

A CATAclysmic Comet AND THE WANING OF BRONZE AGE CULTURES

IN OUR PREVIOUS ISSUE (MARCH/APRIL 2014), TBR included an article on the mysterious and amazingly sophisticated ancient megalithic builders of Malta. In this issue, researcher Marc Roland tells us more about these enigmatic master masons and what became of them. The answer to the fate of the megalith builders of Malta may shed some light on what happened to so many other vibrant European and Mideast cultures that also waned at just about the same time, around 2200 B.C. Although Malta does show evidence that it was hit by several massive tsunamis at the latter part of the ice age, the culture survived until an even greater cataclysm befell it.

By Marc Roland

After more than 30 centuries, the ruins of Malta still stand as mute testimony to the singular genius of our Stone Age ancestors. It was here, on these arid islands in the middle of the Mediterranean—due south of Sicily—that they successfully transitioned from Paleolithic cave painters to Neolithic megalith builders. In so doing, they spread a new creed of celestial worship far beyond their obscure and inhospitable base, encoding its fundamental principles in monumental architecture. Long before—17,000 years ago—they had fled their European birthplace—then in the tightening grip of ice age conditions—and migrated down the Italian peninsula. Mighty glaciers then locked up much of the Northern Hemisphere's water, resulting in sea levels nearly 400 feet lower than at present, exposing a land-bridge to north Africa.

Halfway across, the refugees paused and settled to invent the Neolithic Age, the precursor to civilization. Some 4,500 years later, the ice sheet began melting away to release vast stores of water, drowning the earliest megalithic centers, and turning high ground of the progressively inundated land-bridge into the central Mediterranean islands familiar today.

Were the master builders of Malta—and many other Bronze Age cultures—eventually extinguished by cometary strikes about 2200 B.C.?

Undaunted by these major geological transformations, temple engineers of what became the Maltese archipelago flourished and continued to perfect their already ancient greatness. Strangely, they left no indication of social decline or cultural crisis when their world was blotted out around 2200 B.C., suggesting that the end was sudden and unexpected. After 14,880 years of unrelenting creativity



that had defied the catastrophic climax of an ice age, the megalith builders abruptly disappeared for causes that are still unknown.

Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans and others who landed at Malta in much later centuries were no less mystified by its crumbling, limestone temples of Gigantija or Hal Saflieni than modern archeologists struggling to understand how such an incredibly long-lived society could have winked out of existence without a trace or any prior notice of trouble.

An early clue came to light around 1902, when workers cutting cisterns for a new housing development accidentally broke through the roof of an ancient hypogeum (underground tomb or religious chamber). Subsequent excavation at the subterranean series of shrine chambers found they were stacked in four floors, down to 35 feet beneath the surface of the ground. Each level had been expertly hewn from the naked rock, hammer dressed into spacious, circular halls with corbelled ceilings and inward-slanting, smoothed walls, themselves richly decorated in geometrical patterns and spirals in red, white and black pigment. There were limestone staircases, pillars and grand entrances flanked by large, stone basins. A flight of

The glaciers that dominated Europe during the last ice age also locked up enough water to lower sea levels worldwide by nearly 400 feet, thereby exposing a land bridge from the tip of the Italian peninsula, via Sicily, and across the central Mediterranean. As many of the animal remains found and depicted by humans on Malta went extinct after the ice age waned, it shows that the Maltese megalithic builders arrived in the Malta archipelago before—not after—the ice age ended.

steps led to a seven-foot-deep shaft referred to by modern visitors as “the snake pit,” but it was more likely used originally for the sacrifice of ritual herbs.

On the right side wall, the entrance to the third floor was carved with the image of a human hand, while a port-hole within a trilithon—an architectural structure consisting of two large stones set upright to support a third on their tops—was in turn framed within a larger trilithon, and yet another, still larger trilithon.

Everything about the hypogeum—associated with temple Hal Saflieni—bespeaks the elegance and sophistication of its builders. How they perfected such a monumental achievement and conducted ceremonial activities

there for centuries in total darkness are enigmas underscored by the complete absence of any trace evidence for prehistoric torches. Not a single scorch mark has been found on its ceiling, nor anywhere else throughout the underground temple's 1,500 square foot interior. But this is a minor mystery compared to the hypogeum's 7,000 human remains "buried in a matrix of red earth," as described by highly respected researcher David Hatcher Childress, president of the World Explorers Club.¹

Graham Hancock, the well-published alternative science writer, who engaged in extensive archeological research at Malta around the turn of this century, commented on "the massively disordered nature of the remains described in the excavation reports. The presence of these disarticulated, non-anatomically disposed remains in an entirely 'unstratified' deposit 'made of the red earth one finds in our fields' that was 'always of the same type and contained objects of the same quality,' cannot be explained by any form of deliberate burial—with or without prior excarnation."²

Nor are the tangled masses of the subterranean temple's chaotically buried dead alone on Malta. In the southeast of the island lies Ghar Dalam, a capacious natural cave with a 25-foot-wide mouth and 17-foot-high ceiling. Inside its 375-foot-deep interior are thousands more human remains in the same jumbled condition.

"Exactly as in the hypogeum, notes Anton Mifsud (a native Maltese expert on his island's prehistory), the organic remains in Ghar Dalam 'were not distributed in an anatomical manner, as they would have been in a ritual burial, but they were dispersed in random fashion inside the stratum of earth they lay in'."³

According to Mifsud, the same scene was repeated elsewhere in Malta, such as the Santa Lucia Hypogeum:

... a smaller version of [the hypogeum] at Hal Saflieni, with a megalithic entrance and an internal architecture similar to the temples above ground. The deposit inside this hypogeum consisted of human remains admixed with Neolithic pottery and amulets, in a matrix of red earth soil. The context is similar to that at Hal Saflieni. In the words of the director of museums at the time, the deposit inside the Santa Lucia Hypogeum was "as if the mass had been dumped inside the monument from the surface." F.S.

Mallia could not have been more precise, and the close proximity of the two hypogea enhances even further a similar mechanism operating in both monuments in the creation of the deposit in question.⁴

Mifsud concludes that only one agency is "capable of creating such a conglomeration in an unstratified earth matrix in which 'the same quality of shards were found on the surface, at the bottom and in the spaces in between,' and in which 'fragments of shards in parts of the hypogeum fitted other fragments deposited in other caves far away.' That agency is a massive flood."⁵

During the first, professional excavation of Ghar Dalam, in the late 1860s, Italian scholar Arturo Issel found "the burnt remains of hippopotamus, whose bones had apparently been cooked and opened up to extract the marrow for consumption."⁶ This important find proved that Malta was occupied by humans 83 centuries before mainstream archeologists believed possible, because the hip-

popotamus went extinct on the island 13,500 years ago, including large numbers of other ice age animals, such as red deer, wolves, dwarf elephants, brown bears and foxes.

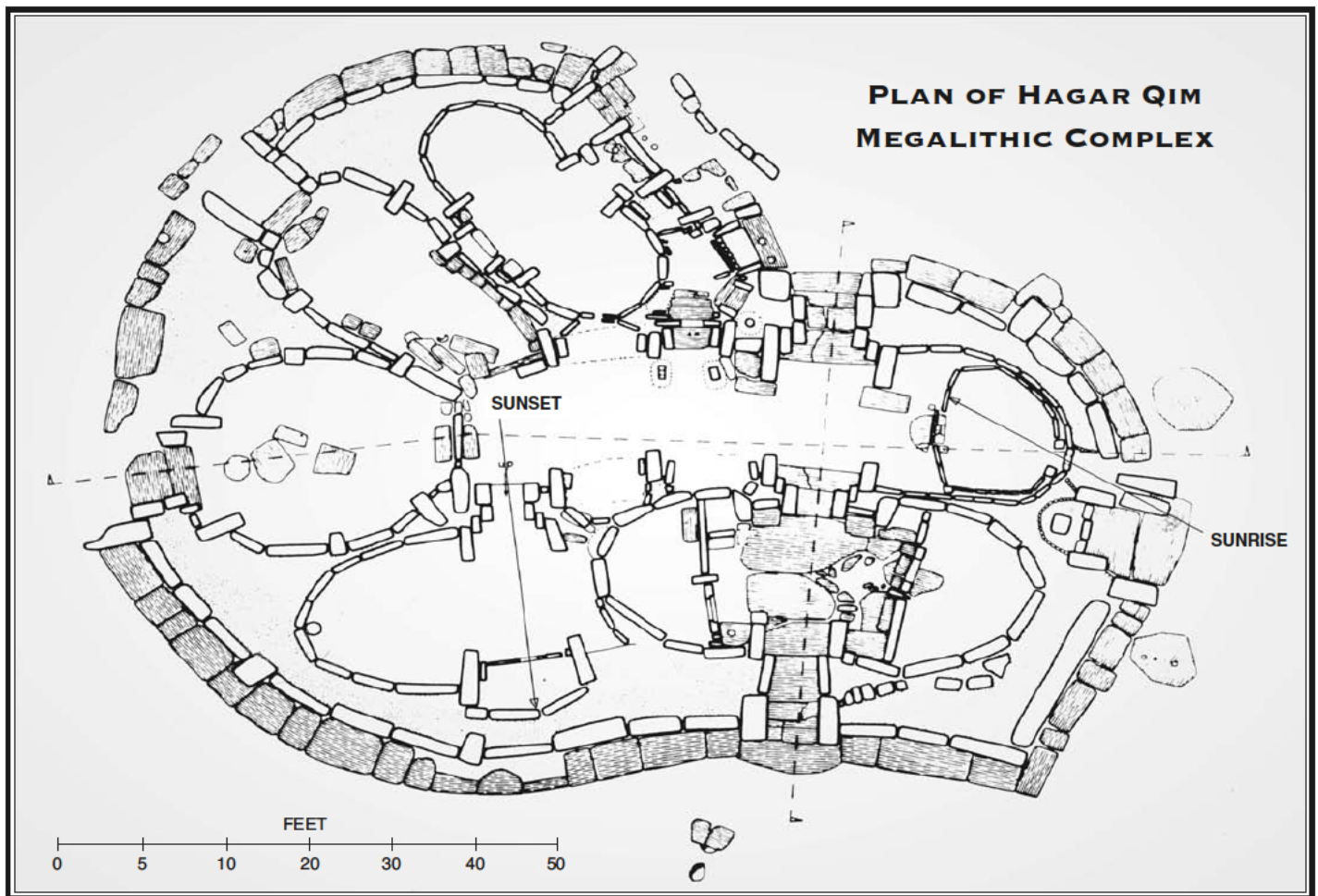
The "massive flood" that wiped them out in one fell swoop and simultaneously tumbled their remains together with tens of thousands of human victims was something paleoge-

ologists refer to as a "meltwater pulse"—the sudden surge of hydrodynamic energy released in a single action by melting glaciers. Warming conditions at the close of the last ice age discharged one monstrous tsunami after another into the Atlantic Ocean and across the Mediterranean Sea.

As cataclysmic as such events undoubtedly were, they did not, however, purge Malta of all its human residents, who went on to greater heights of megalithic accomplishment for another 11,300 years. They vanished in a flash, as it were, not at the end of the ice age, but in the middle of the Bronze Age. Their sudden disappearance persisted as an unsolvable riddle until the end of the last century, when scientists finally learned what happened to the venerable megalith builders.

In 1997—from July 11 to 13—the Society for Interdisciplinary Studies hosted scientists from Sweden, Japan, Australia and many other parts of the world at Britain's

"The tsunamis that killed thousands of Malta's inhabitants were not the reason their culture died."



This map shows the summer and winter solstice alignments demonstrated at the Hagar Qim megalithic complex on Malta.

venerable Fitzwilliam College, in Cambridge. Among the best known presenters were Victor Clube and William N. Napier, astronomers at Ireland's Armagh Observatory. Their theory, according to renowned Florida researcher Kenneth Caroli, is that:

[A] giant comet was perturbed into a sub-Jovian orbit at some point between 30,000 and 70,000 years ago. Since then, it has gradually fragmented into lesser, subsidiary comets or devolitized asteroids. The new comets created debris-tubes which are still seen as annual meteor showers, such as the Taurid meteors that illuminate the Northern Hemisphere every Nov. 1. But when these comets were younger, they were also denser, and could wreck havoc on our world whenever it passed through their thickest portion.⁷

Their theory attracted favorable attention from other society scientists, who generally concurred that a primary set of Bronze Age cataclysms had been brought about by the close passage of a large, materially dense celestial

body. These confrontations fundamentally impacted and traumatized civilization around 2200 B.C., when comets Encke and Hale-Bopp shared a similar approach near Earth orbit. Prior to its most recent appearance, just 17 years ago, computer calculations put Hale-Bopp 15 million kilometers from Earth, in 2213 B.C., just when Malta's megalith culture vanished. At that time, Encke, traveling on a converging orbit, was nudged by Hale-Bopp toward our planet. As the former comet executed a near-miss (perhaps by only 1 million miles or somewhat less), it unleashed a heavenly barrage of meteoric debris.

Data presented by Clube and Napier to substantiate their observations were not only convincing, but prompted their colleagues at the 1997 Cambridge conference to search for additional, supporting evidence in their own, sometimes widely divergent, scientific fields.

W. Bruce Masse, an environmental archeologist with the U.S. Air Force, found that "the period 2350 to 2000 B.C. witnessed at least four cosmic impacts (circa 2345 B.C.,

2240, 2188, 2000) and perhaps a fifth (circa 2297 B.C. to 2265).⁸ His conclusion was confirmed by Fitzwilliam College geologists, who identified trace elements of a 359-megaton asteroid that exploded over Argentina, leaving a series of impact craters across the Rio Cuarto area, 2200 B.C. Swedish geologists Lars Franzen and Thomas B. Larrson found in their geologic material “indications of strongly increased atmospheric circulation in rhythmically appearing periods” throughout the Bronze Age, with a high peak in the late 3rd millennium B.C.⁹ Their studies also discovered that ash-fall from the Icelandic volcano, Hekla-4, dated a major eruption to about 2290 B.C.

In March, 1998, a specialist in paleoclimatology, Harvey Weiss, professor of Near Eastern Archeology at Yale, showed that the Habur Plains of northern Syria represented a highly productive agricultural and metropolitan region until all its farmlands and cities were rapidly abandoned. A prolonged, extreme drought forced mass evacuations. Ancient ocean sediments from the Gulf of Oman dated the sudden deterioration of what had been a stable climate to circa 2200 B.C. Weiss’s conclusion was substantiated by Peter DeMenocal at Columbia University’s Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, in New York. He found that chemical signals from the Greenland Ice Sheet Project 2 coincided with the Syrian drought.

Four years before DeMenocal’s confirmation, a researcher at the Swiss Technical University in Zurich analyzed sediment cores from the bottom of Turkey’s Lake Van, which lies at the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates River. Gerry Lemcke determined that the lake’s volume of water declined radically at the same time, with catastrophic effects for the rural and urban populations of Mesopotamia. Glaciers renewed their advance in Lapland, northernmost Sweden and the Himalayas.

Caroli describes “a narrow growth event from the American tree rings and the climate instability reported on the Anatolian sequence. Does the burning of the northern European bogs reflect extreme drought, or something else, such as aerial detonations?”

Additionally, Lars Franzen found “spherules similar to those reported in Syria. He made a comparison of certain rare minerals found in the burned layers of the bogs, pos-

sibly cosmic dust, with the site of the Tunguska blast (in Russia) of 1908.”¹⁰

Irish oak chronologies display evidence of an extraordinary “narrowest ring” event in 2345 B.C. which, Mike Baillie believes, “could have a cometary relationship.”¹¹ Baillie, professor in the Paleoecology Center at Queen’s University, Belfast, Northern Ireland, is the leading expert in tree-ring dating. He additionally pointed out that major flooding occurred at Lough Neagh, the largest lake in the northern part of Ireland, around 2200 B.C.

Radiocarbon dating of flood-plain deposits for that same period in central England’s Ripple Brook catchment evidenced drastic increases of sediment deposition. The “World Chronicle” section of medieval Ireland’s *Annals of Clonmacnois* describes “lakes breaking out” all over the country and nationwide panic.¹² In Old Irish myth, the family of Partholon is described as immigrants from a disaster at sea, arriving on the south coast.

“Does the burning of the northern European bogs reflect extreme drought or possibly aerial detonations?”

The archbishop of Armagh, James Ussher, student of the King James Bible, deduced through internal evidence of the Old Testament that “Noah’s Flood” occurred in 2349 B.C. Anticipating Clubbe and Napier by 300 years, one of the 17th century’s greatest scientists, William Whiston, successor to Isaac Newton at Cambridge, concluded that the Great

Flood of 2349 B.C. was brought about by the near-miss of a large comet. In *The Laws*, Plato states that “the famous deluge” of Ogyges took place less than 2,000 years before his time; i.e., circa 2300 B.C.¹³ Varo, the Roman scholar, wrote that it occurred around 2136 B.C. In Classical Greek tradition, the Ogygean flood was accompanied by nine months of darkness (ash fall).

The height of Egyptian civilization in the Old Kingdom collapsed with the fall of the VI Dynasty. A Coptic account in the Abou Horneis papyrus tells of a fiery danger that appeared from “the heart of the Lion,” the constellation Leo, near the star Regulus. Accompanied by loud thundering in the sky, a rain of burning stones shattered Egypt in “the first minute of Cancer.” The Great Flood followed immediately. Caroli states that the report “could refer to a period when the summer solstice left Leo for Cancer, circa 2200 B.C. The papyrus sets the catastrophe for 399 years after a prophetic dream which resulted in building the

Great Pyramid. If so, the event must have occurred sometime after 2254 B.C.”¹⁴

A mysterious mass death, including widespread fires, occurred at the port city of Mendes, which was abandoned until the advent of the New Kingdom. According to Masse, evidence for widespread destruction after the start of the 22nd century B.C. “suggests that a cosmic impact may have been a factor, a date which fits well with the estimate of 2188 B.C. for the ‘Sodom and Gomorrah’ impact.”¹⁵

At the same moment in history, the Akkadian empire collapsed. A contemporary epic, “The Curse of Akkad,” tells of “heavy clouds that did not rain,” “large fields which produce no grain,” and “flaming potsherds that fall from the sky.”¹⁶ Archeologist Marie-Agnes Courty found collections of petroglyphs which suggest humans witnessed a celestial impact in Syria, circa 2350 B.C. In ancient Chinese myth, 10 “suns” fell from the sky after having been shot by a divine archer, an allegory in myth of the celestial chaos during this period. Nine years of cataclysmic floods followed during the reigns of the emperors Kuan and Yu. Caroli believes “both were connected to sky-dragons, probably comets.” Using royal chronologies, he dates the “10 suns” incident to circa 2141 B.C. Emperor Shun wrote of a large meteor he saw fall from the sky and strike the Earth around 2240 B.C., followed by a great flood: “The whole world was submerged and all the world was an endless ocean. People floated on the treacherous waters, searching out caves and trees on high mountains. The crops were ruined and survivors vied with fierce birds for places to live. Thousands died each day.”¹⁷

The central Mediterranean was not exempt from these 3rd-millennium B.C. cataclysms. Native Maltese author and researcher Joseph Ellul points to additional evidence at another Malta site, Hagar Qim:

Huge blocks of stone from the western wall have been blown off from their original position and piled up in a heap some 10 yards away toward the east, as if they had been so many wooden boxes and not blocks of stone almost a meter square and about three meters long. . . . They have a lot of mortar petrified to them, and some of it actually joins the stones themselves to each other. This solidified mortar proves without any doubt that mortar was used in those days and also proves that when the stones of the building fell, they were for a time underwater, so that the mortar could soften and harden again in a different position. If the stones fell under dry conditions, the mortar would have crumbled and fallen



Neolithic temple of Mnajdra, Island of Malta.

COMET ENCKE AND ITS IMPACT ON CIVILIZATION

Collisions between the Earth and comets are crucial to the destruction of human cultures and civilizations. One key player has evidently been Comet Encke, a frequent visitor to Earth's vicinity. Encke, another comet and several asteroids appear to be part of the Taurids, a big meteoroid stream. Half of all meteors may come from a broad stream surrounding the Taurids. This suggests the Taurid stream and the associated bolides are debris from an extremely large ancient comet that broke up thousands of years ago. We could call it Smaug, since no one seems to have named this “mother of comets.” The direction in the sky that the famous Tunguska object came from suggests it also could be related to Smaug. We know by observing Comet Shoemaker-Levy that comets can and do fragment. Smaug would be expected to release both small bits (of the size that produce most of the meteors we see) and larger chunks (50 yards or more in diameter). The fragments will be concentrated near the orbit of the parent body before they gradually spread out. While the Taurid stream is very broad, at its core we can expect a concentration of fragments. As a result of Jupiter's gravity, the orbit of this central concentration changes over thousands of years, sometimes being brought into intersection with Earth's orbit. According to calculations, the last intersections were circa A.D. 300 to 500, and, before that, somewhat earlier than 2100 B.C. The most recent intersections may have been a couple of centuries earlier, and the intersections before that could have been as early as 3000 B.C. A pair occurred in 3600-3500 and 3200-3100 B.C., possibly provoking the construction of Stonehenge I.

to dust, and never stuck again. Certainly, no earth tremor or strong wind could throw such heavy stones to such distances and all in the same direction. Only a gigantic wave of water from the west could reasonably explain these movements.¹⁸

Hagar Qim was among the last of Malta's temples, built sometime after 2800 B.C., so the damage it suffered could only have been incurred by a tsunami generated by meteors dropped into the central Mediterranean Sea by Comet Encke, 300 years later. Hagar Qim and a contemporaneous structure, Tarxien, are still covered by yard-deep layers of silt.

"During that time," Ellul explains, "sand particles carried by water settled down to a thickness of three feet on the floor of the ruined temple, where it remained unmo-
lested till its excavation in 1914. This water-deposited sediment was not found only on Malta, but it was also discovered in Iraq, near the town of Ur. Archeologist Sir Leonard Wooley discovered this kind of virgin silt to a depth of nine feet. Under this layer were found the remains of another civilization. This layer of virgin silt was also discovered in the south of France to a depth of six feet."¹⁹

These related finds in the Middle East and Western Europe provide some appreciation for the scope of the natural catastrophes that additionally extinguished the megalith builders of Malta. Or did they? Is it conceivable that at least some of them fled the cataclysm by escaping beyond the beleaguered Mediterranean world, and crossed the Atlantic Ocean to a remote sanctuary in the Americas, as so many other refugees did in later centuries? The question is not as far-fetched as some historians may believe, based as it is on a comparable site found in Colombia, where we might expect overseas visitors to have made their landfall.

In the Department of Cauca are five ancient underground temples, each one remarkably similar to Hal Saflieni's Hypogeum at Malta. *Alto del Aguacate* ("Avo-
cado Hill"), *Alto de San Andrés*, *Alto de Segovia*, *Alto del Duende* ("Hill of the Goblin") and *El Tablón* ("The Plank") belong to Tierradentro, a national archeological park supervised by the nearby town of Inza. Although smaller and built on a single level, all above-ground entrances are ori-

ented toward sunset on the winter solstice. The main chamber—surrounded by several lesser chambers at depths of 15 to 25 feet—is carved out of the limestone rock into a corbelled vault supported by slanting archways and accessed by a spiral staircase, a highly advanced architectural feature unknown to any Andean or Mesoamerican high cultures, but found at least once in Neolithic Malta. Niches or hollows are spaced off by squared columns, while the ground-plan for the site is oval, with sunken pits in the floor and large basins positioned near grand staircases. Walls are painted with anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and geometric patterns, including concentric circles and lozenges, in red, black and white pigments.

As such, the Tierradentro complex compares closely—often identically—in so many respects to its Maltese counterparts, an organic relationship between them seems inescapable, despite the oceanic vastness separating South America from the central Mediterranean at a time,

mainstream scholars insist, long before transatlantic voyages were made. That relationship is nonetheless reinforced by the very uniqueness of the hypogea themselves: They recur nowhere else throughout pre-Columbian America, and are rarely encountered in the ancient Old World outside of Malta.²⁰

Initial radiocarbon analysis of some food residue found at *Alto del Duende* dating it to the 6th to 9th centuries A.D. was embraced without further testing by conventional archeologists as evidence sufficient for assigning the "Hill of the Goblin" and the other four underground temples to the late 1st millennium.²¹

But these half-hearted C-14 investigations prove only that someone enjoyed a meal inside the Tierradentro Hypogeum 1,000 or more years ago, and cannot be associated with its construction. To deduce from such a fleeting, paltry survey that the entire complex must have been carved at that time is untenable. Moreover, the Inza hypogea cannot be identified with any native culture from the 6th to 9th centuries, nor with any earlier Colombian people. They are singular locations which show no sign of previous development, but, on the contrary, give every indication of having been engineered by outsiders already in possession of an advanced construction technology and totally unrelated to the indigenous inhabitants.

"The Tierradentro complex in Colombia compares often identically in many respects to its Maltese counterparts."

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN EUROPEAN & SOUTH AMERICAN HYPOGEA



At left, Malta's hypogeum at Hal Saflieni. And at right, the eerily similar hypogeum at Tierradentro in Colombia. Researcher Marc Roland posits that these structures are so similar that the same culture was most likely responsible for building them. However, these similarities between structures found on Malta and ones in the New World are not unique. For instance, one of the temples on Malta features what has been called a "speaking tube," a small tubular opening carved in the rocks between a secret chamber and an obvious congregational area. Ostensibly, a priest could talk through the tube and communicate with worshippers without being seen. There is only one other megalithic complex on Earth yet found that displays this nearly exact same feature: Mystery Hill megalithic complex in New Hampshire, U.S.A., also known as "America's Stonehenge." Author Marc Roland and TBR's editors doubt this is mere coincidence.

Close parallels between pre-Columbian Tierradentro and Stone Age Malta represent persuasive—if not yet universally accepted—evidence that at least some megalith-builders from the Mediterranean Sea survived the natural catastrophes that afflicted it 42 centuries ago. And someday, perhaps, the similar temples they left behind on both sides of the world will be allowed to testify to their imperishable greatness. ♦

ENDNOTES:

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- 5 Hancock, *op. cit.*
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15 Masse, *op. cit.*

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18 Ellul, Joseph, *Malta's Prediluvian Culture*, Valletta: Printwell, 1988.

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20 Very few Stone Age hypogea are known in Europe outside Malta, with a single example in Portugal and one on the island of Sardinia. Several in Greece were used as subterranean medical clinics during the Classic Period.

21 Chaves, Alvaro and Puerta Mauricio, *Entierros Primarios De Tierradentro*, Bogota: Banco de la Republica, Fundación de investigaciones arqueológicas nacionales, 1985.

MARC ROLAND is a self-educated expert on World War II and ancient European cultures but is equally at home writing on American history and prehistory. He is also a prolific book and music reviewer for the PzG, Inc. website (www.pzg.biz) and other politically incorrect publishers and CD producers in the U.S. and overseas. He lives near Madison, Wisconsin. Roland has seen many of his articles published in the pages of THE BARNES REVIEW over the last several years. See more about Malta in the March/April 2003 issue —\$8 from TBR.