

Report on the Museum for 1914-15.

PREHISTORIC ANTIQUITIES.

Several prehistoric remains came to light during the year which are well worth recording.

DEBDIEBA.

On the road known as "Ta Hal-Farrug", which from Mkabba leads to the north, towards "Nghieret", a mound existed which, from the large stones protruding from its surface, might be taken for the remains of a megalithic station.

With the valuable cooperation of Dr. Thomas Ashby, the Director of the British School of Archaeology at Rome, the mound was excavated in October 1914.

The ruins were found to be in a very dilapidated condition. The construction of the Hal-Farrug road appears to have entailed the destruction of the greater part of the monument and, very probably, portion of the same extended under the fields to the east and was destroyed in the course of the formation of the field and the periodic working of same. The portion of the ruins still existing, was also made use of at different times, as walls, both old and comparatively modern, crossed each other and several round silos were constructed in spaces between some of the megalithic slabs.

The results of the excavations, though not very brilliant, added one more neolithic station to the long list which has been drawn in the last few years.

The station is of the type of those existing on the Cordin hill. It consists of a number of rooms, used probably for domestic purposes, and small oval areas and well formed niches which suggest places for worship. The whole was, presumably, enclosed by a thick wall much more massive than those used within the building. A considerable number of slabs and blocks were in situ and enabled the architects Mr. C. Rizzo and Mr. R. Galea, to make a fairly good plan of the building.

Several stone pillars, some cylindrical and others tapering at one end, were found at various points of the ruins. No personal ornaments, statuettes or implements, barring two scrapers, were found and there was no trace of metal, such as copper, bronze or iron.

Potsherds were very abundant, but only a few were of the delicate and well finished type met with at Corradino.

A detailed report of the excavations will be published, in due time, by Dr. Ashby.

MINOR MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS.

Several of these archaic structures were discovered during the year.

DOLMENIC NICHE AT BIRZEBBUGIA.

A dolmenic niche at present divided in two spaces by a wall of small stones, but which probably formed one elongated chamber, was discovered on the rocky plateau to the N.W. of Borg In-nadur at San Giorg of Birzebbugia, S.E. of the so-called Phoenician reservoir.

The niche, as one can see it to day, consists of a roughly quadrangular space, about 1.07 m. long and 1.37 m. high, the three enclosing walls being made of three stone blocks about 84 cm. thick. Besides the other two spaces, adjoining the space to the east another space, very nearly as large as the one just described, is likewise enclosed by large stones built in one or two courses but the covering slab is wanting.

DOLMENIC NICHE AT HAL FARRUG.

Another dolmenic niche is found in the deep ravine to the west of the Hal-Farrug road, which leads to the valley known as "*Il Wied ta Ghar Hanzir*". Two large slabs, though rather thin, cover an elongated space of about 1.22 m. by 1.83 m. To reach this niche steps are cut in the rock which is very steep in that place.

Signs of prehistoric human activity are numerous in this interesting ravine such as globular pits, artificial caves and cup-like depressions on the sides of the rocks, which are, surely, worth investigating.

DOLMEN AT BIDNI.

A typical dolmen in fairly good preservation was discovered on the 3rd March by Mr. Carmelo Rizzo and the Curator who were visiting the top of the rocky plateau at Bidni (Zabbar District) known as "*Ix-xghara*". The space enclosed is about 92 cm. high, the slab

2.74 m. with an average thickness of 25 cm. In the middle of the slab a round hole about 8 cm. in diameter, pierces the stone through. This has weakened the slab which is now broken in two, presumably under some comparatively slight shock. The two portions of the slab are still in touch and in situ, supported all round by large blocks of stone.

The entrance looks to the north. The remains of a megalithic wall, which was double at some points, can be seen to the south of the dolmen.

STONE CIRCLE.

A well preserved stone circle can be seen at the western end of the rocky plateau called "Tal Palma" to the N.W. of Sebbieh. The site known as "Ras il Gebel" is very prominent and overlooks Ghain Toffieha bay to the W. and the Gneina plain to the S.W. The circle is made of good sized slabs on end. It is all encumbered with stones and stands alone by the edge of the cliff. In the neighbouring fields remains of megalithic buildings are seen which are, however, hopelessly disjointed and moved about. Prehistoric sherds were picked up in the vicinity of the remains.

MENHIR AT SEBBIEH.

In the district of "Sebbieh" to the west of the road that leads to Ghain Toffieha, in a site known as Liskorba, a fine stone pillar can be seen standing by a mound from which large blocks of stone are protruding. The place must have been an important neolithic station considering the extent of the ruins and the great quantity of prehistoric potsherds that can be picked up at the surface of the neighbouring fields. The stone forming the menhir is roughly dressed about 69 cm. thick 1.52 m. wide and about 3.66 m. high from the surface of the field.

The potsherds collected during a hurried inspection of the place are as fine as any found in connection with our neolithic buildings. The pottery was well baked, highly finished and ornamented with incised straight and curved lines of various depth. The site is bound to give interesting results if properly excavated.

NEOLITHIC STATION AT XROBB IL GHAGIN.

With the help of Dr. A. V. Laferla, who was for a time encamped in the vicinity, the megalithic remains at the edge of the high cliffs to the south of Munxiar, were partially investigated. This was evidently a neolithic station of the first order, not for the extent of the building, nor for the size of the stones used, but for the degree of finish which is to be observed in all the component parts. The various slabs and blocks uncovered are cut and arranged in the most dainty fashion. A dolmenic niche, very tastefully finished, was uncovered quite close to the cliff edge. A lintel 1.90 m. by 74 cm. by 27 cm., is finely dressed with a slightly convex front covered with pittings enclosed in a narrow frame. It rests on two small pillars about 30 cm. high, the enclosed space under the lintel having a deeply concave back wall, made of small stones carefully built like a modern rubble wall.

In front of this niche and in close contact with the pillars a long stone slab is laid 20 cm. thick, 2.59 m. long and 86 cm. wide. On the upper surface at the middle portion of this slab an elongated knob exists, 30 cm. long and about 5 cm. high with an oval base and a convex surface. This knob is damaged and lacks definition. The front edge of this slab is bevelled and at a height of 20 cm. was embedded in a thick, smooth, white torba floor, which unfortunately was in part removed in the process of excavation.

The slab rests on a layer of small stones which extends under the torba floor, its internal edge however, can be seen resting at the middle, on a large stone ball, of the type so common in our megalithic ruins.

The lintel of the niche has its upper surface continuous with a level floor made of a series of other stone slabs in the middle of which a slab is placed on end as if to serve the purpose of a threshold. Two fine slabs are fixed on the very edge of the cliff and they are very dangerous to approach, the edge of the cliff at this point being fissured and with a great tendency to flake. It is clear that a portion of the monument, perhaps the greater portion, was carried away along with the rock on which it was built during the comparatively rapid decay of the cliffs.

Though the excavation of the site has been very limited, enough has been cleared to show that an elaborate megalithic station once flourished on this high tableland overlooking the blue open sea and the series of bays and islets which indent this south eastern coast, the first which is reached by sails approaching the island from the east.

Abundant potsherds were found both in the soil at the surface and deep under the torba, forming the floor of the building.

The pottery was mostly of the fine elaborate pattern found at Hal Safieni, Mnaidra, Cordin and Santa Verna. The fawn coloured variety, delicate and burnished is abundant.

During the visit of Dr. Ashby to Malta some systematic digging was done in Ghar Dalam cave with the help of Mr. Rizzo, L.S. & A. and Mr. Despott the Curator of the Natural History Museum of the University. Two trenches were cut, one on each side, about 1.83 m. long, 1.52 m. wide and 3.05 m. deep at about 90 m. from the entrance. The excavations proved very satisfactory not only for the amount of the material obtained but also for the light thrown on the superpositions of the various layers. The 3.05 m. of soil which filled up the cave at this point was clayey and damp, the lower 2.44 m. being nearly pure clay, the red soil being limited to the upper 60 cm. In the red soil, bones of domestic animals such as sheep or goat, pig and ox were found, but nearer the clay, fossil bones of extinct animals are already met with. Remains of the following animals were identified:— Elephants, *E. mnaidrensis*, *Hyppopotami*, *H. pentlandi*, *H. minor*, Bear, *Ursus arctos*?, Stag, *Cervus Elaphus v. barbarus*.

The potsherds found in this cave testify to the use of this cave by human beings, from prehistoric to Punic times. Under 30 cm. of red soil, fragments of amphorae and plates of the common Punic clay ware were met with, but lower down, just before the fossil bones are reached, the rough prehistoric ware, so peculiar in its colour and its texture, makes its appearance. The highly polished and finished pottery of Halsafieni, Cordin and Mnaidra has not been found, but the rougher ware common at Burmgeez, Borg in-Nadur and the well-tombs at Attard is abundant. Special researches were made to discover traces of paintings, drawings or carvings on the walls of the cave, but without any result. It is hoped that, if the systematic study of this important cave, be continued for a number of years, much light on the early history of these Islands will be shed.

EXCAVATIONS AT XGHARIET MEDWIJA OR XGHARA TAL CACCIATURA.

The excavations made under the direction of Dr. Ashby in the district of Birzebbugia in May 1914 were mostly financed by Miss Douglas (now Mrs. Van Buren), a student of the British School of Rome, who very generously contributed £50 besides personal supervision.

The plateau or Xghara to the south west of Ghar Dalam is covered with the ruins of extensive buildings, which were partly excavated about 20 years ago by Dr. A. A. Caruana, who, however, published no report on the excavations. The late Dr. Filippo Vassallo had prepared a rough plan of the excavated portion, but he neither finished the plan nor made it public.

A huge mound of stones and rubbish, raised by the former excavators, divided the ruins in two portions and made the study of the site well-nigh impossible. When this mound was cleared the plan of a Roman house could be distinctly traced.

Unluckily the remains were very roughly handled, both by the former excavators and by the country people, who have been delighted for centuries in moving about the stones and pulling down all that was found standing.

The potsherds found were abundant, but not of much archaeological importance. Their type was Roman and quite in keep with the architecture of the house, but the quality was not so fine as one would be led to expect from the elaborate building.

The house was found to have been dependent for its water supply on the archaic cistern, known so far as the "Phoenician Reservoir". Though we have no data to show that the "Reservoir" is of Phoenician handwork, still it is clear from the recent excavations just mentioned that it was constructed before the Roman house.

A detailed report on these excavations is to be published by Dr. Ashby, plans being prepared by Prof. R. Galea, L.S. & A.

OLD CISTERN AT BUR GRAD.

Another cistern of the type described in last year's report was examined. Cisterns of this type, constructed with very large blocks of stone, prove to be very numerous in the island and although they cannot be reasonably ascribed to prehistoric times, still the use of large stone blocks, handled with great ease and effect, recall always the days when megalithic buildings were in vogue and when the people preferred employing large masses of stone in works wherein smaller stones could have been used.

The cistern examined in November 1914 is not a large one, but is as solidly built as tanks of much larger dimensions. It is placed in the district called "Bur Grad" or "Ta' Gernac", in the limits of the villages of Luca, Tarxien and Gudja.

It consists of a tank cut in the white calcareous rock 6.19 m. long, 2.49 m. wide, and not more than 1 m. deep. At its north-eastern end a trench 61 cm. wide and 6.60 m. long, is cut which turns sharply at right angles, and again parallel to the main cistern, for 2 m. The width of the trench is 1.40 m. wide.

The main tank is covered by 21 slabs disposed in four rows of an average size of 1.51 m. by 1.10 m. The slabs, which lie in the main direction of the cistern, are supported by 11 pillars on the rock at right angles to the former.

The dimensions of these supporting blocks are 2.34 m. by 1.43 m. by 1.43 m. The holes for draining water are cut in the slabs one at the southern and the other at the northern end of the cistern. The cistern was found full of soil. When cleaned, it yielded very little archaeological material, the few sherds obtained being fragments of clay amphorae of Punic type.

During the financial year the number of visitors to the various places of interest was as follows:—

Valletta Museum (on payment) ...	1,388	St Paul's Catacombs ...	249
Do. (free) ...	5,199	Hal-Safieni... ...	927
Roman Villa Museum ...	376		

Besides personal emoluments (£305. 5. 0), the sum of £56. 8. 1 was expended in connection with the exploration of antiquities, £37. 12. 10 in connection with the purchase of objects of antiquity and £16. 1. 5 on miscellaneous expenses.

OBJECTS ACQUIRED DURING THE YEAR.

1 gold medal (40 m.m.) of Fra Fabricio del Carretto, Grand Master of the Order of Rhodes. (1513-1521).

The medal is described in "Memoires numismatiques de l'Ordre Souverain de St. Jean de Jerusalem" par le baron Edouard Henri Furse—Rome 1889 at page 318. This is a medal struck to commemorate the election of Del Carretto to the Grandmastership. A silver medal of this description was known to exist in the Friedlander collection and a golden one is only described in the collection of the Prince of Montenegro.

1 gold coin (Ducato) of Queen Giovanna of Sicily 1516-1519.

1 brass coin (Diniere) of Adrian de Wignacourt.

1 silver shilling George IV—1825.

1 silver crown George IV.

1 old print of Ghar il Cbir, Malta.

5 old maps of Malta and Gozo.

13 prints and original sketches by Maltese artists.

8 punches of the time of the Order.

1 lithograph portrait of Sir W. Reid.

1 gold and enamel decoration of the Order.

besides a great quantity of potsherds, etc. obtained from the various excavations.

DONATIONS.

The following donations were made during the year:—

The Curator Wallace Collection, Manchester Square, London	Photo of an old picture representing a view of Valletta.
S. J. A. Churchill, Esq., M.V.O. British Consul General, Naples	Photo of Tesserà Hospitals in Naples Museum
H. E. General Sir Leslie Rundle, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., C.V.O.	A framed photo of himself.
Robert Galea, Esq., L.S. & A. ...	Plan of Roman House recently excavated at Xghariet Midwia.
R. Cachia Zammit, Esq. ...	Plan and section of the old church of S. S. Salvatore, Notabile.
Alfonso Drago, Esq., L.S. & A. ...	Plan and section of old cistern at "tal Hlas".
Col. E. P. S. Roupell, D.S.O. ...	2 framed water colours—plans of Macedonia.
The Chief Engineer ...	Marble inscription from the demolished tower of Benghisa. (time of De Redin).
His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor ...	32 old seals of the various Government Depts.
Mrs. Pringle ...	Old seal of the Gran Corte della Valletta.
The Curator Valletta Museum ...	Copy of Macmillan's book on Malta & Gibraltar
Valentino Lupi, Esq. ...	1 lithograph of Governor Ponsonby.
Do. ...	1 old clay incense burner.
Filippo Xerri, Esq. ...	1 old document (1693).
Giuseppe Teuma, Esq. ...	1 document (1827).
Rev. Salvatore Zammit, D.D. ...	1 brass ciborium.
Rev. Canon Lorenzo Vella ...	2 documents signed by Sir Alexander Ball.
Giuseppe Calleja, Esq. ...	Fragment of a wall (1799).
Mrs. A. Horsley Mayo ...	1 old brass Sig. eastern coast,
Nob. Lorenzo A. de' Marchesi Testaferrata	4 marble car. other architectural remains.
Rev. D. Antonio Cachia ...	1 print of a place and deep underground in Prison.

28th May, 1915.

found at Hal Safieni, and burnished is abundant. ZAMMIT, Curator.