

## Cupola of St Catherine's church to be restored



The main cupola of the historic St Catherine of Italy church in Valletta is to be restored, which will complete the conservation of the unique, baroque building dating back to the time of the Knights.

The project, which is being financed by Bank of Valletta, has been entrusted to the restoration firm Sante Guido Restauri.

It follows another intervention on the church's exterior that ended in 2003. But the interior remained in a bad state of repair and conservation efforts were long overdue. Following centuries of climatic and man-made conditions, the church was left in a dilapidated state.

Besides the infiltration of rainwater, it suffered extensive damage during World War II.

Moreover, the stone of the dome's lantern suffers from a process called powdering, which can be seen from the amount of powder and pieces of stone found underneath it.

The dome, divided into eight segments by ribs, is decorated with scenes from the life of St Catherine.

Its conservation involves an extensive restoration project and a combination of applications to ensure that the natural colours are brought back to their original splendour.

Damage to the mural paintings of the dome, due to undergo restoration, was first tackled after the war, with a second restorative intervention between 1965 and 1966 by the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro of Rome, in collaboration with the National Museum of Malta.

Notwithstanding both restorative projects, the infiltration of rainwater was detrimental and increased the process of powdering of the stone.

The gold leaf is missing in some parts, and in others it is becoming dislodged and is covered by superficial deposits, which make it appear dull.

The church of St Catherine is closed to the public, awaiting the restoration of its interior.

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