

THE  
NEOLITHIC TEMPLES  
OF  
HAL-TARXIEN MALTA

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A SHORT DESCRIPTION  
OF THE MONUMENTS  
WITH PLAN AND ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

Prof. T. Zammit  
DIRECTOR  
MUSEUM DEPARTMENT



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Malta—1925.

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The honourable  
Rev. E. Daudia D.D.  
M.P.F.

with the author's  
compliments.

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## PREFACE.

The only report on the Tarxien temples appeared in the "Archaeologia", the organ of the Society of Antiquaries of London, in the years 1916, 1917, and 1920. These three papers were fully illustrated and dealt with the monuments and with the objects found in them during the excavations. With one exception, the illustrations in this booklet are reproduced from those that appeared in the report, by kind permission of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

This booklet gives a simple description of the monuments and is meant to help the visitor to make a systematic inspection of the ruins. The objects met with during the excavation may be seen in the Valletta Museum. To attempt to describe them would only confuse the visitor and distract him from the observation of the buildings which are important enough to engross his thoughts. These ruins are better preserved than many others we have in Malta and Gozo, and as the greatest care was taken during their excavation, all the characteristic features of these neolithic monuments have been left unimpaired. One can safely assert that as

monuments of the late Stone Age they are unique of their kind. Nothing approaching this bold architecture, and the consummate art shown by the builders of these temples, in the pre-metallic age, has been discovered anywhere in the world. Malta stood alone then, in the Mediterranean Sea as a refuge to mariners, anxious for ages to reach its harbours, to worship in its numerous temples and to revel in its magnificent buildings full of works of art the like of which had not yet appeared on any other shore. The ruins of the Tarxien temples are enough to testify to the highly developed skill and ingenuity of the Maltese in the Stone Age period.

T. Z.

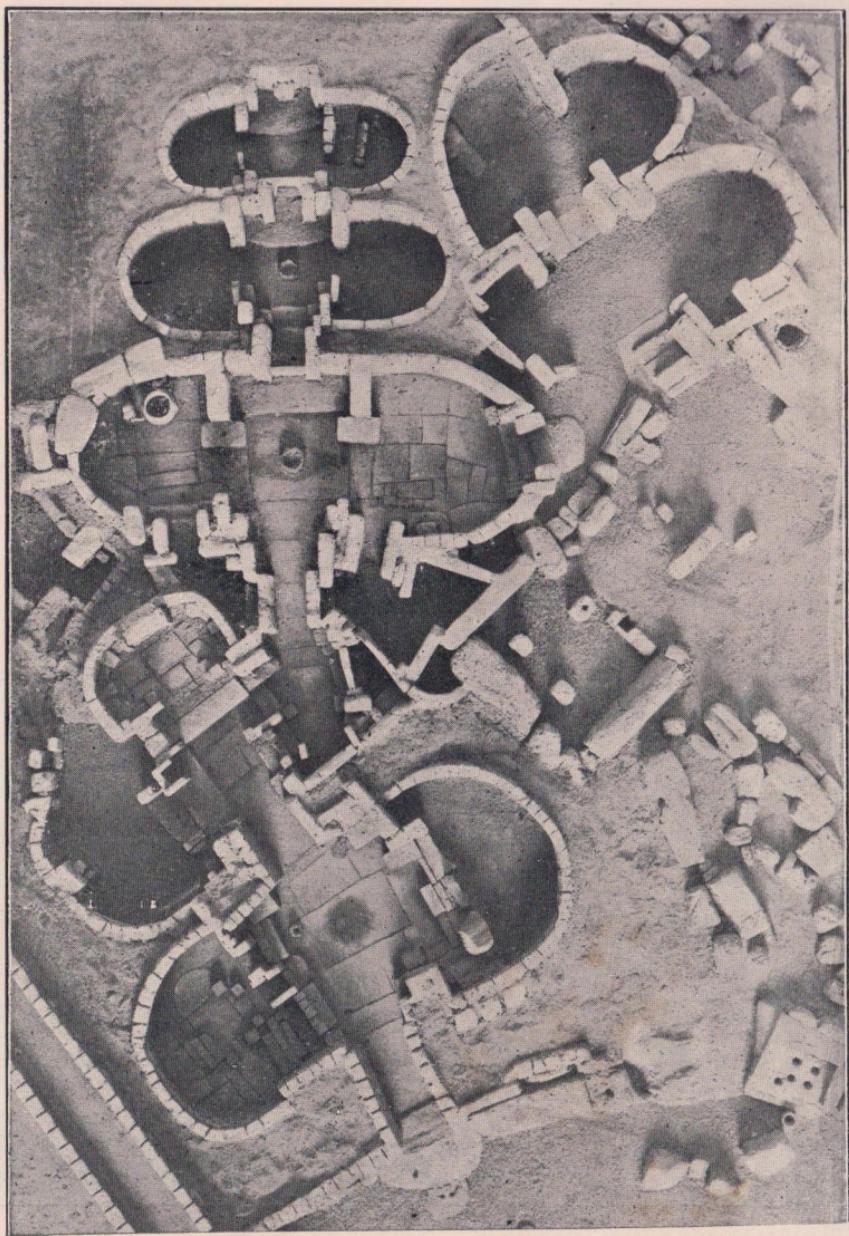
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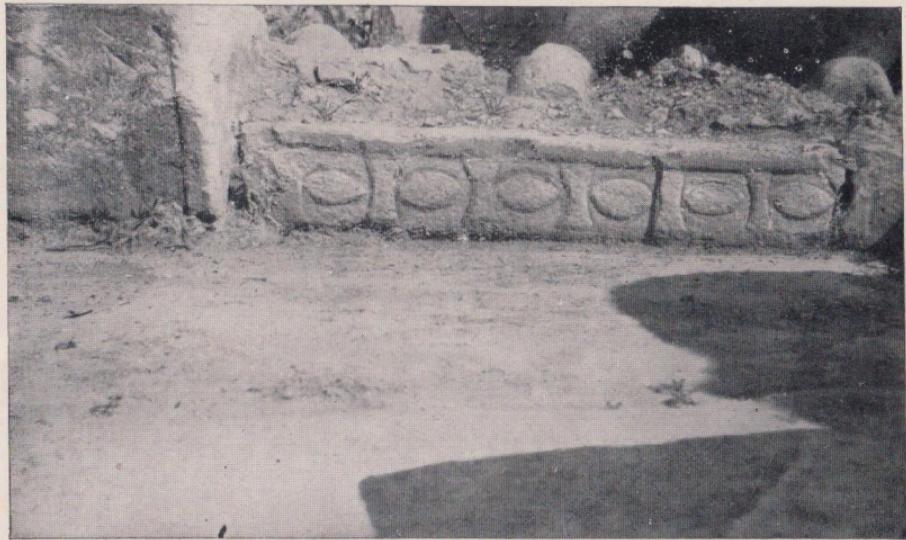
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(1) Plan of the Tarxien Temples—Bird's eye view.



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(3) 3rd. Temple—decorated frieze at the base of the colossal Statue.

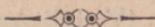


(4) 3rd. Temple—decorated block.



(5) 3rd. temple—decorated blocks.

## The Tarxien Neolithic Temples.



Near the village of *Tarxien*, to the east of, and five minute's walk from the village, *Paula*, a group of megalithic ruins was discovered in 1914.

In a large field, to the north of the small cemetery known as ta l'Eruieh, the tenant pointed out to the curator of the Valletta Museum a spot where large stones were met with when the field was worked deeper than usual. A trial trench was made at the site pointed out, and the top of a large stone pillar was reached under less than three feet of soil.

In 1915, Professor T. Zammit decided to excavate the field, with but faint optimism indeed, as nobody had imagined that more than a chance stone could be brought to light in that field, to which no tradition of buried buildings was ever attached.

In a few days enough soil was removed to show that the remains of an extensive building

had been buried there for the last five thousand years. During 1915 and 1916 the outline of the ruins was disclosed and the excavation of the monument was continued during the next four dry seasons. (Vide "Archœologia" 1916-1917-1920)

Cleared of the stones and soil that covered them, the ruins proved to be those of a group of three temples which were built not later than the fourth millennium B.C. but which, at about 3,000 B.C., collapsed and were abandoned. In the course of ages, the ruins were gradually buried in dust blown over them by the wind and carried by rain-water. When three feet of dust had gathered around and over the ruins, the forsaken spot was made use of as a burial place by a people who had, by that time, come to use metallic tools and a special kind of pottery differing in all details from that used in the temples.

The Stone Age people who built the temples used them as a place of worship, sacrificed animals to a presiding deity, and handled ritual pots of great beauty and superior workmanship. Flint knives were used in the temples and stone and clay images were numerous and carefully turned out.

The people who later utilized the barren

site, when the temples were covered with dust, had a custom of burning their dead, and of depositing the ashes in large cinerary urns along with smaller vases, copper implements, and personal adornments. The Bronze Age urns found at Tarxien stood, probably, side by side and covered a large circular area.

In time, the clay urns were knocked down and, in their turn, covered with dust. In later days, probably during the Roman occupation, an enterprising farmer set himself to make an arable field out of the waste ground. He broke up the high standing pillars, pushed down the loose blocks, covered the whole with stones, dust and soil, dug out a water tank in the live rock, and over the buried ruins he merrily grew his crops.

Thus the magnificent monument of a hoary antiquity came to be hidden completely and forgotten to such an extent that not the slightest tradition of it survived to our days.

### **General Considerations.**

The three Neolithic temples are of the same type but vary in size, in architectural merit, and in decoration. (Fig 1)

The earliest one, to the N.E., consisted of

two parallel sets of semi-circular apses, with a passage in the middle in a N.W.-S.E. direction. The second one has three parallel semi-circular apses connected by a large passage in a N.-S. direction; the third one has two parallel sets of apses with a passage parallel to that of the first temple.

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

Even to a casual visitor it is clear that, although built in the Stone Age, the three temples belong to three different periods. When the first temple became insufficient for their requirements, the people added a second to the West of it and, later on, a third 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 and, what is of greater significance, the potsherds met with in the three buildings, both above and below floor level, are all of the same type, similar in all characteristics to the well known neolithic pottery collected in the other Maltese prehistoric sites of Gigantia, Hagar Kim, Mnajdra, Halsafeni, Cordin, Mgarr etc.

### **Description of the Temples.**

At present the visitor approaches the temples from an ample semi-circular forecourt, with a wide entrance in the middle. The threshold is a huge slab, convex in front, 16 feet long, 9 feet wide at the middle, and over 3 feet thick. It is embedded in a floor made of beaten earth (torba floor), a material utilized wherever flagstones are not used.

### **The outer Wall.**

Huge rectangular blocks lie to the right and to the left of the entrance for a length of about 50 feet each way.

Originally, huge slabs stood at the back of the rectangular blocks to form the front

wall enclosing the building: of these only a fragment, about 5 feet wide, can at present be seen behind the first stone block on the right.

At each end of the semi-circular front wall a remarkable structure was built of which the use can hardly be conjectured.

### **The Divination Block.**

On the right of the forecourt this peculiar structure is nearly complete, on the left, however, only traces of it remain. That on the right consists of a huge stone block with a square surface, once fenced by a high wall on three of its sides. A step is cut in front of it and a barrel-shaped stone stands in front. (Fig 2)

The surface of this block is slightly concave in the middle, and has a flat ledge round three sides. Six conical pits, about 1 foot deep, are cut in this block, one on the edge and five on the square surface.

The use for which this block of stone was intended is not apparent. The pits may have served the purpose of mortars in which grain could be pounded with long poles as practised in Eastern countries. This would

suggest the production of flour and the making of cakes for use in the temple.

As, however, a great number of stone balls, varying between two and three inches in diameter, were found heaped up in the vicinity of this curious stone, one is induced to believe that these balls were in some way connected with the structure. The stone balls may have been thrown from a distance on to the surface of the block, either in the course of some game or better for the purpose of divination. From the earliest times everything had had for man a magical significance, and manifold modes of divination were resorted to by primitive people for the purpose of ascertaining coming events both private and public.

The pits are worn out in such a way that they go through the whole thickness of the stone.

A similar arrangement existed on the extreme left of the fore-court, but the stone block there is broken and only part of it remains showing two of the conical pits.

### **Spherical Rollers.**

All around this broken stone one can see numerous stone balls fixed in the ground.

These balls were used as rollers which helped to move the blocks about and to have them transported from the distant quarry. It appears that when the finished stone was brought to its destined site the rollers were left buried under it. This must have been a regular practice, for many of the large blocks in these temples stand on a number of big stone rollers. The round stones may also have had a magical significance, judging by their number and their symmetrical arrangement in many cases.

### **The Third Temple.**

Coming back to the entrance in the middle of the semicircular fore-court, one steps over the huge threshold into a short passage paved with one block of stone. The walls of this passage have practically disappeared but enough of them remained, especially on the right, to enable the excavator to build a rubble wall on the original lines. This patching up had to be resorted to wherever there were gaps in the megalithic structure, with a view to give a clear idea of the line and of the extent of the original walls.

The short passage opens at once in the square space accurately paved and surrounded by stone blocks or benches decorated with spiral patterns in relief.

This is the entrance to the third temple, the latest in construction and therefore the most elaborate of the three.

### **The Colossal Idol.**

To the right, there are low stone rectangular benches intended probably to provide sitting accommodation. A fragment of a colossal stone statue stands to the right. Of this statue only the shins and part of the feet are left. The shins are pear-shaped showing extreme fatness; the knees are covered by a pleated skirt. The rest of the statue which must have stood 8 ft. high, is gone-quarried away as stone in later days. Behind the statue is a semi-circular apse with low walls made of slabs on end. (Fig 3)

In this apse are the remains of an enormous baked clay bowl which could not be restored owing to the loss of most of the fragments. What remains of it shows the great skill of the potter in turning out a

magnificent vessel decorated on the outside with a scalloped pattern.

The bottom and portion of the walls of a large stone bowl are also to be seen in this apse, the left corner of which is covered with a heap of Bronze Age sherds, the remains of hundreds of cinerary urns. These once stood in the vicinity, full of human ashes and of numerous smaller vessels, implements and other objects now exhibited in the Valletta Museum.

### **Main Altar.**

In front of the square space to the left, there is an elaborate altar surmounted by a delicately built niche. The surface of this altar is decorated with spirals, now worn out by the action of time. At the foot of the altar there is a round hole plugged by a conical stone that fits so well that, when new, the entrance must have been all but unrecognizable. When this stone was removed during the excavation, a flint knife, used undoubtedly in the ritual slaughter of the animals, was found, and a mass of horns, bones, and potsherds, filled up the large cavity behind.

### **Secondary Altars**

On the left of the entrance, symmetrical with the altar, is another decorated block without a niche. The spirals here are of great beauty and extend to the upper face of the stone where they appear in very low relief.

To the left of the space there are two rectangular blocks or benches, flanking a narrow entrance, provided with a low semi-circular threshold. These benches or altars are of great beauty on account of the raised spirals covering their surface. (Fig 4. 5. 6.)

### **Chapel with Animal Friezes.**

The entrance, flanked by smooth slabs on end, leads into a chamber once elaborately built but of which very little remains. In front, richly decorated stone stools or stands were arranged around, and dainty friezes were cut at the foot of the altars. Part of a frieze, at floor level, shows three goats, a fat pig and a ram cut in low relief. The other half of the frieze was never found.

In front of this frieze, to the extreme right, is another block of stone decorated with

two rows of goats, eleven animals in each row. The animals, thus depicted, represent the victims accepted for sacrificial purposes. They are not fanciful animals but were copied from nature for they do not differ from the present breed of Maltese goats except in their having long curved horns, whilst the present goats have small horns. Stowed away in the many niches built in the temples, were found masses of large goat horns which correspond to those depicted in the friezes.

### **The burnt Offerings.**

From this part of the third temple one may gather that the people who worshipped in these temples sacrificed large animals to the deity whose image was erected in the open space at the entrance. The slaughtered animal was roasted on a slow fire built in the centre of the square space, as proved by the circular patch of burnt floor to be seen there. Part of the roasted victim was, probably, distributed to the congregation in small stone vessels. A great number of conical stones with a concave surface, found in the vicinity, may have been used as platters. After this distribution, a portion of the animal

was stowed away in a niche or in a cupboard as a memento of the burnt offering. All the niches that still stood in the temples were found crammed with horns, skulls, or other half burnt bones of oxen, sheep, goats and pigs. The disposal of the remains of the numerous burnt offerings clearly demonstrated what actually took place five thousand years ago.

Near the fireplace, a cylindrical stone basin with a pitted outer surface is still fixed in the floor; it was used, probably, as a holy water font. Fire and water are elements intimately connected with rituals at all time and in all places. Several conical stones, very cleverly worked, were found in this part of the temple and some of them were left at or near the site where they were discovered.

### **The Main Passage.**

The main passage, flanked by upright slabs and paved with a huge block of stone, leads to an oblong space limited in front by the best decorated stone of the whole

building, about 11 feet long. The decoration is in the shape of a double series of S shaped spirals forming a running pattern cut in sharp relief.(Fig. 7. 8.) This stone is placed in front of an elliptical platform on which a graceful trilithon stands at the back, and a series of low stone benches are arranged around as the seats in a choir.

Probably, this kind of chapel was domed and was a very holy place as the stone benches are burnt all over in red patches as if offerings had been consumed by fire upon them for a long time.

### **The side Apse to the West,**

To the left of the space, a low step leads into a side apse not so deeply concave as the other apses and not so well aligned.

Two recesses are formed by upright slabs; those on the right, the only pair left standing, were found full of horns and other bones. The threshold has a pair of conical pits in the middle. To the left, all the stones that once stood up have disappeared.

The floor here is made of beaten earth (torba floor) which is very hard, through exten-

ive burning of wood or other such material on its surface.

### **Archaic Shrine.**

In a narrow recess to the right, an archaic looking shrine is still standing on a low platform. Pitted slabs on end formed, originally, a kind of gate beyond which is an altar table supported by a pillar at its middle portion. The altar slab is carefully picked, thus showing a pleasing rough surface. On its left back corner a cylindrical hole is carefully cut, protected by a well fitting stone plug. This tiny shrine has curved walls and was probably domed. (Fig. 9.)

The left wall of this shrine was made of large blocks which are now completely ruined.

### **Apse And Chamber on Eastern Side.**

Coming out of the main passage one has in front a curious structure or rather what remains of it. Standing to the right is a gateway made of a thick slab on end through which an oblong entrance had been cut; of this, only the jambs remain, the upper part

having been knocked off. In the base, or threshold, a pair of conical rope holes are cut in the middle. The surrounding uprights are badly burnt and smashed.

A narrow passage to the left side of this curious gateway was flanked by a huge pillar of which only the base remains to-day.

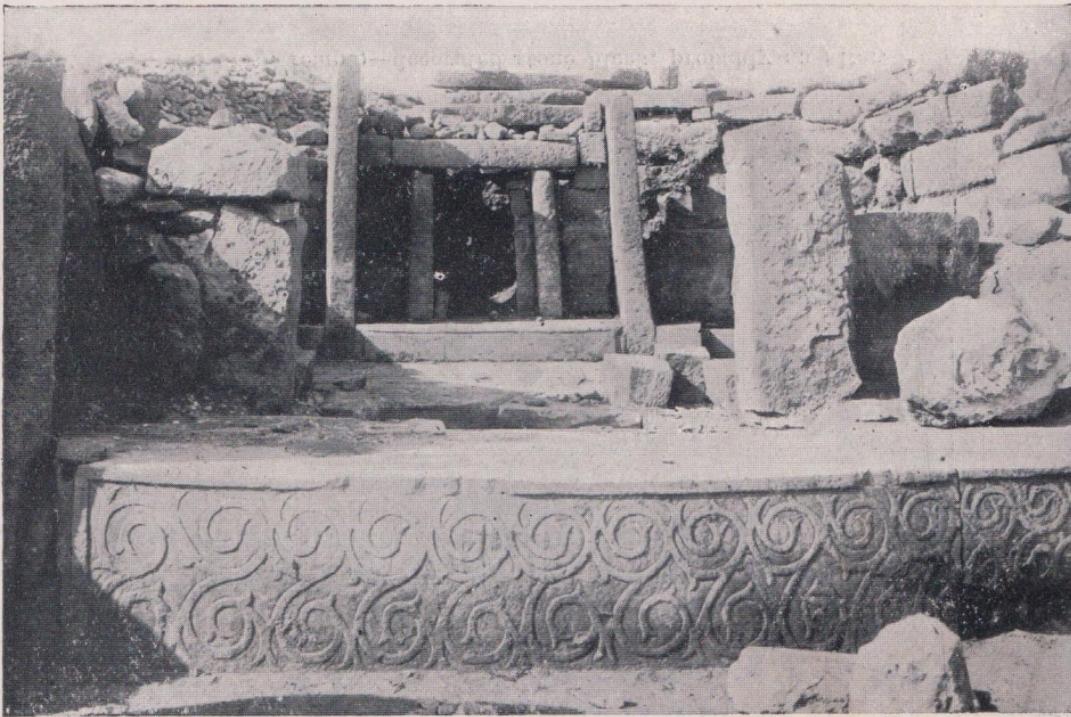
One gets thus into a space roughly triangular and patched up, evidently, when the third temple was built on the fore court of the second one. In front, a rectangular space, once closed and roofed over, is reached through another doorway cut into a solid slab. This room was full of animal bones and potsherds of the neolithic period.

A slightly curved pillar with a pitted surface is fixed at the end of the space which overlooks the entrance and the long passage of the second temple.

It would appear that this pillar was fixed in its present position to mark the axis of the second temple. It was certainly placed there at a comparatively later date, for it originally formed part of a pitted slab on the right wall. The pitted slab on the opposite wall is still *in situ*.



(6) 3rd. temple—decorated stone block, probably an altar.



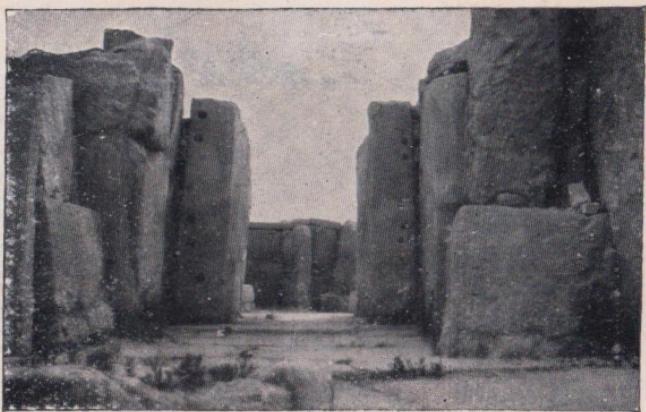
(7) Decorated block in the third temple.



(8) Decorated block in third temple during its excavation—about 1 ft below Bronze Age layer.



(9) Archaic niche and Court in the third temple.

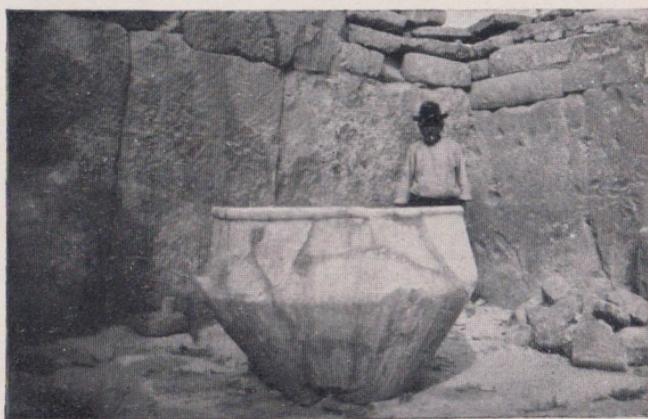


(10) Entrance to 2nd. temple—view looking out.

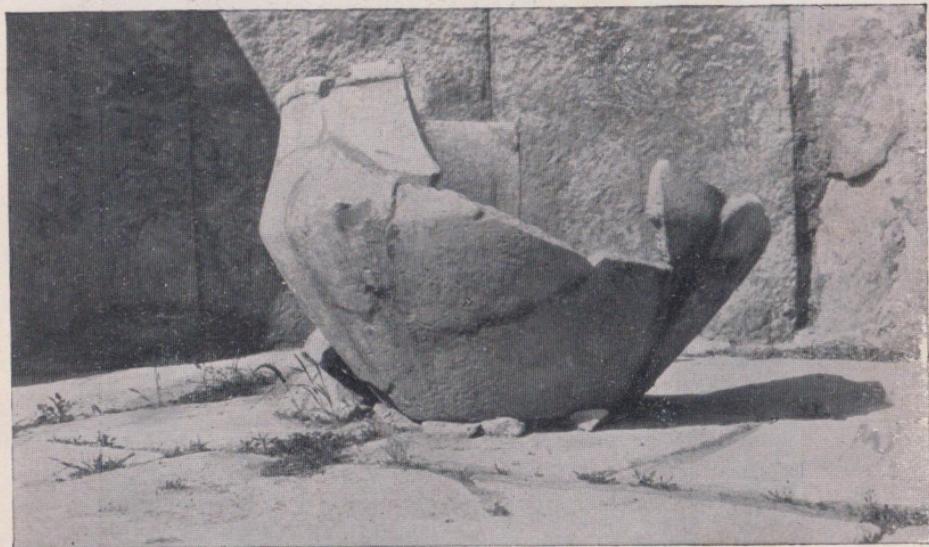
Photo taken from the entrance of the temple. (1)



(11) 2nd. temple—view from entrance.



(12) Reconstructed stone bowl in 2nd. temple.



(13) 2nd. temple—Stone bowl during reconstruction.



(14) 2nd. temple—fire place in front of barred entrance  
to inner apses.

### **Entrance to the Second Temple.**

One walks now into the second temple with its imposing entrance made of huge blocks on end, squared and finished by picking and rubbing. (Fig 10 11)

The passage is over twenty feet long, well paved with large stone blocks, cleverly arranged. The innermost slabs have rope holes on their outer face and at the edges as if a door of a light material, such as wood or leather, had been fixed on with flexible hinges of sinews or ropes. Two large holes on the opposite walls suggest the use of a huge bar which may have been intended to keep away large cattle or to secure the door from within.

Flanking the extremity of the entrance are the remains of two huge quadrangular pillars standing on a high base or rather podium, suggesting a decoration which survived in later sanctuaries such as the famous pillars in the temple of Jerusalem.

### **The Two Main Apses.**

In front of the entrance is a square space about 15 feet wide, whilst an elliptical

space extends for about 25 feet on each side.

The second temple is very imposing at this-point. In the centre there is a circular fireplace still full of ashes, with brim discoloured by fire which extended far beyond it on the floor. Large logs of wood must have been kept burning for a long time in this fireplace for the flagstones of the floor are burned for a considerable distance.

To the left (west) there is a deep apse made of large slabs on end on which ashlar masonry was laid in such a way as to close in as they went higher, until they formed a dome over the whole space. This feat of architectural skill ensured a long life to the building but the shock of an earthquake must have caused complete destruction when the tottering blocks came down with irresistible force.

On the extreme left, a side entrance once existed which was judiciously and very effectively blocked by a stone slab that was lowered from the outside. The walls show evident signs of a destructive fire that burnt the limestone in big red patches.

Though greatly reduced in size, the jambs of this doorway show that rope holes were

cut out for the usual hinges. Of the lintel, barely one half remains and this had to be pinned to save it from coming down during the excavations.

The calcination of the walls must have been caused by the Bronze Age people who burned their dead against the slabs which acted as wind-screens. The large pyres, lighted at every cremation, have disintegrated the walls to their present state.

To the left of the apse, a small room is reached across a high threshold made of one huge block of stone. The entrance was through a perforated slab on end, now broken at the top. The walls of the room are mostly disintegrated by fire but a well constructed niche with a double floor still stands in the left wall. On the right side, a deep niche is constructed for the reception of animal bones. The wall in front, made of small stones, shows, very distinctly, that when built it encroached on the space of this room which was originally much larger in size. When the third temple was added, the wall of one of the side chapels was built across this room. This fact alone would show that the chapel of the

third temple was built at a later period.

The rock bottom of this small room is about five feet below the floor made of beaten earth.

### **The Stone Bowl**

Coming out of this small room into the western apse, one can examine a fine stone bowl, over 3 feet in height and very graceful in shape, hewn out of a monolith. Its walls are so thin that it did not stand the rough handling when the temple came to be destroyed. It was found crushed, a little to the East of where it stands now. Most of the fragments having been recovered it was partly reconstructed. (Fig. 12, 13.)

Smashed once more in 1925, by evil-intentioned persons, it was reconstructed somewhat more clumsily; even as it is, its original shape and beauty come out very distinctly.

### **Room with Carved Animals.**

The eastern apse (right) opens at its end into the outskirts of the first temple but in its southern wall, a doorway constructed with slabs on end, leads into a room of

which the walls are badly damaged by fire.

A double floored niche stood once on the extreme right of this room, and a pit, about 5 feet deep, is excavated in the middle of the floor. It has a circular mouth, covered with a flat round slab. When opened, it was found completely empty. It is now covered with earth to ensure its preservation.

This small room is remarkable for the figures of three animals carved in low relief on the southern wall. Half of this wall is made of a huge block which forms the front of a small room, reached through a square opening at floor level. This small room was originally roofed and contained a great quantity of animal bones. Above the square opening, the figure of a bull, facing to the left, is cut in relief. The top of this slab is broken and the figure of the animal is therefore considerably damaged.

Further on, in the same room, a s'ab, 15 feet long and 4 feet thick, forms the remaining portion of the wall. On this slab a bull, facing to the right, is carved with great skill; the head is small, the horns long and curved; a hump is clearly delineated and so are the high rump and the long tail.

Somewhat lower down, a sow is carved facing to the left. The head and the body are mutilated by the action of fire but thirteen young sucklings, along the nether part of her body, leave no doubts about the species of the animal. Found in different circumstances, a cave, or on the wall of a rock shelter, these carvings might easily be taken for palaeolithic art. As they are, however, they are of unique interest as the expression of neolithic culture.

The western wall of this room shows distinctly that the people who built the third temple encroached on the space of this room whilst building the recess to the right of the main entrance.

### **The Inner Apses.**

Walking back to the fireplace in the middle of the entrance, one faces a noble structure made of two huge slabs standing on end, one on each side of a threshold over fifteen feet long and eight feet wide. This threshold is surmounted by a set of slabs on end forming an entrance between two uprights. (Fig. 14.)

Very noticeably, the passage is blocked by a slab as if the *profanum vulgus* was not allowed to enter the sacred precincts. This formal exclusion of intruders suggests some other entrance for the privileged few. A flight of steps, outside the eastern apse, appears to have been meant for the priests to reach the Holy of Holies by a private route. The stairs, in fact, lead to a passage which ended in the innermost apse.

### **Apses beyond the Barrier.**

Beyond the sacred barrier, there is a ten foot corridor, at the end of which, well squared rectangular stone benches are built on each side. The wall slabs are carefully rubbed and a pair of ropeholes, of exquisite finish, are drilled on each side.

### **Decorated Screens.**

Standing like a pair of screens, one on each side, are two beautifully smoothed slabs on which four converging groups of spirals, are cut with consummate skill. The spirals are wide and flat, quite distinct in technical details from the spirals in the

third temple. The latter, in fact, have narrow, convex body and are often branched; those of the second temple are broad, flat and without any branching. To enhance the beauty of their lines these spirals have a background pitted with deep circular holes; the whole design is extremely effective. It is probable that the background was originally painted red, for here and there traces of a red pigment are still visible. (Fig 15)

Beyond these screens, both to the right and to the left, a perfectly built apse extends for a depth of about 15 feet. This is also the width of each apse at its base. The slabs on end forming the wall of both apses are about 7 feet high and 2 feet thick, but they are so gracefully poised that one can hardly notice the great skill with which they were placed in position. The curve of the apse is true, and each slab fits the one next to it with such a nicety that the ends of the slabs that come together must have been rubbed with extreme care.

One can hardly conceive the amount of trimming the sides of these slabs had to undergo before they were made to stand where they are. The slabs standing on the ground slant in-

wards so that they form the base of the dome which was completed by courses of masonry built upon them.

The extreme care taken in finishing these stones can be better appreciated when one is made to note four small holes at the foot of the right pillar at the entrance to the north-east apse. These holes contained a polished fossil and polished black pebbles, fixed with care. It was on the same principle that the pillars of mediaeval churches were bejewelled and embellished with precious stones.

Details such as these bring out forcibly the artistic talent of the Stone Age inhabitants of these Islands, combined as it was with the skill shown in quarrying, transporting, and erecting blocks of stone of enormous weight.

In the middle portion of this part of the temple there is another fireplace, somewhat smaller than the first one described, and less deeply eroded by fire. In the N.W. apse a stone water basin, with pitted surface, is fixed in the floor. Between it and the wall, the finest terracotta bowl ever met with in Malta was found during the clearing of the site.

Another fine threshold, about 12 feet long and 8 feet wide, marks the entrance to the third system of apses. This threshold is more remarkable than those crossed so far, for the trilithon that forms the entrance and the other slabs flanking it, stand on a ridge which was purposely left in relief though the threshold was polished smooth.

The further side of the compartment, opposite the entrance, must have ended in a dolmenic table altar of which the horizontal slab is lost but the vertical supports are still there to afford the necessary information.

The northwestern apse was found intact. It is made of vertical slabs like the other apses but smaller in size, although worked and set with the same care and skill. One piece of the ashlar masonry laid on the top of the first slab, on the extreme left of the apse, is so squared as to show the inclination followed in the subsequent courses to ensure the proper doming of the apse. This stone, found *in situ*, gives the key to the whole architectural problem of the covering of the temples and although we can, by analogy, from the masonry still existing at Mnajdra and Hajar Kîm, understand how the problem of the roof-

ing was solved, still a well squared stone with definite inclination and found in its original position, was an un hoped for discovery. (Fig 16)

Just below this particularly interesting stone, one of the double-shelved niches stands in perfect condition, as if built last year. The slabs forming this niche are cut and polished with extreme care; they fit each other neatly and the wall is properly dented to receive the slabs. Mortar was used to fix the stones and to fill up the gaps and the hollows that had to be cut in the wall.

This corner of the temple is, probably, the most interesting to the archaeologist and to the architect who find food for reflection as to the excellence the building art had attained in the late Stone Age.

The Apse to the South East had completely disappeared when the excavation was made, so that a wall was built of small stones to show where it formerly stood in symmetry with the one on the western side.

The destruction of this apse must have taken place during the Roman period, for besides the foundation of a comparatively modern wall in a N.-S. direction, numerous potsherds of the Roman type were found strewn about on the floor.

This point is the end of the furthermost part of the second temple, so that one has to retrace one's steps to beyond the blocking slab. Turning to the left, past the room with carved bulls, one finds the remains of a betyl, or standing pillar, fixed in a wide base. The people who worshipped in the Hal Tarxien temples had a special veneration for pillars for several such stones were erected in their temples. The floor in these temples, is mostly paved with what to the uninformed may as look like ordinary flagstones: they are, a matter of fact, huge blocks.

One of these blocks was removed during the excavation in order to make the thickness of the pavement apparent to all. One can now see how the pavement was actually laid and how difficult and lengthy the process of laying these blocks must have been; it was only by rubbing that the stones were made to fit to such a nicety. Through the gap left, one can also observe that under the threshold of the southern entrance to the second temple, some of the round rollers were left buried when the stone was placed in position.

### The first Temple.

Ascending two low steps, in which a pair of small rope-holes is cut, one leaves the second temple and approaches the first one, of which the original facade has been to a great extent pulled down.

To understand what remains of this temple one has to be reminded that, originally, it consisted of two sets of double apses connected by a passage that divided them in their middle line.

The two eastern apses are there still in their original position but the two apses to the west were pulled down and rebuilt, in part, when the second temple came to be constructed.

Leaving the second temple, through the south eastern passage, we have immediately on our left a recess in which a flight of steps is built; this leads to the top of the walls of the apses. Six of the steps are laid between the walls, the last two being hewn in a block of stone placed at the head of the stairs. These steps lead to a passage covered with beaten earth which, undoubtedly, ended in the innermost chamber of the second temple.

Presumably, this passage was reserved to the priests, once the passage to the second temple was obstructed by the decorated slab.

The recess in which the stairs are constructed was originally part of the first western apse which was reduced in size by a thick wall of slabs. One has only to look in front to see how deep the eastern apse and how shallow the western one is now.

This first temple of which the entrance faces south west has the axis bearing  $15^{\circ}4'15''$ . It is reached over a high threshold which is still intact. To the right, the huge stones of the facade, though considerably hacked about, are still standing. The corresponding slabs and blocks of the left side have been completely destroyed.

The floor is made of beaten earth of considerable thickness. The slabs are much larger than those that make up the other apses and they are hammer dressed and imperfectly smoothed here and there; they are well trimmed, however, at the sides where they come in contact with each other. The masonry that topped these slabs has all disappeared but the remains of one of the

stones was found *in situ* and left there as an important landmark for future students.

The pillars marking the entrance to the second system of apses are huge monoliths beautifully worked and finished. Beyond these pillars, the space to the left is all that remains of the original apse, destroyed when the second temple was constructed. In front, there is a square space which, presumably, was filled up by the horizontal slab of a dolmen forming a table altar. On the eastern aspect of this temple another huge monolith stands as the northern limit of the deep apse.

This North Eastern apse is of special importance not only on account of its peculiar architectural features but because it is connected with a mysterious recess which served, probably, as an oracular room.

### **Oracular Room,**

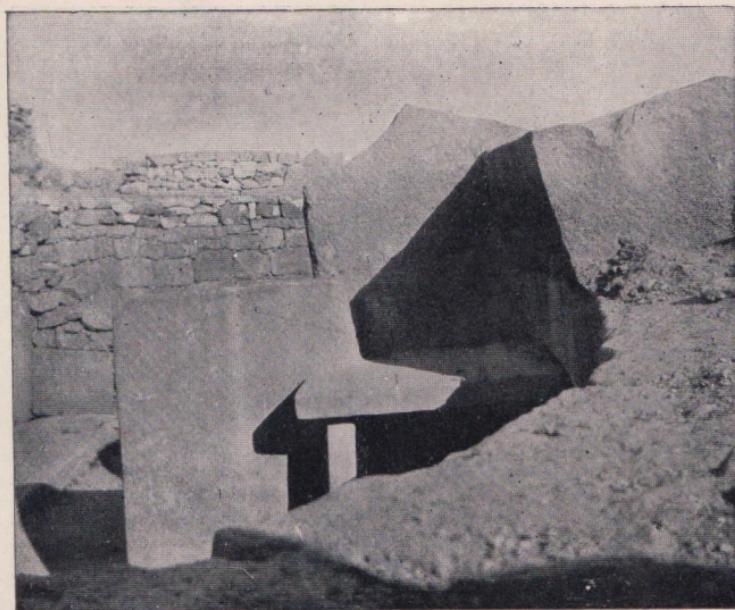
The seven big slabs on end forming the walls of this apse, stand on a rocky ledge and the floor is made of beaten earth. On closer investigation, it may be observed that a floor of beaten earth was first made at about a foot

from the rock bottom and then, for a reason not very apparent, it was, later on, raised to the present level. A small portion of the floor was cut through and left open in order to make this important fact clear.

Another peculiarity, to be observed in the apses of this first temple, is that nearly all standing stones have a deep notch at the base which enabled the masons to apply a lever to the stones when they were being erected.

This feature shows the great antiquity of this building for in later temples the notch at the base is never found, the workmen having, presumably, learned how to handle the large blocks of stone without applying a lever to a cavity at the foot of the stone. Notches at the base of large standing stones are observed at Hagiar Kîm, particularly in connection with the largest blocks on the outer wall to the North East. (Fig. 17.)

On entering this furthermost apse at Tarxien, one notices the fact that two of the front slabs of the wall are shorter, by a foot and a half, than the others. This anomalous construction may be explained in this way. Slabs, similar to those forming the wall of the apse, were laid horizontally

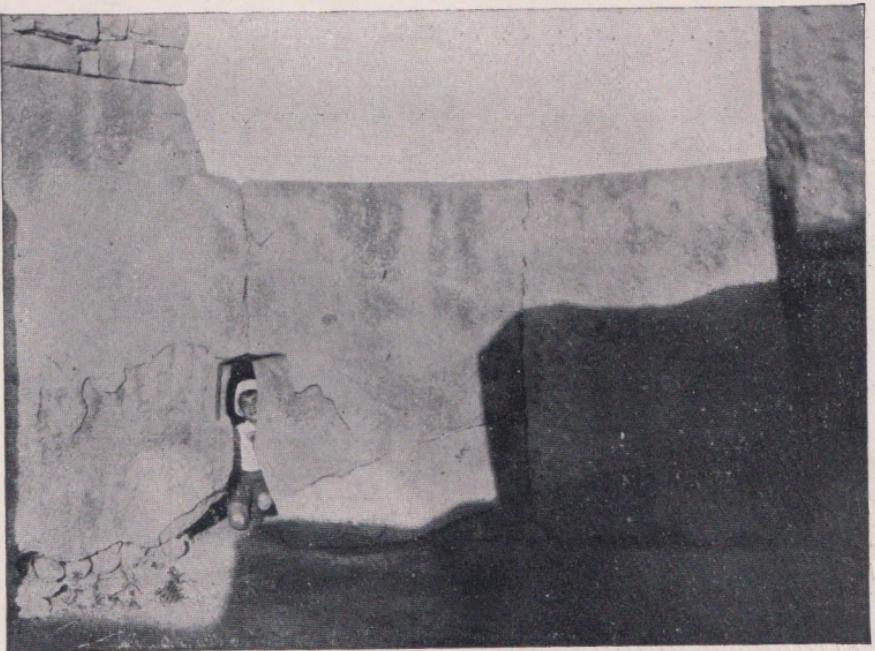


(16) 2nd. temple—Stone *in situ* showing the springing of the dome.

(16) 1st. temple—monoliths with notch at base.

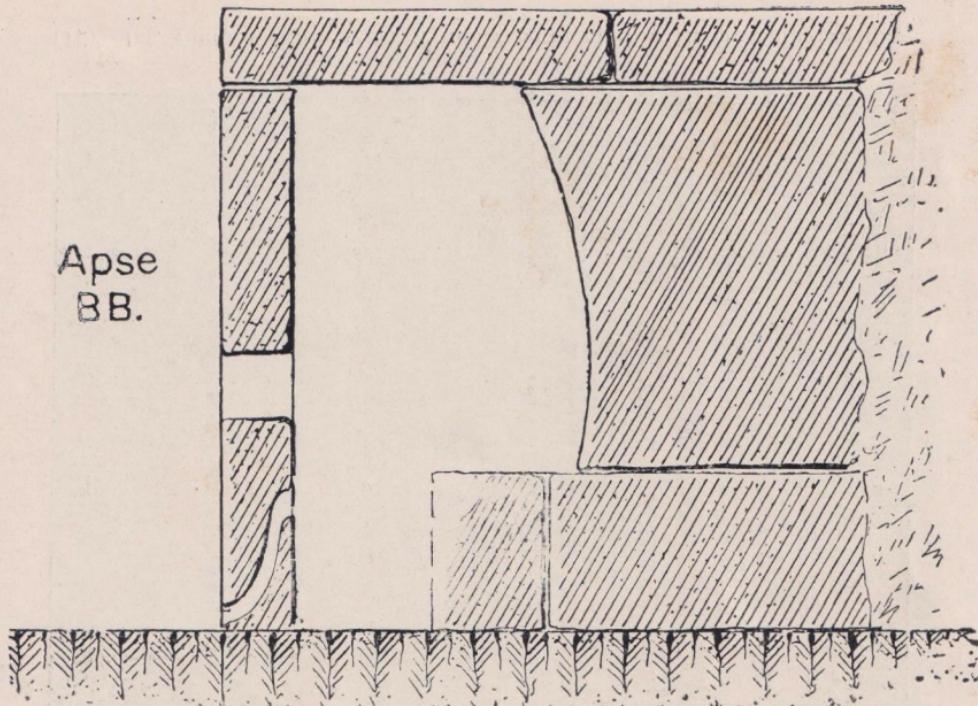


(17) 1st. temple—monoliths with notch at base.



(18) 1st. temple—apse with window connected with Oracular room.

Apse  
BB.



(19) The oracular chamber in the first temple—a reconstruction.

to fill the gap in the wall and extending outwards, they were supported by a huge pillar at the back. This arrangement resulted in the formation of a small room behind the apse, the back of the room being made of the vertical pillar and the roof by the horizontal slabs.

This room at the back of the apse was probably used as an oracular chamber which communicated with the worshippers in the apse of the temple through a small window neatly cut at the junction between the second and the third slab on the left.

Unfortunately, the slabs in the vicinity of this window are damaged by fire so that further details of the opening cannot be obtained. The window-like opening must have been, originally, cleverly concealed from view. The priest on the other side of the apse could, however, drop an object on the floor of the same through an ingeniously cut hole in the wall of the room in which he sat. (Fig. 18. 19.)

These well concealed chambers, or oracular rooms, are a peculiar feature of our megalithic buildings such as Hagar Kîm, Mnajdra and the Halsaflieni Hypogeum.

Although no oracular chambers are to be found in the second and third temples of

Tarxien it is to be presumed that the oracular chamber in the first temple was continued in use as long as the temples remained standing.

### **The Eastern Buildings.**

Walking out of the first temple one has in front, and to the East, disordered groups of remains which are not so easy to understand as the methodically arranged stones of the temples.

In the upper field to the east, the destruction of the primitive buildings was thorough, for the ground, being at a higher level, the making of an arable field necessitated the complete demolition of walls, and no prominent stones were allowed to stand. The temples to the west were saved because they were built on a lower ground so that it was enough for the farmer, intent on making the field, to knock down the tops of the higher stones and fill the gap with the chippings of the maimed walls.

From what was left after the wholesale devastation one could recognise traces of dwellings which were probably used by those who had charge of the temples.

Immediately at the back of the walls of the first temple, huge stone blocks were sunk meant to support the uprights which otherwise could not stand and bear the weight and the stress of the masonry upon them.

Following the back wall of the apses one comes to the oracular chamber already described, in front of which are two small chambers reached through a doorway hewn out of a slab which, minus its lintel, still stands facing east.

An open rectangular space follows, ending on the outer side in a thick wall. This space was covered with a beaten earth floor, well preserved all along the wall. At its northern end, a roughly circular low wall forms an enclosure with a well made torba floor.

This has all the appearance of the floor of a hut made, probably, of a perishable material. Other similar hut foundations can be seen higher up with unenclosed patches of torba floor at irregular intervals.

Stretching in a North-South direction there are, beyond the thick low wall, the remains of a series of circular hut emplacements

with a paved passage in the middle reached originally, over a threshold facing South.

In the middle of the field there is a long deep pit which supplied the soft clay limestone for the making of the torba floor. The rock here is so soft that it can be cut with any sharp stone. Mixed with stones or pounded pottery and sometimes with lime, this soft rock may be beaten to form a smooth surface which in time hardens like concrete, and becomes as hard as stone if fire is applied to its surface.

One large slab of stone about 12 feet long and 7 feet wide lies flat on the southern end of the field. It is probable that it stood once on its side and formed part of the outer wall that originally surrounded the whole monument.

Between the upper and lower fields, at the back of the right wall of the first temple, a barrel shaped kiln was, in much later days, built in the rubbish, heaped up in the course of ages. Charcoal was, probably, prepared in this kiln for some charcoal was found in it and no lime; it is moreover built of small stones and not of clay tiles. Sherds of late Roman pottery were also found in and near this modern kiln.

### **Later Water Cistern.**

That an attempt to turn part of the field into a garden was made in later days, is clearly proved by a wall built of small squared stones with modern tools, just outside the second temple and to the East of it. Blocks of the neolithic building were turned into water channels and into square pillars which were intended to support the roof slabs of a cistern. This was never completed but one fine pillar, 15 feet long, which was part of the megalithic building was thrown down to form one of the walls of the cistern. A trench about 2 feet wide and 11 feet deep, covered by 18 slabs, leads from this intended cistern to a bell-shaped water tank, 15 feet deep, which is still in use to the south-east of the monument.

Between this and the second temple, always on the eastern side, enormous blocks of stone lie flat on the ground. These must have formed a boundary wall which was thrown down at an early period. The notches made by modern iron wedges show clearly that out of these blocks stones were quarried when required to build a wall or patch up some building in the neighbourhood.



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