

ARCHAEOLOGICAL NOTES

The "Report on the working of the Museum Department for the year 1957/58" contains interesting data regarding the latest developments in archaeological work in Malta.

In an introductory note on the National Museum housed in the Auberge de Provence Capt. C.G. Zammit, Director of the Museum, refers to the official inauguration by the Minister of Education on the 11th January, 1958. "In the present exhibition", says the Report, "the more important archaeological, artistic and historical collections are now on show to the public: the former are displayed on the ground floor and the latter on the top floor, or 'piano nobile', of the Auberge de Provence.

"The prehistoric collections have been arranged in conformity with Professor J.D. Evan's recently compiled chronological classification which covers a period of about 1,500 years, from 2,300 B.C. to 800 B.C. This collection includes a number of decorated stone blocks recently transferred to the National Museum from the Tarxien prehistoric temples for better preservation and protection. Typical examples of tomb furniture of the Punic and Roman periods have also been displayed in one of the halls of the ground floor."

The Director gives details of various excavations undertaken by the Museum during 1957/58. The following extracts give an idea of the work carried out:

ROCK TOMB AT MOSTA

"On the 4th October, 1957 whilst work was in progress for the construction of kennels in the grounds of Fort Mosta (Malta 2" map (1954) ref. 485755), a burial chamber of a rock-cut tomb was broken into.

The tomb consisted of an elliptical chamber hollowed out in the face of a low escarpment to the south-east of the Fort.

The burial chamber was very roughly cut and measured 8ft in length, 3ft 2in. in maximum width and 3ft 4in. in maximum height; its long axis ran in a north-east, south-west direction. The entrance to the chamber was situated in the middle of the south-west wall and was partly hewn out of the rock and partly built with rubble; it measured 3ft 3in. in height, 3ft in width and 1ft in depth and was found blocked by a rubble wall.

Fragmentary remains of a human skeleton belonging to an adult female, a bilychnis oil lamp and fragments of punic pottery were recovered from the layer of field soil, 1ft high, which covered the floor of the burial chamber.

ROCK TOMBS AT VICTORIA, GOZO

On the 10th October, 1957, two rock tombs were accidentally discovered in Mgr. Pietro Pace Street, Victoria, Gozo by workmen who were digging a trench in the rock for the laying of a cable.

These tombs were very roughly cut in the Globigerina limestone and consisted of a vertical shaft giving access through a rectangular entrance to a laterally situated burial chamber; the long axis of the tombs, passing through the shaft and chamber were orientated in an east-west direction. Both tombs

were violated a long time ago when most of the funerary pottery was taken away and the shafts and chambers filled with debris."

ROCK TOMBS AT FERRIS STREET, RABAT, MALTA

"On the 12th November, 1957, the burial chambers of two rock-cut tombs in Ferris Street, Rabat, were broken into whilst a trench was being dug in the rock for the lying of a cable.

Tomb No 1.

Situated opposite the gate leading to the playground of the Government Primary School.

The burial chamber was almost rectangular in plan with a flat ceiling and measured 6ft in length, 4ft in width and 3ft in height; its long axis was orientated in a north-east south-west direction. A trench, 4ft in length, 1ft in width and 9in. in depth was cut in the floor along the north-west side of the chamber. A lamp-hole was hollowed out in the middle of the south-east wall just below the ceiling.

Access to the burial chamber was originally gained through a rectangular entrance, 2ft wide, 2ft 3in. high and 1ft deep, situated in the north-east wall; its sill was 3in. above the floor of the chamber. The usual sealing slab was missing. The shaft outside the burial chamber was not explored as it extended under a field wall.

Both these tombs were violated a long time ago when the larger vessels such as amphorae and cinerary urns were removed and the shafts and chambers filled with soil. The terracotta, glass and brass objects recovered from the burial chambers of these tombs were found resting on the floor of the chambers in a layer of silt about one foot high."

ROCK TOMBS AT TARXIEN

"Three rock cut tombs were accidentally uncovered during levelling operations for the construction of a new Government Primary School on the by-pass road at Tarxien (Malta 2" map (1954) ref. 5576 89). These finds were reported to the Museum by the Public Works Department Engineer in charge of the construction of the school, who also placed a number of workmen at the disposal of the Museum Department whilst the tombs were being examined.

These tombs consisted of a vertical shaft giving access through rectangular entrances, to one or more laterally situated burial chambers. They were cut in a very friable layer of Globigerina limestone and some of the ceilings of the burial chambers had given way under the weight of the bull dozer which was used to strip the site of the overlying field soil."

ROCK TOMB AT MTARFA

"On the 7th March, 1958, a rock cut tomb was found by workmen who were digging a shaft in the public road at the back of the Maternity Hospital, Mtarfa.

The tomb consisted of a vertical shaft giving access to two laterally situated burial chambers cut in the south-west and south-east side respectively.

The shaft was rectangular in plan and measured 7ft 5in. in width and 11 ft in depth. Its long axis ran in a north-east south-west direction.

The rectangular entrance to the south-west chamber measured 1st 9in. in width, 3ft in height and 8in. in depth; its sill was level with the floor of the shaft. The chamber, 5ft 4in. in length, 3ft 7in. in width and 4ft in height, had its floor on a level with the sill of the entrance and its ceiling curved gently towards the sides. A platform, 1ft 6in. high and 2ft 4in. in average width, ran along the south-west side of the chamber and a lamp hole, 8in. wide, 6in. deep and 8in. high, was cut in the west wall close to the jamb of the entrance of the chamber."

ROMAN REMAINS AND SARACENIC GRAVES AT RABAT, MALTA

"During the period under review, the field known as "Tal-Frañiż" (See Museum Annual Report for 1956/57), was stripped for all the field soil by the Public Works Department. Although it was evident that Roman constructions built with well squared blocks of stone, originally existed on this site, the remains uncovered were scanty and mostly disconnected. It appears that the destruction of the old buildings took place a long time ago and that the blocks of stone were removed from the site for building purposes.

At the east side of the field the remains of a number of intercommunicated troughs and the bed of a press similar to the one found at the Roman House near Borġ-in-Nadur, Birżebbuġa, and described by Dr. T. Ashby in his "Roman Malta", were uncovered.

A plan of the site showing the various remains of walls, the water cisterns and the troughs has been made and photographs of the remains have been taken for record purposes.

At the south-west corner of this same site seven Saracenic tombs were uncovered and examined. The tombs were built with rubble and were covered by slabs of stone. They rested on a layer of field soil just above the Roman remains and four feet below the surface of the field. All the graves were orientated in an east-west direction, the skull being to the west and the face looking towards the south; they contained the human skeletal remains of male adults in a fairly good state of preservation. No archaeological remains were found inside the tombs and no head stones were present on or near the graves.

It will be recalled that a number of similar Saracenic graves were unearthed thirty-three years ago in Museum Esplanade, Rabat and at the back of the Museum of Roman Antiquities. (See Museum Annual Report 1924/25 and 1925/26)."

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Excavations were also carried out during 1959 at Borg In-Nadur, Luqa and Bahrija. The results are set out briefly in the following Press Releases issued by the Department of Information during the year.

BORĠ-IN-NADUR

"During June 1959, Dr. D. Trump, Curator of Archaeology of the Museum, has been excavating a Bronze Age Village, with the help of volunteers, at Borġ-in-Nadur. The site is on the point of the ridge above and to the west of the head of St. George's Bay, Birżebbuġa, near the Neolithic Temple of the same name. It was originally trenched by the late Dr. Caruana in 1881, but no scientific excavation of the site had since been attempted.

One hut and the greater part of a second were found and completely cleared. They have dry stone walls still standing to a height of some two and a half feet, and beaten torba floors. In one was found, in position, a large stone mortar for pounding grain, a quern for grinding the flour, a roller the use of which is unknown and two fireplaces. The other hut also had a quern, a roller, many pottery jars and cups lying where they were broken when the hut was destroyed, and a large carved stone slab brought up from the Neolithic temple possibly for use as a bench. The village was defended from attack by a great stone wall which spans the ridge to the West.

The pottery found was fragmentary, though some half-dozen vessels will be capable of reconstruction. Elsewhere in the same field, other trenches struck the rubbish tip of the village, which produced great quantities and broken pottery of much archaeological interest. Many sheep or goat bones were found, with smaller numbers of cow and pig bones. Two of these had been shaped as awls. One of the querns is of lava imported from Sicily, showing that contact was maintained with the outside world at that time.

The excavations have shown that there was a small settlement of the Tarxien Cemetery people joined by a group of early Borg-in-Nadur folk about 1350 B.C. Later the village grew in size and the defensive wall was built around it. At a date, estimated at about 900 B.C., but which can be little more than guesswork until the pottery has been examined, the pottery had developed into that of the last prehistoric culture of the Islands, named from the site of Bahrija, and at this date the site was abandoned. Part of it was cultivated as a field in Roman times, but otherwise it remained undisturbed until 1881 and today.

A small exhibition of the finds, with drawings and photographs will be displayed in the National Museum, Valletta, as soon as it can be prepared, and the trenches are being left open for a few weeks to allow the public to see the remains." (Department of Information, Press Release dated July 14, 1959).

LUQA

"While what were thought to be two old cisterns in a field at 'Tal-Mejtin' near Luqa were being cleared, a quantity of bones was found among the spoil. Mr. Charles Scicluna of Luqa reported the find to the Museum Authorities but the bones turned out to be mostly those of pigs and of no great archaeological importance. However, amongst the earth brought up from the lower part of the shafts, some broken pottery belonging to the Bronze Age was identified. The shafts were then completely cleared and three jars, almost whole, were found together with fragments of perhaps ten more.

The excavation revealed the presence of a group of tombs dating back to about 1400 B.C. They are pear-shaped, cut 15 feet deep into the rock and are 10 feet wide. Entry is through a small 3-foot hole in the centre of the roof. One of the tombs which have just been cleared appears to have been emptied for use in Roman times, and some other sherds and the animal bones belong to that period. The second tomb had not been disturbed and contained the extremely interesting pottery remains. These remains are now being cleaned, restored and studied at the Museum for what they can reveal of Malta's distant past. They

will then be put on display." (Department of Information, Press Release dated 16th October, 1959.)

BAHRIJA

During October, 1959 the Museum Department carried out further excavations under its Curator of Archaeology, Dr. Trump, with volunteer assistance, to follow up the results achieved last spring at Borg-in-Nadur, Birzebbuga. The site chosen was again a late prehistoric village defended by cliffs, on the exposed promontory of Qlejgha, Bahrija, above the West coast.

No walls were found in the area uncovered, the huts which once stood there being represented only by damaged patches of torba floor, clay-lined or terracotta fireplaces, and a great quantity of broken pottery and other domestic rubbish. This included a quantity of bronze of which none has previously been found in Maltese prehistoric levels except for the cemetery in the Farxien Temples. Finds included a decorated finger ring, a complete sewing needle four inches long, part of two other needles or pins and a number of small shapeless scraps of metal. One piece of iron was also recovered.

Two levels of occupations were recognised. The earlier contained pottery identical with that found in Hut 1 at Borg-in-Nadur, belonging to the period 1200-1000 B.C. The upper level contained two main groups in association, one similar to that from the second hut at the other site, and the other closely related to material from Southern Italy. Four sherds of painted pottery were discovered here, believed to have been either imported or copied from Sicily and Taranto and belonging to the period 900-800 B.C.

The main result of the excavations is to confirm the guess made based on the evidence found last spring, that the Bahrija material, whose existence was known as the result of a three-day trial excavation on this site in 1909, does not represent a period much later than Borg-in-Nadur. The assumption is that a group of colonists came to Malta about 900 B.C. and settled in this remote village, being absorbed with the inhabitants into a single community. The newcomers were not strong enough to disturb the native population elsewhere in the Island. Further development of both peoples was cut short by the Phoenician conquest a century later.

A representative display of finds, with drawings and explanatory notes of the excavation, will be shown at the National Museum, Valletta, as soon as it can be prepared." (Department of Information, Press Release dated December 3, 1959.)

J.C.P.