

THE NEOLITHIC TEMPLES  
OF  
HAJAR KIM AND MNAIDRA  
AND THE "MISKA" RESERVOIRS

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WITH PLANS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

Professor THEM. ZAMMIT,

C.M.G., M.D., D.Litt. (Oxon)

DIRECTOR OF THE MUSEUM DEPARTMENT,

MALTA

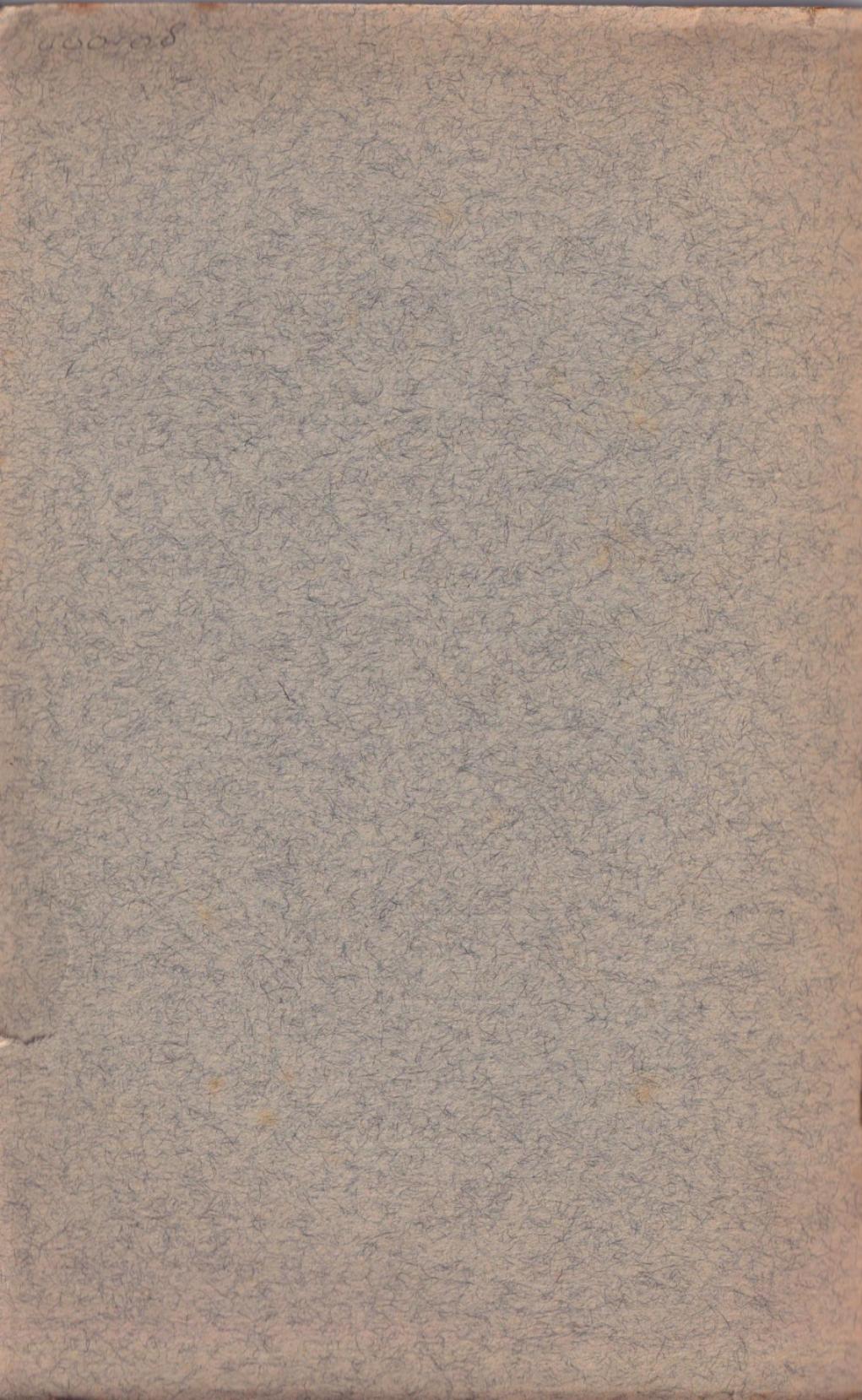
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1927

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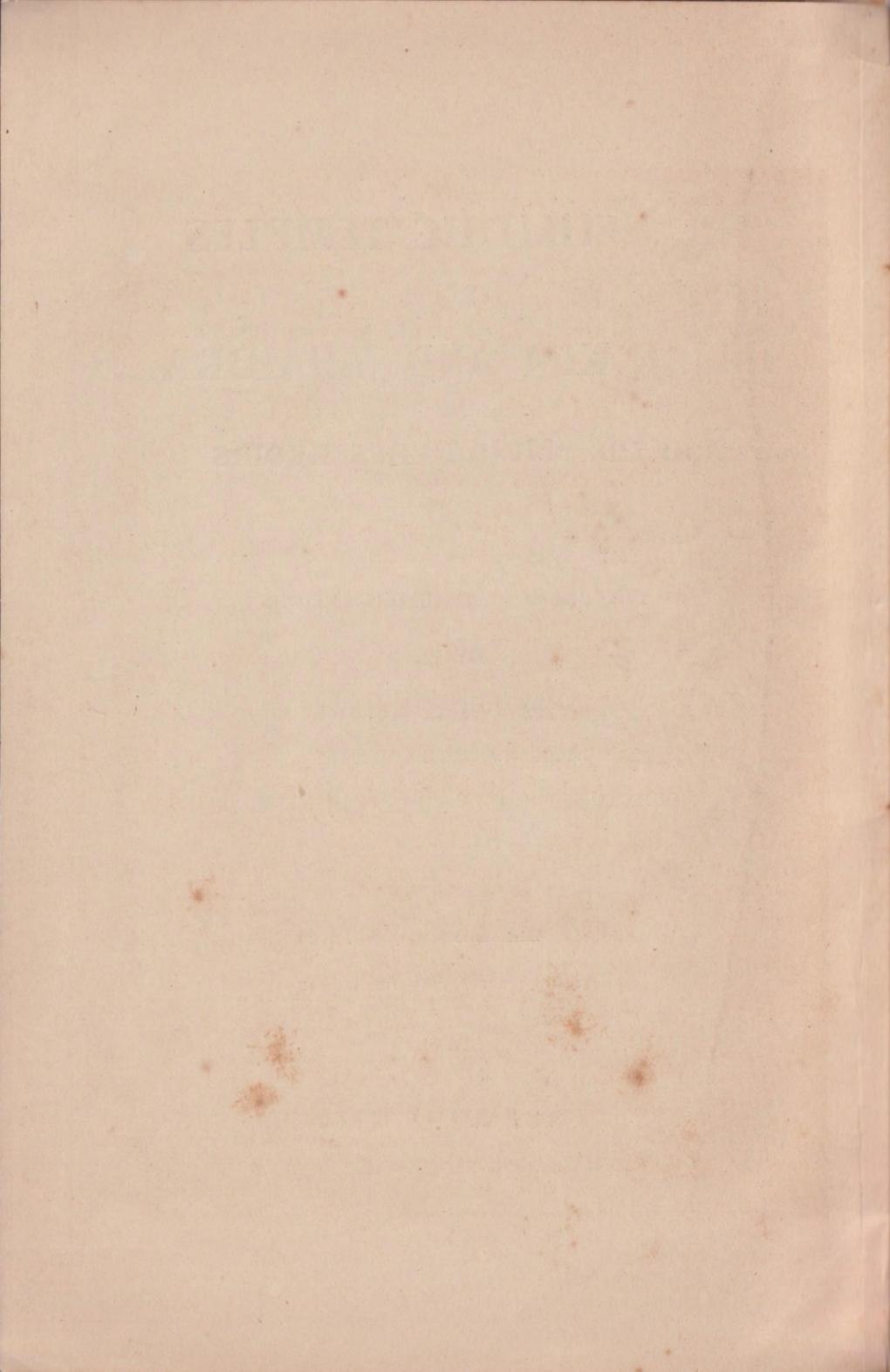
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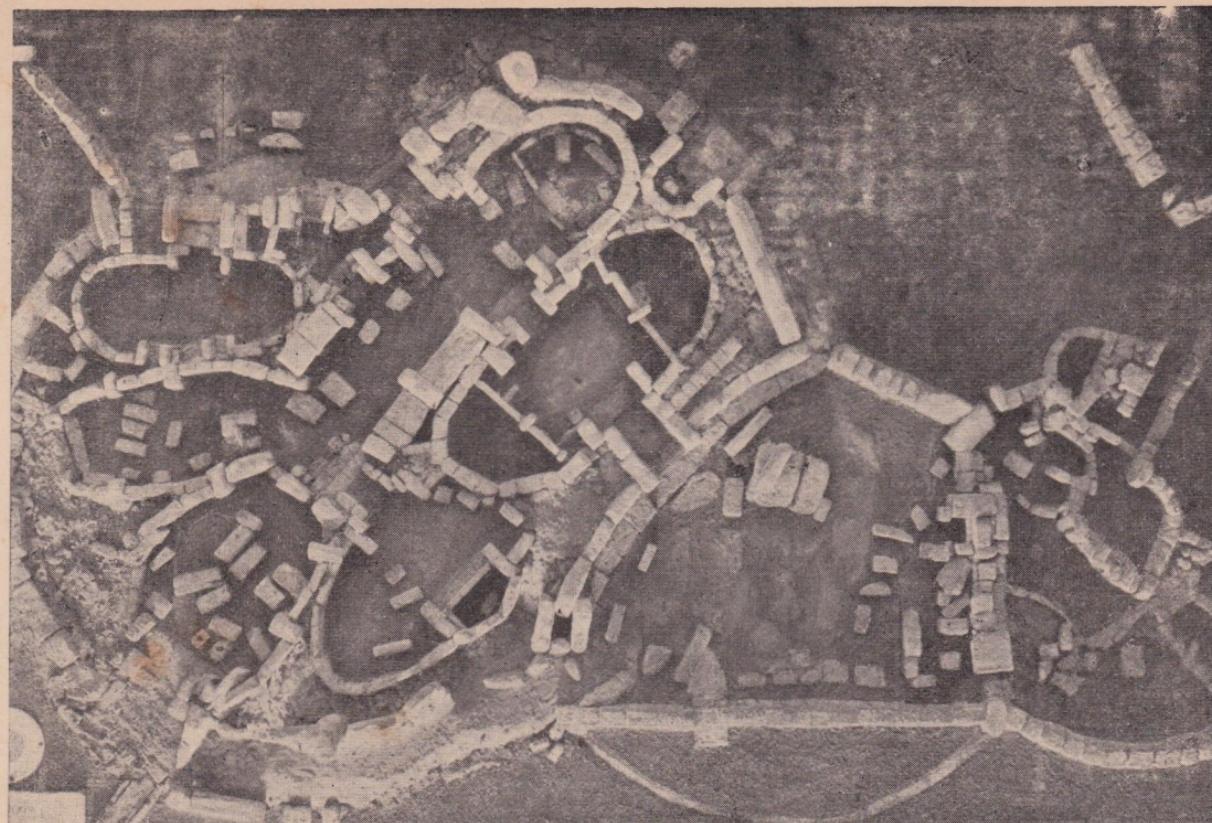
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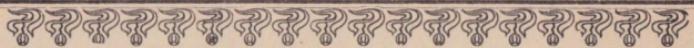
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Malta — Hajar Kim — Bird's eye view of the ruins.



## HAJAR KIM, MNAIDRA AND MISKA

The *Stone Age* period, that in Southern Europe lasted till the end of the third millennium B.C., flourished to such an extent in the Maltese Islands that the remains of the monuments erected at that time are unique in the whole world.

Megalithic buildings were numerous, both in Malta and in Gozo, and their remains, in various states of preservation, are met with all over the Islands. Menhirs, dolmens, cromlechs, are common enough, but vast structures, which point to a thriving population, are entirely out of proportion to the size of the country. Hajar Kim, Mnaidra, Tarxien, Borg-in-Nadur, ta Hajrat, in Malta, and Gigantea, Santa Verna, ta Marsiena in Gozo, are most interesting monuments that deserve to be known not only to the archaeologist but to all those who are interested in history and in the early development of the human race in Europe.

These megalithic buildings are now the bare skeletons of once magnificent structures, mostly roofed, paved, and tastefully decorated with pit-marks and sculptures, having doors and curtains at the various entrances. Food and drink were carried about in exquisitely made jars, cups, and dishes of which the specimens collected during the excavations, are as marvellous as the buildings themselves.

## HAJAR KIM

The name *Hajar Kim* means standing stones, for, before the excavations of this ruin, all that could be seen of the ruin was a mound of earth from which the tops of big stones protruded. These ruins stand on a rocky plateau overlooking the sea on the west coast of Malta, facing the islet of *Filfla* which stands out gracefully about three miles away. One reaches the spot after passing through the village of *Krendi*, about 8 miles from Valletta.

### **EXCAVATIONS**

These ruins were excavated at public expense during the Governorship of Sir H. F. Bouverie, in 1839, by Mr. J. C. Vance of the Royal Engineers. Within two months, that officer made a plan of the buildings and sent to Valletta a stone altar, a decorated slab and seven stone statuettes which are now exhibited in the Valletta Museum. The account of his excavations was published in Vol. 29 of "Archeologia" in 1842.

In 1885, Dr. A. A. Caruana made further excavations and published a lengthy report with elaborate plans, sections and views, drawn by Dr. Philip Vassallo of the Public Works Department.

In 1910, the surrounding fields were searched with proper care and the ruins themselves accurately surveyed by members of the School of Rome (Dr. Ashby, Mr. Peet, Prof. Tagliaferro and the writer) who repaired some of the damaged structures and made a rich collection of potsherds, flint implements, stone and clay objects, now deposited in the Valletta Museum.

### **DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT**

The Hajar Kim monument consists of a series of buildings of the type of other Maltese megalithic structures; that is, a semicircular forecourt in front

of a high retaining wall, with a passage down the middle, flanked by two sets of deep apses on either side.



Malta—Hajar Kim—S. W. aspect.

This simple plan was, in this particular case, modified in the sense that one of the apses was demolished and replaced by four large enclosures independent of each other, and reached through separate entrances.

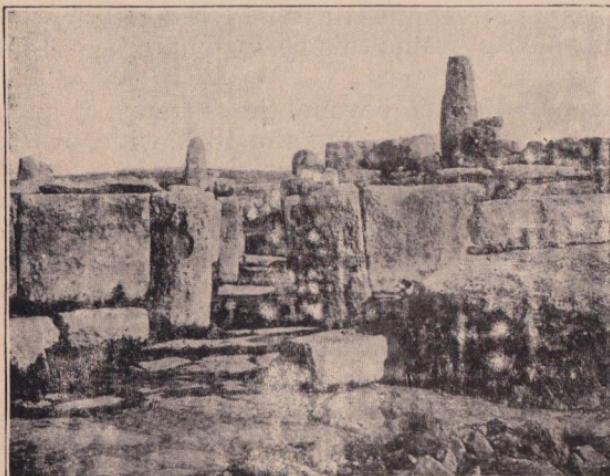
The building was evidently a temple, or to apply a more general term, "a place of worship", in the construction of which great skill was displayed by all who had a hand in it. Architects drew elaborate plans, and an army of workmen directed by expert masons quarried the stones, transported the huge blocks to the appointed place, smoothed and squared them, and put them up with a consummate art that makes the modern visitor stare with amazement. The accuracy with which enormous blocks were set up and fitted together, as if they were playthings on a table, is really astonishing.

### THE MAIN BUILDING

The ruins, now enclosed within a high rubble wall, are approached from the South. An extensive semicircular fore-court in front of the outer wall is paved with large irregular blocks. This solid, but uneven, floor is still encumbered with large blocks that probably formed part of the wall. They are huge masses of limestone which is now difficult to replace in their original position. It would be a pity to break up and clear away these blocks when they are a striking evidence of past architectural efforts.

One of the paving stones is hollowed throughout and forms a deep pit which at present has one of the open ends-blocked up. It probably once served the purpose of a fire-place, for there are signs of fire in one of the holes.

To the right of the forecourt, a mass of disjointed blocks are seen, some standing and some lying at various angles; they must have been, originally, a series of chambers, possibly dwelling-places of the attendants of the temple. Their present state,



Malta—Hajar Kim—Main entrance S.E. aspect.

however, makes it difficult to conjecture the precise use to which they were put.

Before reaching the main entrance, a square slab, about 10 feet long and 1 foot 5 inches thick, was found lying flat on the debris that covered the floor. In 1910, when the floor was cleared, this slab was supported by pillars; it is now quite out of place in its present position. Lying on it is a block of masonry 7 ft. 5 in. by 2 ft. 5 in., by 2 ft., evidently fallen from the neighbouring wall. Local people call this stone *the bell*, for when struck, it emits a ringing sound. No regard need be paid to this, as any close-grained stone poised on another one is bound, when struck, to give a similar ringing sound.

The façade of the temple faces South and is made of three large slabs on end on each side of the entrance. Well-squared blocks of stone, at the foot of the slabs, serve to shore them up and likewise offer sitting accommodation.

The gateway, in the middle of the façade, is made of two large slabs on end facing each other at right angles to the wall on either side. Originally, horizontally laid stones formed a covered entrance and passage. A fine threshold flanked by large smooth blocks frame this heavy but graceful doorway.

About 10 feet beyond the entrance, is an oval area (A), about 47 ft. long and 18 ft. wide, of which the walls consist of large slabs on end, topped, originally, by courses of masonry. The two apsidal ends are separated from the central court by vertical slabs, one on each side, pierced by a rectangular opening 4 ft. high and 3 feet wide. Through these openings, probably protected by a curtain or a door, one has access to the side apses.

The central area is paved with well-set smooth blocks and, along the walls are low stone seats or altars, at one time decorated with pitmarks, now mostly obliterated. Some of these blocks are discoloured by fire.

Important objects, now shown in the Valletta Museum, were discovered in this court in 1839. The stone statuettes, known all the world over, the stone altar with deep carvings on the four sides, representing a plant, and the stone slab with spirals in relief, were all standing about this limited area.

The next area (B) is reached through a passage made by three large pillars on each side. It is a long enclosure which, originally, ended into two deep apses, of which, at present, only the Eastern one remains, the other one having been destroyed when the four independent chambers, or chapels, were devised.

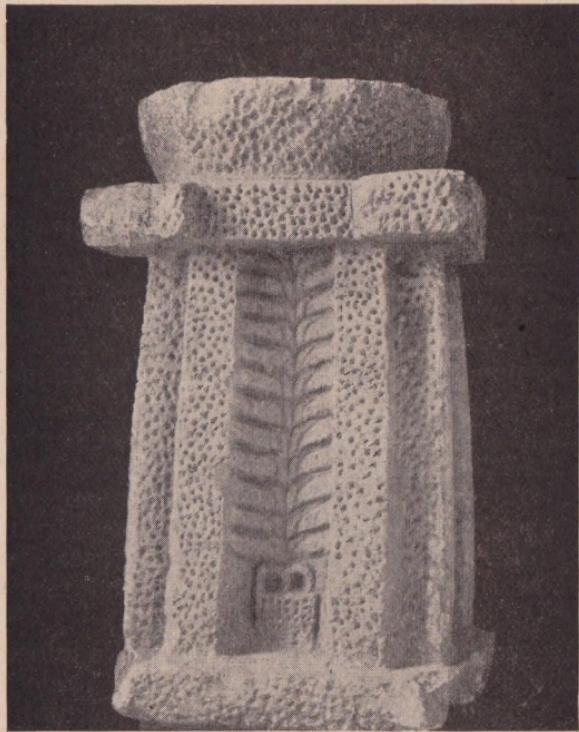
The right (Eastern) apse, 20 feet deep and about 18 feet wide at the base, is made of 18 vertical slabs on which oblong blocks are built overlapping each other as they go higher, and so ultimately forming a vaulted roof. It is clear that these apses were covered, but of the vault only a few courses remain.

A row of smaller slabs fences an oval enclosure within the Eastern apse; the enclosure is clearly marked but most of the slabs have almost crumbled away. At the back of the apse one of the wall slabs is pierced by an oval hole, about 16 in. from the ground, which opens at the back into a small room (M), the seat, probably, of an oracle.

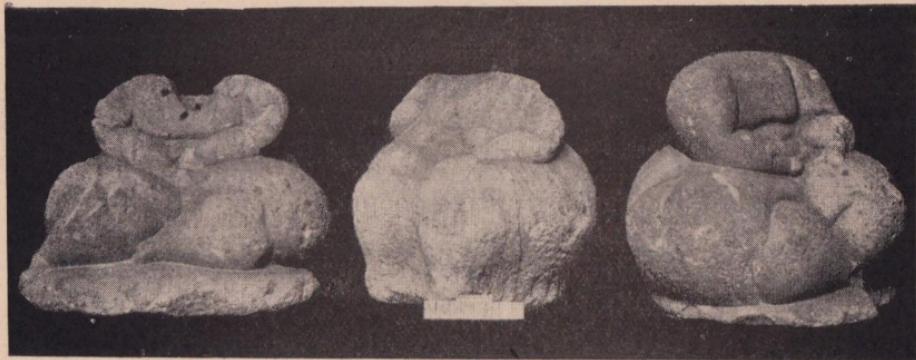
These oracular rooms form a prominent feature of the Maltese megalithic sanctuaries. They show that all these places of worship were built with great forethought and that complicated rites had already evolved in the course of the religious development of that primitive people.

Close to this apse, is the second entrance from the North, at the end of a 12 ft. passage, well paved and solidly built of slabs on end.

To the left of this passage, within the area (B), is the entrance to an interesting annexe, very



Hard-stone altar from Hajar Kim



Three of seven stone statuettes found at Hajar Kim.

elaborately constructed with well-smoothed slabs. These, originally, were lavishly decorated with pitmarks, but the action of time has effaced them, most of the slabs themselves being reduced to dust.

This small enclosure (D) was, evidently, the holiest part of the temple. On each side of the doorway stands a stone altar of a peculiar shape, with an oblong top and a solid rectangular base. The edges are rounded and raised. The foot of one of the altars is pierced by two elliptical holes one above the other.

The entrance to D is well paved and neatly flanked by slabs on end. The threshold is provided with a couple of conical pits connected at the apex as if they were meant for rope holes. This is a remarkable feature of these megalithic temples, conical rope-holes being bored in every important threshold.

To the left of the entrance, heavy slabs form a kind of niche in which an altar slab is supported by two vertical pillars, 3 feet from the floor.

To the right, a strongly constructed cell contains also an altar hewn out of a single stone and deeply discoloured by the action of fire.

In front of the enclosure, the passage widens into a quadrangular area (C), with an elaborate cell at the end. A slab 2 ft. 10 in. high, blocks the entrance to this cell at floor level, whilst another slab, resting on two pillars, is placed across the top, thus reducing the whole to a rectangular window-like opening.

Beyond this window a kind of cupboard is constructed. The first excavators have not recorded what they found in this recess, but if we may judge by the finds in the Tarshien temples, it must have been full of animal bones and broken pottery. It appears that when a burnt offering was made, the horns or other parts of the animal sacrificed were deposited in a cell as a memento of the sacrifice. We should always bear in mind that we

have before us the naked and often mutilated skeleton of the original building, battered and wasted by every adverse agency for six thousand years, so that we can hardly conceive the beauty and the finish of a monument decorated with all the care that an artistically minded people lavished upon it.

#### THE WESTERN APSE

Against the sides of the western apse three dolmenic structures are built in shallow recesses, two on the southern side, and one on the northern. These trilithons consist of a well-squared slab filling the recess standing on two uprights between five and six feet in height. The table stones, broken by fallen blocks, were repaired in 1910 and strengthened by extra pillars put up for the purpose.

#### ROOM F

At the end of the Western apse one approaches, on the left, the bottom of a flight of four steps leading to a room (F) which stands at a higher level. This is one of the additions made to the original temple by the Stone Age people.

Four steps lead to a well-paved entrance, flanked on both sides by the usual series of slabs on end, into a room which to the right, is 35 feet long and 15 feet wide, whilst it ends abruptly in a slight curve at the eastern side. The floor is made of beaten earth and, except on the eastern side, the walls consist of slabs on end. Here the wall is common with that of the apse below which jutting out at this level, renders slabs un-necessary.

The pitting of the blocks in this room has practically disappeared, but we know that it actually existed by what remains on the foot-stone to the right of the doorway.

To the South, in front of the main entrance, the wall bulges out at an angle forming a deep

recess which is converted into a polygonal niche by vertical slabs. This recess, which was once covered, is reached through a window-like opening cut in a vertical slab. The floor of this niche is below the level of that of the main room.

A cylindrical pillar, which may have stood in the middle of the room, lies now on the floor. The early excavators are not clear about the position in which this pillar was found.

Behind the wall, to the south, part of the original outer wall is visible and one is struck by the magnificence of four slabs that tower over this room which, probably, was domed over at about the height of the outer wall.

#### ROOM G

Coming down from the upper room, one finds that, through a gap between two wall slabs, a hall at a lower level is reached. This large oval hall is the second of the four dependencies of the main temple. Its proper entrance is a fine gate-way to the South-West, the gap through which one now passes being due to the accidental removal of a stone from the wall.

The wall of this room is made of megalithic slabs, some with the broad face in a line with the wall, others wedged at right angles between them, with the edge projecting into the chamber. The slabs vary between 6 and 8 feet in height and from 3 to 7 feet in width. The ashlar masonry which once topped these slabs is nearly all displaced, some of it encumbering the floor to this day.

The entrance was, probably, furnished with a door; hollowed out in the form of a cup, two hard-stone blocks which may have served the purpose of sockets in which a door-post moved may be seen near the entrance.

That this room was of considerable importance can be deducted from the remains of a decorative frieze discovered, some time ago, on one of the slabs of the outer wall. The stump of a big vertical slab, still in situ, shows in relief the feet and lower part of the legs of two corpulent figures characteristic of the Maltese Neolithic period. The remains on the right represent the extremities of a large figure, those on the left of a smaller one.

No doubt, other sculptures decorated the walls of Hajar Kim as also those of other temples. We are obliged, therefore, to acknowledge that we have a very faint idea of what these megalithic monuments looked like in their original state.



Malta—Hajar Kim—part of boundary wall.

**ROOM H**

The third annexe to the main building is reached a little further to the north, moving always along the outer wall. This is another elliptical room adjoining the one just described, with which it has one of its walls in common.

The threshold is still in situ but the pillars of the entrance are gone. Nevertheless, this is the original entrance, for the gap now existing in



Malta—The highest pillar in the Hajar Kim temple.

the wall, through which access may be had, is accidental. This is very clear, seeing that in the right hand corner of the wall a mass of disjointed stones is now heaped up just as it came down, ages ago, probably by an earthquake.

This room is in all respects similar to the one close to it, and has, therefore, no special feature that requires special mention.

#### **ROOM I**

A far better room or chapel is the fourth annexe which is reached by walking further, along the outer wall in a North Eastern direction. This room opens to the North, and is constructed on a platform about two feet high. A conical pit is neatly dug in the solid rock in front of it; to the right of the platform, a similar pit is cut in the pavement of the floor of the entrance.

This room is well constructed and in a good state of preservation. The walls are made of comparatively small slabs, between 4 and 5 feet high and about 3 feet in width. At the back, the slabs and foot blocks are so arranged as to form three niches mostly decorated with the usual pitmarks. To the right of the entrance a quaint side niche is constructed as if meant for a porter's lodge. It is well made with smoothed slabs and carefully laid flag-stones.

#### **NORTH EASTERN WALL**

On leaving the fourth room one reaches, on the Northwest, the entrance to the main building in a line with the main passage in a N.W.—S.E. line. This entrance is solidly paved and has a substantial threshold. It is flanked by strong high slabs and is very imposing.

From this point onwards, the outer wall of the temple has a remarkable solidity and a very stately aspect. The slabs are of unusual height

and thickness. To ensure their stability enormous blocks of stone, which to the casual observers appear to be outcrops of the rock, are sunk at their feet.

Wedged between the second and third slab, a roughly hewn pillar, 17 feet high, towers over the ruins; its base is hollowed out to allow the insertion of a pole to operate as a lever when the pillar was placed in position. Other huge slabs follow, until one gets to a very interesting niche built in a recess (L) of the wall.



Hajar Kim—Shrine and oracular room—looking east.

A conical pillar, with the top now broken, stands in the niche paved with smooth blocks, and a triangular pitted slab stands on its apex before it. The niche is flanked by two large slabs, one on each side. To the right of the niche, a deep recess, or rather a small room, is formed by the slabs and the wall pierced at the back by the hole seen in the eastern apse (B). This chamber (M) would

be the oracular room which originally was kept well concealed. Here the priest responsible for the oracle was stationed, the place being completely screened and out of view.

Close to the shrine, the remaining part of the wall consists of one single slab on end. This is the finest stone of the monument; it is 2 feet thick, 9 feet high and fully 23 feet long. It stands majestically at the end of the wall, and like its less bulky companions, is shored up by huge blocks of stone buried at its foot. In two of these stones, sunk at the foot of the block, connected double holes are to be found.



Malta—Hajar Kim—Slab on end measuring 23 feet.

### **ANNEXE TO THE SOUTH EAST**

The large slab completes the circuit of the main building, but a detached group of rooms (N) exists to the east. This section is in a bad state of preservation, many of the stones of the outer wall having been displaced or destroyed. An imposing entrance to the N.E. leads to a passage about 20 feet in length. A circular room to the right of the passage is encumbered with fallen blocks; at the apsidal end of the passage, small recesses are formed by a few slabs which give one the impression of having been used as a manger. It is probable that this was used as a cattle pen and a dwelling for the attendants.

Bones of numerous sacrificial animals (ox, pig, sheep) were found during the excavation of Hajar Kim, a fact which clearly shows that sacrificial animals were constantly required in the temple; a cattle pen, close by, was therefore a necessity in order to supply the animals for which there was such a constant demand.

That cattle roamed about this and similar temples, might also be inferred from the fact that in both jambs of the main entrance of the buildings a deep wide hole is usually cut for a crossbeam, presumably to keep out cattle.

### **SECONDARY TEMPLE**

The remains of a smaller temple is found at about 30 yards to the north of the large one. This building has suffered greatly from exposure, many of the uprights having been overthrown, while others are completely disintegrated. The plan of the building may, however, be made out from the stones that remain standing. This small temple consisted, originally, of two sets of enclosed areas parallel to each other. The first elliptical area measured 46 feet in length with a maximum

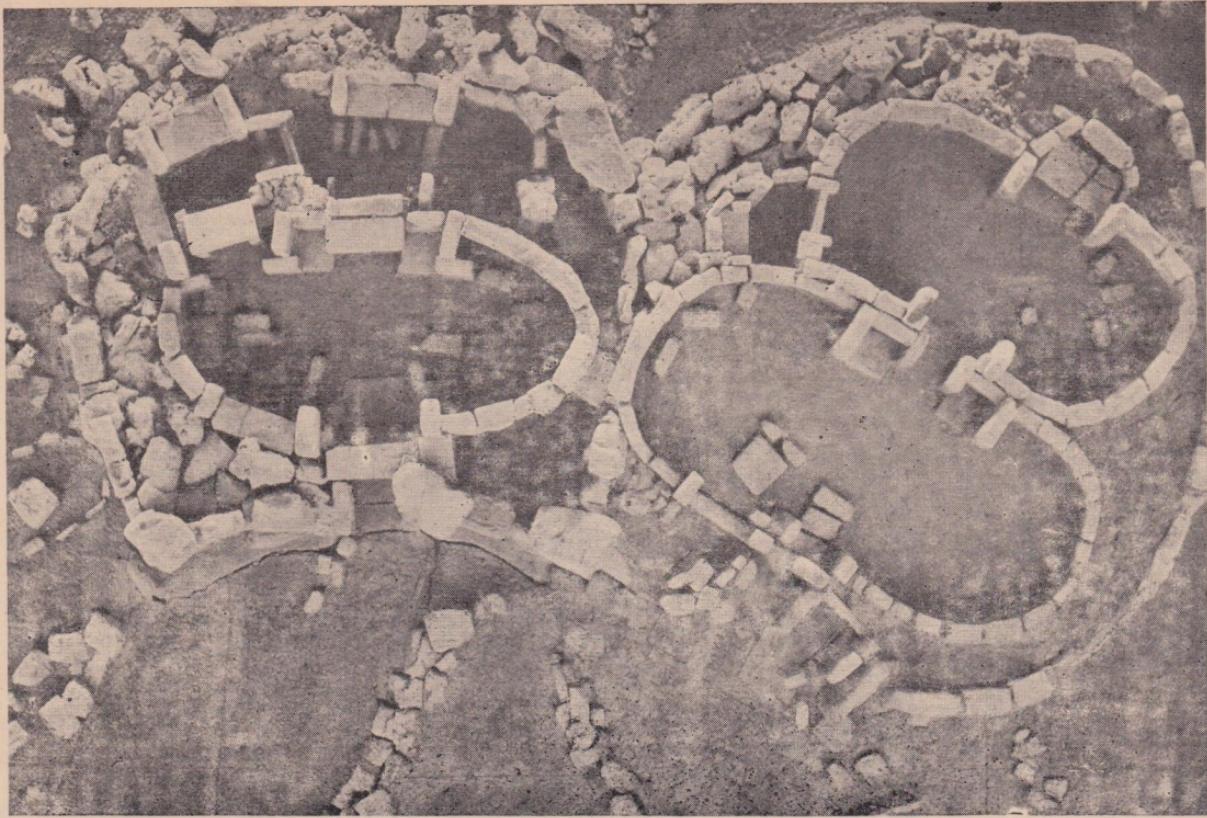
width of 20 feet, the area to the north of this, being somewhat smaller. In front of the main passage a polygonal niche was constructed, to the left of which, two semicircular apses appear, one on each side. Of these apses only the western pair are left standing. Originally, the whole building was enclosed by a thick wall, but of this only some of the foundation stones have survived.

Stone balls of different size may be seen along the walls of this and of similar buildings. These were the rollers used for the transport of the huge stone blocks. Excavations have shown us that when a stone arrived at its destination the roller was buried under it thus helping to give it a solid foundation.

## MNAIDRA

### MNAIDRA

This is another megalithic temple which stands about half a mile to the west of Hajar Kim. Whereas the latter is on the top of the rocky plateau, Mnaidra is built at the foot of the hillock close to the edge of the promontory in face of the blue sea and the islet of Filfola. Again, Hajar Kim, unlike Mnaidra, is built of soft stone for it stands on the soft rock known as "globigerina limestone", a rock that, flaking as it does in huge slabs, made the quarrying of the stone for the temple a comparatively easy task. Walking down towards Mnaidra we see all round us the laminated zones of this soft stone that have only to be cut to the required size and lifted up to be used as building material.



Mnajdra—Bird's eye view of ruins of the temple.

Further down the path, to the W., the nature of the rock changes abruptly from a soft flaking white stone to a compact, rough, reddish coralline limestone. This semi-crystalline rock forms the rest of the hill down to the sea-shore, as well as the islet out to sea.

Parts of Mnajdra are built of this hard, heavy stone; whence their rugged appearance. On the other hand, the smooth slabs, pillars and blocks that are rubbed smooth and decorated, were all brought down from near Hajar Kim; the coralline limestone being difficult to work.

Mnajdra consist of two different building at different levels; the higher one looking South-east, and the lower one due East.

The two monuments were cleared by Vance during the year 1840 (1) but no detailed account of the excavation is known to exist. The first accurate plan was made by Dr. Alb. Mayr in 1902. In 1910 Members of the British School at Rome helped to make further investigations which resulted in the collection of the important archaeological material, now exhibited in the Valletta Museum.

#### **SUBSIDIARY BUILDING**

Coming down from Hajar Kim, just before reaching the temples, a small subsidiary building occurs on the right of the visitor. Little remains of this neat and pretty building. A narrow doorway looking South is lined by slabs on end, originally decorated with pitmarks. This leads to an area of which the walls have practically disappeared. At the back, an apsidal space, lined with small stones, has in front three slabs and a pillar on each side.

The pillar-stones are decorated with pitmarks drilled in horizontal rows on the inner surface. This queer decoration was either left unfinished or was the work of a novice who had no proper pattern in mind.

(1) VASSALLO. *Monumenti Antichi di Malta* 1876, pag. 31.

### THE FIRST SANCTUARY

The first building to be reached is the one at the higher level. Its façade betrays some disorder, and is apparently disarranged. In its present state it has two entrances, the first one reached being in all probability the original one. The second doorway, which is dilapidated, must have been constructed at a later date.

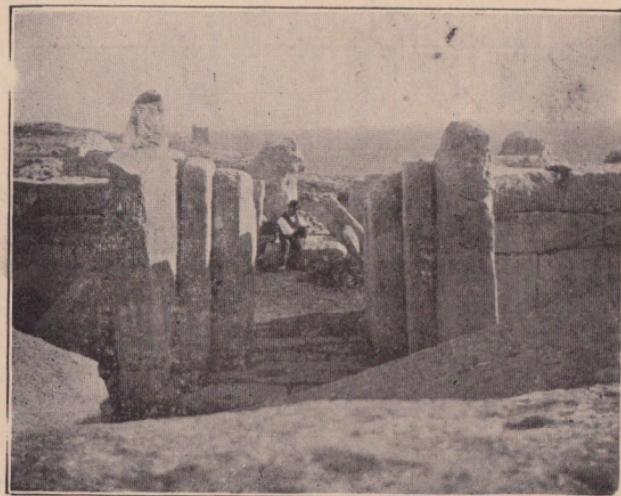
The first entrance is solidly paved, and standing outside it two slabs, one on each side, form a kind of anteroom. The gateway, now broken, consists of an enormous slab pierced in the middle by a rectangular opening four feet wide and five feet two inches high. This is a feature of several of the Maltese Megalithic buildings in which doorways, instead of being built, are cut through the thickness of a slab.



Mnajdra — Higher temple.

The entrance leads directly into an ellipsoidal area, fiftyfour feet in length and twentyfour in breadth, the walls of which are made of a row of slabs on end about three feet high. These are surmounted, at present, by two courses of long blocks which once were more numerous and were arranged so as to converge into a vault. The floor of these two apses is made of stones and beaten earth which in time became as hard and uniform as if regularly paved.

In front of the entrance is the passage to the next set of apses, solidly and magnificently erected, with large well-smoothed slabs flanked on each side by a low rectangular block of stone. Thus two recesses are formed; in the left one, a model of a megalithic building, apparently the work of a contemporaneous artist, is carved.



Mnajdra—Neolithic temple, inner court.

The second area, with its two side apses, is reached through this entrance, between magnificent stone slabs, with sides notched to receive a horizontal slab to roof the passage over. A fine

solid threshold gives a well finished appearance to the whole.

The northern area is fortyfive feet long and twenty feet broad in the middle. Here too, the walls are made of well-squared slabs on end with ashlar masonry built upon them. A deep recess at the back is filled up by a well-cut horizontal slab, ten feet nine inches long, five feet ten inches wide, and one foot two inches thick, supported, originally, by a pillar at each end at the height of five feet from the ground. More supports were inserted in 1910 when the slab, broken in the middle, was repaired. A raised threshold made of two blocks of stone is laid along the hexagonal recess.

The wall of the eastern apse is plain and continuous. A curious rectangular cavity, thirteen inches by ten, is carefully cut in one of the wall slabs; the use of such a deep niche can hardly be surmised.



Mnajdra—View of main hall.

In the western apse, the wall is decorated with an elaborate façade which bears no relation to the construction of the building. A highly finished window-like doorway, with beautifully curved and smoothed edges, three feet high and two feet wide, opens in front of a deep niche.

In this niche a stone table standing on a curved cylindrical pedestal is flanked by high vertical slabs, and backed by a large slab set against the wall. The back of this niche corresponds to the wall of the outer area in which, one of the slabs having given way, has partly exposed the niche.

#### **LOWER TEMPLE**

Leaving the first temple, one steps down over heaped-up boulders to the level of the second temple, ten feet lower down.

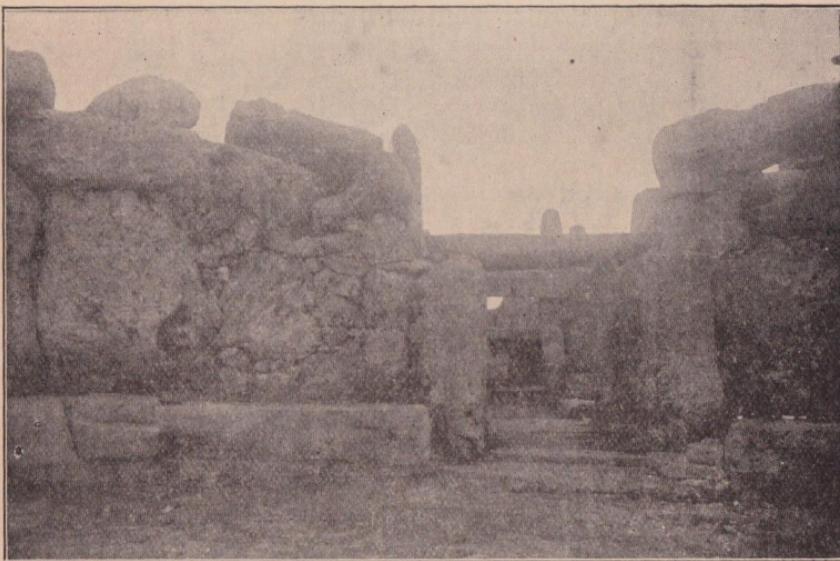
The outer-wall of the building has a striking appearance, being made of large reddish masses of semi-crystalline rock piled up to a considerable height. These blocks of stone, quarried from the local rock, are roughly hewn, but the rugged surface gives them an impressive aspect.

The whole façade has a semicircular court in front, emphasised by large quadrangular blocks which afford sitting accomodation. The fore-court is paved with rough boulders which make an uneven hummocky floor. Not far from the entrance, and in front of it, one of the paving stones shows a double rope-hole to which, probably, a sacrificial animal was occassionally tied.

Before crossing the threshold of the wonderful edifice, a detail which easily escapes the observer should be noted. Ensconced in the corner of the first footstone, on the left of the entrance, a slender hard-stone cone is fixed in the thickness of the wall. Another smaller cone is planted to the left of the threshold, while a third one, not far from it, has now its apex broken off. This recalls the famous sacred



Mnajdra—Bird's eye view, higher temple.



Mnajdra—Lower temple.

cones and cylinders that in Chaldaea were placed in the foundation walls of important buildings.

To the right of the threshold a double-holed stone is firmly fixed in the ground.

The gateway and the passage are carefully and solidly paved, and lined at the sides by slabs six feet high. This passage was originally covered in by slabs laid horizontally over the uprights; one of these slabs, nine feet nine inches long, is still in situ.

The stately entrance leads to an elliptical area, fortyfive feet long and twentythree feet wide in its middle portion; the floor is formed by the outcrop of the natural rock.

In front, a magnificent trilithon stands at the entrance of the next courtyard. On each side of this doorway is a low, well-squared rectangular block with bevelled edges decorated with pitmarks.

The right apse has a wall of standing slabs on which courses of masonry are laid and which, eventually, formed a cupola covering the apse.

Cut in the slabs, at a short distance from the floor, two rectangular windows open into rooms at the back used probably as oracular chambers.

#### SIDE CHAMBER

A couple of steps to the right of the entrance lead to a doorway made of standing slab pierced by an opening, three feet four inches high and two feet wide. Behind this doorway, a triangular chamber of which the walls are made of great blocks of roughly hewn coralline limestone, affords a striking contrast with the dainty niche in the right corner.

This niche, lined in front by a well-cut vertical slab, is flanked by two pillars which support a horizontal slab in front: the rest of the roofing

of the niche consists of other slabs and stone blocks. The vertical slab in front is pierced by a neatly cut window-like aperture, two feet five inches high and seventeen inches wide.

Built within the niche, a rectangular cell made of smooth slabs, is supported by a pillar deftly shaped with a bulge in the middle. This was evidently a very holy shrine in which some precious object was kept.



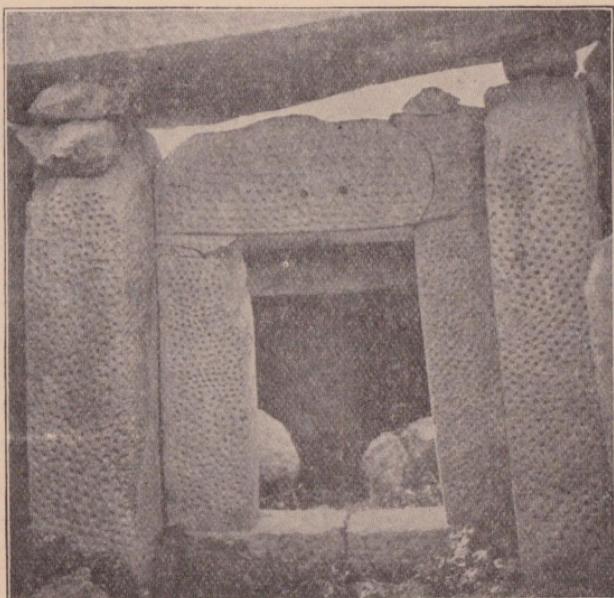
Mnajdra—remains of corbelled vault.

In the north-west corner of this chamber two horizontal slabs are superimposed, with a distance of two feet eight inches between them. The lower slab is supported by side pillars and forms a kind of altar.

The outer wall consists here of enormous blocks of coralline limestone slanting so sharply inwards that one hesitates to approach them. Leaving the

chamber one may walk past the entrance of the main courtyard, at the side of which a thrilithon, over five feet in height, with a table slab, nine feet nine inches long, is built in a recess of the main wall.

Further on, against the wall to the south, a rectangular block is laid as if meant for a pedestal of some big object. This block is six feet six inches long and one foot three inches high. Turning



Mnaidra—pitted stones.

sharply to the west, one faces the most striking part of the whole building, the entrance to the chamber at the back. A large slab on end flanks this entrance on each side at right angles to it, while two slabs with their face parallel to it stand before the two as if to limit the width of the doorway. A low step, built beyond the outer slabs, shows on the left side a couple of rope-holes.

Beyond this is the façade proper, consisting of a vertical slab, pierced by a rectangular opening three and a half feet high and two feet wide, encased in a magnificent trilithon. All the stones of this beautiful façade are decorated with pitmarks of various sizes.

Not without a sense of reverence and awe one enters the Sanctuary, a rectangular room with double altars in deep recesses, one in front and one to the left. The recess in front, bounded all round with large slabs, contains two superimposed slabs. The lower one, three feet three inches from the ground, is supported by pillars at both ends and rests in the middle on a solid biconical pillar. The other slab is laid at a distance of two feet six inches from the lower one, and is supported in the middle by a cylindrical pillar.

The other recess in the left corner of the room contains also a double altar similar to the one near it. The lower slab, supported at both ends, is two feet seven inches from the ground, and the second slab lies two feet above the other. The lower slab is decorated with pitmarks on both surfaces.

Turning to the North, a short narrow passage, flanked by high slabs, kept apart by a horizontal slab, leads to an area in front of the main entrance and at its furthest end.

This chamber has at the back a deep recess in which an altar is built consisting of a solid slab, nine feet nine inches long and three feet nine inches wide, supported, at a height of three feet seven inches from the floor, by two slabs, one at each end.

Looking out towards the main entrance, one gets a view of the magnificent passage stretching across the whole building. This passage is lined throughout by huge uprights, of which some have suffered extensively from exposure. Most of the horizontal slabs that used to run along the vertical pillars have also disappeared in the course of ages.

One of these slabs, which now lies broken in the outer apse, was found in the passage, and once formed the lintel of a doorway. In its middle part it has a circular hole; when laid on the side pillars, now worn out, this hole corresponded with a similar one drilled in the threshold of the room. These two holes appear to have been the sockets of a door, the leaves of which turned on two pivots, one below and one above.

A high walled semi-circular apse to the North of the chamber has its floor about a foot higher than that of the adjoining area. When the floor, which is made of beaten earth, was excavated in 1910 many interesting objects were discovered, including some clay figurines which have the appearance of votive offerings. They seem to represent diseased parts of the human body offered "*ex voto*" in the sanctuary of a healing deity. All these interesting objects, along with very early



Malta—Mnajdra with Filfla islet in the distance.

pottery, stone implements and animal bones, are now exhibited in the Valletta Museum.

On leaving this second building of Mnajdra, one can see the remains of walls and foundation stones to the south-west of the monument, testifying to the existence of one or more subsidiary buildings now utterly destroyed.

A roughly built massive wall, starting from the south-west, surrounds the lower temple of Mnajdra but does not embrace the temple on a higher level, a sure indication that the two buildings were not erected at one and the same time.

#### **GENERAL OBSERVATIONS**

A few general considerations may not be amiss after a review of the Hajar Kim and the Mnajdra groups of buildings.

A simple inspection of the buildings will convince the visitor that they were not intended for a dwelling house or a palace. In any house, large or small, used as a dwelling, personal comfort and the ordinary conveniences of life are essential. None of these important features are to be found in these megalithic buildings; nothing has been done to ensure privacy or the general comfort of the inmates. On the other hand, everything appears to have been done to provide accommodation for animal sacrifices, burnt offerings, and ritual oracles.

Recesses are constructed as depositories for sacrificial remains, statuettes of deities are met with in the form of corpulent figures, with all the features of reposeful supernatural beings who expects devotion and oblation at the hands of their worshippers. The highly decorated pottery is also more suitable for a place of worship than for common household use.

It is often said that these buildings were tombs of important personages, or places destined for

hero-worship. It is well to remember that no burials were ever discovered anywhere close to Hajar Kim and Mnaidra. One skull reported to have been found during the first excavation of Hajar Kim must be attributed to a casual burial in the mound that once covered the monument.

The two groups of temples were partly domed over and partly opened to the sky. The apses were undoubtedly vaulted by the process known as corbelling, that is by making each course of masonry project a little beyond the one below it. The corbelled vault is the most primitive kind of vault known. The passages were made of vertical slabs over which large blocks were laid horizontally. The courts and the other yards were uncovered, the burning of sacrificial offerings taking place in these open spaces.

It is probable that, originally, after enclosing the building within a thick wall, the whole was turned into a mound with the aid of stones and earth; this protected the building from adverse agencies and gave it a more solid and attractive appearance. A people who lived in the glare of a sunny climate were surely in the habit of conducting their religious rites, as far as possible, in a subdued light or in the dark.

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## THE MISKA TANKS

The question of the water supply of Hajar Kim and Mnaidra for ritual and other purposes has, so far, baffled all those who have taken an interest in these megalithic buildings. No reservoirs have ever been discovered in the vicinity and no springs are known to run in the neighbourhood which is all dry soil and rock.

To the North-east of both monuments the ground rises up in a gentle slope and ends in a limestone plateau with a hard, compact, smooth, bluish surface.

In this compact impervious rock six large reservoirs are dug out, once covered with huge blocks of stone. These tanks are filled with rain water led through shallow channels cut for the purpose.

This site is called the "Miska" or "watering place" and, although in the course of time most



The Miska Tanks, to the North-West of Mnaidra.

of the covers of the reservoirs have been broken or carried away, and the tanks themselves half filled with stones, the shepherds who frequent the locality can always find some water in them.

These tanks, six in number, are bell-shaped and considerably deep. The one met with as soon as the plateau is reached from Mnaidra side, is elliptical at the surface, eleven feet long and five feet wide in the middle. It is uncovered, and is cut for the first few feet in a straight line, from which point it widens considerably towards the bottom.

At a short distance from this tank there is a group of three others, one of these is nine feet seven inches wide at its mouth. The second one has a circular mouth with a diameter of seven feet four inches. This tank is covered with slabs, seven feet long, the gap between the central slabs being filled up by others placed at right angles to the rest thus leaving a square mouth at the centre from which water may be drawn. The third tank of the group has an elliptical mouth seven feet seven inches long and five feet wide, it is covered by four slabs about six feet long.

Further to the north, is another group of two reservoirs distant from each other about seven feet and a half, but actually connected under the surface. Their mouth is circular and measures four feet in diameter. One of the tanks is uncovered, but the other is covered with a large slab of which the centre is pierced by a hole through which water may be drawn.

There can be no doubt that these tanks were the work of the neolithic people; the rough chiselling of the rock and the large blocks with which they were covered are characteristic of the earliest civilization.

It is easy to understand why the reservoirs were dug out on the top of the hill, and why it

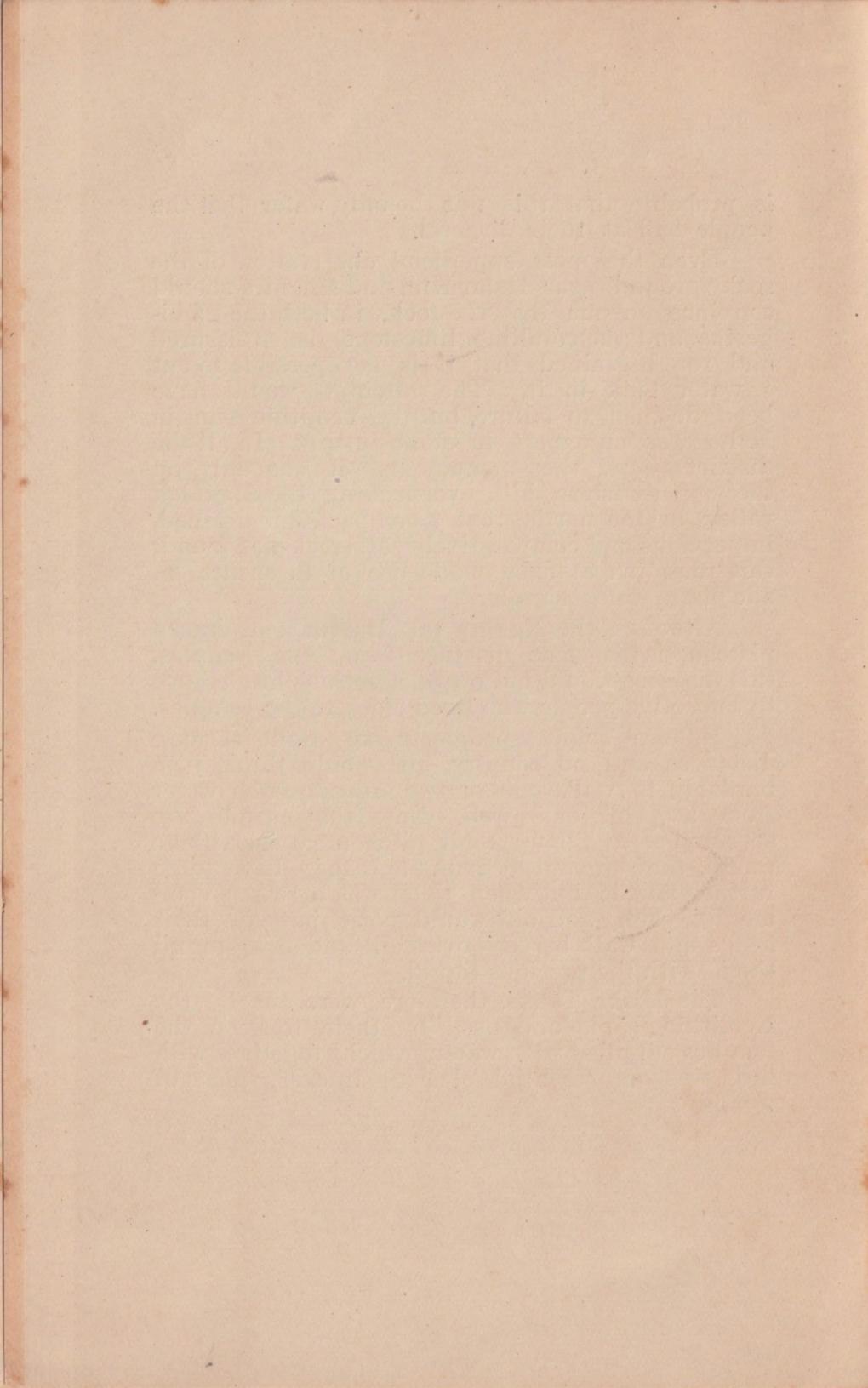
is probable that this was the only water that the people had at their disposal.

Even the most superficial observation of the rocky ground near Hajar Kim and Mnaidra should convince anyone that the rock, in both the globigerina and the coralline limestone, is so fissured and rough-grained that it is not possible to cut a water tank in it. The attempt would have been doomed to failure, but the neolithic man in Malta was an expert in stone-cutting. In all the district round the monuments, it was only on the north-western hill, over-looking the Magħlak valley to the north, that a compact, fine-grained, impervious and comparatively soft rock was found; this rock was at once made use of to ensure an adequate water supply.

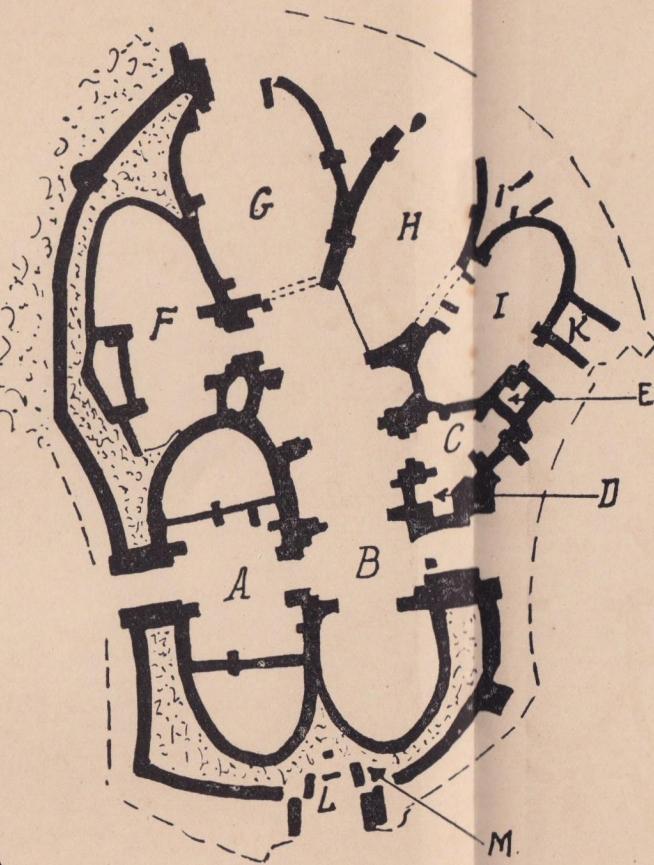
Although the Xaghra tal Magħlak, or Miska plateau, is at some distance from the temples, this distance would not prove a serious hinderance to the active people who lived close to the temples.

Maltese country-people make light of long distances and no country girl would think it a hardship to walk one or two miles to fetch water from a spring or a well. Now that people are accustomed to fill up their pitchers at the village pump, they are apt to grumble if they have to go further afield; but when water was a scarce commodity, young and old would poise jars on their heads and walk briskly over hill and dale to fill them with the precious liquid.

The Miska Tanks, therefore, were cut by the Neolithic people and used by them to keep the temples supplied with water, which, together with fire, was an essential element in every place of worship.



S.  
W.  
E.  
N.



HAGIAR KIM

