



The *spiral* is the most common design in megalithic art on Malta, and indeed around the world. Believed by some to represent eternity, the design is expressed in a wide variety of forms across the islands and clearly had a significant meaning for the ancient Maltese peoples. These spiral designs may be seen in the Temples of Tarxien in the south of Malta.

400m away from the Hypogeum, one finds the Megalithic Temples of Tarxien which were built around the year 3000 B.C. These are the most beautiful temples built in Neolithic times and they are unique in the world due to their exact and refined architecture and their unique and beautiful art.

Most of the original architecture and art found in these temples was placed in the "Tarxien Room", in the Museum of Archaeology in Valletta. So, the architecture seen nowadays in the temples is only the copy.

Sir Themistacles Zammit, the eminent Maltese archaeologist, discovered The Tarxien Temples in 1915. The Tarxien group of Neolithic temples is of the same type of other similar buildings in Malta and the sister island, Gozo. They are all made of a series of parallel semi-circular apses (rooms) connected with well-built passages. Most probably, the apses were covered by domes made of corbelled "ashlar masonry". They all have a semi-circular forecourt and were originally confined by a high wall of monoliths that in many cases had survived to our days.

The temples of Tarxien are made up of three temples, one bigger than the other and each one built in the shape of the "Fat Lady". From their architecture, the historians had ample evidence that the temples were built in different periods, with the third temple (one enters first from the third temple) being the last one to be built. Before entering the third temple one surely notices a well similar to the "Misqa" (which in English means irrigation) tanks found near Hagar Qim Temple. This well outside the third Tarxien Temple surely provided the temple with a constant supply of water. Near the well there are a lot of round stones which acted as rollers for the large stones. These round stones were left there after the large stones were erected.





One enters into the temple through a "Trilithon Entrance", which is surely a copy of the original. Inside the temple, on the right of the entrance, there is the lower remains of a very large and fat statue of the "Fat Lady". This gives us **evidence** that this symbol of fertility was the goddess of Neolithic people and was worshipped in the temple. In the third temple one finds a flat slab with figures of animals embossed on it. This gives us evidence that probably these animals were the ones that were sacrificed. There is also **a flat slab with spirals** (symbol of eternity) embossed on it. The surface of the main altar is decorated with spirals and at its base there is a round hole plugged by a conical stone. When during the excavations this conical stone was removed, a flint knife was found, together with a mass of horns and animal bones that filled up the space of the hollow altar. This surely gives us ample **evidence** that animals were slaughtered with the flint knife and the animal sacrifices were then offered to the "Goddess of Fertility".

Most of the large stones and monoliths have a couple of small round holes from which the ropes were passed into, in order to pull the stones while transporting them on the round stones. There is also a "round fireplace" on which animals were burnt.

The second temple is the one, which has the most elaborate architecture. On one of the boulders there are two carved figures: one of a bull, which is the symbol of strength; and the other of a sow, which is the symbol of fertility. The architecture of the first temple (the last to be seen during a visit) is the simplest and most basic one. It is also the most ruined since it was the first one of the three to be built.

Finally, it is important to mention that the Tarxien Temples were also used by the Bronze Age People (just like the Borg in-Nadur Temple). These people used the Temples as cemeteries since they were more warlike and not as religious when compared to the Copper-Age People.