

5. Dr. A. V. Laferla's proposal.

1. The following gentlemen are admitted active members of the Society:

Lt. Col. H. W. Engerer, K.O.M.R.
Dr. Salvatore Borg.
Mr. Edgar T. Agius.

2. The reading of the papers by Prof. Tagliaferro and Mr. Scicluna respectively, is then proceeded with. A discussion after the reading of each of the papers ensues.

3. Dr. Laferla, seconded by Prof. Tagliaferro, proposes that the Society should take steps to cause the erection of memorial tablets on buildings occupied by eminent men during their sojourn in Malta and suggests that all details should be left in the hands of the Committee. Approved *nem. con.*

4. Dr. Enrico Frendo, seconded by Mr. Levanzin, asks for permission to propose a vote of thanks to Dr. Bartolo for the lecture on "Ancient Malta" recently delivered by him at the Lyceum.

Permission having been granted the vote is approved *nem. con.*

The meeting is adjourned *sine die.*

5. Proposta del Dr. Laferla.

1. I seguenti signori vengono ammessi soci attivi:

Col. H. W. Engerer, K.O.M.R.
Dr. Salvatore Borg.
Sig. Edg. T. Agius.

2. Si procede alla lettura delle rispettive comunicazioni del Prof. Tagliaferro e del Signor Scicluna. A ciascuna di dette comunicazioni segue una discussione.

2. Il Dr. Laferla, secondato dal Prof. Tagliaferro, propone che la Società prenda la iniziativa per far collocare delle lapide commemorative sopra edifici già occupati da uomini eminenti durante il loro soggiorno a Malta e propone che i dettagli ne siano affidati al Comitato. Passa unanimamente.

4. Il Dr. Enrico Frendo, secondato dal Sig. Levanzin, chiede il permesso di proporre un voto di lode al Dr. Bartolo per le due conferenze su "Malta Antica" da lui recentemente tenute al liceo. Accordato il permesso, il voto passa unanimamente.

L'adunanza è aggiornata *sine die.*

Prehistoric Burials in a Cave at Bur-Meghez, near Mkabba, Malta.

IN a communication read before the Malta Historical and Scientific Society at the meeting held in February last on a Neolithic tomb discovered at Bukana, near Attard, our worthy Vice President, Prof. Them. Zammit, stated that the importance of that discovery was due to the fact that hitherto nothing certain was known as to the mode in which the builders of our megalithic monuments buried their dead.

All the rock-tombs discovered almost everywhere in the Maltese Islands, except the one at Bukana, belong to historic times.

Prehistoric human remains have only been met with in three places, viz: Ghar Dalam, Hagiar Kim and Hal Saffieni.

In the course of a too limited excavation made at Ghar Dalam in 1892, Mr. J. H. Cooke discovered, in the surface deposit, a human metacarpal bone and some prehistoric potsherds. No inference, however, could be drawn from these scanty data as to whether the individual to whose hand the bone had belonged was buried in the cavern or not.

At Hagiar Kim a skull of a negroid was discovered in 1839; but nothing is known as to the mode of its burial.

Prof. Zammit in his First Report on the Hal Saffieni Prehistoric Hypogeum, after giving a full description of the confused state in which human bones were found, states that the bones were strewn about out of their natural position; and that the heaping of skeletons was quite evident and that the enormous amount of bones accumulated in the hypogeum was quite out of proportion with the size of any dwelling centre in the neighbourhood. The thousands upon thousands of bodies massed in these grottoes might well represent the population of all the neolithic villages in Malta.

The mode of burial remained, however, doubtful, as there were no sufficient data to decide whether the hypogeum was a real burying place, an ossuary, or both.

The neolithic tomb lately discovered by Prof. Zammit at Bukana furnished at last a solution to the problem which had till then puzzled archaeological students.

But that is not the only solution.

It has been my good fortune to discover another mode of burial in prehistoric times, to which I have the honour to call the attention of this Society, viz: burials in the soil of natural caves.

It is probable that this mode of burial was of an anterior date and in more general use, as it obviated the necessity of digging tombs in an age when no metallic tools could be used for cutting stones.

My coming across this mode of burial was quite accidental.

Whilst engaged at the beginning of last month in exploring the ossiferous fissure which crosses the stone-quarry known as "Tan-Naxxari" at Bur-meghez, three quarters of a mile to the N.E. of Mkabba, where a large quantity of half fossilized bones of more than one variety of stag (*cervus elaphus*) were being extracted, I was shown several human teeth, molars and incisors, purporting to have been found in the same quarry at the furthest end of the fissure near the surface of the rock. I received the report with utter incredulity and was hard upon the poor man who made it, whom I took for a rogue trying to impose upon me; but on his insisting on the veracity of his report, I repaired to the spot where to my surprise and delight I found that a rent in the rock, having the form of a funnel had been cut across at the remotest part of the quarry, and that its section had been left exposed to sun and rain for nearly three years.

The rent, which at that part was two metres deep from the surface, was full of loose red earth overlying a thick conglomerate of broken bones and small water-worn pebbles. Among the bones were easily distinguishable fragments of human skulls and teeth, a ramus of human mandible, broken bones and teeth of stags and several bones of birds. The conglomerate had evidently never been disturbed from the time of its deposition. Under what circumstances that deposition was formed it is difficult to say now; but it is possible that the organic remains were carried by strong currents of water

and deposited at the bottom of the rent where the velocity of the water became less.

The immediate contact of human remains with those of the stag in an undisturbed conglomerate, apparently of a great antiquity, suggested very naturally the idea that I had before me palaeolithic man: possibly the oldest inhabitant of Malta.

I was much excited at the time, but that excitement did not last long, for on the following day Mr. Carmelo Rizzo, the chief engineer of the Public Health Department, to whom I showed the conglomerate, called my attention to a small object of a different colour from the rest, slightly protruding from the upper part of the conglomerate. When extracted, that object turned out to be the handle of what might have been a small bowl. The inference was inevitable. The presence of a fragment of pottery, however small, excluded at once the possibility of the conglomerate belonging to the palaeolithic age. Pottery in fact is characteristic of the neolithic age. The notion of pottery belonging to palaeolithic times, although upheld by Belgian archaeologists, is repudiated by the archaeologists of all other countries.

But if the presence of the small fragment of pottery dealt a deadly blow to the idea that the skull belonged to the palaeolithic age, it was not less true that the stag, which lived in Malta in the quaternary period, still lived during the neolithic age.

This fact is confirmed by the coexistence of human and stag bones and teeth in a cave existing near the surface of the soil in an adjoining quarry where they were found associated with neolithic pottery mostly belonging to one or other of the various classes into which the pottery found at Hal Saffieni has been distributed.

The description of the cave and of the objects found therein lies beyond the scope of this paper and will form the subject of future communications to this society when the exploration of the cave will be completed. Let it suffice to state here that a large number of fragments of pottery belonging to the age of the megalithic monuments in Malta were found associated with the remains of man, of the stag and of other animals. This fact is of paramount importance as it fixes the epoch of the human burials which form the subject of the present paper.

Before beginning the exploration of the natural cave which I shall call the "Bur-meghez Cave", although my

workmen call it very appropriately "Il Ghar tal catâvri" (the cave of skeletons), I was shown some bones belonging to the stag which were found near the mouth of the cave, and I expected to find that the cave had been the abode of the stag, the remains of which were so abundant in the rock fissure crossing the adjoining stone-quarry. However, the teeth belonging to several other animals, which will be determined later on, prove that the cave was not the exclusive abode of that ruminant.

The red earth which filled the cave to an average height of 30cm. from the roof was mixed with a very large number of more or less small round or subangular pebbles of the same quality of soft stone as the rock of the cave, viz: globigerina or freestone immediately underlying a 4 foot layer of yellow or upper "soll". With the pebbles were lying about in groups a considerable number of irregular unhewn stones measuring from 30 to 60cm., and in some cases even to 80cm. in length; some of them flat and angular, others with rounded edges. The flat stones were lying either horizontally or slightly inclined. The presence of these large flat stones in the cave at first suggested the idea that they might have been the fallen portions of a part of the roof, of which collapse there were unmistakable signs.

Moreover, the horizontal position of the flat stones excluded the possibility of their having fallen accidentally; and the probability of their having been given that position intentionally went on increasing gradually till it forced itself upon my mind as a certainty. That happened when one, two and more human skulls were discovered under the flat stones. It was then that the puzzling presence of the big stones lying horizontally was explained. The cavern had been used as a burying place, and the stones and pebbles had been used to prop up or cover the corpses. The number of skulls hitherto discovered is twenty five. They were all found in the first five compartments of the cave. The whole number of these compartments and the total length of the cave are at present unknown.

The corpses were laid down horizontally on their left side, in most cases in a crouching position looking east. The skull and the sides were propped up with more or less large pebbles. The flat stones very likely served to cover the corpse at a certain height and to prevent it from the pressure of the overlying material. But if this had been the real object of the flat stones

it was frustrated in nearly all cases. The water which entered the cave periodically from the several holes communicating its interior with the surface of the rock caused a setting of the material contained therein, with the natural consequence that nearly all the skulls were crushed by the pressure of the overlying material. In some cases the skulls were lying on the large flat stones themselves.

There are unmistakable signs that some at least of the corpses did not remain undisturbed for a long time, as besides the skulls which, although more or less crushed, were complete, there were several portions of others lying about at a certain distance from one another: a fact evidently due to those skulls having been removed from their original position to make room for fresh burials. The same may be said of the long bones which though, as a rule, found lying horizontally in the direction of the axis of the cave (E.N.E.) or in a perpendicular direction, were in some cases lying without any order, or even heaped up *pèle-mèle*. With the progress of the work, as the number of these big stones went on constantly increasing, the idea of their being all due to the collapse of a part of the roof had to be abandoned, particularly when their total volume exceeded the possible volume of the fallen portion.

So far, upwards of 15 metres have been excavated; but I have reasons to believe that the cave extends as much again.

All the burials hitherto discovered were made at depths varying between 30cm. to 2 metres below the surface of the red earth.

Owing to the fact that the skulls lay on one side surrounded by pebbles it was extremely difficult to extract them therefrom and to take the necessary measurements for determining the cephalic index. It may, however, *prima facie*, be retained that the skulls were dolicocephalous belonging to the Mediterranean race as defined by Sergi.

I entertain a hope that further excavations will furnish sufficient data for an accurate determination of the cephalic and other indices.

Had the existence of human burials been foreseen, the excavation would have been conducted with less hesitation and uncertainty at the beginning.

But in scientific research truth does not shine upon us all of a sudden; but dawns gradually and slowly. After two weeks of continuous work, having acquired a clear idea of the mode of burial, I could foretell the existence of a skull in any part of the cave from the size and arrangements of the pebbles and other stones.

On the contrary no order whatever could be observed in the distribution of the fragments of pottery which were strewn about all over the cave at all levels from 10cm. below the surface of the red earth to the very bottom of the cave.

The sherds are, as a rule, small, of a thickness varying from 4 to 25 millimeters. As is generally the case, the thicker the sherd the coarser the ware.

The colour varies from yellowish red, through crimson and dull red, to grey and black, the red varieties occurring oftener than others. As far as could be ascertained from their smallness, the fragments belonged to whole or broken bottoms of jars, rims of bowls and handles of various forms, among which a two-large-holed handle common at Mnaidra, Hagiär Kim, Hal Saffieni and Cordin. Very likely other forms of vases will be discovered when a thorough study will be made after the completion of the excavation.

The style of decoration corresponds to that of some of the first classes of the pottery found at Hal Saffieni. Some of the designs seem to be new. The scale ware, fluted ware, incised and cut out ware are freely represented.

Prima facie, it may be stated that the pottery is identical with that found in the Megalithic Monuments at Hagiär Kim, Mnaidra, Cordin and Hal Saffieni. Flint is very rare. So far, only two fragments have been found one of which is a broken knife. Of personal ornaments three perforated shells have been discovered, two of which had been given the form of buttons and the third that of an almond.

As already stated, the full description of the cave and of all the objects found therein lies beyond the scope of this paper, and, if I have mentioned with some details a few of them, it is because they are characteristic of the age to which the burials described in this paper are to be attributed.

Had I postponed this communication till after the completion of the excavation, I would have had sufficient time and more material for its preparation; but I wished to put on record, without unnecessary delay, the discovery of these pre-

historic burials, because it opens a new field of research, particularly in caves and rock-fissures, in quarries in the neighbourhood of the Megalithic Monuments, which, like Hagiär Kim, Mnaidra, and Cordin, Gigantija and Xeuchia, have not yielded human bones. Such research, if conducted with perseverance, will, I have no doubt, throw fresh light on the prehistoric period of the Maltese Islands.

N. TAGLIAFERRO.

DISCUSSION.

Dr. T. Zammit said:

The discovery of Prof. Tagliaferro is of great importance and is more far-reaching than it might be thought.

The possibility that the first inhabitants of these islands might have been buried in natural caves was so far overlooked as these natural grottoes were very rare with us.

The caverns constantly found in connection with stone quarries in the globigerina limestone are little known as they are always full of red soil and are destroyed the first thing when a field is utilized as a quarry. These caves are superficial and are scooped out by surface water in the layer of stone which is very friable.

Animal bones have frequently been met with in these caves or fissures, as they should better be called, but human bones were so far overlooked.

Prof. Tagliaferro thinks the cavern at Burmeghez to be a natural one, I think however that although scooped out by physical agencies, it shows distinct traces of man's handwork. Some of the ventilators are surely finished up with the aid of tools and the entrance was also enlarged by means of tools.

The pottery and the shell ornaments leave no doubt that neolithic people lived or were buried there.

I have seen with Prof. Tagliaferro the spinal column of a human skeleton buried in a huddled position and I intend to stiffen the bones with paraffin and have them carried to the Valletta Museum, along with the potshed and other objects found by Prof. Tagliaferro.

Once the clue has been given we must now keep a sharp look out on all the fissures in connection with stone-quarries and it is not improbable that in a near future some of these caverns may be found near Hagiar Kim where stone is known to be quarried.

Some important Documents of the Archives of the Sovereign Military Order of St. John of Jerusalem and of Malta.

I trust I shall not be exposing myself to a charge of egotism if I venture to state very briefly the origin and purpose of this paper on the Archives of the Sovereign Military Order of St. John of Jerusalem and of Malta.

The last few years which I have spent in the Public Library, where the most important records of the Order are kept, as well as the example of the Librarian Monsignor Alfredo Mifsud, a keen student of local history and an authority on matters referring to the same, have prompted me to interest myself in the elucidation of a subject which is of the utmost importance to the full understanding of the history of the Knights Hospitallers and of my dearly loved country.

The tendency of modern historical research is the disclosure of original documents with which to support statements made in connection with any event. With very few exceptions, writers of the history of Malta, as far as I am aware, have made statements and quoted passages without citing the sources of their information. This, therefore, in my opinion, necessitates the re-writing of a new history of our most interesting Island founded on documentary evidence and conducted in the light of modern historical research.

It is this that has urged me to present to you these few hints taken from an inventory, probably, made by Dr. Luigi Vella (1), and later on revised by Dr. C. Camilleri and Dr. Ant. Briffa, on some important documents contained in the

(1) Thus writes the Rev. Lambert B. Larking in his work "The Knights Hospitallers in England," 8vo. London 1857. pag. IX. *Note.*

"When I was there in 1839, neither the governor nor any of the authorities to whom I had access could give me any information as to the Records of the Order. They were all supposed to have been lost. The following extract of a letter which I received from Mr. Winthrop (the United States Consul in Malta) will testify that they still exist, and that great facilities are afforded to all who wish to inspect them. I cannot forbear