

MAN

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ORIGINAL ARTICLES.

With Plate A.

Archæology.

Excavations in Malta in 1914.

Ashby—Zammit—Despott.
By T. Ashby, T. Zammit, and G. Despott. ¶

Despott.

I.—EXCAVATION.

During a week's stay in Malta in October 1914, I was able to conduct the excavation of a portion of a megalithic building, on a site called Id-debbieba ("the Place of the Echo" in Maltese), pointed out to me by Professor T. Zammit, Curator of the Valletta Museum, who frequently visited the site, and has contributed the report on the objects found which forms the second part of this paper. The funds for the work were provided by the Government of Malta, and the site itself is Government property.

The building is situated on high ground in the middle of the S.E. portion of the island, with a fine view, except to the south, on the E. edge of the Hal-Farrug road, which runs from the Poor House to Mkabba, and about three-quarters of a mile from the centre of that village. It is situated at a distance of a few hundred yards N.W. of the quarries of Bur-meghez,* and the same to the E. of It-Torri Tal Wilgia.† Only a portion of it is included within the area belonging to the Government, and how much of it lies (or lay) under the neighbouring fields, and how much has been destroyed by the construction of the road, it is not easy to determine, for the portion of it which has been laid bare does not conform sufficiently closely to the plans of these megalithic buildings, as far as we know them at present,

* See N. Tagliaferro, in MAN, XI (1911), No. 92, for a description of a prehistoric burial cave found here.

† See *Papers of the British School at Rome*, VI (1913), p. 123, for a description of this tower, which belongs, however, to the Phœnician period, to judge from the pottery discovered on the site.



FIG. I



FIG. II.

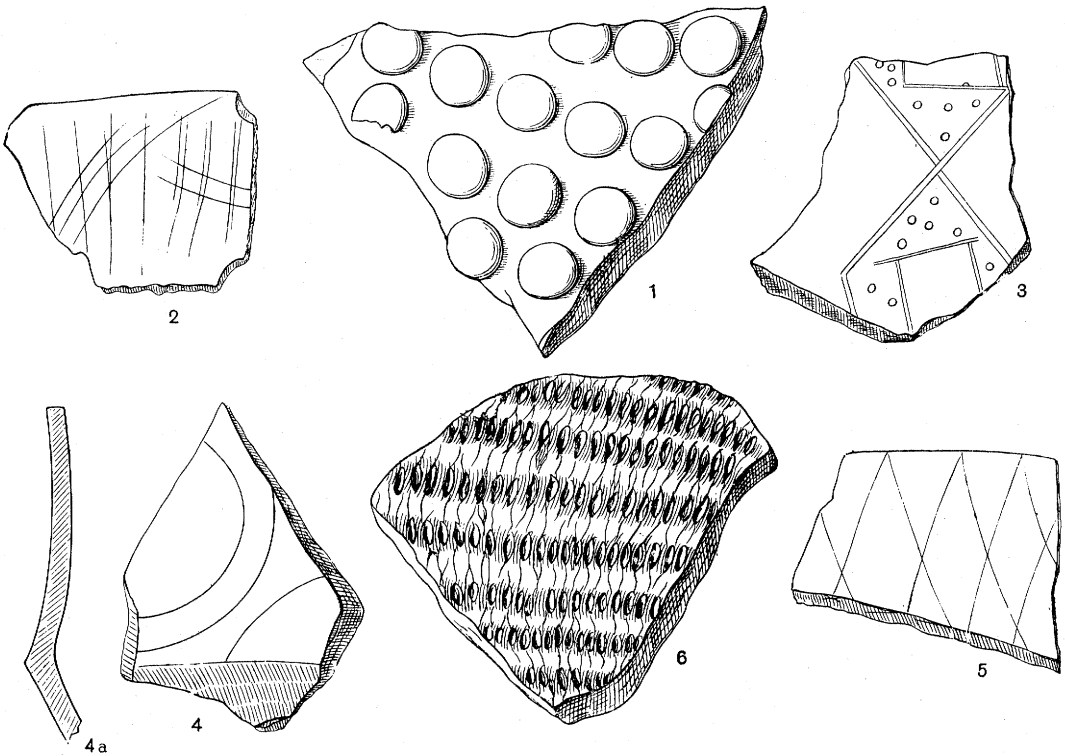


FIG. III.

to enable us to determine with any degree of probability what relation it bore to the whole. See the Plan, Fig. 1 (text).

On the N. two lines of stones running side by side (1) appear to belong to a double wall, the interval between them having been filled with stones and earth. The continuation of this wall seems to curve away to the S.E. and to disappear under the field wall. The other lines of wall (2) marked on the plan are somewhat doubtful, and are composed of smaller stones, though at *2a* there are some large ones; and here were found two small columns of the type so common in Maltese megalithic buildings (Nos. 1 and 2 of the list below). But the first really determinate portion is the wall (3), composed of not very large stones.

To the E. of this were found two more short columns (Nos. 3 and 4 of the list).

No connecting wall to the E. has been found, so that we do not know what was the nature of the space it enclosed. Immediately to the E. of it the rock is overlaid by a number of small stones (perhaps thrown in from the surrounding fields), but it soon rises in level.

To the W. of it are some scanty traces of walling (4), as though there had been one or two small rectangular chambers, belonging no doubt to a later date.

To the S. of these are two standing slabs (5, 5'), 2 feet 1 inch apart, which are no doubt *in situ*; the slabs 5'', the westernmost of which projects into the road, may be connected with them.

The interval between them is filled with walling of small stones, which is no doubt of later date. Close to 5' was a broken block of stone, with part of a funnel-shaped hole in it 7 inches deep and $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. It was lying loose, but close to it is what may be a piece of later walling (6) with five stones lying one upon the other.

To the E. are some extremely indeterminate remains, including two large fallen blocks (7, 7'), which are no doubt remains of the megalithic building. 7 has three shallow steps cut in it, the purpose of which is uncertain, while 7' has a large hole in it.

Here begins a straight line of wall (8, 8') which is no doubt of the later period. The stones at 9, 9' may have belonged to the original building.

We now reach what is really the only determinate part of the original building—the central portion where we find the room or passage 10, which is largely built of vertical slabs (Pl. A, Fig. II). There was no trace of a torba or other floor, and the existence of a funnel-shaped hole in the rock at *a** would indicate that there was none. The room, like the rest, was found to be full of small loose stones at the bottom, but they did not form a pavement.

To the E. of this hole is a niche or doorway *b*, 2 feet 6 inches in width. The large blocks on each side of it have each of them one of the usual tie holes. They are 3 feet 6 inches in height, but do not rest directly on the rock, as indeed none of the blocks in this room do, but upon about 10 inches of earth. At the back of them (*i.e.*, on the E. side) there seem to be footing blocks. In the angle *c* next beyond this doorway, a small column was found lying, and another was found further to the S. (Nos. 5, 6 of the list). Further south, on the same side, is another opening *d*, filled with walling of smaller stones, and beyond it is another large slab *e*. Beyond it we may place, somewhat doubtfully, the entrance to the room.

The W. wall was almost entirely composed of smaller stones, with the exception of the large slab *f* and the fallen slab *f'*.

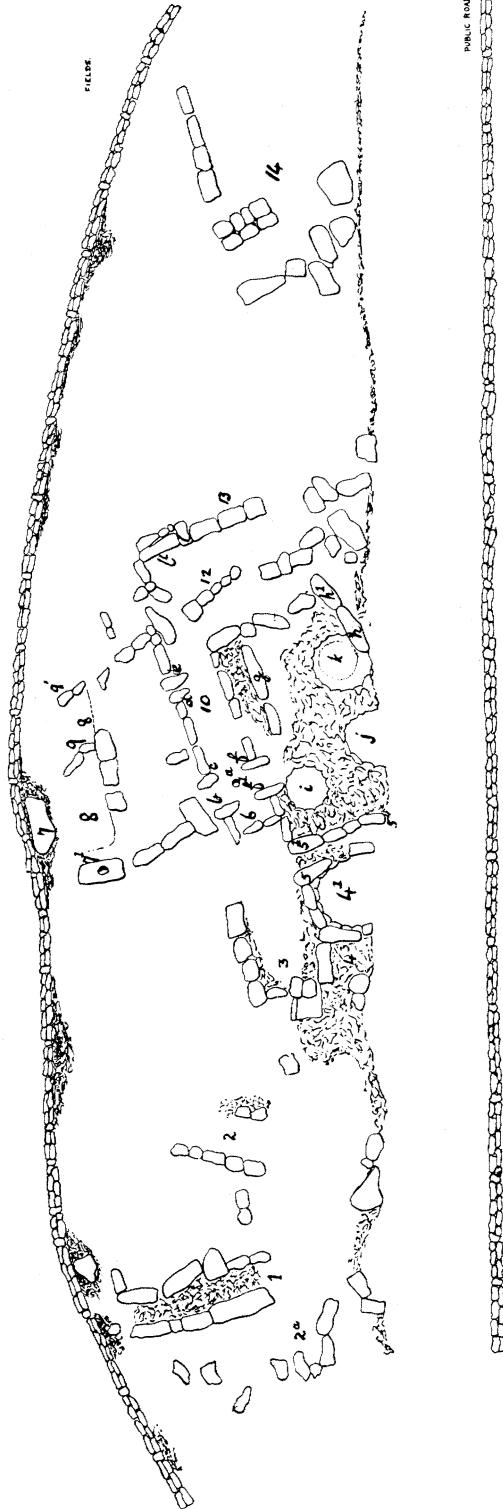
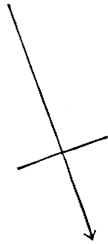
It was a solid wall of considerable thickness, which increased as it ran N.W.; on the S.E. and S.W. sides it is supported by large slabs, of which *g*, measuring 6 feet 2 inches long by 3 feet 8 inches high, is the largest in the whole building.

* This hole measures 9 inches in depth and 1 foot in diameter at the top.

"Debdicba" Neolithic Station

North of Mġabba—Malta.

1914



PLAN,—FIG. 1

The space 11,* which these slabs and others (now only represented by the slabs *h*, *h'*) once enclosed, has later been occupied by three curious circular constructions, *i*, *j*, *k* (Pl. A. Fig. I). They have domed roofs of small stones which were closed at the top (at any rate in the case of *k*) by a circular slab (No. iv of the list below); *k* is 4 feet in height internally, and 5 feet 7 inches in diameter. It is cut down into the rock for a depth of only about 6 inches.

Fine earth was found in all of them, but no trace of burning.

The object which they served and the date at which they were constructed are quite uncertain.

On the S. side of 10 and 11 there is a curved wall of small stones (12) which may be the original wall.

The straight wall 13, on the other hand, which incorporates two of the megalithic blocks *l*, *l'*, is certainly of later date; but the walls 14 at some distance off seem to belong to the original building.

THOMAS ASHBY.

II.—OBJECTS FOUND IN THE COURSE OF THE EXCAVATION AT ID-DEBDIEBA.

(1) *Objects of Stone.*

(i) Six pillars, some of hard coralline limestone and some of soft sandstone, cylindrical in shape, but some tapering at one end. They are of the type usual in Maltese megalithic ruins. Their measurements are as follows:—

Height.	Diameter of base.	Top diameter.
1.—1 ft. 8 in.—55·5 cm.	1 ft.—30·5 cm.	8 in.—20 cm.
2.—1 ft. 5 in.—43·0 cm.	9 in.—22·5 cm.	7 in.—17·5 cm.
3.—2 ft.—61 cm.	1 ft.—30·5 cm.	9 in.—22·5 cm.
4.—1 ft. 10 in.—55·5 cm.	1 ft. 3 in.—38·0 cm.	1 ft.—30·5 cm.
5.—2 ft. 4 in.—71·0 cm.	1 ft.—30·5 cm.	1 ft.—30·5 cm.
6.—1 ft. 9 in.—53·0 cm.	9 in.—22·5 cm.	9 in.—22·5 cm.

No. 1 is now preserved in the Valletta Museum. The others were placed together and buried again in the ruins.

(ii) A rectangular block of stone $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches (114 mm.) long and $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches (87 mm.) high with a groove running along its length $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches (37 mm.) deep and $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches (62 mm.) wide.

(iii) A hard stone block 2 feet (61 cm.) \times 1 foot 9 inches (53 cm.) \times 10 inches (25 cm.) with a cavity 9 inches (22·5 cm.) in diameter and 8 inches (20 cm.) deep. The cavity is quite smooth and must have been used as a mortar.

(iv) Two stone slabs, very probably the covers of two of the pits (*i*, *j*, *k*) constructed in the ruin. One of them was roughly circular, 3 feet 11 inches (119 cm.) wide and 4 inches (10 cm.) thick. It was perforated in the middle with a round hole 1 foot 4 inches (40 cm.) in diameter.

The other slab was square and of the same thickness. The fragment of the slab measured 2 feet 1 inch (63·5 cm.) by 1 foot 4 inches (40 cm.). It had a hole in the middle 1 foot 2 inches (35 cm.) in diameter with a groove round the edge.

(v) Fragment of a hard stone rubber. This stone was perfectly smooth on one side and roughly oval in shape. About 1 foot (30·5 cm.) long and 6 inches (15 cm.) in thickness.

(vi) A stone slab 3 feet 4 inches (101·5 cm.) in length and about 3 feet (91 cm.) wide was found loose in the ruins. On it a pillar was cut, showing that the slab probably formed part of the walls of a niche.

(vii) Flint instruments. These were scarce, for though flakes and small fragments were numerous, only two large objects of flint were obtained. One of these is of a dark grey flint of very fine texture $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches (57 mm.) long and about 1 inch (25 mm.) wide, tapering at one end and broken flat on the other. The edge on one side of

* Here was found the block of stone described in Professor Zammit's list (No. III).

the stone is slightly convex and tooled to render it more keen; on the other side the edge is blunt and shows a conchoid fracture.

The second instrument is of a creamy white chert, pyramidal in shape, about 2 inches (50 mm.) long, with a base of $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches (35 mm.). The sharp edge is produced by fracture without any retouching.

(2) *Objects of Earthenware*—

Fragments of dark red bricks with a very rough texture were found. Some of the pieces were evidently fragments of floors or walls of ovens.

Pottery.—Potsherds were very abundant, but hopelessly mixed up with stones and soil, and in very small fragments. Most of this material came from vases of neolithic times (contemporary, that is, with the original building) made of a grey-black clay; but sherds of later epochs, Greek and Roman, have also been obtained, showing that the site was made use of for centuries.

Large Vases.—Fragments of thick, hand-made, unornamented black clay vessels were more numerous than the finer variety. These thick vases always become thicker at the rim, which has usually double the thickness of the vase. Actual measurements gave the following result: For vases 18, 15, 12, 8 mm. thick, the free edge was found to be 38, 32, 17, 15 mm. respectively.

Most of these large vessels had the characteristic triangular handle so common in the pottery of the Maltese monuments; in the smaller vases the handle is often superseded by a knob, which must have proved more ornamental than practical.

Medium Sized and Small Vases.—These resemble very remarkably the Halsaffieni ware. Their texture is fine, the modelling is excellent, and the finishing is accurate and elaborate.

It is interesting to compare these sherds with those obtained from other Maltese monuments, especially with those obtained from Halsaffieni, as described by Professor Tagliaferro, in the *Liverpool Annals of Archæology and Anthropology*, Vol. III (1910), p. 1 *sqq.*; *cf.* also Peet in *Papers cit.*, p. 29 *sqq.*

Section B, Class 3. Pit-mark Ornaments.—Good pieces were obtained of a fine ware on which the pittings are not in the shape of dots, but small, comma-like incisions (Pl. A, III, Fig. 6).

Section C. Buff Ware, Relief Decorations of Leaves, Fish-scale and Scallop Pattern.—Only a few sherds were found, too small to reconstruct the pattern, but large enough to recognise the type.

Section D. Black or Red Ware decorated with Prominent Studs.—A triangular fragment, about 25 mm. in length, of a light buff colour, was found studded with circular discs, such as those shown in Plate VI, Fig. 3. The studs were larger and more closely arranged. The fragment resembles a pattern found at Mnaidra (Fig. 1).

Section E. Yellow and Grey Ware, highly polished, but without Ornament.—Numerous samples of this kind of ware were obtained, varying in colour from a pale buff to a dark grey or even dull black. The shape of these vessels could not be clearly obtained owing to the small size of the sherds.

Section F. Red Ware with Incised Rope Ornament.—A good piece of this type was found resembling very much vessels from Halsaffieni.

Section G. Polished Ware decorated with Incised Lines.—

- (a) Simple geometrical designs—fragments abundant.
- (b) Lines starting parallel and then diverging—several sherds of this description obtained.
- (c) Composite designs of lozenges, triangles, zigzags, and lattices—abundant sherds of this class recovered (Figs. 2, 5).
- (d) Curved lines, scrolls, and meanders—sherds so ornamented were abundant (Figs. 4 and 4a).

Nos. 1-2.]

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[Jan., 1916.]

Of Class 19 of this section, a good piece was obtained which shows a slight variation from the Halsafieni type. On this sherd two deep lines cross each other, forming two triangles joined at the apex. In each triangle two small squares are inscribed, and the space all round is filled with pit-marks. The sherd is of a reddish paste, and the incision is filled with a thick white paste (Fig. 3).

THEMISTOCLES ZAMMIT.