



REPORTS

on the working of

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INDEX

House of Representatives	1	Housing	53
Public Service Commission	5	Education	54
Information Division	7	Public Libraries	64
Armed Forces of Malta	10	Museums	68
Task Force	14	Treasury	70
Gozo Secretariat	16	Inland Revenue	72
Police	17	Public Lotto	76
Civil Aviation	19	Customs	78
Statistics	22	Audit	81
Electoral Registry	24	Posts	83
Wireless Telegraphy Branch	26	Port	89
Oil Exploration Division, O.P.M.	28	Health	94
Computer Centre	30	Environment Division	99
Attorney General	32	Works	100
Public Registry (Malta)	34	Water Works	109
Public Registry (Gozo)	38	Labour and Emigration	115
Notary to Government (Malta)	39	Social Services	119
Notary to Government (Gozo)	41	Trade	124
Courts of Law	42	Industry	127
Prisons	44	Agriculture and Fisheries	130
Land	48	Tourism	134
Land Registry	52		

Museums

(Period covered:

1st January, 1986 to 31st December, 1986)

The Archaeological Section

The year under review was marked by the opening of a number of new Museums. During the first three months of the year, the Archaeological Section concentrated on the thorough re-organization of the Gozo Museum on modern lines after necessary structural repairs and re-decoration had been completed. New display units were acquired, and improvements made to the general layout. Considerable attention was given to the extension of the Punic and Roman sections of the Museum and important material from both old and recent excavations, previously stored for lack of space, was displayed for the first time with adequate documentation. A small but interesting collection of Greek, Punic and Roman coins, illustrating the coinage current in the Maltese Islands in antiquity, was also exhibited. The Museum, now exclusively dedicated to Archaeology, was officially re-opened as the Gozo Museum of Archaeology by the Hon. A. Sceberras Trigona, LL.D., M.A. (Oxon), M.P., on the 6th April, 1986.

The site of a suspected catacomb at Bingemma, in the limits of Rabat, was investigated by the Archaeological Section assisted by a number of volunteers from the "Grupp Arkeologiku Malti." Excavation revealed that it had been very considerably damaged in the past by quarryings to the extent that neither its plan nor any structural features could be discerned. With the exception of a few sherds of the late Roman period, no archaeological material was recovered. A survey carried out in the surrounding area revealed two small Palaeo-Christian catacombs, both considerably damaged by quarrying and twelve thoroughly rifled Punic tombs.

A small Palaeo-Christian catacomb was investigated at Mgarr. Among the material recovered from the excavation were a number of 5th/6th century oil lamps with typical Christian iconographics. Interesting features of the catacomb were a cross carved in the rock in low relief, and the outline of a galley incised in the rock above a 'window-grave'.

The Archaeological Section carried out a systematic survey at Ghajn Qajjet, in the limits of Rabat. Five Punic shaft inhumation tombs and a Palaeo-Christian catacomb were located and documented. These were however all found to have been previously rifled, and yielded no archaeological material.

Preliminary excavations on a prehistoric site at Ta' Raddiena, off Gharghur Road, Birkirkara, reported to the Museums Department by the Rev. Prof. Mgr. V. Borg during the construction of the new B'Kara By-Pass, were carried out early in October. Mr Francis S. Mallia, Dip. Archaeol. (Lond.), F.S.A., former Director of Museums, planned and conducted the excavations on behalf of the Museums Department and with the necessary authorisation of the Ministry for Culture. Sea Malta partly sponsored the operation by providing a container free of charge to serve as a site office and store. The principal aim of the exercise was to ascertain whether a curving line of megaliths, standing alternately on end and on the side, had belonged to a Copper Age temple. A buried wall was found to have a curvature similar to that of the megalithic wall and probably denotes an apsi-shaped internal area. From a layer of soil beneath this internal wall a number of potsherds dating to the Tarxien phase (c. 3000 - 2500 B.C.), and one or two earlier phases were recovered. Further excavations will be carried out on the site after the results of the first sounding are studied in detail.

The Fine Arts Museum

The Fine Arts Museum was completely redecorated. A record number of Exhibitions was held. This included the annual Maltafest Exhibition.

Work of restoration of the vault of Victory Church proceeded as also work on the Palace and on the Museum collection. A number of important works of art were acquired through the Gollcher Art and Archaeological Foundation and presented to the Museum.

Spinola Palace at St. Julian's was thoroughly restored and opened as a Museum of Contemporary Art. Later in the year two rooms were inaugurated as a permanent exhibition of photographic art. It is hoped to turn the Museum into an Art centre where artists will be able to exhibit and sell their works.

The Natural History Section

The staff of the Natural History Section concentrated mostly on finalising the Gozo Science Museum. The old Gozo Prison was restored and turned into a Museum. Specimens totalling more than 2000 are exhibited in new showcases. The exhibits were chosen from items kept at the stores of the Department of Museums together with the addition of a few other specially acquired items. The Museum was inaugurated in January 1987 and houses displays of Gozitan fauna in Earth Sciences, Birds, Marine Life and Flora besides other sections on Evolution, one on Foreign Natural History, a small greenhouse and an exhibition hall. This hall will, initially house an exhibition on 'The life history

of Insects'. Other exhibitions will be organised in it at various intervals.

Work on the extension of the Marine Aquaria section was continued. Glass aquaria were installed and further specimens collected. Work on the restoration and the eventual opening to the public of the Dungeons at Vilhena Palace is also in a very advanced stage. The walls of these prisons and three adjoining rooms, have been sand-blasted. Electrical installations is being changed and the 'torba' floors paved with 'franca'.

Because of its dangerous state, the railings of Għar Dalam Caves have been removed and new ones are being installed. Several experts in the different fields of Pleistocene palaeontology have been approached with the idea of building a new Museum at Għar Dalam on modern lines. Two leading experts on Hippopotamus of the period have already come to Malta and concluded a preliminary survey. Other experts on elephants, deer, birds and giant land turtles will follow. A plan for the building of a new Museum building around the already existing one, has already been approved by the Hon. Minister.

Work on other sections was continued, especially on the Museum's Land-snail collection. A book on this

subject has now been completed by Dr. Mandahl-Barth from Denmark and is being published in Malta before summer 1987. The Museum also received several donations of equipment and specimens during 1986.

The War Museum

During 1986 various improvements were carried out at the National War Museum. The exhibition area was also enlarged by utilization of an Annex on the left-hand side of the Main Hall; this contains displays of Artillery and Infantry subjects. The Annex on the other side of the Hall has been refurbished for the exhibition of other relics.

Following the decision to restore the War Rooms at Lascaris, work on the Fighter Control Room was completed in August 1986, to coincide with the 44th anniversary of "Il-Convoy ta' Santa Marija". The restoration of two other rooms, the Filter and Combined operations Rooms, is at an advanced stage.

M. J. ZERAFA
Director

17th March, 1987