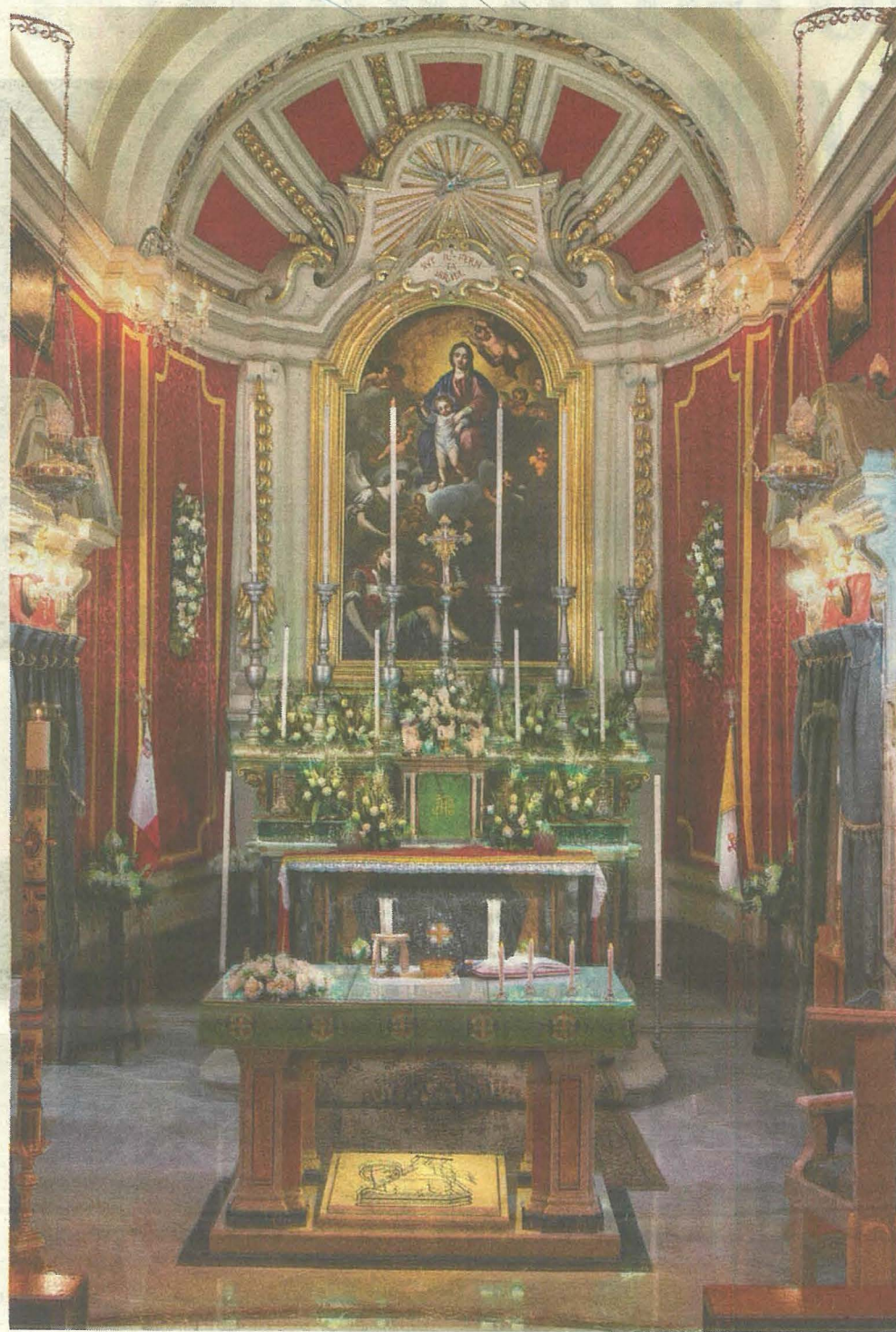


Book unveils legend, history of Ta' Liesse church



The main altar with the altarpiece by Enrico Arnaud. PHOTOS: DANIEL CILIA

Walking uphill towards Victoria Gate in Valletta one cannot help but notice a small, baroque church on the left-hand side of the road.

Most will know that the area is known as Ta' Liesse, especially due to national events that take place in this particular spot, but not all will be aware that the church is actually dedicated to Our Lady of Ta' Liesse or that it is tied to a legend.

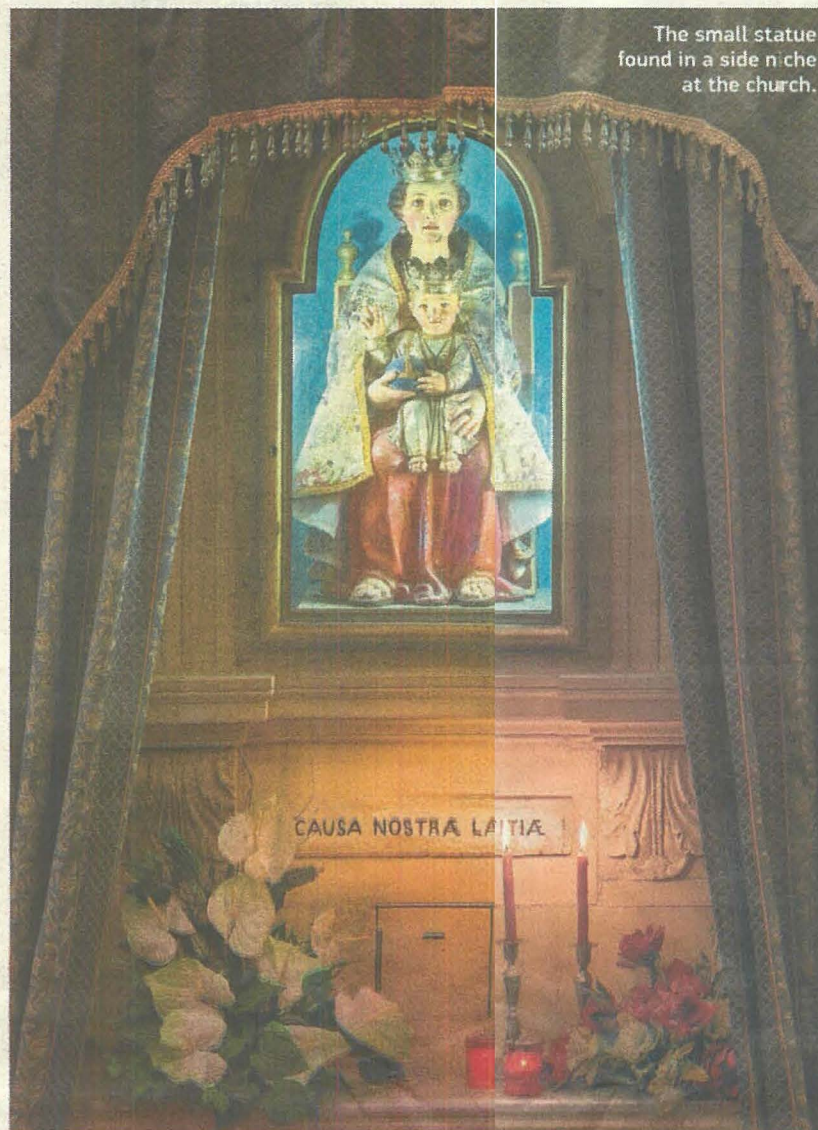
How many would have actually entered the church to admire its artistic treasures or ever considered its historical significance?

All of these aspects and more are tackled in a new book titled *Ta' Liesse, Malta's Waterfront Shrine for Mariners*, which was launched last week.

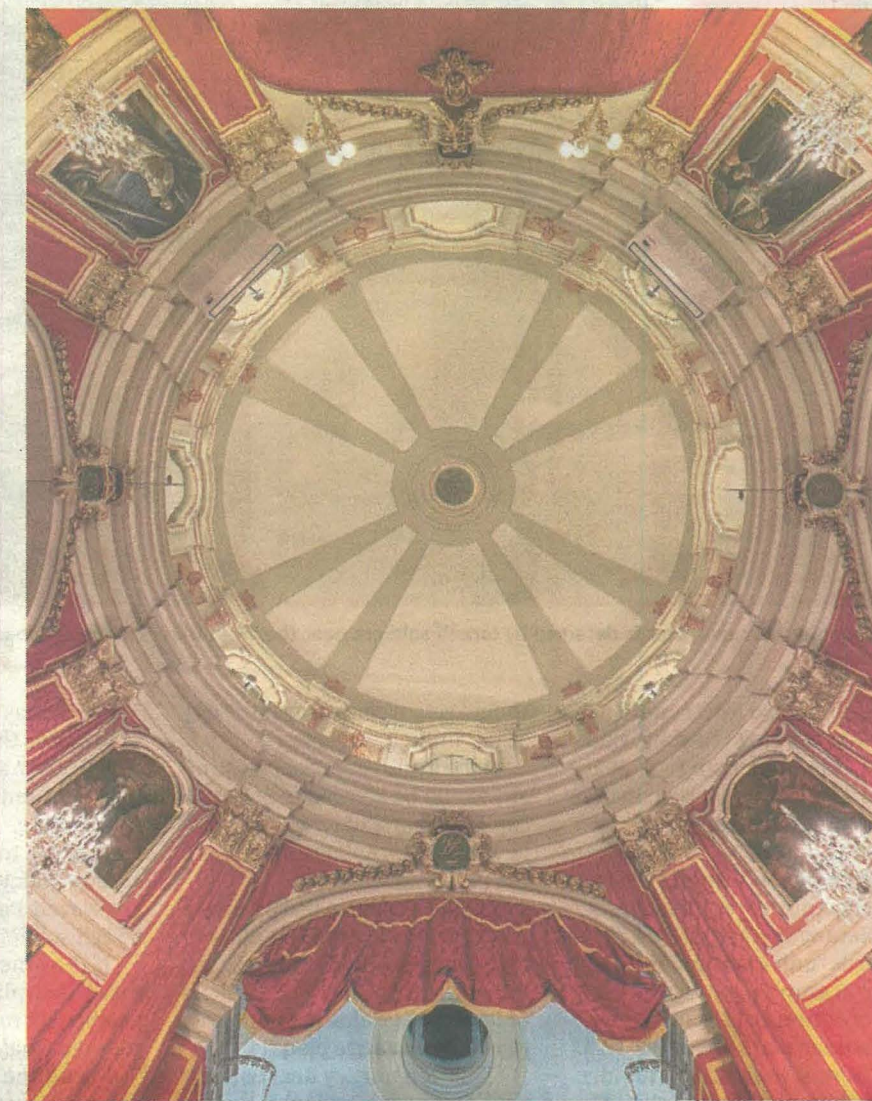
"All funds from the book, which is complemented by over 370 images, will be going towards the restoration of the rest of the church's paintings"

In its introduction, Judge Emeritus Giovanni Bonello, who is the book's general editor, says that despite its physical dimensions, the church has a "massive history" and is more than just a place of worship.

"It is also a unique time capsule of tradition, defiant spirituality, ancient legend, art, ritual, continuity and survival. Like antique centres of worship, a memorial to faith, hope and charity," he writes.



The small statue found in a side niche at the church.



The church's cupola from the inside.



The oil on canvas painting *St Maurus Healing a Sick Child* by Giulio Cassarino, signed and dated 1623, is the first artwork that will undergo restoration once the necessary funds are collected.

The hardbound 256-page book provides evidence of this.

It includes a collection of essays by 11 contributors who write in detail about different topics, such as the development of the Hospitaller cult in Malta, the maritime spaces, archaeology and urban harbours, the paintings of the Liesse legend cycle, the campanological legacy of the church and the significance, conservation and restoration of the titular painting representing *Our Lady of Ta' Liesse*.

The painting, the work of Enrico Arnaud (1692-1764), offers an interpretation of the legend of three knights Hospitaller, members of the noble house of Eppe, who were freed from Saracen captivity in Egypt through the miraculous intervention of the Blessed Mother.

All funds from the book, which is complemented by over 370 images, will be going towards the restoration of the rest of the church's paintings, which include an

anonymous work depicting *St Louis, King of France and Giulio Cassarino's St Maurus Healing a Sick Child* (1623).

Among the precious artworks also found in the church is a statue of *Our Lady*, traditionally believed to be a copy of the original one belonging to the sanctuary *Liesse-Notre-Dame* in the Picardie region, France. This statue is particularly important as the original one, which was venerated for centuries, was destroyed during the French revolution.

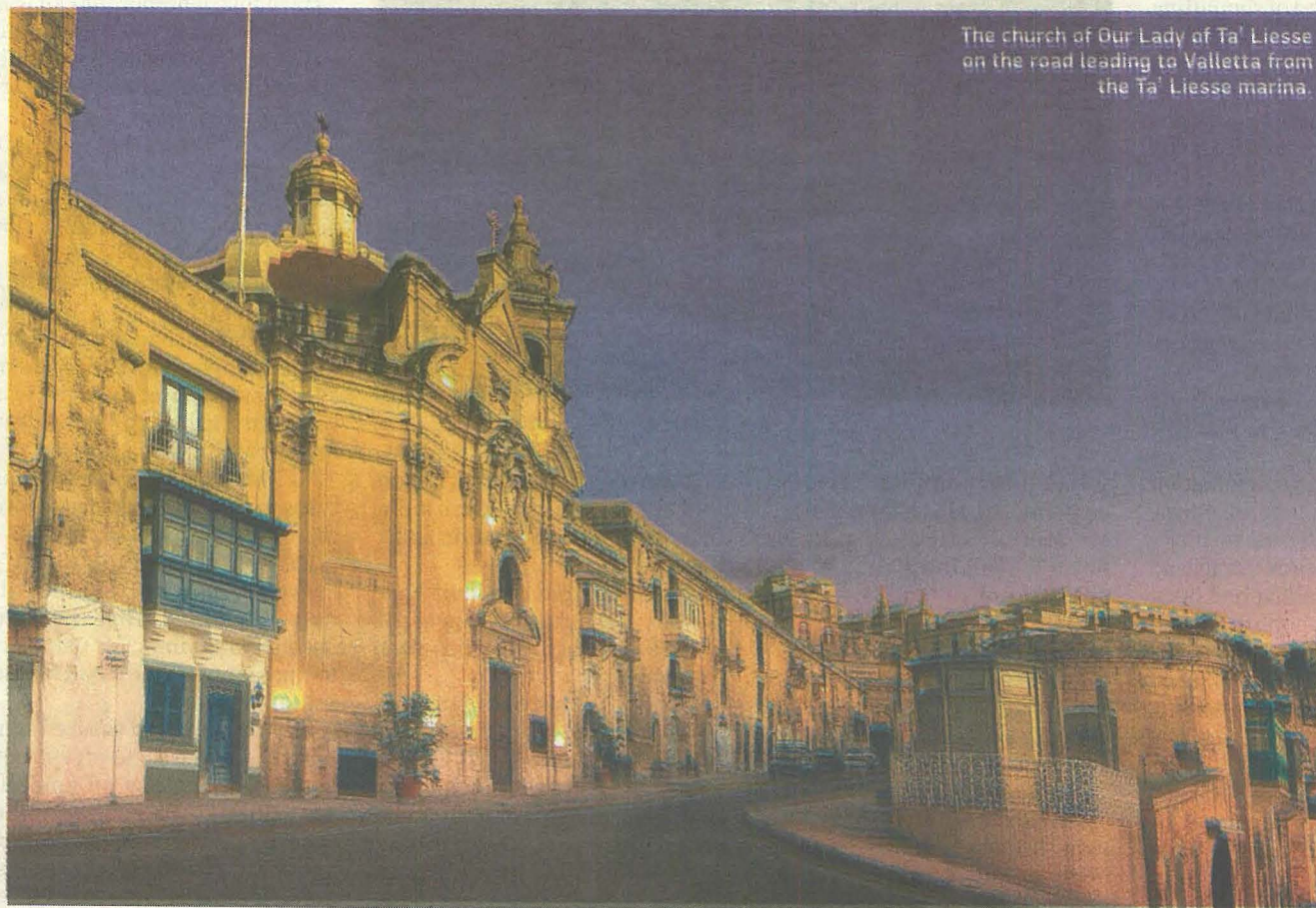
Devotion to *Our Lady* is also expressed through another statue at the Valletta church and an important number of cycles depicting the *Ta' Liesse* legend.

One of the book's essays goes into detail about this cycle of paintings, while another essay looks into the devotion to the *Madonna Ta' Liesse* in France.

The scholars contributing to the publication are Dr Bonello, Kenneth Cauchi, Roger De Gaetano, Carmen Depasquale,

Nicholas Joseph Doublet, Eric Fenech Sevesta, Thomas Freller, Christian Mifsud, Amy Sciberras, Mevrick Spiteri and Theresa Vella. Raymond Miller is the copy editor while photography and design is by Daniel Cilia.

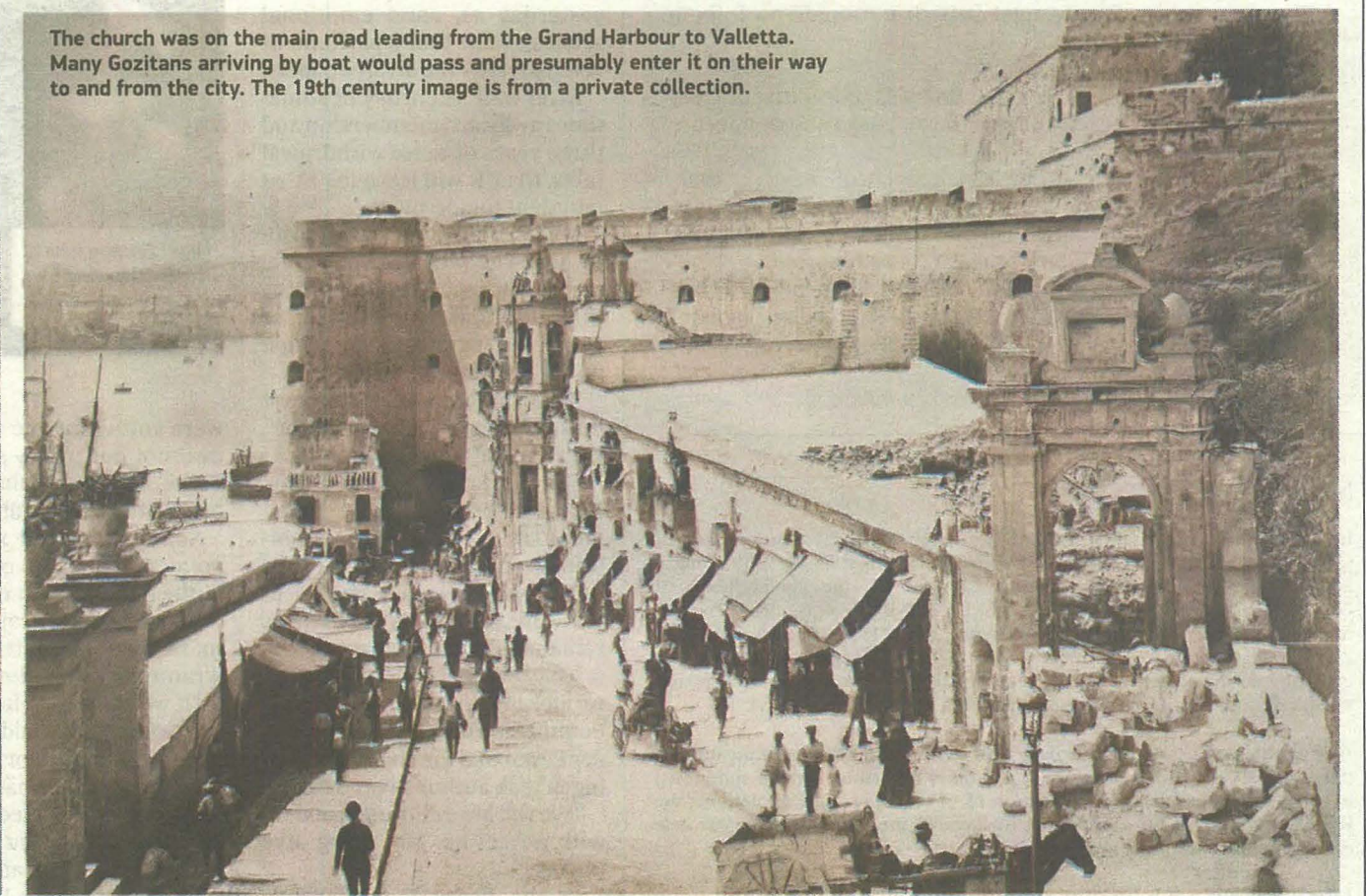
The book is published by Miller Distributors Ltd and is supported by the Grand Harbour maritime companies. Its launch, held last Thursday, was chaired by Archbishop Charles Scicluna.



The church of Our Lady of Ta' Liesse on the road leading to Valletta from the Ta' Liesse marina.



A detail from a 17th century painting showing Ta' Liesse church and the chapel of San Salvatore between the warehouses. This painting belongs to a private collection.



The church was on the main road leading from the Grand Harbour to Valletta. Many Gozitans arriving by boat would pass and presumably enter it on their way to and from the city. The 19th century image is from a private collection.