

# A Culture Terminated by the Michigan Copper Trade — Understanding Bronze Age Malta

Jay S Wakefield

Upon arrival September 19, 2016, the Maltese Islands were found to be hot and humid, while dusty and dry. "It last rained last November" I was told. Close

waiting for the rain. It did not appear that farming is any longer a prosperous occupation.

The construction is focused on new

were filled with yachts, some of them huge. A sleek dark blue sailboat with four masts and five spreader sets, and a five story black & white power yacht "from India" caught my eye. It dawned on me that I was observing a tax haven in operation, and my guess is that the new buildings going up are also tax haven condos for the rich of the world. A sharp gal in a tourist information office at a Heritage Malta site confirmed that "none of it belongs to Maltese".

The city is ancient, and it has obviously been difficult to build a 4 lane highway through the buildings and narrow alleyways. So driving around Valletta is not only a left-side of the road challenge leftover from the British, but you need to negotiate tunnels, construction projects, and complex unlabeled offramps. Thank god for the innumerable traffic circles, an innovation that helps a great deal, though we got lost a number of times in spite of a GPS. In lots of places, however, there is not room to build a real traffic circle, so they have painted a blue dot, maybe five feet in diameter at complex intersections of the multiple one-lane streets in the center of towns, to show you that you are supposed to drive as though there were a



**Photo 1:** Cart Ruts, Clapham Junction, Malta

to Africa, the islands receive winds from the hot south. Surrounded by a salty sea, they are humid, but not high enough to hold rain clouds, like volcanic islands are. The islands are made of uplifted limestone sea bed, some of it hard, some of it very soft. The Mnajdra temple has an obsidian glass "snake" in the entry door sill, with nearby glass associated with a half-inch tubeworm fossil, the results of "hot smoker" volcanism on the ancient seafloor. Since the south shore of both the larger islands is beaten by rough seas. Both islands have a long face of spectacularly tall and steep cliffs, often beyond vertical. The soft stone is used to build everything, most of the houses 2 or 3 stories tall, with stone balconies and ballustrades (posts under the railings) turned of the pink stone. There is a lot of construction going on, and old buildings being torn down, so there is a lot of fine light grey/pink sandy dust. There is apparently one farming season, after it rains. Fields everywhere were tilled,

apartments or condos along the waterfront of Valletta, and other waterfront cities and towns. The marinas and bays



**Photo 2:** Temple of Hagar Qim, prior to installation of tarp roof by European Union



traffic circle there. It mostly works. The locals are fast and aggressive, but do not honk much. Coming out of a torturous underground parking garage, a fast truck in the street swiped the dust off our front bumper. The car rental guy laughed and said "that's Malta!" Malta is famous for its many cart-ruts. They appear all over the island, wherever the topsoil is eroded away. Similar ruts have been found in the Azores,

roofed sites on Malta: Tarxien, Hagar Qim and Mnajdra. These temples built of big stones started small, and grew in size and complexity for twenty-five hundred years, from 5000 BC to 2500 BC. Note that these structures contain trilithons, megalithic stone chambers once roofed, and menhirs. Fourteen freestanding dolmen have been found, and large freestanding menhirs were erected. We found one big menhir be-

BC is immediately distinguishable from Temple Period wares. This decoration is now strictly rectilinear, with bands of parallel heavily-incised lines, horizontal or forming deep zigzags. The resulting triangles are hatched." An example is **Photo 3**. Note that these two small cups are joined together. There were three examples of this in the museum cases, one with the bottoms broken. I have not seen this design before, though there is a lot of ancient joined pottery in Mexico and Peru.

Within the temples, and the Hypogea (bones of 7,000 individuals in it), large statues and and all the way down to small statuettes of obese women have been found. **Photo 4** shows some of them from a museum collection, and **Photo 5** shows the bottom remains of a large one in the Tarxien temple. These figures, and the temple and hypogea walls, have remaining coats of red ochre, thought to have been traded by sea from volcanic islands, like Lipari, off Italy. Most all of these figures are missing their heads. Fragments of the most finely-carved meter-high statue, with elaborate pleated skirt were found scattered, intentionally smashed, and scattered over the large burial pits at Xaghra Circle. This appears to be deliberate mutilation of the Temple's sacred icons, out of desires to eradicate the memory of the previous regime. The late Temple, Mnajdra, features Or-



**Photo 3:** Bronze Age pot, Archaeological Museum in the Castello, Victoria, Gozo

France, Turkey, and other places, but nowhere are there so many as on Malta and Gozo. If one envisions Neolithic man living on a forested land, with sandy topsoil, one can begin to see the mud or sandy grit being ground into the soft stone, wearing it away, below the wheels or travois legs. So the tracks come and go, like potholes in the ancient forest floor. Some tracks lead into the sea, some under ancient walls, others off cliffs, so we know they are old. Photo 1 shows some of the deepest ruts, at a famous place called "Clapham Junction", at Buskett, after a busy junction in London. The strange thing about the ruts is that usually, when a cart is pulled by an ox, the hooves have carved a pathway between the wheel tracks, but in these, center bumps are often high, and a center path has not been observed.

**Photo 2** shows an aerial view of the Hagar Qim temple before it was roofed by UNESCO. There were originally 23 known temple sites, but now there are four major sites that are being preserved, Ggantija, on Gozo, and three

tween two houses, but another is private, seen only in a photograph, while another at the airport was moved to an inner garden there. A pile of well-made slingstones is in a museum exhibit, just like the ones in the Canaries and the Balearic Islands. Remember that Hannibal had a whole division of "Balearic 'slingers'" in his over-the-Alps army. The Canary Islanders slung stones at the arriving Portuguese to keep them from landing on the beach. So that while the Neolithic Maltese developed a unique Temple culture and artistic style, it was by many measures, a part of the greater megalithic culture. It is thought that the first people arrived from Sicily, with knowledge of how to make pottery. There is a clay layer on the island, between the sandstone layers, which has provided pottery material, and a water barrier, so pumping can retrieve old rainfall trapped in the sandstone above the clay layer. A wide variety of pottery types have been identified with time zones within the temple building period. The pottery decoration "after 2500



**Photo 4:** Headless figurines, found in Hagar Qim temple, Malta





**Photo 5:** Remaining portion of 2m statue in first apse of South temple, Tarxien, Malta

acle holes, "which imply a priesthood". Were its power and exactions resented by the rest of the population? "We have deduced hints of increasing exclusivity of the priesthood from Temple plans, particularly the walling off of inner apses and presence of oracle holes. Could there have been increasing demands and a progressively more recalcitrant populace?" One small clay figure found at Tarxien (**Photo 6**) found has balls, and "splinters of shell jammed into the clay body before firing". Is this the dark side of a male-female conflict?

The historians who have written all the guidebooks to the Malta Temple sites all agree that there was a sudden and complete collapse and social change at 2500 BC that brought in bronze axes "imported from abroad" (**Photo 7**), a different people with different skills and principles, and new pottery styles. Also described is a "mysterious disappearance of the temple people ... and repopulation with new people who disposed of their dead by cremation and used bronze tools and weapons". A large eroded stone half covered with ship "graffiti" was found at Tarxien. The curved ship hulls have high prows and sterns, but the experts cannot determine whether they should be dated to the early Bronze Age or at the 2500 BC juncture, when it is known that ships appeared. "The sophisticated temple culture suddenly collapsed.. At Skorba at least it could be seen that great chips had been knocked out of the temple structure... Tarxien was turned into a cemetery, and Skorba and Borg-in-Na-

dur were taken over by squatters". All the temples were abandoned." "It is as if the islands were abandoned utterly". "In other parts of the world, the introduction of what must have always have been expensive metal is almost invariably accompanied by the appearance of sharp divisions within society... it is probable that strong leaders arose".

After 2500 BC, the beautiful artwork of the temples (**Photo 8** here as preserved in the National Museum of Archaeology in Valetta) is to be found on Bronze Age Minoan vases (**Photo 9**, taken in the Heraklion Museum in Crete). The art of Malta is also found on the entrance Stone at Newgrange, Ireland (**Photo 10**). The big Boyne Valley site is at lat-



**Photo 6:** Seven cm male clay figurine with shell jabbed into the clay prior to firing, Tarxien temple

itude of 54°N, because it is the reciprocal of the important 36°N latitude of Malta, due to the then-holy science of the spheres ( $54+36=90$ , which is  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the 360° sphere of the Earth). The Minoan involvement in the trans-Atlantic trade in copper, starting at 2500 BC, brought them past Malta with boatloads of copper ingots. We know these were sold in Sardinia, Egypt, and elsewhere by the Minoans. It appears the actual cast bronze axes found on Malta were manufactured on Crete or Sardinia, and brought to Malta by traders. ■



**Photo 7:** Bronze axes found in Malta, "imported from abroad"

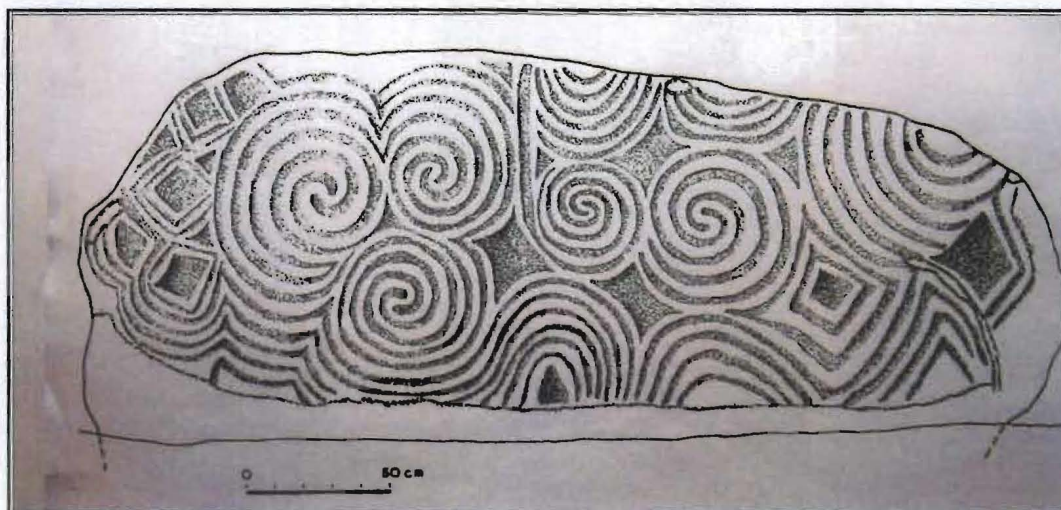




**Photo 8:** Temple blocks with repeat spiral pattern art, Tarxien temple, now located in the National Museum of Archaeology, Valletta, Malta



**Photo 9:** Bronze Age Minoan amphora with Maltese pattern art, in the Heraklion Museum, Crete



**Photo 10:** Bronze Age Newgrange Entrance Stone with Maltese pattern art, at 54°N



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# The Copper Trade

A photograph of a large sailing ship's mast and rigging against a backdrop of a steep, rocky cliff and a body of water. The mast is a prominent vertical structure, with various ropes and pulleys visible. The background features a steep, rocky cliff face on the right and a body of water on the left. The overall tone is historical and maritime.

Jay Stuart Wakefield



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by Jay Stuart Wakefield

*"Over and beyond mere living, the human Spirit adds and creates what is better than what was before" -R.Roefield*



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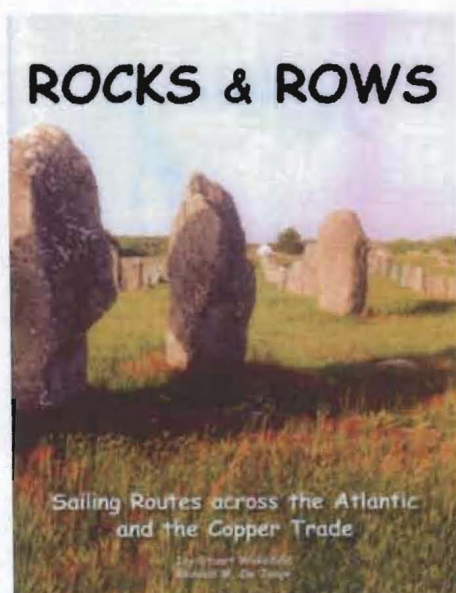
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Cover photo by Richard Holt Wakefield, Yacht Valhalla in Bahamian waters, 1946

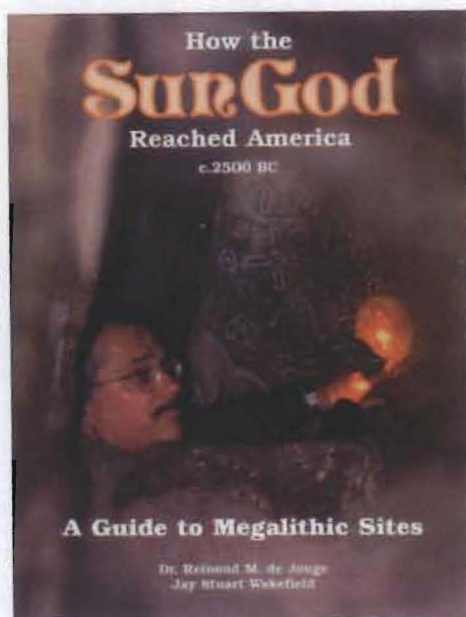
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