REPLACEMENT OR PLASTIC REPAIR: A DISCUSSION ON CURRENT LOCAL RESTORATION PHILOSOPHY

David Zahra

Dissertation submitted to the Institute for Masonry Construction and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Conservation Technology for Masonry Buildings

ABSTRACT
The aim of this study is to address the issue of the intervention on historic masonry structures, with respect to replacement and plastic repair. This will be accomplished by taking into consideration published literature as well as international charters on the subject; analysing current practices in Malta and the predominant philosophies embraced locally; understanding the perception of society with respect to the issue of restoration; and listing the factors and economic forces influencing the project, with a view to arriving at a set of principles that are specific to restoration of local heritage structures.

Replacement and plastic repair interventions are somewhat interchangeable. The choice of one system over another is usually a dilemma for the conservation architect, not only with regards to the choice of methodology, but also to the materials that should be used and the finish to be applied. Nonetheless, the major concern is to arrive at the decision to intervene, or otherwise, on the historic fabric and to what extent.

The study attempts to understand the ‘scenario’ in which restoration projects are carried out in Malta by analysing the current local restoration industry, from the philosophical, ethical, practical and economic points of view. This will be contrasted with international charters and current (contemporary) thinking on restoration. It therefore seeks to identify the problems, the deficiencies, the different philosophies, the economic implications, the public perception and the competence of contractors, inherent in the industry.
Moreover, this dissertation will seek to arrive at a set of conclusions which will identify restoration principles that could serve to guide interventions on the historic fabric in Malta, with particular reference to the replacement or the plastic repair of the stone. This way forward is derived from an appreciation and understanding of the ‘realities’ in which the local conservation architect operates.