



REPORTS
on the working of
GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS
for
The Year 1988

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INDEX

House of Representatives	1	Museums	79
Office of the Prime Minister		Ministry for Social Policy	
Armed Forces of Malta	7	Social Security	87
Electoral Registry	13	Health	92
Wireless Telegraphy Branch	15	Housing	99
Civil Aviation	17	Labour and Emigration	101
Air Terminal	20	Welfare	110
Information	22	Ministry of Finance	
Statistics	25	Treasury	115
Oil Exploration Division	27	Inland Revenue	117
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior and Justice		Audit	122
Courts of Justice	31	Public Lotto	124
Attorney General's Office	33	Computer Centre	127
Police	35	Customs	129
Prisons	39	Ministry for Development of Infrastructure	
Public Registry (Malta)	42	Works	135
Public Registry (Gozo)	46	Water Works	150
Notary to Government (Malta)	47	Posts	158
Notary to Government (Gozo)	49	Ministry of Productive Development	
Land Registry	50	Industry	167
Lands	52	Agriculture and Fisheries	172
Ministry of Education		Ministry for Development of Tertiary Sector	
Education	57	Trade	179
Environment	69	Ports	183
Public Libraries	74	Registry of Shipping and Seamen	189
		Ministry for Gozo	
		Gozo Secretariat	193

Museums

(Period covered:

1st January, 1988 to 31st December, 1988)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SECTION

In the year under review a new system of admission for visitors to the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum was introduced. This limits the duration of visits to 45 minutes, each followed by a 45 minute period of darkness, whilst the maximum number of visitors is limited to 60 per visit.

This was found to be necessary due to the delicate microclimate inside the monument which is adversely affected by large numbers of visitors. Prolonged periods of illumination also lead to the growth of algae which threaten the decorative motifs painted in red ochre on the rock. These measures were taken following the advice of both local and foreign experts, including UNESCO.

The research project initiated jointly in June 1987 by the University of Cambridge, the National Museum of Archaeology, and the University of Malta, was resumed. Fieldwork was concentrated on the prehistoric site at Xaghra, Gozo, known as 'Iċ-Ċirku', and continued throughout September. The excavations confirmed a significant sequence of burial deposits ranging chronologically from the Żebbuġ to the Tarxien phase of Maltese prehistory (4200 — 2500 B.C.). Early burial in the Żebbuġ phase was in small rock-cut tombs where successive interments were accompanied by shell necklaces, ochre (complete with mixing palettes), a polished amulet, a stone axe and the second recorded find of a limestone statue-menhir in the Maltese Islands. One of the tombs was reutilised in the Ġgantija phase (3600 — 3200 B.C.). By the end of the Saflieni/Tarxien phase (3200 — 2500 B.C.), towards the end of the Temple Period, these simple tombs were apparently replaced by large natural underground caves modified for human burials. In particular, it seems possible to identify the cave visible on the left of the Otto Bayer excavation, as depicted in a watercolour painting by the German artist Charles F. Brockdorff in the early 19th century.

Though already partly excavated over a century and a half ago, these caves provide considerable interest for the coming season in 1989.

An undisturbed rock-cut tomb dating to the late Punic Period was accidentally discovered at Gudja in

October by workmen engaged in ground levelling operations in connection with the new Air Terminal Project.

The tomb was discovered when a mechanical excavator partly broke through the roof of its burial chamber. Thanks to the prompt action taken by architects Edwin Delia and Raymond Farrugia, who immediately stopped the work on the site and informed the Museums Department, the tomb was subsequently investigated by the archaeological section.

On excavation the tomb was found to be of normal Punic type consisting of a square vertical shaft with a rectangular opening in one of its short sides giving access to an oval burial chamber with a slightly vaulted roof. Inside the chamber the skeletal remains of three individuals were found lying on a funerary platform hewn out of the rock at the back and parallel to the entrance. A small lamp-hole was scooped out of the rock to the right of the entrance which was sealed with a large rectangular stone slab. Various items of pottery, deposited as grave-goods with the interments, were recovered from the burial chamber. These consisted of an oval amphora, a shallow bowl, a plate, a pitcher and a pair of two-wicked oil-lamps. This pottery, decorated with concentric red linear bands over a cream slip, is characteristic of the third century, B.C.

Another rock-cut shaft inhumation grave was brought to light by workmen during ground levelling operations near Craig Hospital in Gozo. On investigation, the tomb was found to have been almost completely destroyed by a mechanical excavator and only yielded some fragments of human bones and a few potsherds of Punic type.

Various items of equipment and chemicals were donated by UNESCO to the Archaeological Section's Stone Conservation Laboratory. Work carried out by the laboratory mainly centred on the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum. As in previous years, readings of air temperature and humidity, wall temperature and humidity, and CO₂ and air currents, were regularly taken. This was carried out with the collaboration of Miss Antoinette Bonnici, a university student who has taken up a study of the microclimate inside the hypogeum as the subject of her thesis. Algae scrapings were also taken at various points and identification was carried out by Prof. P. Schembri and Dr E. Lanfranco at the University of Malta. Some biocide trials using formalin were also carried out.

On the initiative of the Hon. Dr Ugo Mifsud Bonnici, Minister for Education, Dr Emilio Custodio, a UNESCO consultant in hydrology, visited Malta in December to advise on the water problems at the Hal

Saflieni hypogeum. During his stay Dr Custodio had discussions with Museum officials, and also with Dr G. Debono and Dr J. Mangion of the Works Department Hydrology Section, who have been collaborating on the matter with the Museums Department for the past two years.

A bilateral research project between the National Museum of Archaeology and the University of Florence to study the causes of deterioration of the major megalithic temples, with a view to their restoration, was initiated.

Miss Joanne Cassar of the Stone Conservation Laboratory attended a conference entitled 'Early Advances in Conservation', organised by and held at the British Museum in November. Miss Cassar's contribution to the Conference was a paper on 'Past Stone Restoration Methods in the Maltese Islands'.

In collaboration with the Works Department, the Stone Conservation Laboratory provided technical assistance in various restoration projects on historical buildings, in particular the Mediterranean Conference Centre in Valletta.

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

The newly-constructed rooms on the Upper floor of the Museum of Fine Arts were tiled over. It is planned to open them to the public with the Joseph Briffa and George Borg bequests as part of the activities connected with the 25th Anniversary Celebrations of Malta's independence.

The old medieval fresco at the Abbatija tad-Dejr catacombs has been detached by Mr Alfred Briffa and removed to the Museum of Fine Arts where it has been put on public display in Room 2. This is a very important addition to the national collection since it represents one of the earliest indigenous works of art which has thus been saved from further deterioration. The same restorer has continued the cleaning of the 18th century murals in the vault of the Church of Our Lady of Victory, Valletta, and has also began repair work to the ancient mosaics at the Roman Villa, Rabat. He also restored a ceiling prospect (18th century) at the Ministry for the Development of the Tertiary Sector.

Similar large scale works of rehabilitation are being undertaken by George Farrugia on the mural paintings and decorations of Verdala Palace in the Boscetto Gardens. The same restorer has also finished the restoration of the Wignacourt portrait by Giulio Cassarino (1582-1637) in the Museum of Fine Arts, apart from repair-work and intervention on the large "Allegory of the Order" (18th century), formerly part of the Palace

decorations, the icon of the Damascene Madonna; and other paintings held by the Museum. The painstaking restoration of the ancient but war-shattered icon of the Eleimonitria — also belonging to the Greek Catholic Church — has continued apace. Among the duties undertaken by Maurice Cordina was the restoration of a Pinto portrait by an 18th century artist.

During 1988 the Museum was able to utilise the services of two 'copisti' who made modern replicas of the two works by Mattia Preti (1631-1699) — "St John the Almoner" and "God the Father". The two Preti originals belong to the Museum collection; the replicas are intended to be placed in the Church of San Ġwann t'Għuxa; Cospicua, where once the two originals were sited. A replica of a "Mystic Marriage of St Catherine" by Filippo Paladini (1544-1615) was painted for the Church of S. Caterina d'Italia. A copy of a landscape by Gerolamo Gianni (1837-1895) was also made for one of the Maltese Embassies abroad. It is hoped to utilise the services of these two "copisti" to lessen the drain of good originals from the Museum collection to peripheral sites.

It was possible, thanks to the good will of the Parliamentary Secretary for Posts and Telecommunications, to reclaim for the Museum an excellent view of Valletta from Senglea Point by the Swiss artist Louis Ducros (1742-1810). This was placed on exhibition in Room No. 18, also enhanced by the addition of "Interior with figures" by Adriano Cecioni (1836-1886) (a Gollcher Foundation presentation). Similarly the early 19th century view of Valletta variously attributed to J. Serris, G. Schranz and G. Pullicino and bequeathed by Messrs Farsons Ltd, was hung in Room 19. A "Mystic Marriage of St Catherine" by Filippo Paladini now enhances the exhibits in Room 3 — this work was obtained through the good will of the present Rector of S. Caterina d'Italia and fills an important lacuna in the national collection where formerly a painting by Filippo Paladini was lacking.

All told 50 art exhibitions and other events took place both in the Museum of Fine Arts as well as in the Salon and rooms on the upper floor of the National Museum of Archaeology. Of these, 38 occasions consisted of art exhibitions by both Maltese and foreign artists, while there were also four photographic shows. The Museum of Fine Arts assisted in sending four exhibitions abroad, three of which consisted of Maltese contemporary art — one for the Association Malte-France and the other two for UNESCO Headquarters in Paris including one for the Malta Day held in December 1988. A fourth exhibition of objects connected with the Order including documents, armour, silver plates and pharmacy jars, was despatched to the Museum of the Legion d'Honneur, Paris.

The Museum was also instrumental in arranging for the large Crucifix of Polidoro da Caravaggio to be sent from St John's Church, Valletta to the Naples exhibition of the artist's works and for its subsequent restoration by the Museo di Capodimonte, Naples.

A number of Maltese embassies abroad, as well as several Ministries were provided with Maltese and other works of art; in these instances preference is given to contemporary works, all of which are inventoried. A start has been made to photograph the drawings and prints held by the Museum of Fine Arts and whenever possible to provide them with passpartout backing.

The Museum also hopes to utilise in the near future a new permanent exhibition hall sited in the basement of the National Museum of Archaeology. This should be inaugurated during the month of January, 1989.

Exhibitions — 1988

JANUARY

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Tony Mangion (Photography) | Fine Arts |
| 2. Ilan Hasson | Fine Arts |

MARCH

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Kevin Casha | Fine Arts |
| 2. Alfred Camilleri | Fine Arts |
| 3. French Group | Mus. of Archaeol. |

APRIL

- | | |
|--|-------------------|
| 1. Nature Photographer of the Year | Mus. of Archaeol. |
| 2. Coins Exhibition (Central Bank) | Mus. of Archaeol. |
| 3. A.P. Camilleri, L. Buttigieg, R. Darmanin | Mus. of Archaeol. |
| 4. Steven Bonello | Fine Arts |
| 5. Antoine Paul Camilleri | Mus. of Archaeol. |

MAY

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Yugoslav Exhibition | Fine Arts |
| 2. Aldo Riso | Mus. of Archaeol. |
| 3. May Inspiration (Fashion Show) | Mus. of Archaeol. |
| 4. Aldo Micallef Grimaud | Mus. of Archaeol. |
| 5. Karl Borg | Fine Arts |
| 6. Czech Glass | Spinola |
| 7. Sonia Delaunay | Fine Arts |

JUNE

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Photographic Society (Malta) | Mus. of Archaeol. |
| 2. Giampiero Cacciato | Mus. of Archaeol. |
| 3. J. Alfino & T. Briffa | Fine Arts |

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 4. Gordon Faggetter | Mus. of Archaeol. |
| 5. Russian Christianity | Fine Arts |
| 6. Jan Alan Johannsen | Fine Arts |

JULY

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. MZPN Auction Sale | Mus. of Archaeol. |
| 2. Antonio Cataldi | Mus. of Archaeol. |
| 3. Marco Cremona & Gabriel Caruana | Fine Arts |
| 4. Victor Leinenbach | Fine Arts |
| 5. Korean Exhibition | Mus. of Archaeol. |

AUGUST

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Maltafest 1988 | Mus. of Archaeol. |
| 2. Margaret Ralston | Fine Arts |

SEPTEMBER

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Irish Artists | Mus. of Archaeol. |
| 2. Durra | Mus. of Archaeol. |
| 3. Rene & Remi Coucke | Fine Arts |
| 4. Pablo Setien | Fine Arts |

OCTOBER

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| 1. German Artists | Mus. of Archaeol. |
| 2. Russian Orthodoxy | Mus. of Archaeol. |
| 3. J. Borg Manduca | Mus. of Archaeol. |
| 4. Spanish Stamps | Mus. of Archaeol. |
| 5. European Heritage Exh. 'Ottocento Art' | Fine Arts |
| 6. Alfred J. Camilleri | Mus. of Archaeol. |

NOVEMBER

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Noel Galea | Fine Arts |
| 2. Eva Lange | Mus. of Archaeol. |
| 3. Zell Osborne | Fine Arts |
| 4. Edwin Galea | Mus. of Archaeol. |
| 5. John Busuttil Leaver | Mus. of Archaeol. |

DECEMBER

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Sara Giuffrida | Fine Arts |
| 2. Rita Grima | Fine Arts |
| 3. Roberto Masi | Fine Arts |
| 4. Archaeological Art and Archaeology | Mus. of Archaeol. |

CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM

Notwithstanding its impressive facade, Spinola Palace was beset by a series of problems that hampered its proper functioning as a museum and consequently had a very low rate of visitors. Currently efforts are being made to find a more suitable alternative to house and reorganise the Department's growing modern and contemporary art collection. On various occasions this

section has sent on loan works of art for exhibitions abroad and locally.

The setting up of a Museum of Medical History, in the former Santo Spirito Hospital at Rabat, is under active consideration. Progress has been slow as no Medical Historian has been found to provide the historical background for the exhibits.

Following instructions by the Hon. Minister of Education to produce educational information on our museums for use by teachers and schoolchildren, the following committee was set up:— Fr M.J. Zerafa, Chairman; Mr Michael Sant; Mr Emmanuel Fiorentino; Mr Vincent Zammit, Mr Dominic Cutajar and Mr Antonio Espinosa Rodriguez (Coordinator).

Since the inception of the project the committee has held four meetings. To set the project going the following writeups are now being prepared:— 'St John's Co-Cathedral' by Mr Dominic Cutajar; 'The Hypogeum' by Mr Emmanuel Fiorentino; 'The Tarxien Temples' by Mr Vincent Zammit; 'The Magisterial Palace at Valletta' by Mr Antonio Espinosa Rodriguez. Mr Michael Sant is writing the worksheets (in Maltese) on all the four monuments for the use of schoolchildren.

This project is primarily intended to assist primary school teachers organising or taking their pupils on cultural visits to the said monuments. Mr Pierre Bonello and Miss Josian Dimech are preparing the required artwork, in consultation with the respective authors, to illustrate the various pamphlets and worksheets.

It is intended to house the proposed Maritime Museum in the former Naval Bakery at Vittoriosa. The following committee was formed by the Hon. Minister of Education to advise and assist in the setting up of the project:— Judge Stephen Borg Cardona (Chairperson); Mr Joseph Muscat (Secretary); Mr J. Degray; Prof. Anthony Bonanno; Mr Alfred Ellul; and Mr Antonio Espinosa Rodriguez (representing the Museums Department).

GEOLOGY AND PALAEONTOLOGY SECTION

Għar Dalam Museum:

A large number of Pleistocene elephant molars found cracked and broken into several parts have been repaired.

Dr Zammit Maempel undertook the basic task of cataloguing the Hippopotamus material in the Collection. Over 4,500 items have since been classified, numbered and catalogued.

The marine and land shells recovered from the Pleistocene and Cultural deposits of Għar Dalam have been identified, classified and catalogued with the help of Mr Paul Sammut of Rabat, a teacher seconded to the Museum Dept.

As the old Museum display cases lack internal lighting, two additional 5 feet neon tubes were added to the four feet tubes already present in the Exhibition Hall.

Labels indicating nature and origin of organic remains displayed were placed in each display case. These showcases will be substituted by didactic displays in the projected new Museum.

The security of the Għar Dalam material has been considerably improved by the installment of padlocks (with anti-tampering metal flaps preventing access to screws) in addition to the existing lock. These were fitted to all cases having sensitive material.

Additional trays were added to cope with the large number of material classified.

In preparation for the new Museum, Dr Zammit Maempel has commissioned the BMNH to prepare a cast of a bear jaw found at Għar Dalam in 1892 and now in their collection. A mounted skeleton of a fox to replace the one stolen in 1980 and further material for the new exhibition have been ordered.

Construction and restoration work to adapt the Bakery for use as a maritime museum is being carried out under the direction of Architect Christopher Spiteri who had taken over from Architect Joseph Spiteri. The work is being carried out by the Environment Section, Ministry of Education and the students from the School of Building Girolamo Cassar. Although parts of the building are now complete much work has as yet to be done to complete the readaptation of this important historical building to a museum.

To assist the Department in the formation of this new museum Mr Joseph Muscat (Teacher II) has been detailed to the project and is presently engaged in the drawing up of blueprints for the construction of models of galleries of the Order of St. John for eventual exhibition at the above-mentioned Museum.

The Department is currently engaged in the search and acquisition of suitable exhibits for the maritime museum.

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

In the early stages of the year, all Museum staff was divided into two groups, one group of which had the task to continue to reorganize the Museum's study collections whilst the other group started work on the restoration and the re-decoration of the palace housing the Museum.

Up to the end of the year the land-shell collection was nearly completed and 5,000 lots of some 35,000 specimens were sorted, identified and catalogued. Storage trays and units were specially built by Museum staff and helpers. A disused part of the palace was cleaned, white-washed and had the electricity installed so it could house this study collection.

Butterflies and other insects were donated and acquired so as to enhance the pre-war collections that had lost colour through age. This old collection has also been sorted out and indexed.

Over 100 scarce and rare sea-shells were acquired during the year. With these the Museum can now boast of an excellent collection of the family C O N I D A E, the families of MURICADAE AND CYRAEIDAE were also sorted, the latter family has also been prepared for exhibition.

Work on the mirteral collection has continued at a steady pace and some 500 specimens have been identified and catalogued during the year.

In May the Museum acquired a very important collection of birds, most of which are recorded from Malta. Because of the size of the collection, the disused chapel at Vilhena had to be restored so it could house and store the collection. Because of this collection it was decided to increase the birds hall to an adjoining disused part of the building. To do this, some minor alterations had to be done first, this was followed by work on the fitted showcases which are being assembled by Museum staff. This section is expected to be completed by May 1990. It will double the present bird exhibition area and as such will also increase the number of specimens exhibited, from the present 400 to 1500.

A few but very rare fish were received on donation by various fishermen, these include some four new species for the Maltese Islands and one for the Mediterranean. These were treated by taxidermist and prepared for exhibition.

Work is also in hand to increase exhibits at the Gozo Museum of Natural Sciences. The birds hall will have a new diorama, depicting Maltese birds of the open

country and another showing the families of birds found in Gozo. A collection of insects is also being prepared for the Gozo Museum, this will be a completely new section. During 1988, two exhibitions were held at the Mdina Museum and one at the Gozo Museum.

The Friends of the National Museum of Natural History have donated a complete collection of the magazine *La Conchiglia*, a collection of Maltese Crustacea, birds and various office equipment. The funds collected during 1989 will be going towards a computer.

GHAR DALAM CAVE

Lighting and illumination within Cave has been considerably improved. The entire installation has been replaced and features of special interest have been highlighted and spotlighted.

The railing along cave path — removed in May 1986 to accomodate BBC Natural History Film Unit filming a slot in the series *The First Eden* — was completed in March 1988.

Patches of algal growth within Cave were studied by Dr G. Zammit Maempel and found to belong to two different species: *Anacystis montana* and *Schizotrix calcicola*.

GARDENS ATTACHED TO CAVE AND MUSEUM

As the gardens are an integral part of the Cave and Museum complex, great efforts were made to have the site cleaned up. This was done with the help and co-operation of Mr Coccopardo of D.O.E. A full time gardener was requested and a number of plants and trees have been planted. A number of small litter-bins on poles have been erected along path to Museum and from Museum to cave.

The projected new Museum Building is still in the draftboard stage. This building will eventually replace the present Museum.

M.J. ZERAFA
Director