

ANCIENT SKIES

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MALTA - MYSTERY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

BY MISS LORE HASSELMANN*

The State of Malta, situated in the center of the Mediterranean Sea, consists of three islands, Malta (the largest), Gozo and Comino, which appear to be the remaining vestiges of a land bridge which connected Africa and Europe in prehistoric times. The Maltese Islands lie between Sicily, 90km (56 miles) to the north, and Tunisia, 325km (202 miles) to the southwest.

The best evidence proving the once-existing land connection between Sicily and Tunisia is Ghar Dalam, the "cave of darkness" on Malta which is 230m (755 feet) deep with stratification showing animal life back to 360,000 BC. In the lowest stratum there are fossils, tusks and skeletons of deer, bear, waterfowl and small elephant, indicating these animals used the land bridge between the two continents. The upper stratum contains children's skulls and teeth and clay fragments dating back to 5,400 BC.

While in Malta, I was fortunate to be able to examine the manifold phenomena of the islands, thanks to the expert guidance and assistance of members of the Society for the Research and Investigation of Phenomena (SRIP). The phenomena are of two basic types: the so-called "cart ruts" and the megalithic temples.

Concentrating first on the "cart ruts", I learned that once the islands of Malta and Gozo were covered with ruts, but little has been done to protect them and they are largely ignored, giving way to new building; however, hundreds of ruts are still visible on the two islands, and can be examined in detail. For the most part, the ruts are parallel grooves, engraved into the limestone surface, looking very much like a railroad layout, with curves, switches, crossings and shunts. It is surprising that the gauge of the tracks is fairly uniform - 1.23m (4 feet) - although the depth of the ruts or grooves varies, with some as deep as 72cm (28.3in.) The width of the grooves will vary from 65cm (25.6 in.) to 123cm (48.4 in.). The inner surfaces of the ruts are smoothly finished and are somewhat V-shaped, wider at the top and tapering to a narrower bottom. The ruts are found all over the islands, on hills, in valleys, down to the water's edge, and in to the sea. Also, divers have found that the ruts continue in the stone to great depths below sea level. At one place, the ruts continue down a hillside into a valley, now covered with fertile earth, which geologists estimate to be about 60,000 years old.

The characteristics of the Maltese ruts raise obvious questions - how were they made? If not of natural origin, then who made them and why?

The rather uniform gauge of the tracks and their other startling characteristics would seem to rule out natural causes. Neither erosion nor the cracking of cooling, molten stone could produce the curves, switches, shunts and crossings - nor the smooth interior surfaces of the ruts.

The local inhabitants seem to be satisfied with the easy explanation - that the grooves are "cart ruts" made by heavy, wheeled carts. Admittedly, that is what the ruts look like, thus giving rise to the theory; however, one can see real cart ruts in the stone streets of the ruins of Pompeii in Italy, but those grooves are not at all like the Maltese ruts, and they run straight - not in curves.

To test the "cart" theory, my friends of SRIP constructed a wheeled vehicle to run in the grooves and it did fine on the straightaways, but it could not negotiate the curves.

Another theory is that sledges, laden with heavy building stones, made the tracks, but again, the curves and switches refute the theory.

Some have suggested that the tracks were carved by the movement - on sledges, carts, or some other type of vehicle - of the enormous limestone blocks used in the construction of the more than 33 megalithic temples found on Malta and Gozo. But it is immediately obvious to the on-site viewer that none of the tracks run to any of the temples. In fact, many run by the temples as if they were not there - which they probably were not when the tracks were made. From the geological viewpoint, the tracks existed many thousands of years before the first temple was constructed.

Sadly, we must admit that there is no satisfactory solution at the present time to the riddle of the Maltese ruts.

Equally puzzling, but definitely not of natural origin, are the ruins of the large buildings found on the islands of Malta and Gozo. There can be no question that these megalithic temples are the work of an advanced civilization, capable of quarrying, transporting and erecting into buildings, enormous blocks of limestone. According to archaeologists, the Maltese temples are the oldest constructed free-standing monuments in the world - 6,000 years old!

The gigantic constructions are made of enormous limestone blocks, either of hard coralline limestone or the softer globigerina limestone, which weigh several tons each. Carefully worked and polished, the blocks are erected into a very unusual architectural design (see aerial view). Most of the temples are located on the island of Malta at the principal sites of Mnajdra, Hagar Qim, Tarxien, Kordin, Xrobb, il-Ghagin, Ta'Hagrat, Skorba, Tal-

(Continued on next page)

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Qadi and Bugibba. The temple site of Ggantija is located on Gozo Island.

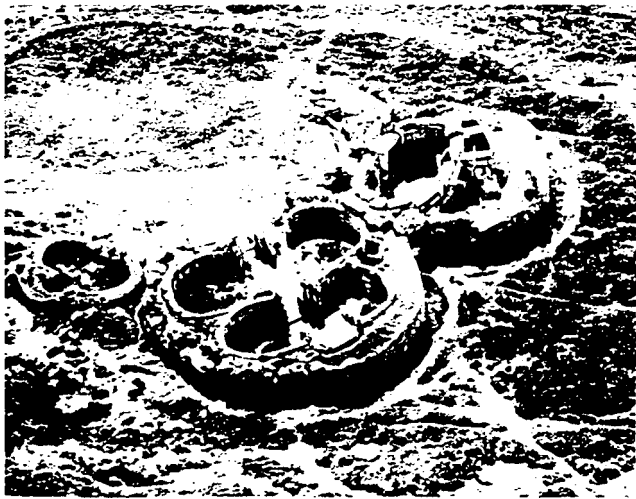
Each site contains multiple temples, from two to four, all of which are above ground. There are three temples at Mnajdra, on the south coast. Tarxien, located near the town of Paola, has four. Near Paola, is the astounding Hal Saflieni Hypogeum, a subterranean vaulted chamber. Three stories underground, the Hypogeum is a marvel of architectural design and craftsmanship, with a huge dome-shaped vault. The niches and columns on which the dome of the great hall rests are worked in faultless style, with clear-cut lines and sharp edges. The dome is composed of massive curved monolithic stone slabs. With its faultless acoustics and excellent air-conditioning system designed into the stone complex, the Hypogeum could not have been produced by Stone-Age workmen, with hand tools and flint axes. The entire complex of the Hypogeum incorporates the air-conditioning and acoustical system, which means that it had to have been carefully engineered from its inception, bearing in mind that the lower floor of the complex is 12m (40 feet) below ground level!

An underground tunnel connects the Tarxien temple complex with the Hypogeum, and members of SRIP suspect that other surface megalithic temples have underground passages to secret sanctuaries, not as yet discovered.

Artistic work also abounds in the temples and the Hypogeum, where some rooms are painted and ornaments of spirals and animal friezes are also used. Terra cotta figurines also were found and are on display in the Hypogeum.

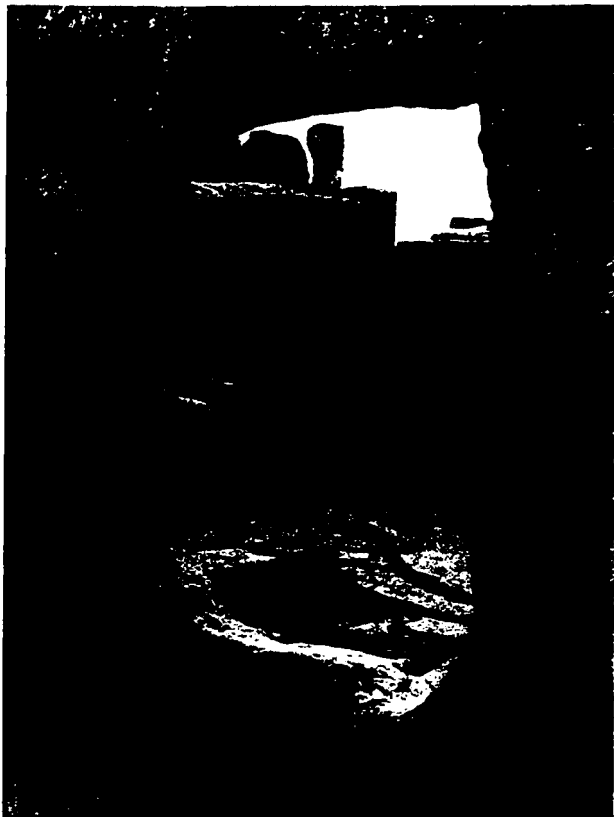
Meticulous investigations have proved that the Maltese temples are astronomically orientated. An analysis of the alignments can be found in an article in *Archaeoastronomy*, Vol. IV, No. 1, by George Agius and Frank Ventura, University of Malta. The bulletin is published by the Center for Archaeoastronomy, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742 USA.

Erich von Daniken also deals with the phenomena of Malta in Chapter 3 of his book Signs of the Gods?, published by G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, NY 10016 USA.



MNAJDRA TEMPLES, aerial view. Photo: Department of Information, Malta.

NOTE: Except for the above photo, all photos used in this article were taken by Erich von Daniken and he holds the copyright.



Above and Below: Hagar Qim Temple, Malta





ABOVE: HAGAR QIM TEMPLE, MALTA



ABOVE, BELOW AND TO THE LEFT:
THE "CART RUTS" OF MALTA



In his new book, The Stairway to Heaven, Zecharia Sitchin deals with the Journey to the Afterlife of King Pepi I. On page 66 he quotes from textual material that he interprets, logically, as indicating that "The king is not simply skyborne, he is orbiting Earth". Sitchin then refers to a verse stating that the king "crosses the sky like Sunt, which crosses the sky nine times in one night!" According to Sitchin, the meaning of Sunt and thus the comparison are as yet undeciphered. It is the purpose of this note to furnish a possible solution to this puzzle.

The clue lies in the characteristics of Sunt, rather than in the meaning of the word itself. What is it that crosses the sky nine times in one night? Consider a satellite orbiting the Earth just above the atmosphere - it makes one journey around the planet in one and one-half hours. During an average night of twelve hours duration it would encircle the Earth eight times. Taken in conjunction with Sitchin's earlier reference to the king orbiting the Earth, the implication is apparent that Sunt is a satellite in low Earth orbit!

It is of interest to examine the alternatives opened up by this interpretation, which would seem to be limited to the following:

- The interpretation is incorrect, and the meaning of the verse lies outside the realm of space flight (in which case, of course, it remains undeciphered).
- The interpretation is correct (in which case, of course, the consequences are profound).
- The interpretation is correct, but only to the extent that the ancient Egyptians could compute the orbital period of a satellite just above the atmosphere and wove it into the account of the king's "Journey", the description being otherwise fanciful.

Sitchin states that the king then soars away towards the eastern horizon on the way to its destination. The significance of departures towards the East was treated in my article in Ancient Skies 2:1. For launches to destinations within the Solar System a small but useful launch assist may be obtained by launching in the direction of the Earth's spin, from West to East.

In some interplanetary missions, entry into a "parking orbit" has preceded the interplanetary journey. Adoption of the most cautious of positions would seem to leave room for the possibility that the ancient Egyptians had some knowledge of the basic mechanics of space flight. Stuart W. Greenwood, 4505 Calvert Rd., College Park, Maryland 20740 USA. (Dr. Greenwood has a PhD degree in aerospace engineering from the University of Maryland).

Note to Dr. Greenwood: "Your interpretation is plausible; and if the first and last observations are included, then the number of the satellite's visibility in a 12 hour period is indeed 9 (not 8).
Zecharia Sitchin."

ZECHARIA SITCHIN's The 12th Planet in paperback is now in its fourth printing, from AVON Books, New York, NY 10019. Mr. Sitchin reports that the first printing of the hardcover edition of his new book The Stairway to Heaven has been sold out. A second printing is underway by St. Martin's Press, NY.

SECOND MEETING IN FULDA. A full day of lectures and slide presentations (all in German) will be held in Fulda, Germany, October 9-10, 1981. Anyone interested in attending should contact AAS, Baselstrasse 10, 4532 Feldbrunnen S/O, Switzerland.

Exorbitant prices in Vienna, Austria during the summer season have necessitated a rescheduling of our World Conference in 1982 to November. The Conference site will be the Hilton Hotel in the heart of Vienna. Special rates have been negotiated for our members. Members should plan to arrive at the hotel on Thursday November 11, 1982 and depart on Sunday November 14. Two full days of lectures and presentations will be held on November 12 and 13. Members outside of the United States and Canada who wish to attend should contact AAS, Baselstrasse 10, 4532 Feldbrunnen S/O, Switzerland. Members in the United States and Canada should contact the Society headquarters office. A group flight is being planned to depart Chicago on Sunday, November 7, 1982, arriving Vienna on November 8. Three full days will be available to sightsee in Vienna before the Conference begins. On Sunday November 14, the group will fly to Amman, Jordan to begin a two week expedition.

POST-CONFERENCE MEMBER EXPEDITION NOVEMBER 1982

Following the Vienna World Conference, our group will depart Vienna on Sunday November 14, 1982 for Amman, Jordan. After visiting that capital city, we will proceed overland to southern Jordan for a two-day exploration of the ruins of Petra, the "rose-red city, half as old as time." With its Greek-Roman style building facades exquisitely carved into the living rock, Petra was lost to the outside world for centuries. John Lloyd Stephens was the first American to visit the ruins in 1836.

Returning to Amman, the group will then travel to Jerusalem for a three day visit of the holy city. Then, the group will fly from Tel Aviv to Nairobi, Kenya for five days of animal watching, a camera safari and relaxing in the wilds of Africa. We will return to Chicago on November 28, 1982.

Anyone interested in participating in this most unusual adventure should contact the Society headquarters office.

ERICH VON DANIKEN has reported that recently he was flown into the South American jungles of the Sierra Nevada by Colombian Air Force helicopter, where he explored the ruins of a lost city, never before visited by a European. His fascinating account of the exciting adventure will appear in his next book.

NEW BOOKS IN GERMAN:

DIE KOSMISCHEN EINGEWEIFTEN, by Axel Ertelt, Johannes Fiebag, Peter Fiebag and Hans-Werner Sachmann, in paperback.

DIE EPOCHE DER "ENGEL", by Hans-Werner Sachmann, in paperback.

Both books are available from Hans-Werner Sachmann, Emsinghofstr. 35, D4600 Dortmund 15, West Germany.

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