



REPORTS
on the working of
GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

covering periods between

1st April, 1977

and

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Museums

(Period covered:

1st April, 1977 to 31st March, 1978)

The Archaeological Section of the Department conducted an important investigation at the medieval church of Hal Millieri during the first fortnight of April 1977. The campaign was carried out with the active co-operation of the "Hal Millieri and Bir Miftuh Trust" and the Classics Department of the University of Malta.

2. In the course of the excavations the remains of a small church, known from historical documents to have been dedicated to the Visitation, were brought to light. The church was built against the north wall of the existing Annunciation chapel, probably built towards the middle of the 15th century. Further investigation under the paved floor of the latter revealed that this church was preceded by an earlier chapel with a torba floor. It is hoped that a study of the stratified pottery and coins found in the course of this work would provide a more accurate chronology for the original construction and rebuilding of the church. Both the Visitation and Annunciation churches were found to contain a number of burials. The skeletal remains which were brought to light are being studied by the Anatomy Department of the University.

3. In November a palaeo-Christian catacomb cut in the rock was discovered at Rabat under the back yard of a private house under construction. The monument, however, proved to have been already rifled. Preliminary work on the clearing of rubble in the area where the monument was broken into has been completed and arrangements are currently being made for its preservation.

4. In October the Section was informed by the Police that skeletal remains had been exposed by rain water near the R.A.F. station at Marsaxlokk. Investigations showed that the skeletal remains belonged to a simple burial in a shallow pit, similar in all respects to several others excavated by the Section in the same area which was apparently utilised as a burial ground. It was impossible to date the burial with any degree of accuracy as no pottery items or objects of any kind were found associated with it. The align-

ment of the skeleton — with the feet due east — would seem to suggest a Moslem interment.

5. An ancient circular pit for the storage of grain was discovered at Xewkija, Gozo in January; with an internal diameter of approximately 1.20 metres and a depth of 1.40 metres, its walls were lined with baked pottery, rendered on the inside and set in a layer of clay against the surrounding rock.

6. After its original use was discontinued, the pit served as a dump for broken pottery, including stoves, amphorae, dishes and plates. A fine red-ware cup of *terra sigillata* type and stamped with the maker's mark and a pottery stand decorated with a Doric frieze date the find to the Roman period.

7. Two double-chambered rock-cut tombs dating to the 2nd/1st century B.C. were discovered in March during construction work on a football ground near the Tarmac Factory at Hal Far. The tombs yielded the usual furniture of pottery items typical of the late Punic period, some of which clearly showing a Hellenistic imprint.

8. Throughout the period under review the Section carried out a thorough re-organisation of the Conservation Laboratory at the National Museum of Archaeology. Concurrently, essential restoration of important archaeological material — notably many items of Punic jewellery and early Phoenician red-burnished ware — was dealt with, in preparation for display in the extension planned for the upper floor of the Museum.

9. The new Sciortino Hall at the National Museum of Fine Arts, containing the best works bequeathed to the nation by the Maltese sculptor Antonio Sciortino, was inaugurated by the Minister of Labour, Welfare and Culture. For the occasion a small exhibition of manuscripts and photographs connected with Sciortino and his work was prepared. Work on the drawings, water-colours, maps and manuscripts was completed and the section is now open to the public. A proper workshop has been set up.

10. A new restorer of paintings has now joined the Museum staff on completion of his course at the *Istituto Centrale del Restauro* in Rome. This has made it easier to restore a number of paintings from the Museum collection as well as pictures from Government departments and churches. Most of the time, however, was taken up with the restoration of the Nasoni Panels from the Palace. These had been taken

down during the last war and most of them were in a very bad state. The panels of one of the corridors were brought to the Museum, fixed and mounted on marine plywood and restored with the help of a number of volunteers. A couple of panels that were missing are now being painted and the panels of the first corridor should be up in the very near future. The other corridors will then be taken in hand.

11. Another major work taken in hand recently was the re-organization of the Armoury. All the items had been transferred to the ground floor of the Palace awaiting a proper re-arrangement. This has now been taken up in earnest and should be ready this year.

12. All works of art at the Museum and in government premises are now being catalogued and photographed to provide an up-to-date inventory. This has been made possible by the addition of a clerk to the staff.

13. Items to be exhibited in the proposed Folk Museum are being stored at the Inquisitor's Palace, Vittoriosa and will be set up as soon as the structural repairs now being carried out are completed.

14. New acquisitions include a portrait bust by Vincent Apap, a 17th century wax head, drawings and some objects for the proposed folk museum.

15. As in previous years a good number of exhibitions by Maltese and foreign artists were held at the Museum. Each artist exhibiting at the Museum has donated a work of art, thus helping to build up a representative collection of contemporary art. It is proposed to roof over an area on the top floor to house this growing collection.

16. The programme of temporary exhibitions comprised the following:

Subject of Exhibition			Exhibitor or Organiser
Paintings	...	...	Hilda Lewis
Paintings	...	...	Mary Depiro
Paintings	...	...	Essentialists
Prints	...	...	Hungarian Artists
Drawings and Paintings			William Driscoll
Drawings and Paintings			Janne Staehr
Drawings and Photographs	...	...	Nicole Melnik
Painted Fabrics	...	...	Marie Antoinette de Piemo

Subject of Exhibition			Exhibitor or Organiser
Lithographs and contructions	...	...	Christa Rudloff
Lithographs etchings and drawings	...	...	Lady Willet
Paintings	...	...	Monica Szathmary
Paintings and Drawings			El Faatah University
Paintings and Drawings			Wednesday Group
Paintings and Drawings			Harry Alden
Paintings	...	...	Esprit Barthet
Paintings and Drawings			Raymond Pitre
Paintings and Drawings			H.D. Chauhan
Paintings and Etchings			R. Saliba
Woodcuts and Lithographs	...	...	Embassy of the People's Republic of China
Paintings	...	...	Hazel Strokes
Paintings	...	...	Margaret Ralston

17. The staff of the National Museum of Fine Arts were responsible for the setting up of the Italian *Bronzetto* Exhibition held at the Palace and for the Art Exhibition held in aid of the Physically Handicapped at the Embassy of the Sovereign Military Order. An exhibition of Maltese works of art was held in London and other works were sent for exhibition abroad. An exhibition of Maltese art was held at the Grand Hotel Verdala, Rabat.

18. Members of the staff gave lectures on Art History at the University, the School of Art and at other cultural centres. They also helped to produce art programmes on M.T.V. The lecture room was used for lectures, meetings by art societies and by the "Friends of the Museums" society recently set up.

19. The year's work in the National Museum of Natural History was mainly concentrated on the proposed Mammal halls, which were nearing completion by the end of March 1978. This sub-section will occupy three halls on the south wing of Vilhena Palace and will comprise more than 45 mammals from various countries and continents. The show-cases and the dioramas inside them were all produced by the Museum staff.

20. A hall displaying the original colour drawings and some of the line drawings for the book "Birds of the Maltese Archipelago" has been set up. This extension will be officially inaugurated on the same day as the Mammal halls. Meanwhile, sale of the publication itself contin-

ued at a steady pace, 1612 copies being disposed of by the end of March 1978.

21. Field research in ornithology was carried out by a team of Museum volunteer helpers. Throughout the year 5665 birds of 77 different species were ringed and eight recoveries of Museum-ringed birds reported; the Chiffchaff was once again the most-ringed species, accounting for 1036 of the above total. The Museum organised two bird-ringing expeditions to the island of Filfla on the week-ends of 25/26 June and 16/17 July; on these occasions a total of 907 birds of three different species were ringed, the Storm Petrel being the most commonly ringed species with 899.

22. Further work was done on the Museum's research and display collection, particularly those referring to birds, insects, shells and reptiles, while hundreds of sea-shell specimens were cleaned, identified and indexed. More local insects were collected and set for the Museum collection. The collections were augmented by more local insects and reptiles; the latter, together with the available foreign specimens, are being prepared for display. Plans are also in hand to set up an exhibit of Maltese flora in collaboration with the Natural History Society.

23. The Assistant Curator of Natural History worked on a large number of Quaternary avian remains in the collections at Għar Dalam and the Museum at Mdina, classifying and registering them under number and provenance. It is hoped that this material will be transferred to Għar Dalam when the museum there will be reorganised.

24. Assistance was given to a group composed of Ph.D. tutors and students from the University of London while studying the *Discoasters* of the Middle Miocene clays of the Maltese Islands. 23 species were recorded, 9 of which new to science and among the latter one which has been named *Discoaster zammitmaem-peli* in honour of the Assistant Curator. The exercise was followed by the first electron-microscope study ever to be carried out on these local fossils and by the relative publication by Mr M. Hojjatzadeh, an Iranian student with the group.

25. The Assistant Curator also collaborated with scientists in the Federal Republic of Germany and the United Kingdom in the study of Quaternary lizards and giant extinct birds of the Maltese Islands.

26. Besides giving lectures on geology and

palaeontology to museum guides and upper secondary and University students, the Assistant Curator of Natural History published the following:

An Outline of Maltese Geology, 44 pp. 29 pls., 6 figs., June 1977, with a Foreword by the Minister of Labour, Welfare and Culture;

The magical properties of rock from St Paul's Grotto, Rabat, Malta, in *Studies in Speleology*, London, 3 (1): 29-32, Aug. 1977.

27. During the year the Museum received the following donations:

part of a cetacean rib in globigerina limestone from Hofra ż-Żgħira — donor: Mr Joseph Gatt of Għaxaq;

four boxes of unsorted material from the Quaternary sand dunes at Marfa Point — donor: Dr T.O. Morris of St Paul's Bay.

28. The year under review in so far as the War Museum at Fort St Elmo, Valletta was concerned, was marked by further improvements in the layout and display of many sections in the exhibition hall. In several instances this was due to important acquisitions by gift or purchase which came about through the close collaboration existing between the Department and the War Museum Association.

29. A fibre-glass replica of the ship's bell of H.M.S. *Illustrious* was presented to the Museum by Admiral Sir Charles Madden, formerly Chairman of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. The Royal Air Force, Luqa donated a mobile trolley for the Spitfire Merlin engine and a trestle for the Gladiator "Faith". The Department purchased an oil painting showing surrendered units of the Italian fleet at Marsaxlokk Bay by Rowland Langmaid, an official war artist.

30. Members of the War Museum Association participated in a joint project with the R.A.F. Sub-aqua Club and the Armed Forces of Malta to investigate the sunken wreck of a war-time Beaufort aircraft off Żonqor Point. Among the material recovered were an engine, the gunner's seat and two .303 Browning machine-guns. The Management of Malta Drydocks agreed to the Association's request to refurbish the only *bar-chino* surviving from the Italian E-boat attack on the Grand Harbour on 26th July 1941.

F. S. MALLIA

Director, Museums Department

24th May, 1978,

**Comparative statement of visitors admitted to Museums and Monuments
during the Financial Years 1976-77 and 1977-78**

Place	1976-77		1977-78	
	On Payment	Free	On Payment	Free
National Museum of Archaeology	20,630	3,124	18,716	5,436
National Museum of Fine Arts	8,147	2,817	8,619	4,185
National Museum of Natural History	15,298	11,716	14,520	14,957
Palace Armoury	28,130	10,847	27,347	9,215*
Museum of Roman Antiquities	21,909	6,791	20,203	8,542
St Paul's Catacombs	38,312	4,382	40,498	6,662
Hal Saflieni Hypogeum	24,119	5,739	26,335	10,352
Tarxien Temples	17,817	5,067	19,198	8,006
Għar Dalam Cave and Museum	14,549	5,250	17,662	8,655
Inquisitor's Palace	2,199	1,503	2,813	1,573
Haġar Qim	—	—	—	16,847
Gozo Museum	7,794	1,249	9,997	2,033
Ġgantija Temples	49,800	1,927	39,699	5,382
General Day Tickets	127,088	—	152,990	—
Total	375,792	60,412	398,597	101,845
Total admission fees collected	£M22,774.12,5		£M23,624.04,5	

* Inclusive of 2,638 visitors admitted during the 8th September Exhibition.

NOTE: Admission to museums and monuments on Sunday was made free of charge with effect from 25 September 1977 in terms of Legal Notice 126 of 1977.