

World Heritage Site Management: protecting a site in its landscape, a Maltese case-study

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“The Maltese must be made aware that they are the guardians of the temples and not their owners. The insular mentality of an island people must make way for a broader scope of thought that takes into account the validation and equally legitimate claims of the international community towards their upkeep and conservation”
(Vella, J 2001 www.otsf.org/Place 8/11/04)

In April 2000, a violent vandalistic attack on the megalithic temple site of Mnajdra on Malta left the island and the wider community shocked and angered. This was not the first attack, but was the latest and most extreme of a series of incidents of serious vandalism during the 1990s. The vandalism was condemned by local and international communities and widely publicised but the perpetrators have not been identified.

This incident served to highlight some potentially serious shortcomings in implementation of the World Heritage Convention (WHC) on a local level, with particular reference to its intention to protect sites and landscapes of ‘outstanding universal value’ (UNESCO 1972). The shock of this attack triggered an overwhelming local response. Marches through the capital Valletta and much public outcry culminated in the passing of the Cultural Heritage Act of 2003, which reorganised the management of the heritage on Malta through the creation of two distinct bodies with responsibility for different heritage issues.

Sadly this was not an isolated incident, either on Malta or in the wider World Heritage community. This paper examines the response of the Maltese community and WHS management team to the incident.

World Heritage and the World Heritage Management Plan

The Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (generally known as the World Heritage Convention) was adopted by the seventeenth session of the UNESCO General Conference in Paris on 16th November 1972. The Convention recognises that “parts of the ... heritage are of outstanding interest and therefore need to be preserved as part of the world heritage of mankind as a whole”. The associated Operational Guidelines document forms the basis of the practical implementation of the World Heritage Convention, overseen by the World Heritage Committee.

The use of a management plan, never specifically mentioned in the articles of the Convention, first occurs within the Operational Guidelines.

The production of a management plan, or demonstration of traditional management techniques is currently compulsory for World Heritage site inscription and must be annexed to the nomination document in order to demonstrate that the state party is able to manage the site in a manner befitting its 'outstanding universal value'. Without an adequate management plan a property cannot be inscribed as a World Heritage Site.

In order to ensure that the Operational Guidelines are followed in the implementation of the Convention, the World Heritage Committee monitors the activities of the various state parties and the conditions of the properties through systems of reactive and periodic reporting. Reactive monitoring occurs on an ad-hoc basis, the World Heritage Committee will respond to reported issues such as immediate threats to World Heritage or requests for assistance from state parties. Periodic Reporting on the other hand is a structured cyclical process whereby the World Heritage Committee monitors the implementation of the Convention region by region.

Periodic Reporting was introduced in 1997 to provide on a six-year cycle of monitoring:

- *to provide an assessment of the application of the World Heritage Convention by the state party*
- *to provide an assessment as to whether the World Heritage values of the properties inscribed on the World Heritage List are being maintained over time;*
- *to provide updated information about World Heritage properties to record the changing circumstances and the state of conservation of the properties;*
- *to provide a mechanism for regional co-operation and exchange of information and experiences between state parties concerning the implementation of the Convention and World Heritage Conservation;*

(<http://whc.unesco.org> 01.03.05)

The possession of a management plan by the individual properties enables the state party to gather the required information in order to submit the Periodic Report to the World Heritage Committee. Each region has a Periodic Reporting deadline, by which time all State Party Reports need to be submitted to the Committee.

The Maltese Background

The Maltese archipelago currently has three World Heritage Sites: Valleta, Hal Saflieni Hypogeum and the Megalithic Temple Sites. The Megalithic Temple Sites of Malta were inscribed in 1980 and date from the Neolithic period onwards; with dates as early as c.3500BC (Trump 1980: 88) they predate sites such as the Egyptian pyramids (c. 2500BC) and Stonehenge (c.2000BC).

The oldest surviving megalithic structures on Malta are of a simple trefoil plan (Joussame 1985: 221), although it is possible that the very earliest consisted of a single cell, such as that seen at Mgarr. Simple trefoil plans are found at Kordin, Mnajdra, Skorba and Tarxien. This shape appears to then evolve into a passage with transepts, such as that seen at Ggantija on Gozo. The most common basic plan common to the temples is a passage with pairs of transepts branching off it (Ridley 1971: 7).



Figure 1 Mnajdra and Hagar Qim

These monuments are generally acknowledged to be places of worship and may have been central features of a settlement or territorial division (Joussame 1985: 222). Contemporary with these temple sites are rock-cut tombs and structures. The most impressive of which is the Hal Saflieni hypogeum, an underground structure, which is constructed on a similar plan to the temples. When excavated these underground chambers were found to contain a huge quantity of burials in its 20 chambers, adding up to an MNI (minimum number of individuals) of almost 7,000 (Joussame 1985: 222). The main room of the hypogeum echoes the architecture of the temple sites including doorways mimicking the style of the uprights and lintels above ground (Whittle 1996: 317). Designs of spirals, lines and dots painted in red ochre survive on the walls and reflect the designs carved into the megaliths at the temple sites.

Well-known features of this period in Malta are the figurines and statues found at both the temple sites and the Hypogeum. These obese figures are found regularly at the temple sites in varying sizes from tiny figurines to enormous statues well over life size, such as the example at Tarxien. Some of these figures appear to be female and are commonly referred to as goddesses, while others are more androgynous.

There are approximately thirty temple sites in total on the Maltese archipelago, varying in size, date, and state of preservation. These range from single-celled structures to extensive and sophisticated temple complexes. The inscribed sites are: Mnajdra, Hagar Qim, Tarxien, Ta'Hagrat and Skorba on Malta and the two temple complexes of Ggantija, on Gozo (added to the inscription in 1992). These were inscribed under criteria iv of the World Heritage Convention Operational Guidelines:

- iv. *be an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history,*

Mnajdra is one of the most dramatically located of the temple sites, set on a hillside overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. Unlike some of other sites, such as Tarxien, Mnajdra is in a rural location and retains much of its original setting. A short distance up the slope from Mnajdra is Hagar Qim, another dramatic temple site. Currently these are managed as part of an Archaeological Park, which also contains various features from later periods. It is much visited during the summer months by coach parties of foreign tourists. These tourists constitute the majority of the temple visitors although local schools do use the sites and there are some education programmes in place and more being developed. Facilities at the Archaeological Park currently (2005) consist of a car and coach park, booths selling tickets and guidebooks at the entrance to the temple sites and a privately owned bar/restaurant beside the parking area.

Although the setting of Hagar Qim and Mnajdra appear relatively unaffected by modern development, two major issues affect the sites both on an aesthetic and very practical level.



Figure 2 – The reality of security fences and quarrying at Mnajdra and Hagar Qim

Large wire security fences affect the cosmetic appearance of the sites and their setting and therefore the ability to visualise and understand the sites within their landscape. The second issue has a more serious impact on the conservation of these sites and their setting. Directly behind Mnajdra is a substantial area of quarrying. The cliff has been quarried away almost entirely in one area, and there is a large gulf in the hillside where a huge area of rock has been removed. These are surrounded by the tracks of large quarry wagons and other vehicles. Quarrying has threatened the temple sites for many years, not only affecting their setting within the landscape but also damaging them structurally through the vibration of the vehicles and the quarrying process.

The quarry site at Mnajdra is currently inactive, but now the site faces a new threat. The large quarry behind the temple site is proposed as a landfill site, with the accompanying issues of the almost constant vibration of heavy vehicles and further comprising the setting of the site within its landscape.

Over recent years Mnajdra has been the target of several serious incidents of vandalism, necessitating the tall security fences and 24-hour security presence. However in April 2000 even these did not prove adequate as while the security guard was patrolling Hagar Qim vandals broke into Mnajdra, pulling down 60 of the megaliths, some of which were smashed and daubing the remaining stones with graffiti. This resulted in the long-term closure of Mnajdra to the public while attempts were made to restore the site and remove the graffiti without further damaging the vulnerable megaliths.

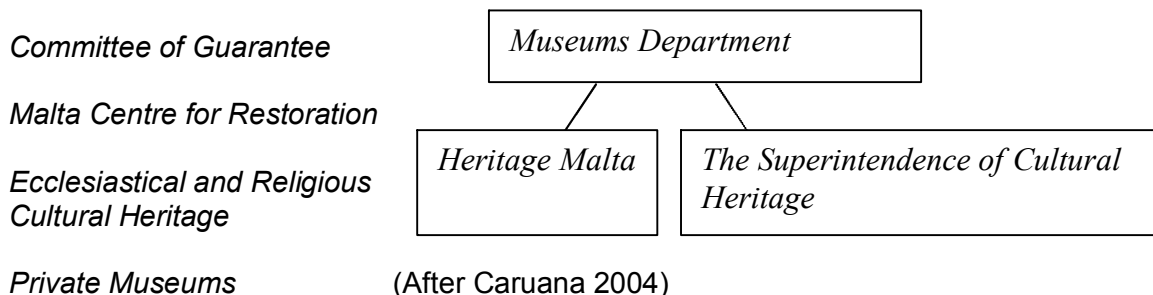
The Current Situation – Looking to the Future

Various pieces of heritage legislation have been passed in Malta since 1910, these include the Protection of Antiquities Ordinance (1910), the Antiquities (Protection) Act (1925). More recently other legislation such as the Development Planning Act (1992), the Environment Protection Act (2001) and most recently the Cultural Heritage Act (2002) have impacted on the way Malta's heritage is treated. The Development Planning Act is supported by the *Structure Plan for the Maltese Islands* of which policies TOU11, TOU15, REC12, ARC2, ARC3, ARC4, CZM3, RCO1, RCO2, RCO4, BEN15, PUT7, AHF4 and AHF all impact on the temple sites. These range from guidance on archaeology, tourism and environment to issues of equal access. The *North West Local Plan* makes more detailed provisions for the future of Hagar Qim and Mnajdra, recommendations are made for the safeguarding of the archaeological park through the prevention of conflicting land uses, such as quarrying and building (Linco Bianco etc al 2004:59) and many of its policies relate directly to the preservation of the sites themselves.

The latest piece of legislation, the Cultural Heritage Act 2002 came into force in January 2003 and was brought about as a result of the outcry against the damage to Mnajdra done by the vandalism. This is intended to move Maltese heritage management on with a new vision, including:

- Legislative reforms moving away from antiquated Acts and conventional institutions
 - Creation of new institutions to respond to the challenges of Malta's heritage sector
 - Reform of outdated, inefficient and complex operational procedures
 - Investment in heritage and the exploration of alternative sources to be able to create a sustainable framework of initiatives that address the market directly and yield economic power
 - Recognising heritage as one of the main factors of social and economic development and encouraging private sector involvement in the new framework
- (Caruana 2004)

This Act created a new structure of heritage management on Malta:



In this new arrangement Heritage Malta and The Superintendence of Cultural Heritage replaced the Museums Department. These new bodies entrusted with the care of Malta's cultural heritage are in an early stage of development but are already working on new projects and changing the perceptions of Malta's heritage, both locally and internationally.

Two of the most notable projects these organisations are currently working on, related to the temple sites, are a conservation and interpretation project at Mnajdra and Hagar Qim and the World Heritage Site Management Plan (WHSMP).

At the time of writing (April 2005) the WHSMP is still in draft form and not yet in the public domain, however a project description statement for the Hagar Qim and Mnajdra Temples Conservation and Interpretation Project was published in December 2004. This will be embraced as one of the World Heritage Site Management Plan's projects and comprises the following:

- a. *Construction and furnishing of Visitor's Centre and Visitor's Orientation Point;*
- b. *Construction/installation of accessibility and interpretation measures consisting of routes, tracks and interpretation facilities;*
- c. *Security measures, including the installation of high-tech surveillance systems*
- d. *Design and construction of temporary protective shelters for the temple structures.*

(Lino Bianco & Associates and Heritage Malta 2004: 5).

These measures are intended to tackle the issues of conservation, protection and interpretation at the sites of Hagar Qim and Mnajdra and it was confirmed in August 2004 that project has been selected to receive 3.5million euros in European Regional Development Funds.

As an immediate response the vandalism in April 2000 a Scientific Committee for the Conservation of the Megalithic Temples was formed. With the enactment of the Cultural Heritage Act in 2003 this was dissolved with the dissolution of the Museums Department into Heritage Malta and the Superintendence for Cultural Heritage. In September 2004 this committee was re-established to:

- *provide a multidisciplinary forum for understanding the conservation problems of the megalithic temples;*
- *make recommendations for actions required to conserve and record the temple sites;*
- *monitor the execution of such actions, evaluate results, and ensure that high scientific standards are maintained;*
- *provide a forum for consultation on the development of a research agenda for the temples;*
- *to promote and co-ordinate research on the megalithic temple sites.*

(The Superintendence of Cultural Heritage 2004: 19)

In the case of the Temple Sites of Malta the WHSMP has been used as a tool to pull together a package of legislative and managerial changes. These changes are intended to provide a more comprehensive strategy of protection for the sites and thus fulfil the state party's obligations in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

The legislative and managerial changes being embraced and supported by the WHSMP illustrates a partnership that promises to move World Heritage Site Management on Malta forward by uniting many different agencies in a shared vision of sites managed within their landscape.

This case study illustrates two important issues of World Heritage Management in the 21st century:

- a. Inscription alone cannot adequately protect World Heritage Sites; it needs the co-operation of all stakeholders in the production of a comprehensive, cohesive and practical management plan. The most efficient protection of all can only be provided by the co-operation of all stakeholders in carrying out a suitable management regime and proactively seeking solutions for threats and issues as they arise.

- b. Site boundaries and buffer zones need to be examined very carefully, sites such as Mnajdra were inscribed with tightly drawn boundaries, however without their setting they lose much of the 'outstanding universal value' for which they were inscribed

These issues are being considered as part of an ongoing research project examining the role of the World Heritage Site Management Plan in the relationship and interaction between cultural World Heritage Sites and their settings. Addressing the issues of definition, protection and enhancement of outstanding universal value through the use of a World Heritage Management Plan.

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