

PREHISTORIC MALTA

TEMPLE PERIOD

ĠGANTIJA TEMPLES

The awe-inspiring prehistoric complex of Ġgantija is the best-preserved megalithic ruin on the Maltese Islands. It was erected in three stages over a period of several hundred years during the Ġgantija Phase (3600-3000 BC) by a community of farmers and herders inhabiting the small island of Gozo.

TWO TEMPLES

Ġgantija consists of two temples which were built side by side, enclosed within a single massive boundary wall and sharing the same façade. The boundary wall incorporates a number of huge blocks measuring over five metres in length. Both temples have a single and central doorway that opens onto a common forecourt.

SOUTH TEMPLE

The temple to the South is both the largest and the oldest. Its plan consists of a central corridor with two apses on each side and one at the back. Altar arrangements are preserved in the outer apse right and inner apse left, while the characteristic spiral designs and dotted decorations adorn several architectural elements. Other interesting features include libation holes for liquid offerings, a hearth and a series of four round perforations on each side of the inner door jam, presumably to control access.

GIANTS' TOWER

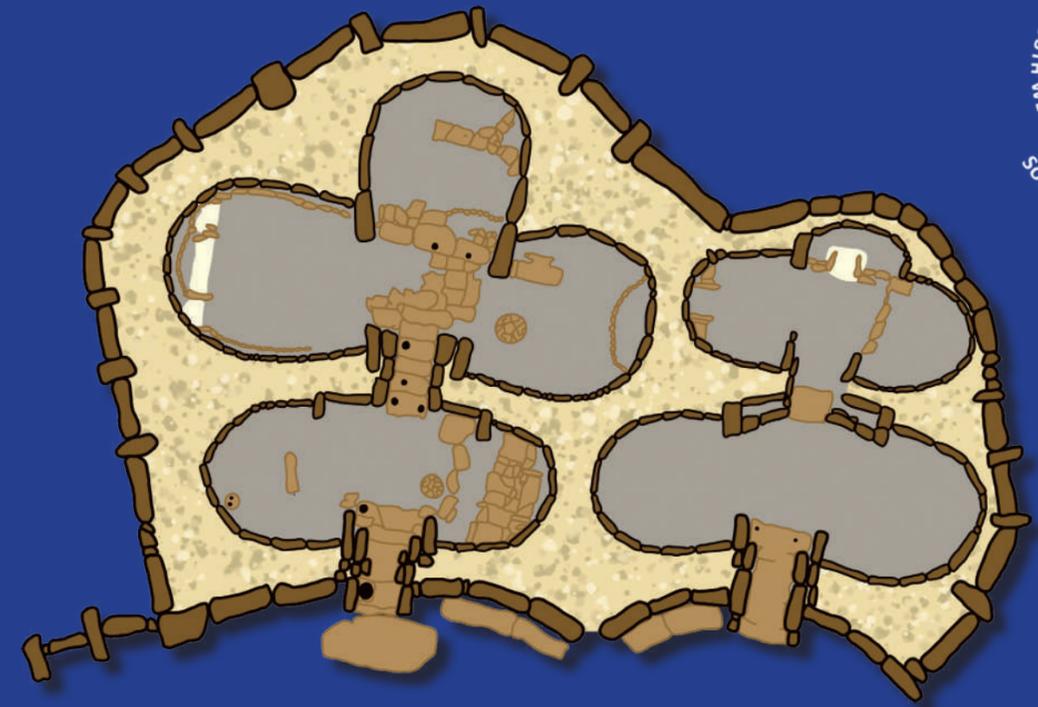
Prior to the 1820s excavation, these ruins resembled a large mound encircled by a colossal wall and were believed to be the remnants of a defensive tower built by a race of giants, thus the name Ġgantija.

NORTH TEMPLE

Apart from being smaller and of a later date, the temple to the North is also less elaborate. The rear apse is reduced to an altar niche and no decorative carvings are found. However, the two huge stones located at the inner side of the first pair of apses are finely crafted.

ROOFING

Originally, these temples seem to have been roofed by a light superstructure supported on wooden beams. However, since timber is relatively scarce in the Maltese Islands, the distance to be covered by such beams was shortened through the slight outward inclination of the inner skin of the walls.



MYSTERIOUS END

These temples remained in use for around 1000 years, down to the mid-third millennium BC, when the Maltese Temple Culture disappeared abruptly and mysteriously. Eventually, the successive early Bronze Age (2500-1500 BC) inhabitants adopted parts of the site as a cremation cemetery.



UNESCO declared the Ġgantija Temples a World Heritage Site in 1980.

