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Museums

(Period covered:
1st January, 1981 to 31st December, 1981)

Throughout the year under review the Archaeological Section gave considerable attention to the re-organisation and improvement of storage facilities for the reserve collection of archaeological material. Suitable shelving units were acquired and the relevant material restored, where necessary, and transferred to a more adequate storeroom. Considerable attention was also given to the extension of the exhibited material in the Punic and Roman halls of the National Museum of Archaeology and to the improvement of its general layout.

2. A small but interesting collection of prehistoric flint implements from Denmark was donated to the National Museum of Archaeology by Mr Louis d'Auchamp of Copenhagen. The collection includes a number of axe-heads, knife-blades, scrapers, an arrow-head and two cores or nuclei showing the characteristic marks left by flakes removed by percussion. These artifacts, found on various settlement-sites south of Copenhagen in Zealand, belong to the Ertebolle Culture, the final Mesolithic culture of the western Baltic coastal region and date to c.5000–4200 B.C. The collection will shortly be exhibited in the section for foreign antiquities at the National Museum of Archaeology.

3. A sad event occurred in June when the important Palaeo-Christian catacomb at Tad-Dejr, Rabat, was unfortunately damaged in the course of works being carried out on the road skirting the western end of the monument. A mechanical excavator being operated in lessening the gradient of the road, broke through the roof of an arcosolium grave and partly destroyed the characteristic features of its aperture. Immediate steps were taken to have the monument carefully restored and this work was completed in July by the Antiquities Section of the Public Works Department in close consultation with the Curator of the National Museum of Archaeology.

4. As a precaution against vandalism, the open area in front of the Tad-Dejr Palaeo-Christian catacomb was enclosed by wire-netting. This is however only a temporary measure as work on the installation of suitable and permanent iron railings enclosing the whole site is expected to be commenced shortly.

5. In collaboration with an *équipe* from the Coluccio Salutati International University of Pescia, Italy, the National Museum of Archaeology carried out an excavation campaign in August on the site of the Roman Villa and *Thermae* at Ghajn Tuffieha. The excavation, aimed at obtaining a better evaluation of the site which was discovered in 1929, confirmed the existence

of further structures and yielded a considerable amount of archaeological material which is currently being studied. The National Museum of Archaeology also collaborated with the Italian *équipe* in a survey of the Bronze Age dolmens in Malta and Gozo.

6. An ancient rock-cut tomb, chronologically dating to the 2nd–1st century B.C., was discovered in September at Tar-Ram Road, limits of Żebbuġ, when a mechanical excavator being operated in the course of levelling the terrain for a new building, partly broke through its roof. The tomb consisted of a vertical rectangular shaft at the bottom of which was a rectangular opening giving access to a small burial chamber. The latter featured a funerary platform and a trench, slightly over 0.50m. in depth, cut parallel to the entrance which was sealed with a large rectangular stone slab. The burial chamber, roughly circular in plan, was found to contain three inhumations; two cinerary urns containing the remains of two cremated individuals; several clay two-wicked lamps of Punic type and various pottery vessels, some of which showing a clear hellenistic imprint.

7. Several members of the Italian Archaeological Mission from the University of Rome were in Malta during November to carry out further studies on the archaeological material from Tas-Silġ.

8. A number of very important houses, probably dating to the 15th Century and situated in Militie Bernardo Street inside the Gozo Citadel, were in July occupied by the Museums Department. These houses were acquired by Government through Presidential Declaration. Immediate steps were taken to survey the respective buildings with a view to their restoration and eventual adaptation for use.

9. On the initiative of the Hon Miss A. Barbara M.P., Minister of Labour, Culture and Welfare, two Italian experts — Signor and Signora Giantomasi — were sent to Malta in late June from the Rome Centre of the International Council of Museums. Their task was to restore the medieval fresco depicting the Crucifixion in the apse of the small rock-cut chapel abutting the main entrance to the Palaeo-Christian catacomb at Tad-Dejr, Rabat. Following the completion of this work in July, it was decided that due to the humid environment it was expedient to detach the fresco from its original location and to transfer it to the National Museum of Fine Arts so as to ensure its preservation. This operation will be carried out in the near future. While in Malta, the Italian experts also examined and restored a limited section of the Paladini frescoes at the Palace in Valletta. The complete restoration of these frescoes, as well as of the paintings decorating the ceiling of the church of Our Lady of Victory in Valletta, will be taken in hand shortly.

10. Preparations for the setting up of a Folklore Museum at the Inquisitor's Palace, Vittoriosa, were stepped up in early October and notwithstanding the small staff available, the task was completed by the end of the following month. A large and varied selection of exhibits illustrating Maltese folklore were arranged on the top and ground floors of the Palace, while the 'Piano Nobile' or living quarters of the Inquisitor on the first

floor, was embellished with fine pieces of furniture. The new museum was officially inaugurated by the Hon. Miss A. Barbara, M.P., Minister of Labour, Culture and Welfare, on the 5th December, 1981.

11. Work on transforming the cistern under the courtyard of the National Museum of Fine Arts into a Monetarium was completed in December. The collection of coins and medals of the Order of St John as well as a comprehensive selection of coins of other periods, previously exhibited in the Monetarium at the National Museum of Archaeology, were transferred to the Museum of Fine Arts and are now displayed in the new Monetarium.

12. In the course of the year a considerable number of the Nasoni decorative ceiling panels in the Palace, Valletta, were fixed in their original location. Steady progress is being made in the mounting and restoration of the remainder.

13. A new hall is currently being erected on the roof at the National Museum of Fine Arts. On completion of this work, the new extension will be utilized for the permanent exhibition of the Museum's collection of modern art.

14. Numerous temporary exhibitions by both Maltese and foreign artists were held at the National Museum of Fine Arts and a number of lectures on architecture and history of art were delivered in the Museum's lecture room. Many of the artists who held exhibitions donated one of their works to the Museum.

15. As in previous years members of the staff were engaged in the examination of antiques and works of art both at the National Museum of Fine Arts and elsewhere.

16. The cleaning of exhibits at the Palace Armoury was continued steadily throughout the year, but with a staff complement of only two Armourers it is difficult to cope adequately with the work which the Armoury entails.

17. The Hon. Miss A. Barbara, M.P., Minister of Labour, Culture and Welfare, officially opened the Museum of Political History on the 29th March 1981. The new museum is housed in the Auberge de France, Vittoriosa, which had been restored and adapted for the purpose.

18. During the first three months of the year, work at the National Museum of Natural History was mainly concentrated on the continuation of the extensive display on the theme 'The Sea'. By the beginning of April, the first of the seven halls in which the exhibits are being set up was already in an advanced stage of preparation.

19. In the spring and summer months, the officer in charge of the National Museum of Natural History continued to attend on Government trawlers to collect specimens for the museum. During these expeditions 170 specimens, mostly *Crustacea* were collected.

20. From October considerable attention was given to the Museum's extensive mineralogical collection with a view to its permanent exhibition, and a card index for the 7,400 specimens in the collection was completed. Structural alterations necessary for the extension of exhibition space were completed in December, and steady progress was made in the manufacture of display units. It is planned to inaugurate this Section in April, 1982.

21. Major structural repairs were carried out by the Antiquities Section of the Public Works Department on the top floor of the 18th century Vilhena Palace at Mdina, now housing the National Museum of Natural History.

22. At the War Museum in Lower St Elmo, Valletta, improvements continued to be made in the general layout of the exhibited material and new show-cases were acquired for the display of military uniforms and insigna. The George Cross was transferred from the Public Library to the Museum and is now displayed in the main exhibition hall.

23. Foremost among the donations made to the War Museum during the year, was a print of H.M.S. Kelly donated by Mr Griffith Fanthorpe. This is one of a limited edition signed by Admiral of the Fleet The Lord Mountbatten of Burma and by the artist Robert Taylor.

T. Gouder,
f/Director of Museums

11th May, 1982