

# REPORTS

ON THE WORKING OF

GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

DURING THE FINANCIAL YEAR

**1921-22.**

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## GHAR DALAM.

During May and June 1922, with the help of Mr. G. G. Sinclair and Mr. E. Flamingo, the physical aspect of Ghar Dalam was investigated, and workable plans and sections prepared for assistance in further exploration.

By careful trenching across the cave floor, it was found that the side benchings which had hitherto been considered to represent the floor of the cave are really great slabs of the side walls which have collapsed inwards, on an ancient clay deposit, during the early history of the cavern, leaving a central trench along the middle into which the majority of organic and other remains have been washed.

A trench 14 feet deep, was sunk immediately outside the entrance in the hope of finding the original rock-cill. The stratification is "torba" and is different from the cave deposits. This trench had to be abandoned after proving the existence of a great deposit of boulders acting as a cill and serving to retain the cave deposits. A further trench, 85 feet outside the entrance, was sunk at a lower level and proved the rock bottom here to be of the same relative level as in the back part of the cave. The only deposit was "torba" similar to that found in the last trench referred to.

The rock bottom of the *wied* was found to be 14 feet below the ground surface, 4 feet above sea level, and 20 feet below the rock level of the cave floor. In all probability the cave was formed when the *wied* bottom was at the same level, and these 20 feet of rock were subsequently eroded, a further indication of the great antiquity of the cave itself.

## SANTA SFIA.

A mound on the right of the tortuous path that from the Birzebbugia road leads to Hal Far, had for years attracted the attention of archeologists on account of large blocks of stone which stood out of the debris. Popular tradition refers to an old chapel dedicated to Santa Sfia (or Sophia) that stood there in old days.

In August 1921, Dr. Guest and Miss Murray undertook to clear out the mound and investigate the site.

The excavation of the site showed that the mound was made of stone debris and remains of large stone blocks. Of the latter, only three were in situ but from their position no architectural information could be gathered. A solitary wall of comparatively small stones runs in a southern direction for a few yards. Whatever buildings were raised on the site, either in prehistoric or in later times, were brought down long ago and their foundations pulled up and moved about.

A pair of cart ruts close to the mound runs out of a field in the direction of the road.

No prehistoric potsherds were found: the few sherds collected being fragments of pots of the Punic or Roman period the remains, probably, of the furniture of a rock tomb rifled in the vicinity.

A worn out Maltese coin of the well known type, with veiled female head and a group of Egyptian figures on the obverse, was found.

## TAL BAKKARI.

To the north of the remains of tal Bakkari tower, a small mound in the public road, which from Zurricco leads to Birzebbugia, shows large stone blocks jutting out here and there. Tradition connects this mound with an old chapel under the name of Santa Maria; some people couple with the ruins the name of St. Catherine.



The mound was examined in July 1921 by Miss M. Murray. When cleared, the foundations of a small building were traced consisting of two rectangular rooms side by side, one about 20 feet long and 12 feet wide, and the other 20 feet long and 9 feet wide. The larger room ended to the east in an apse with thick walls; it had a torba floor and three pillars on each side. The entrance was presumably to the west. A well-squared chamfered slab, which lay loose close to the apse, may have served the purpose of an altar stone; patches of white plaster remained attached to the walls.

It is difficult to understand the use made of this small building; no typical potsherds were found, the few sherds met with were of the common Punic or Roman type, some looked older, presumably of the Bronze Age period. It is possible that a shrine, not unlike several which are still met with in the country, was once built on this site. Originally a different building stood there at a very early date, for some of the big stones, still in situ, stand upon the rocky surface. A bell shaped cistern, covered with long slabs, is dug close to the mound. This is plastered and was in use in quite recent times, before its roof gave way, and soil and stones filled it up.

To the west of the mound a pair of cart tracks of a moderate depth come down from a south-west direction and may be traced beyond the mound to the north-east. The ruts are therefore of an earlier date than the mound itself and have no connection with it.

#### BURMGHEZ.

The ground in which Burmghez cave is found was taken over by the Government during the year. It will now be possible to continue the excavation of the cave and to ensure the safety of the same. No systematic work was done in the cave this year but some digging, done close to the entrance, showed a great deposit of human bones which is well worth investigating.

#### HAL FAR.

Levelling for an aerodrome was commenced early in the year over a large tract of ground, to the north-west of the chapel of St. Angelo at Hal Far, and extended beyond the main road leading from Zurrigo to Birzebbugia. Quite close to this road the excavations brought to light remains of buildings testifying to the site having been inhabited from Neolithic times.

One complete room could be traced of which the walls were made of large stone slabs on end, and several remains of megaliths in situ stood here and there without any connection with each other. Neolithic and Bronze age potsherds were met with, but no flint tools or bronze instruments were found.

Besides the neolithic remains, foundations of an extensive building with rectangular chambers and regularly built walls were disclosed, partly built over a Neolithic site, and these can be referred to a late Punic or early Roman period. These foundations enclosed what appears to be the remains of an oil press and fragments of mortars, troughs etc. Several coins, both Punic and Roman, were recovered. An outlying part of this building, which has had to be buried again, contained a very well preserved torba floor plentifully strewn with Roman and Punic remains. The Naval Authorities who were responsible for the work gave every facility to the Director of Museums to investigate the site and passed to him all the objects met with. The best thanks of the department are due to the Naval Officers concerned.

#### THE ROMAN VILLA. (RABAT)

The preliminary excavations, conducted in 1920, to the North-East of the Roman House at Rabat, could not be continued during the year, although the Government, very wisely, acquired the land between the Roman Villa and the Railway Station.

It was found more convenient, during the year, to clear up the site to the North West of the Museum with a view to see how far the Roman House extended in that direction.

When the house was discovered in 1881 the mound under which the remains were buried was only partially excavated; having preserved a couple of rooms, the rest was covered over once more and the site planted with trees. As the information about the extent of this interesting Roman building was very limited it was deemed



important to clear the whole site and get a comprehensive plan of the house. The clearing of the site showed that the complete destruction of the building took place at a very early date.

The magnificent Roman house was pulled down, the stones of its walls removed and the pavements battered and hacked about, before the 9th century. This is shown by the numerous Saracenic graves built on the floor level of the house. These simply constructed graves were very numerous. Most of them consisted of two stone walls, six feet long and about one foot and a half high, and a couple of feet apart, with a stone slab at each end. Some were carefully made with well squared stones, whilst others were roughly constructed with stones picked up anyhow. The well-constructed graves were covered with sawn stone-slabs about two inches thick. This sawing of the slabs is very striking, for considering that local masons cut their slabs with an adze, the sawing points clearly to foreign workmen having had a hand in the construction of the Saracenic graves.

Evidently, the graves of important people were surmounted by a grave-stone with verses of the Koran cut upon them; numerous fragments of such typical gravestones were collected from among the debris. Not one of them was found whole; most of them were plain with a flat rectangular body and a pyramidal top. Many were more or less elaborately carved with geometrical patterns. The inscriptions were in clear Kufic characters, either sunk or raised.

The direction of the graves was invariably east and west, the head of the body being to the west with the face turned to the south.

All the graves met with were full of soil which in the course of centuries found its way into them, so that no special observations could be made as to the immediate surroundings of the bodies. The bodies in the carefully made graves were laid in wooden coffins of which the iron clamps and the nails were invariably found; a red dust of wood fibres usually stuck to the metal but all other signs of wood had disappeared. In two cases, smaller iron clamps were found at the feet of the body, the remains, probably, of a wooden box in which amulets of a perishable material may have been contained; such as, verses of the Koran written on a strip of parchment.

No personal ornaments or other objects such as buttons, arms, etc. were met with in any of the graves. As an exception, a silver ring was found on the second finger of the right hand of a skeleton laid in a well made grave. The ring is plain with a broad face on which an inscription in Kufic characters is cut.

The Saracens occupied Malta in the year 827 and did not leave before 1100, when Roger the Norman freed Sicily from their yoke. It is surmised that there was in Malta only a small garrison of Arabs which, for obvious reasons, must have kept aloof from the native population. The Roman House at Rabat, had, by the 9th century, fallen in complete ruin and its stones carried away along with the other debris worth removing.

The Arabs found this deserted mound a convenient site for a burial place and simple graves were constructed with the stones still lying about. Some of the graves stood actually on the Roman floor, others were met with higher up in the mound which, evidently, continued to increase in height during the two centuries of Arabic occupation. Some of the graves were barely under two feet of soil which at some points is over six feet deep.

As the object of the excavator was to study the features of the Roman building, the Saracenic graves had to be removed. A few, which were actually on the floor of the rooms, were left standing as documentary evidence. When the other graves were destroyed in the course of excavation, the bones were carefully removed to two pits and conveniently covered with large slabs to secure them against further profanation. The excavation of the remains of the Roman house was somewhat disappointing. It was hoped to find richly decorated floors and eventually fragments of inscriptions, statues and architectural details but nothing of the sort was met with.

The plan of the building was however made out with its numerous rooms, cisterns and water channels.



The water supply of the house was ample and elaborate. Six cisterns have, so far, been met with, most of them about 15 feet deep, capable of storing a great amount of water. Beside these, there are two wells about 40 feet deep which go down to the clay bed and which must have yielded a good supply of running water. Several channels cut in the rock, cross the pavements and lead to reservoirs which presumably were meant finally to water the gardens of the house.

It is of little use to attempt a description of the buildings uncovered, before the whole site is cleared and a complete plan and the necessary sections are available. What is clear, even at this stage of the excavation, is the impression that the foundations cleared out do not belong to one building raised at one time on a homogeneous plan, but rather that additions were made at different times with materials, some of which were presumably taken from older buildings. This refers peculiarly to numerous large roughly hewn blocks of coralline limestone, which form two walls on the northern side.

Of the mosaic pavements, of which charming specimens are shown in the Roman Villa Museum, no traces were found. The floor of some of the rooms consists of a kind of cement mixed with pounded red pottery with bits of white marble embedded in it. The rooms and passages have a floor of pounded earth and lime, covered sometimes with a smooth polished hard mortar. The few walls that are left standing are thickly covered with white mortar with a carefully smoothed surface. The wall of one room was covered with coloured plaster arranged in panels, yellow, red and brown, under a green band and over a black dado, which recalls Pompeian house decorations.

Cartloads of potsherds, varying from the remains of rough pots and enormous grain amphorae to the fragments of tiny vases of thinnest clay, were found mixed with the debris.

Fragments of Samian and pseudo Samian ware and fragments of a black ware of various thickness and finish were numerous all over the place.

Fragments of clay statuettes, Tanagra figurines, antefixa, masks, lamps, etc. were fairly numerous. Fragments of richly decorated glass vessels as well as a few copper objects and a few worn out coins were found.

Among the most important finds were fragments of Arretine red glazed pottery, mostly plain, but some of it gracefully decorated.

By the potter's marks on some of the fragments we can assign Samian pottery to the first two decades of the 1st century A.D. The following marks were kindly deciphered by Mr. A. G. K. Hayter, F.S.A., London:—(1) AMVR (in planta pedis)—Amurius—flourished during 14-54 A.D. (2) CRASINPIS (in planta pedis) C. RASINI-PISANI—50-80 A.D. On the sides of a plate, the inscription MELIDOTOU, in Greek letters, 75 cms. long with letters 8 m.m. high, refers either to the owner, or to a deity, from which, in the opinion of the Rev. Prof. A. H. Sayce, the name MELITA may have been derived.

Some of the vessels date probably from the 1st century B.C.; they resembled the Campanian ware, being coated with a black glaze in imitation of metal. Some of them were richly decorated with floral patterns, two fragments bear figures of Hellenistic style.

Most of the red ware, however, was an imitation of Sigillata of the 4th century A.D.

#### TREASURE TROVE OF PUNIC COINS.

On the 26th July 1921, whilst clearing his field of a heap of stones to the north of Mkabba, a farmer discovered a small clay jar full of small brass coins.

When the fact was reported to the Curator he visited the spot and interviewed the farmer. The jar, about 4 inches in diameter and 6 inches high, had been broken and the sherds thrown in a corner. The Curator was allowed to have the fragments of the jar which were put together as far as it could be done. The coins were subsequently acquired by the Museum Department.

Originally the number of coins, as counted by the farmer, was 300 but only 266 were handed over to the Curator. The total weight of the coins was 1507 grammes, the average weight of each coin being 5.66 grammes. Weighed singly, the heaviest coin turned the scales at 7 grammes. The diameter of the coins varied between 14 and 17 millimeters and their thickness between 4 and 6 millimeters.



They were all of the same type though not two of them similar, that is, struck by the same punch. They all have a slight patina and are in a good state of preservation.

The coins made of brass are of a typical Carthaginian type and date, probably, about 200 B.C.

The obverse shows a head of Persephone to the left crowned by ears of corn.

The reverse has a horse to the right. The animal is at a gallop or raised on the hind legs; in no case it is at rest. No palm tree or any other object is in the field. There are no letters in the exergue.

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During the year the Government took over from the Reverend Augustinian Fathers a site in Strada Sant'Agata, Rabat, in which an early Christian catacomb is cut. It so happened that another Catacomb was discovered in the immediate vicinity, whilst digging for the foundations of a house. This catacomb was also acquired by the Government and connected by a short gallery to the former catacomb, the owner being compensated by a strip of land from the lately acquired site.

The following objects were presented or lent to the Museum:—

The Hon. Comptroller of Char. Institutions.	One framed oil picture representing St. John the Baptist; one bronze statue of St. Catherine on a wooden stand; one Italian panel XVI century from the Orphan Asylum.
Church La Vittoria.	Four capes, 6 dalmatics, 4 chasubles, 1 altar frontal, 10 maniples, 6 stoles, 3 pouches and 4 chalice covers.
Father D. Callus, O.P.	One book "Il P. Ottomano fu vero Principe?".
J. Forester Paton, Esq.	One book "The Archeology of the Holy Land" and three other books.
The Librarian Public Library.	One framed plan of St. Paul's Catacombs.
Prof. H. Vassallo, LL.D.	One framed lithograph representing the late Prof. Dr. G. Vassallo and one framed pencil drawing, by G. Farrugia, representing a lady; one framed lithograph "Catacombe di Malta".
Emmanuele Xerri, Esq.	One silver coin of Pius IX; 3 bronze coins and one brass seal; "Souvenir of the exhibition opened on the 25th March 1901 by H.R.H. The Duke of Cornwall; one old wooden watch case; one photo of St. Paul's Grotto; 10 Malta Postage stamps; one framed lithograph of the new facade of St. Paul's Church, Valletta.
The Hon. Supt. of Public Works.	One framed oil picture by G. Busuttil representing "La Maddalena"; one book "Materiali esistenti e bisognevoli".
Director, Otago University Museum.	Nine jade and other stone tools found at Otago, New Zealand.
The Hon. Collector of Customs.	One stone coat of arms of Grand Master La Cassiere.
Dr. J. Baldacchino.	One Malta postage stamp.
Prof. T. Zammit.	Eighteen old Malta postage stamps.
The Hon. Chief Government Medical Officer.	One flint pistol; 1 marble altar slab; 1 baptismal ladle; one holy water bowl and 2 sprayers; two prayer books, three stoles (blue, red and black); 35 iron hocks and tongs; one hour glass; seven chisels; one flint pistol; one rifle flint; one tin collecting box from Mancel Hospital, Lazaretto.
The Superintendent, Lunatic Asylum.	Two oil pictures.
Enrico Calleja, Esq., L.S. & A.	One pencil portrait of the artist Michele Busuttil; one framed drawing.
V. Briffa Brincati, Esq.	Seven Malta postage stamps.



L. Poinssot, Esq., of Tunis.	Five volumes notes and documents (Tunis Government Department of Antiquities).
Notary C. Micallef Decaro.	One volume Malta Government Gazette.
Lord Abercromby.	Two volumes "A study of the Bronze Age pottery of Great Britain and Ireland".
The Superintendent of Posts.	One set Malta postage stamps surcharged Self-Government; eleven Malta postage stamps.
Rev. Fathers St. Francis Convant.	Two clay jars.
Edward A. Gouder, Esq.	One photo of a Policeman in white uniform.
Rev. Prof. Sayce.	One copy of Cruveilhier—"Nouvelies feuilles de Suse"; one copy Joseph Plessis—Istar—Astarte; one copy Frazer—Adonis.
Società Piemontese di Archeologia e Belle Arti.	Bollettino.
Corrado Cafici, Esq.	One copy: "Stazione Neolitica di Fontana di Pepe".
Col. E. P. S. Roupell, D.S.O.	The History of Freemasonry in Malta.
P. Agius Catania, Esq.	One photo of Grand Master Ceschi.
The Librarian, Public Library.	Three framed pictures representing King Edward, King George and Queen Mary.
Messrs. Chretien & Co.	Three postcards (Legislative Assembly and Senate).
Senator S. Zammit Hammet.	One photo (Legislative Assembly and Senate).
Paul Degabriele, Esq.	One mill stone and one hard stone mortar.

## List of objects acquired for the Museum:—

Sixteen old coins.  
 One small model of fishing boat.  
 One sketch of Ggantia heads.  
 Two stone coat of arms.  
 Two photos—Constitution Day.  
 One old balance.  
 One illustrated book: "the Centenary of St. Paul".  
 One volume "How to observe in Archeology".  
 One volume "Storia di Malta".  
 One volume "Studii sul Fenicio".  
 One volume "Grammaire Armenienne".  
 One lot old pottery.  
 One old lithograph.  
 Eleven books and brochures and eight prints about Malta.  
 One lot iron tools.  
 One lot old costumes (18th century).  
 Six Phoenician jars.  
 Twenty three Malta postage stamps.  
 Two hundred and sixty-six Carthaginian coins.  
 One book on "Maltese Birds and fossils".  
 One book on "Early Churches of Rome".  
 One old parchment of Lascaris.  
 One model of frieze.

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During the year, 6055 persons visited the Valletta Museum, of whom 5123 on Sundays, 193 on Saturdays, and 739 on other week days.

TEM. ZAMMIT,  
Director of Museum.