

## Vicki Gaia's Research Page:

### Malta - The enigma of prehistory



It amazed me to walk on soil that was inhabited 7,000 years ago by prehistoric man. A thousand years before Stonehenge, the inhabitants began to build massive temples made from limestone rocks. Huge stones weighing several tons were quarried and transported from quite a distance, and lifted into place using a simple mechanism of rounded stones and wood levers. These beautiful temples are the oldest 'free-standing' sites in the world. No wonder they're listed as World Heritage sites.

During the Ice Age, Malta was a land bridge that connected Europe to Africa. As the earth warmed up, and the ice melted, tribes migrated from Sicily to Malta and Gozo, bringing with them their farming methods and stone craft. Numerous goddess figurines were discovered, including a gigantic goddess statue at Tarxien. It is surmised that the Mother-Goddess was honored, and the temples built to celebrate the Goddess and her fertility. Remnants of animal sacrifice were found inside the temples, but there is no evidence of violent death. Lyrical spiral carvings, precise dot patterns, and elegant animal bas-reliefs decorated the temple doorways and walls. Finely proportioned pottery was inscribed with geometric and line patterns. The artists used obsidian tools to sculpt and inscribe, for there was no metal found on the island. This intrigued me, because copper was used in Sicily and widely traded through out the Mediterranean.

As the Bronze Age took form, the temple dwellers mysteriously disappeared. Waves of new settlers arrived, many from the Aegean.

I was astounded by Malta's thick layers of history. In 60 A.D. - The apostle Paul's ship ran aground on the shores of Malta. In his three month stay, he'd planted the seeds of Christianity. The Phoenicians, Carthaginians used the island as a base because of its many sheltered bays and natural harbors. Romans added their imprint during the Punic Wars, leaving behind remains of Roman townhouses, mosaics and glass.

In 1530, the Knights of St. John landed on the shores of Malta and made the island their permanent home, clashing with the Maltese nobility. They ruled over these islands, building their defenses of thick limestone walls, elaborate frescoed churches and Knight's auberges - the dormitories of the knights organized by nationality. They were victorious - overcoming the Ottoman siege of 1565.

Their reign ended in when they surrendered to Napoleon's forces. The French ruled for two years before capitulating to the British. The Maltese received their independence in 1974.