

## Valletta's Casa Lanfредucci is no burial ground, says ministry

The government's application to use the underground spaces under Valletta's Casa Lanfредucci fully respected the building's historical and architectural context, the Infrastructure Ministry said yesterday.

The ministry also denied the house had been built on "some burial grounds" or that "some sacrilegious dug out" was being carried out under the adjacent church of our Lady of Victory, as suggested by Flimkien għal Ambjent Aħjar.

The ministry's comments were in reply to the environmentalist organisation's objections to plans to use the basement of Casa Lanfредucci as backstage facilities for Renzo Piano's roofless theatre in Valletta.



FAA claimed the basement was an extension of the crypt of the Our Lady of Victory church, the first structure built in Valletta by the Knights of St John. It also accused the government of extending the footprint of an initial application by submitting subsequent applications and of "slipping in" other applications with the original one.

The ministry said the FAA was "flatly wrong" when it claimed some form of deception so as not to have the original application for the development seem too intrusive.

"On the contrary, the decision for the fresh application was a result of the decision to explore alternative solutions that would bring about less excavation than was originally planned and fully permitted by the original permit," it said. This decision would actually reduce the footprint of the excavated site by a fifth, thus minimising any impact on the surrounding monuments and historic structures.

The footprint of the buildings in the controversy was barely being excavated at all, the ministry said, pointing out all that would be dug out were some four square metres for a lift and just over 12 square metres for a staircase.

"None of this is happening in some 'hallowed burial ground'," the ministry said. The church and anything below, in or adjacent to it were not affected by the application.

The heritage trust Din l-Art Ħelwa yesterday urged the government not to take any decisions on the future of the basement space under Casa Lanfредucci until the

necessary studies about its historical uses were carried out and the conclusions made public. If it were shown that this basement area was once used as a burial ground, then the area must be treated with due respect.

Din I-Art Helwa was involved in two restoration projects at Our Lady of Victory church in the past and had drawn up plans for ongoing restoration of the ceiling paintings as well as other aspects of the church in the near future. The crypt was to be included in the restoration project, it said.

However, the government maintained that Casa Lanfreducci was by no means the church of Our Lady of Victory and “was not the ancient palace of renown built on some burial grounds”. The house was originally called Casa Cassar and was renamed Lanfreducci only recently in honour of the family who owned the house next door that was demolished in the 19th century to make way for the Royal Opera House.

Though burial in crypts under churches was known to occur, the notion that the basements of neighbouring houses were somehow used as extensions for burial was not normal, the ministry said.

It maintained that in the “unlikely event that anything specific is found”, it would respect the normal legal process.

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## Comments

Astrid Vella(1 week, 2 days ago) 

FAA has now had access to photos of the bones photographed in the Lanfreducci basement/crypt soon after they were exhumed. These remains were witnessed on site by some of our most eminent and trusted historians as well as local and foreign knights.

Unless the Ministry of Infrastructure suggests that all these 'testimoni eccellenti' were hallucinating, we feel that the Ministry's talk of “romantic imagination” is now well and truly buried.

FAA would indeed welcome the correct use for cultural purposes of such an important site and looks forward to its proper evaluation and eventual rehabilitation with a view to making it accessible to the general public.

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