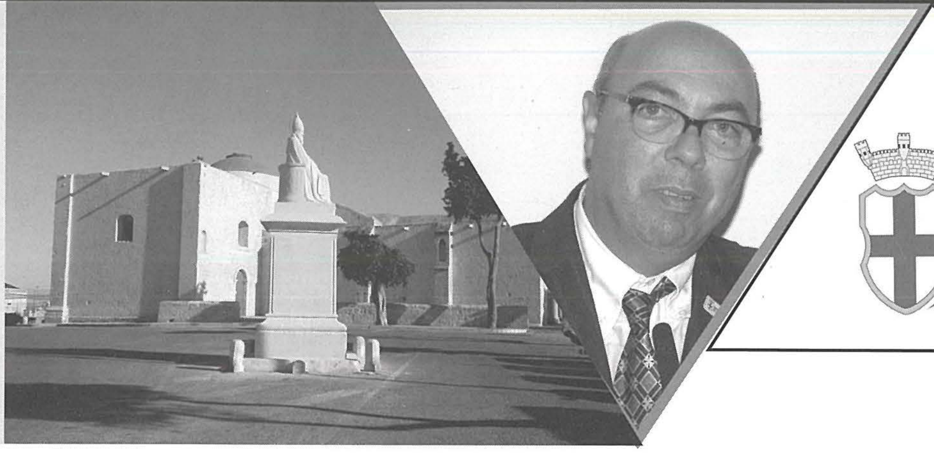
50 sena mill-Iskoperta tal-Passaġġ Sigriet

Kitba tal-Perit Ruben Abela, President ta' Wirt iż-Żejtun



Jingħad li l-anzjani fiż-Żejtun minn dejjem kienu jirrakkuntaw li fil-knisja parrokkjali l-qadima, dik li bosta jirreferu għaliha bħala l-knisja ta' San Girgor, kien hemm xi passaġġi sigrieta. Fir-riċerka storika, din nirreferu għaliha bħala 'storja orali', ir-rakkont li jgħaddi minn ġenerazzjoni għall-oħra u li ma ssibux miktub f'xi arkivji. Irridu ngħidu wkoll li l-istorja orali maż-żmien tinbidel xi ftit, biex ma ngħidux tiżżejjen ukoll. Spiss neseperjenzaw dan anke fi żmienna meta aħbar tinxtered bil-fomm u kulħadd jibda joħloq il-verżjoni tiegħu!

Iżda din l-istorja tal-passaġġi sigrieti fil-knisja ta' San Girgor, 50 sena ilu ssarfet f'verità. Min-nota li hemm ma' armarju żgħir tal-ħġieġ li jinsab f'kamra li tintlaħaq mill-garigor li jagħti għall-bejt tal-knisja, jidher li din is-sejba saret nhar it-12 ta' Marzu tal-1969. Skont intervista li għamlet il-ġurnalista Fiona Vella lil Grezzju Vella, dan isostni li kien hu li sab dan il-passaġġ, meta kien qiegħed jgħin lil zijuh Carmelo Spiteri fuq xogħol ta' manutenzjoni tal-aperturi tal-injam tal-knisja, meta Dun Ġwann Palmier talabhom iduru waħda l-bejt tal-knisja għax kien qed jagħmel l-ilma. Jgħid li hu tela' fuq il-bejt ma' zijuh u spiċċa jilgħab ma' xaqq li sab fil-kontrabejt. Meta ħammel dan ix-xaqq ra li kien jibqa' nieżel fil-fond u ddeċieda li jitfa' laqxa. Mill-ħoss induna li din ma baqgħetx nieżla fil-knisja iżda deherlu li kien hemm xi art oħra fil-qrib. Meta għajjat lil zijuh u dan ra li kien hemm ġebla, bħal kaptell jagħlaq bokka, iddeċidew li jifthuh u sabu li fil-fatt kien hemm bħal kamra jew kuritur. Infurmaw lil Dun Ġwann, li min-naħa tiegħu għajjat lil Ġannmari Debono, is-sagristan, biex jara kienx jaf b'dan l-ispazju. Meta dan qallu li ma kienx jaf, iddeċidew li jesploraw u jaraw fejn iwassal. Peress li Grezzju kien l-iżgħar u l-aktar ħafif minnhom, rabtuh b'ħabel, tawh kaxxa sulfarini u niżluh fil-kuritur. Grezzju jirrakkonta li baqa' miexi f'passaġġ twil u mudlam u xi ħin sab ruħu miexi fuq xi ħaġa li ħass taħt saqajh, ġabarha u nduna li kienet ras ta' skeletru. Bil-qatgħa li ħa ġera ġirja u tela' lura minn fejn daħal.

Aktar qabel għamilt referenza għal nota li hemm fuq armarju. Ġo dan l-armarju hemm ammont żgħir ta' oġġetti li jingħad li nstabu f'dan il-passaġġ, fosthom parti minn salib tal-injam stil Biżantin, tliet muniti li tnejn minnhom kienu bis-salib tal-Ordni ta' San Ġwann, qiegħ ta' żarbuna tal-injam, biċċiet tal-fuħħar, xi buttuni, biċċiet żgħar tad-drapp, u xi buttuni tal-injam.

Din is-sejba ġiet irrapurtata fil-ġurnal Times of Malta ftit aktar minn xahar wara, preċiżament fil-ħarġa tal-15 t'April, fejn ġiet irrappurtata s-sejba ta' passaġġ idur ma' tliet naħat tal-kappellun tal-Lvant tal-Knisja ta' San Girgor. Dan il-passaġġ fir-rapport jingħad li nstab minn Ġannmari Debono, li skont l-istess rapport jirreferu għalih bħala membru attiv tas-Soċjetà Storika taż-Żejtun

Fir-rapport fit-Times of Malta jinkiteb hekk:

TIMES OF MALTA, TUESDAY, APRIL 15, 1969

Skeletons found in hidden Żejtun corridor

BY A STAFF REPORTER

A hidden U shaped corridor said to be of historic importance has been discovered round the eastern transept of the Church of St. Gregory, Żejtun.

The corridor, which is only a few feet from the level of the roof, is believed to have been used by the inhabitants of the village who hid in these corridors during one of the raids by Turkish corsairs.

A theory is that the Turks ransacking the church found the people hidden there, killed them and blocked the entrance. A number of skeletons were found lying along the corridor.

Secret passages

Research work has been carried out at this old church by members of the Żejtun Historical Society. The corridor was discovered by one of its active members, Mr. John M. Debono.

Mr. Walter Zahra, president, said yesterday there has always been a strong and persistent rumour at Żejtun about the existence of secret passages round the dome of the Church. These were partially discovered by some workmen in 1909.

The church of St. Gregory is listed as of Siculo-Norman style of architecture, but in actual fact it contains strong elements of Romanesque, traces of Gothic and even 18th century Baroque decorations in addition to the Siculo-Norman vaulting of the nave.

Resembling a fort

Mr. Zahra said that looking towards the church from the east and south east, one would think that one was looking at a fort rather than at a church. The walls are massive and strong while the buttress wall put up to strengthen the structure adds to this deception.

He added that it did in fact play an active part in the defence of our Islands. On the outer walls of the corridor found, facing the east and in direct line with St. Thomas Tower are two loopholes one foot wide on the inside narrowing to four inches, and three feet four inches from the floor. Two similar loopholes are found in the middle of the corridor facing Marsaxlokk harbour and Fort St. Lucien.

Human skeletons

Another part of the corridor facing the interior of the Island has no loopholes. It was blocked by stone of a more recent date than the rest of the structure. It is in this part that some 16 human skeletons were discovered. The larger heap of bones is just inside the blocked entrance. A few pieces of pottery of various ages were also found.

Prof. Quentin Hughes, Head of the Department of Architecture at the Royal University, was called in to advise the Society. He believes that the corridor might possibly have served as watch tower. St. Thomas and St. Lucien were two major outer defence posts, but as they were built on low ground they could not [illegible] Valletta, so they could not transmit any signal of impeding invasion to the Island.

Signal post

The church is on relatively higher land and can be seen from the towers and from the cities and, according to Prof. Hughes, the church could have easily served as an intermediate transmitting signal post.

Watchers receiving signals from either tower could light a bonfire on the roof of the church and warn Valletta or Mdina as to the direction from which the enemy had [illegible]

Mr. J. Debono, a member of Żejtun Historical Society, who discovered passages in the Church of St. Gregory, Żejtun, with some of the human remains.

15,867 trees from Libya

A total of 15,867 young ornamental trees were yesterday unloaded from the m.v. "Angela Bella", the first consignment donated by the Libyan Government to the Department of Agriculture. The seven different varieties will be kept at "Wied Inċita" nursery before being planted under the afforestation scheme.

Mr. Faraj Turbi, Libyan Charge d'Affaires, Mr. T.M. El Gorbi, First Secretary at the Libyan Embassy and Mr. A. Farrugia, Director of Agriculture, were pesent at the unloading, seen in progress (above).

GEORGE CROSS AWARD ANNIVERSARY

By A Staff Reporter

Today is the 27th anniversary of the award of the George Cross to Malta by His late Majesty, King George VI. The decoration is the highest that could be awarded to a civilian or civilians.

It was on April 15, 1942, often described as "the cruellest month" of the 1940-43 siege that the [illegible] nounced in Malta.

The actual presentation of the decoration took place in the Palace Square, Valletta, [illegible] 1942.

Annual [illegible] held on the anniv[illegible] there were times when ceremonies were [illegible] the Addolorata Cemetery. Both have now been discontinued.

* * *

The Chairman of The Friends of Malta, G.C. has sent the following message to the Prime Minister:

"On the 27th anniversary of the award of the George Cross to the Citizens of the [illegible] send you your Government and People warmest good wishes on behalf of all Members of The Friends of Malta, G.C."

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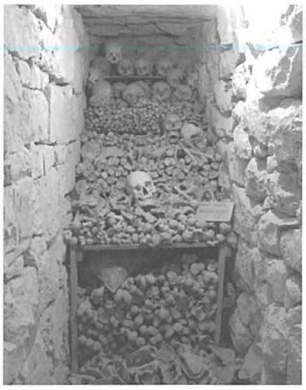
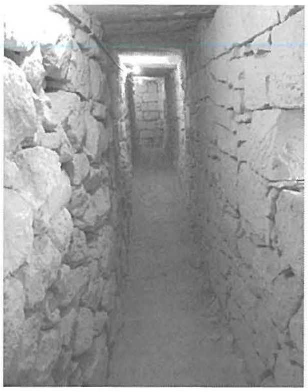
'Il-passaġġ, li kien biss ftit piedi 'l isfel mill-bejt tal-knisja, huwa maħsub li kien jintuża bħala moħba mir-residenti tal-villaġġ f'każ ta' xi attakk mill-kursara Torok. It-teorija hija li t-Torok attakkaw u kissru l-knisja u sabu xi nies mistoħbija fil-passaġġ, qatluhom u sakkruhom hemm ġew. Numru ta' skeletri nstabu f'dan il-passaġġ.' Din l-istorja nkitbet f'ballata minn Walter Zahra li meta saret is-sejba kien il-President tas-Soċjetà Storika taż-Żejtun.





Is-sena l-oħra, il-Professur Mario Buhagiar (2018), f'artiklu li kiteb fis-Sunday Times of Malta, jgħid li fit-18 t'April 1969 kien intbagħat mid-Dipartiment tal-Mużewijiet biex jagħmel rapport dwar din is-sejba. Fuq il-post iltaqa' ma' Ġannmari Debono, li wrieh il-passaġġi u xi oġġetti li kienu nstabu. Il-Professur Buhagiar ma' dan l-artiklu pproduċa kopja ta' xi noti li kien ġabar meta żar il-post. lHuwa jagħmel referenza għat-twieqi żgħar li hemm iħarsu fuq il-Bajja ta' San Tumas u l-Bajja ta' Marsaxlokk, kif ukoll għal numru ta' oġġetti li nstabu, u li semmejt aktar 'il fuq. Punt importanti li jirrapporta, huwa l-fatt li t-tarf tal-aħħar passaġġ kien ibblukkat b'ġebel tas-sejjieħ u knatan imqegħdin bit-tajn. Huwa ta ordni biex dan il-ħajt jinfetaħ fil-preżenza tiegħu, u warajh instab munzell ta' għadam uman li skont hu kien hemm bejn 80 u 90 individwu. Huwa jikteb ukoll li mal-art matul il-passaġġi l-oħra kien hemm ukoll xi fdalijiet ta' għadam uman. Fil-kitba tiegħu, il-Professur Buhagiar jgħid li dak iż-żmien huwa kien assoċja din is-sejba mal-aħħar ħbit tat-Torok li sar fl-1614, bil-possibbiltà li dawn in-nies spiċċaw vittmi maqbuda f'dan il-passaġġ wara li telgħu jistaħbew fih. Fl-istess artiklu huwa jgħid li din l-istorja kienet ġiet approvata ħażin wara analiżi fuq l-għadam li kien sar minn S. Ramaswani u Dr J. Pace (1978) li skonthom dan kien għadam li nġabar minn xi oqbra u ntrefa' f'dan il-passaġġ bħala ossarju. Din l-opinjoni qed jibbażawha fuq il-fatt li ġo rukkell ta' sinsla nstabet il-ħamrija. Il-Professur Buhagiar fil-kitba tiegħu jgħid ukoll li qabel ma nfetaħ fl-1969, dan il-passaġġ jidher li daħlu fih mill-anqas darbtejn oħra hekk kif jidher minn graffiti li hemm minquxin fuq wieħed mill-ħitan tat-tieni passaġġ: 'T 1869' u 'Giovanni Zahra 20.2.1909'.

Iżda x'seta' ġara f'dak ix-xahar bejn id-data meta saret is-sejba fit-12 ta' Marzu u ż-żjara ta' rappreżentant tad-Dipartiment tal-Mużewijiet li saret fit-18 t'April, aktarx instigata mir-rapport li deher fit-Times of Malta tlett ijiem qabel? Ma nafux jekk kienx hemm xi indizzji li setgħu wasslulna aktar tagħrif dwar l-użu ta' dan il-passaġġ u li sfortunatament intilfu għaliex is-sejba ma ġietx irrapurtata mill-ewwel. Illum 50 sena wara, nistgħu noqogħdu fuq dak li għandna miktub dwar il-fatti tas-sejba, iżda x-xjenza tista' teħodna aktar 'il bogħod u hemm fejn wieħed jista' jimraħ f'analiżi differenti li jistgħu jsiru fuq dan l-għadam. Hemm studju ieħor x'jista' jsir fuq l-oġġetti li nstabu u li wkoll jista' jiftaħ tieqa oħra ta' għarfien dwar din is-sejba. Kien għalhekk li Wirt iż-Żejtun applikat u akkwistat fondi għall-proġett 5K0PERTA, taħt l-iskema Small Inistiatives Scheme (SIS) tal-Kunsill Malti għall-Volontarjat. Permezz ta' dan il-proġett li qed isir bi sħab ma' Heritage Malta u s-Superintendenza għall-Wirt Kulturali se jerġa' jiġi studjat dan l-għadam u se jintbagħtu kampjuni barra minn Malta biex issir analiżi tagħhom permezz ta' Carbon dating. Il-pjan huwa li sa bħal dan iż-żmien sena jkollna rapporti xjentifiċi f'idejna li jistgħu jwassluna għal data meta għexu dawn in-nies.

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