “Phallic Symbols”.

Contemporary archeological discourse regarding the proper interpretation of the neolithic period is clearly poles apart from the long-standing popular interpretation drawn on by the Goddess movement and embellished in writings such as those by Marija Gimbutas,<sup>30</sup> archaeological guru of the movement. When I spoke with two archaeologists on separate occasions, it was obvious that neither had much time for a Gimbutas-inspired reconstruction of the Maltese neolithic.

One told me that it is foreigners who “become dewy-eyed” about the idea of an ancient Mother Goddess. The official archaeological line in Malta, which co-incides with that of the British archaeologists who have excavated there alongside Maltese, is that the bulk of the statues and figurines are asexual and there is no conclusive evidence that Malta was ever the matristic, Goddess-worshipping utopia it has been portrayed as being by Gimbutas and others (for example, see Malone 1998: 163).<sup>31</sup>

Yet archaeological discourse in Malta was not always divorced from popular discourse. It has become increasingly so in recent decades. One explanation for the gulf could be simply that the popular discourse has not yet caught up with the revised archaeological interpretation. But it is very noticeable that archaeologists became vehemently opposed to interpretations which follow a Gimbutas line at the time when the Goddess movement became widely interested in the possibility of an ancient matristic society in Malta (and elsewhere in southern Europe). It is difficult not to conclude that they objected to the feminist political agenda of the Goddess movement, which they claimed was misrepresenting the past for contemporary purposes, as much as they objected to Gimbutas for her admittedly faulty methods and style of analysis. Internationally much scholarly effort on the part of archaeologists and others has been directed at critiquing Gimbutas and those within the Goddess movement who have adopted her ideas (Brown 1993; Conkey and Tringham 1995; 1998; Meskell 1995; 1998; Malone 1998). Maltese archaeologists apparently share this position. The conflict between scholars inclined towards a Gimbutas style interpretation and those who are not surfaced publicly at an international conference held in Malta in 1985 titled “Archaeological and Fertility Cult in the Ancient Mediterranean”.<sup>32</sup>

However while Maltese archaeologists privately dismiss Goddess feminists’ utopian reconstructions of Malta’s past, personal relationships between the two groups are surprisingly friendly, mutually supportive and pragmatic. Special entry to particular sites is granted to Goddess pilgrims, and requests for various kinds of information and support are generously met, despite the already overburdened state of the museum’s resources and staff.

A Maltese archaeologist gives talks on Malta's prehistory to Goddess tour groups, and experts on the neolithic sites have been flown to the United States to give talks to Goddess enthusiasts. Intellectually they may have little time for "dewy-eyed" reconstructions of Malta's past, but they are grateful for the money donated by the American-based foundation set up by one of the foreign tour operators which has contributed towards an education programme for Maltese school children, a new archaeology laboratory at the University of Malta, chairs for the Museum of Archaeology's seminar hall, and so on. A pragmatic symbiosis has been achieved with both sides aware of the mutual benefits of getting along, despite their ideological differences. Whatever other agendas each group has, a crucially important shared agenda is the preservation of the sites.

## ARTISTS

Another group with whom the Goddess pilgrims have been engaging recently comprises Maltese artists—painters, writers, architects, sculptors, ceramicists—amongst whom there has been a fresh renaissance of interest in the legacy of the neolithic. Artists working with neolithic symbols have a diversity of motivations, but those I interviewed were all concerned with questions of personal and/or national identity, and had an acute ecological awareness.<sup>33</sup> They were virtually the only Maltese I met who spoke with great feeling about their sense of an intimate, personal connection with the temples, expressed in terms of nationalistic pride, spiritual rootedness, and a deep reverence and love for the Maltese landscape which several referred to as "Mother Earth". For some the neolithic sites were integral parts of a sacralized landscape where spirit and artistic muse were awakened. The ardour with which these artists spoke about the temples resembled that of the Goddess pilgrims, and they referred to some of the same literature, especially Marija Gimbutas's work. Yet in discussion they personally shunned the latter's gendered, politicized approach to the temples, while stopping short of criticizing such an approach.

Clearly some of the artists currently interested in the temples have become so as a result of meeting foreign artists entranced with Malta's temples, many of whom are associated with the Goddess movement. Two told me about how foreigners had inspired and encouraged them to draw on their neolithic heritage, for which they were grateful. The artistic careers of some younger artists have undoubtedly been boosted as a result of association with these foreigners. But other Maltese artists have been working quite independently of the foreign Goddess enthusiasts, and some, like Antoine Camilleri and Richard England, have been doing so since the 1960s. For the younger artists who have grown up in the post-independence era, whether or not they have had much to do with foreign artists, the temples are a source of indigenous symbols and global connections. Some have exhibited alongside foreign artists who are working with similar themes. In 1999 there were three shows in Malta on the theme of the sacred feminine: "Il-Mara",<sup>34</sup> in which Maltese and American artists showed works on the theme of "Female Symbols and Archetypes", "Seven Women/Seven Temples", an exhibition of works on the temples by seven women artists resident in Malta, and "The Goddess", an exhibition of German and Maltese artists' work.

None of the artists I met spoke negatively about the Goddess movement in general or about foreign artists associated with it. A number enjoyed being part of a wider community who shared an artistic interest in the temples.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this paper I have aimed to show some of the different ways in which Malta's neolithic temples have been interpretively employed to serve the interests, politics and agendas of various local and foreign groups. At different times in different quarters the temples have engendered apathy and awe, inspired poetry and protest, have been symbolically employed in the creation of Maltese national identity and by non-Maltese to construct a personal, spiritual identity and ancestry. The "fertility Goddess" has been commoditized by local and foreign tour operators, shunned by local and most foreign archaeologists (the most notable exception being Marija Gimbutas), embraced by indigenous and foreign artists, but ignored by the great majority of local people and tourists. Four and a half millennia of foreign appropriation, and two millennia of Christianity, have resulted in most Maltese feeling disconnected from these prehistoric monuments and the past they represent. For some, especially the trappers and hunters, foreigners' interests in the temples are unwelcome intrusions upon indigenous uses of the landscape. And at least some Maltese see the foreign Goddess tour operators as being in competition for the tourist dollar with local tour operators.

Ironically some of those Maltese who have recently "discovered" the Goddess and their ancient religious heritage have done so as a result of meeting Americans involved in the Goddess movement, a designer religion created in a New Age half a world away. But there are also some Maltese, apparently rather few, who feel a "natural bond" with the landscape in which the temples are set, speak of being energized, awed and inspired by the temples, and are desperately concerned about their preservation. Their concerns do not revolve around foreign appropriation of Maltese cultural property or the political agendas of the foreign temple enthusiasts: they are pragmatically focussed on saving the temples. It is this concern which forges a co-operative link between two groups with different interpretations and agendas: local archaeologists and foreign Goddess pilgrims.

While guiding me around the magnificent underground chambers of the Hal Saffieni hypogeum as the nine year conservation project was being completed, the curator<sup>35</sup> explained: "The [Museums] Department is doing its best to conserve everything with today's technology. Everything is focussed on one thing, the preservation and conservation of the place. If we lose this, we have lost everything".

### *Acknowledgements*

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### *Notes*

1. There are 358 churches in Malta, around one for every thousand people (*The Malta Year Book* 1999: 139).
2. The population of Malta is around 380 thousand, 98% of whom are members of the Catholic church. Of these, 85% practise their faith at least once a week (Mitchell 1997). However many of

the students I talked to at the University of Malta emphasized that the younger generation is not as religious as that of their parents, and that their understandings of Christianity are different.

3. The script for this video, which is screened at the Emigrants Commission near the Upper Barracca in Valletta, the Maltese capital, was written by Peter Serracino Inglott, a priest and philosopher in Malta. It should be noted that archaeologists on the whole would be reluctant to endorse the theory that Malta attracted prehistoric pilgrims because of the lack of conclusive evidence. Indeed archaeologists working in Malta make very few confident assertions about the nature of religion practised in connection with the temples (Trump 1981; 1990; Evans 1996; Malone 1998).
4. Discussing tourist visits to Maltese sites, Mitchell (1996: 211) says that “by seeing the place, you can somehow experience that [prehistoric] activity or event. A site embodies the historical past in the visible present”.
5. There is now a substantial body of literature on this movement, however little of it is academic. A recent exception is *Daughters of the Goddess: Studies of Healing, Identity, and Empowerment* edited by Griffin (2000).
6. See Wiener’s (1995: 499) discussion of poststructuralist critiques of Hegelian assumptions with respect to the relation of culture and power in her article “Doors of perception: Power and Representation in Bali”.
7. Some sites are in such a state of ruin it is not possible to be sure whether they are, in fact, temples. See Trump (1981: 72) for a map showing the distribution of different types of temples.
8. Trump (1981: 67) says evidence of plastering and painting have been identified at Ggantija and Skorba temples.
9. The tiny model of a simple oval temple (height 4.5 cm) found at Ta’Hagrat, Mgarr, suggests the temples were roofed with stone slabs.
10. One of the excavators, W. A. Griffiths, writing in 1920, estimated that site contained the bones of 33,000 people (Mifsud and Mifsud 1999: 155). Both figures are guesses calculated using different criteria.
11. The most famous and exquisitely executed figurine from a neolithic site, commonly known as “The Sleeping Lady” (Fig. 5), was found at the Hal Safieni hypogeum. The figurine depicts a woman, perhaps a priestess, wearing a pleated skirt and bare-breasted, lying sleeping on her side on a couch.
12. Bonanno (1999: 215) says that Bronze Age figurines from Tarxien are similar to statuettes of the Castelluccio culture from Monte San Giuliano (Caltanissetta) in Sicily and elsewhere in the central and eastern Mediterranean.
13. Throughout its prehistory and history Malta has been colonized and re-colonized by a long succession of peoples. From 1530 to 1798 the islands were ruled by the Sovereign Order of St. John of Jerusalem. The head of the Order was the Grand Master who made political directives along with a Council of Knights. The knights were responsible for building formidable fortifications which enabled the Maltese to fend off a massive Turkish attack in 1565, and they built the walled capital city of Valletta. The period of the Knights ended when Napoleon conquered Malta in 1798.
14. When I asked sales attendants in tourist shops what the various replicas of temple statuettes were, I was given the following range of replies, some of which were specific to particular figures, and others which applied to the whole range: “Venus of Malta”, “Goddess of fertility”, “Goddess of love”, “Fertility idol”, “Sitting Lady”, “Fertility Lady”, “Fat Lady”, “Sleeping Lady”, and simply “Venus”.
15. Those in whose homes I saw the statues were mostly artists who expressed a strong sense of spiritual connection with the temples. One woman also has replicas of Goddesses from archaeological sites elsewhere in the world.
16. I am indebted to Richard England, a Maltese architect, artist and poet who came to prominence during this period, to Joe Cauchi, and to my husband Dr Joe Grixti, for discussing this period with me.
17. Both these poems invoke ancient scenarios where maidens are being sacrificed in the temples for their beloved country, either to save it from famine or from foreign invasion. (There is, however, no archaeological evidence that human sacrifice were occurred in the temples.)
18. In the last five years there have been six to ten organized Goddess tours per year. Of course many women arrange their own travel.

19. The film is a Studio D Production of The National Film Board of Canada, distributed by Educational Media, Australia.
20. Published in *The Beltane Papers: A Journal of Women's Mysteries*, 13, 1997, pp. 11–12.
21. For criticisms of the Goddess movement see: Bamberger (1974), Ortner (1974; 1996), Binford (1982), Hackett (1989), di Leonardo (1991), Brown (1993), Conkey and Tringham (1995; 1998), Meskell (1995; 1998), Goodison and Morris (1998) and Westenholz (1998).
22. “The Sleeping Lady”, often used as a symbol of Malta’s past, is reproduced in a print advertisement for Globe Financial Management Ltd., an investment services business in Malta. In the advertisement (*The Malta Independent on Sunday*, 14 May 2000, p. 1), the statuette rests under a large heading “Symbol of fertility”, presumably implying that an abundance of wealth will flow to those who take advantage of the investment opportunities offered.
23. After discovering Malta’s neolithic temples by accident, and being awe-struck by them, this woman began visiting Malta regularly and leading tours. In 1995 she set up a foundation to promote education about Malta’s neolithic heritage and to assist in the temples’ preservation. Amongst its activities the foundation has established a web site, assisted with the organization of conferences and seminars focused on the temples, helped develop educational programmes for Maltese schools, funded a new archaeology laboratory at the University of Malta, and lobbied internationally for funds to conserve the temples.
24. Mnajdra is closer to 5000 than 7000 years old.
25. In 1997 1,111,161 tourists visited Malta, around three times the national population (*The Malta Year Book* 1999: 244).
26. A hazard for women visiting one of the sites on their own, myself included, has been the unwanted attention from a Maltese man offering to point out stones with an extra endowment of “the energy” and invitations to nocturnal access to the site.
27. Reported in *The Times of Malta*, 20 July 2000. Four hundred thousand Maltese pounds is equivalent to 628,000 British pounds or \$US940,000.
28. Jeremy Boissevain (1996b) has considered the question of commoditization of Maltese culture with respect to Holy Week and *fešta* celebrations. His conclusion is that: “While Malta is indeed now selling its colourful rituals to tourists, this commoditization is not destroying them. On the contrary, it has imbued them with new meaning” (1996b: 116). The former religious dimension of these rituals is still “very much alive”, and in addition they are being used to define village identity more rigorously, to recapture a sense of community, to express Maltese culture to visitors from abroad, and by the modernized urban elite to explore and participate in their cultural heritage (Boissevain 1996b: 117).
29. I am indebted to Marisa and Pat for their wonderful generosity as hosts, and to Angèle Andrews for introducing me to a group of trainee guides.
30. Gimbutas’s publications include *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* (1982), *The Civilization of the Goddess* (1991) and, posthumously edited by M. Robbins Dexter, *The Living Goddesses* (1999).
31. Gimbutas is attributed with interpreting the neolithic religion of Malta as centred on a “fertility deity” (Malone 1998: 151) which makes it easier to dismiss her interpretation as simplistic, although Gimbutas herself spoke in much broader terms of a Regeneratrix who gave, took, and regenerated life (1991: x).
32. Gimbutas was present and later declined to have her paper included in the Conference Proceedings (see Bonanno 1986). Two of my interviewees who attended the conference told me about this. I discuss the relationships amongst archaeology, feminism, Gimbutas’s work and the Goddess movement in detail in another paper (Rountree 2001).
33. In particular I am hugely indebted to those who gave me taped interviews, catalogues of their work, tours of their studios and warm hospitality: Richard England, Antoine Camilleri, Isabelle Borg, Josette Caruana, Anna Grima, Ruth Bianco, Marlene Saliba, Joe Xeureb and Louis Lagana. I am also very grateful Raphael Vella for discussing ideas contained in this paper with me.
34. “The Woman” in Maltese.
35. I am deeply grateful to Joe Farrugia for the hours he spent talking with me about the Hal Saflieni hypogeum on two occasions.

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