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Malta: Technology.

Buxton: Hort.

**The Modern Pottery Industry in Malta.** By L. H. Dudley Buxton, M.A. and A. V. D. Hort.

79

The following notes were collected by Mr. A. V. D. Hort during the visit of the Oxford Anthropological Expedition to Malta, and form a part of the report of the Expedition which it has been found more convenient to publish separately. As the Expedition was compelled, owing to shortness of time in the island, to concentrate on certain aspects of Maltese life, it was not found possible to do more than visit the potteries in one part of the island.

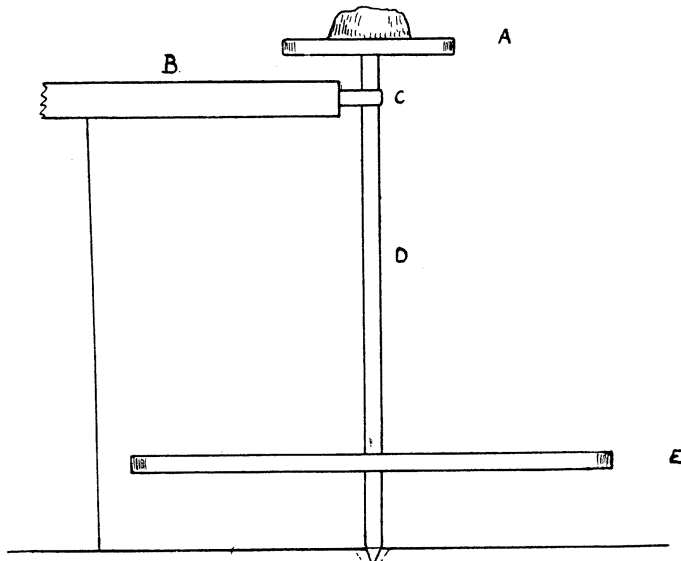


FIG. I.—NEW TYPE.

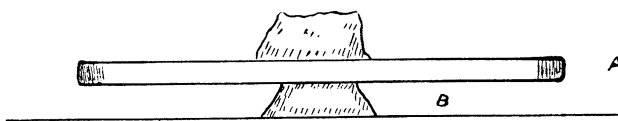


FIG. II.—OLD TYPE.

Pottery is made at Zeitun and Birchircara. At the latter place two methods are in use, an older and a new. In the old method (Fig. II.) a baked clay support (B) in the form of a truncated cone with a maximum diameter of about 10 centimetres, narrowing to four or five on the top, and about three centimetres high, is used. On this support a wooden disc (A) is set and sprinkled with sand to prevent the clay from sticking to the disc. The clay itself is also rolled in sand, and then a flat piece is laid on the disc, which is set spinning by the hand in a clockwise direction,

and a broad strip of clay is laid round the piece already on the turntable to form the walls of the pot. If necessary a second piece is worked on top of this. The hand is wetted and the pot shaped. As soon as it is finished it is lifted off and put aside to dry. The inside and out are smoothed with a small piece of wood. When the pot is nearly dry it is polished with a pebble, but the potters say that it is impossible to get a high polish on the clay they use. This type of wheel is still used for making some vessels, e.g., the olla, a large water-pot about two feet high, with a narrow neck and a handle on either side, but the younger generation for the most part do not know how to use the old method.

The more modern wheel (Fig. I.) consists of an iron spindle with a pointed lower end (D). The spindle is set upright with the point in the native rock floor (F). It is sufficiently tall to clear the top of a wooden bench (B) to the edge of which it is attached by a bearing (C) which allows it to rotate freely. A wooden turntable (A) is placed on top of the spindle which passes through the centre of a wooden disc (E)

just clear of the floor. The lower disc is turned anti-clockwise with the foot, and the clay worked on the upper turntable. This method has been in use only for about ten years. One woman did not know how to use the modern wheel.

The pottery is fired in a simple kiln, the entrance to which is bricked up when firing. Wood, chiefly brushwood, is used as fuel, but broken up boats are also used, and the salt in them gives a white colour to the finished ware. The clay has to be fired slowly as it easily vitrifies, and the potters say coal is unsuitable as it gives too hot a fire.

The clay used is found on the surface near Birchircara. Where moderated with iron it gives a reddish tinge to some of the pots. Sea sand is mixed with the clay. Ornamentation is of the simplest type and is done with the fingers; embossed designs are quite modern. No potters' stamps are used, but the different craftsmen know their work by the shape, thickness and general style of the ware. Handles are always attached outside and are never pushed through the wall of the pot.

There are only a few workshops, and the pottery trade in Birchircara is confined to one family. No evidence of this appears in the family nickname, but they are known as "the people who make pottery." No slip wares are made in Malta, but glazes are just beginning to be introduced. A certain amount of conscious archaism appears in the work of some of the potters, who admire and copy some of the finer bowls from Hal Tarxien. The clay used at Zeitun is of a finer quality than that of Birchircara. It is brought from Gozo, where there is also a pottery industry.

The following include the chief types of pots made, with their Maltese names. A tall, narrow-necked vessel, with two handles, varying from about 16 inches to 24 inches high. The largest types of this form are called *'olla*, the small *zir*. A pot of this form, but made of porous pottery, for cooling water, is called *bombola*. Small bowls with a base ring, and varying in diameter from 3 inches to 6 inches are called *bikia*. Flat bottomed bowls are made in many forms. A big type, about 3 feet across at the top, is called *lembi*; a second, rather smaller, bowl of the same form, is called *mattrat*. The smallest bowl of this form is called *lembieh*. A large pot shaped like a flower-pot, and about 15 inches across the top, is called *concha*, and a smaller pot of the same form, but about 10 inches across the top, and with two small handles, *kasria*. The milk pail (*mahlap*) is a flat bowl about 12 inches across the top, with one handle set horizontally and two vertically. Among the fantastic types of pots may be included the pottery money-box (*carous*), the pot with one side cut out to hold a lamp (*imnara*), the baked clay brazier (*khenur*) and the clay lamp (*musbih*). The lamp is a small saucer with one side pinched in to hold the wick. It is not unlike the familiar mediæval form of lamp used in this country. Although in most parts of Malta its use has naturally been superseded by more modern types of lamps, it appears to be distributed over the whole island, and when used in a draught, or out of doors, is carried in an *imnara*.

Broken potsherds, ancient if possible, but modern in default of better, are used for making roofs. The sherds are collected and placed on a stone slab. A heavy stone, about a foot thick, and 2 feet long, is rounded on the lower side so as to form a rocker, and provided with a ridge on the upper side to enable the workman to grasp it. This stone is laid on top of the sherds on the slab, and gently rocked to and fro so as to crush the sherds, which are then used to form the basis of a kind of concrete. The makers of this type of concrete say that the ancient sherds are much better than the modern:

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