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## INDEX

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

(Period covered: 1st January, 1988 to 31st December, 1988)

ARCHEOLOGICAL 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 'I-c-Cirku', and continued throughout September. The excavations confirmed a significant sequence of burial deposits ranging chronologically from the Zebug to the Tarxien phase of Maltese prehistory (4200 — 2500 B.C.). Early burial in the Zebug 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 Ggantija 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 innumation 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 Custodia, 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 begun 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 Eleonora — also belonging to the Greek Catholic Church — has continued apiece. 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 Gwann t’Ghuxa; 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. Sarris, 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 passepartout 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)
2. Ilan Hasson

**MARCH**
1. Kevin Casha
2. Alfred Camilleri
3. French Group

**APRIL**
1. Nature Photographer of the Year
2. Coins Exhibition (Central Bank)
3. A.P. Camilleri, L. Buttigieg, R. Darmanin
4. Steven Bonello
5. Antoine Paul Camilleri

**MAY**
1. Yugoslav Exhibition
2. Aldo Riso
3. May Inspiration (Fashion Show)
4. Aldo Micallef Grimaud
5. Karl Borg
6. Czech Glass
7. Sonya Delaunay

**JUNE**
1. Photographic Society (Malta)
2. Giampiero Cacciato
3. J. Alfino & T. Briffa

4. Gordon Faggetter
5. Russian Christianity
6. Jan Alan Johanssen

**JULY**
1. MZPN Auction Sale
2. Antonio Cataldi
3. Marco Cremona & Gabriel Caruana
4. Victor Leinenbach
5. Korean Exhibition

**AUGUST**
1. Maltafest 1988
2. Margaret Ralston

**SEPTEMBER**
1. Irish Artists
2. Durra
3. Rene & Remi Coucke
4. Pablo Setien

**OCTOBER**
1. German Artists
2. Russian Orthodoxy
3. J. Borg Manduca
4. Spanish Stamps
5. European Heritage, Exh. ‘Ottocento Art’
6. Alfred J. Camilleri

**NOVEMBER**
1. Noel Galea
2. Eva Lange
3. Zell Osborne
4. Edwin Galea
5. John Busuttil Leaver

**DECEMBER**
1. Sara Giuffrida
2. Rita Grima
3. Roberto Masi
4. Archaeological Art and Archaeology

**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 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

Ghar 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 Ghar 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 Ghar 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 Ghar 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 galleys 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 mineral 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 Vihena 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.

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 cooperation 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