

# REPORT

RMS020220  
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25<sup>TH</sup> May 2020



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## Restoration Method Statement for the Main façade of the Archbishop's Palace, Archbishop Street, Valletta

I, the undersigned Conservation Architect was engaged by Mr. Michael Pace Ross on behalf of the Archdiocese of Malta, in order to assess the condition of and propose a restoration methodology for the main façade of the Archbishop's Palace, located in Archbishop Street, Valletta. This report is a descriptive account of a technical site visit that was carried out on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2020.

In conjunction with this same documentation, there is enclosed and submitted the relevant photographic evidence.

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## PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

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- Item: Front elevation of the Archbishop's Palace in Archbishop Street, Valletta.
- Characteristics: Main façade of the Archbishop's Palace building. The façade is symmetrically arranged around an imposing portico which was later crowned with a niche housing an allegory to Christianity.
- Date: The main façade overlooking Archbishop's Street, is composed of an earlier ground floor and a later additional first floor. An inscription above the main entrance states that the year of construction of the earlier edifice is 1624 and that the extension was built in 1953.
- Dimensions: 458 sq. m.
- Finish: Plastered and painted masonry on ground floor, fair faced masonry on the first floor.
- Location: South Street, Valletta
- Related files: Not applicable



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## CONSIDERATIONS

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Stone does not deteriorate as a result of aging alone. The service life of all commonly used natural stone depends on its being protected from a variety of deteriorating agents. Given the appropriate conditions, deterioration encountered will usually fall into one of three principal categories: (1) biological, (2) physical, or (3) chemical.

### ***Biological***

Biological damage is caused by the normal activities of living organisms such as moulds, algae and lichens.

- Moulds need very little food sources to grow and although their effect on stone is minimal the discoloration caused by such growths may be aesthetically disfiguring and socially unacceptable. Moulds need a source of moisture to grow and they thrive in areas which are rarely exposed to sunlight.
- Algae need high levels of moisture to grow and their presence often indicates a continuous source of water. Such plants are thus often found in the proximity of leaking pipework. Although relatively harmless, their growth is an indication of a severe water problem which needs to be tackled.
- Lichens are often found growing on stone in rural areas. The presence of pollution does not allow these organisms to establish themselves and thus their presence is often an indication of cleaner air. In the urban landscape they are thus mostly present on the higher courses of buildings, on parapet walls, high string cornices and roof top structures. Controversy on whether such organisms are capable of causing damage to the stone is still current, however, the extent of colonization, the nature of the material upon which the colonies have established themselves, the characteristics of the monument and its location are all factors which are to be taken into consideration prior to establishing whether the damage being incurred is one worth noting and acting upon.

### ***Physical***

Physical damage may be once again classified into two categories. The first, known as structural damage, may take the form of mechanical breakages, abrasions or cracks. These may be caused by external bodies exerting forces onto the structure or through excessive loading of the structure itself. Excessive load failure may manifest itself due to faulty design or redistribution of loading and thus the creation of new load paths. The latter may occur as a result of changes to the structure or as a result of excessive weathering causing loss of structural fabric.

A second category of physical damage is that caused by the elements and the environment, referred to as weathering. Weathering can take the form of microcracks, flaking, powdering, erosion, salt efflorescence, pitting and alveolisation. All these forms are the result of mechanical damage occurring within the pores of the natural

stone. Such damage is mainly caused by salts which are carried within the pores in their dissolved state within moisture and crystallise upon the evaporation of such moisture.

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### ***Chemical damage***

Strong chemicals such as acids or alkalis may stain and dissolve limestone whereas certain paints, oils and stains penetrate deep into the stone causing permanent discoloration. An array of products which contain such chemicals and other additives have been, and are still being used, on stone surfaces causing very often irreparable damage.

HISTORIC NOTE

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Upon construction of Valletta, Bishop Baldassare Cagliares expressed the wish to transfer his official residence from Birgu to the new city. A compromise reached with the Knights allowed a new residence to be built in Valletta on condition that the Bishop's court and prison were retained in Birgu. The plans for the Palace were drawn up by Tommaso Dingli. Alterations were made in 1730 by Bishop Alpheran de Bussan and a floor added on in the 1950's by Archbishop Michael Gonzi.



APPRAISAL

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1. While the ground floor shows clear signs of having been, at one point in time, completely covered in coloured renders, the first floor only shows signs of paint remnants in specific, isolated areas. The main entrance portico is still also today fully rendered.



The main portico is still fully rendered.



Remnants of coloured plaster are still present on the ground floor.



Stones have been changed in previous interventions



Alveolar damage on the bottom courses.

2. A number of previous interventions in the form of changed masonry units and repairs using plaster are present on the ground floor. Pigeon spikes have also been installed over the portico but no extensive recent restoration intervention is evident.
3. The lower courses of globigerina limestone blocks exhibit alveolisation and extensive powdering in some areas. This deterioration is accelerated by the amount of traffic pollution that the façade is exposed to. The narrow and busy street has also led to the bases of the portico columns being extensively damaged through impact with vehicles and a heavy layer of deposit is clearly visible on the rendered areas of the façade.
4. Black crust deposits are present on all the cornices and window pediments. Some of these architectural elements are extensively damaged and corners, which are mostly prone to detachment, are causing a hazard to passers by as they are becoming dislodged and falling onto the pavement.

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Black crusts are present on all cornices.



Damage at the corners of the building due to signage.

5. The corner pilasters of the building contain a number of masonry units that have been damaged due to the insertion of metal brackets for the fixing of signs and other utilities.
6. The timber apertures on the ground floor have been replaced and seem to date back to the British period while the internal shutters are of an earlier construction. The glazed apertures are in need of repair but the metal gratings are in a good condition. Some of the basement windows are completely missing while others are in a bad condition and need to be replaced. The first-floor windows are in a poor condition and are allowing the infiltration of water into the Piano Nobile spaces.

## PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS

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The following conservation works are being proposed;

- The erection of scaffolding shall take place in such a manner as to minimise obstruction to passing traffic. Scaffolding on the ground floor shall be limited to the propping needed for the higher levels. For access to the different levels, the scaffold shall wrap around the corners of the building and an access tower shall be created in one of the side streets. The necessity to work in this manner shall increase the cost of scaffolding when compared to the average prices.
- All unwanted metal fixtures, such as nails, hooks, electricity brackets and metal conduits, as well as any hanging wires along the facade are to be carefully removed. This shall be done by carefully drilling around the inserts until they can be pulled free. The resulting void is then to be filled up using a mortar mix.
- All present renders and mortars shall be documented prior to any cleaning intervention.
- All cement renders, whitewash and paint are to be cleaned from the façades using manual methods.
- Biological growth is to be removed using a suitable biocide. The biocide is to be applied in a dilute form by brush or spray and, following each application, washed down with water to remove any chemical residues.
- The façade is to then be dry-brushed, using a nylon brush, to eliminate any loose material and deposits. Washing down using clean, deionised water should pursue. In areas where hard crusts are present, such as underneath the cornices and protruding elements, nylon brushes should be used after the softening of the deposits by means of water. Should it be necessary, poultices are to be applied to remove any remaining residue of black crust. No aggressive chemicals or grit blasting is to be used to remove any soiling.
- The deteriorated stonework is to be repaired using plastic repair techniques, based on a lime-based mix where possible. Where in certain areas the replacement of stonework needs to be reverted to, stone of identical size and shape is to be utilised. Any heavily deteriorated masonry which is to be replaced is to be chiselled to a depth in no case less than 230mm in thickness. All newly re-instated masonry shall be grouted to the original wall with an appropriate lime-based grout. Where applicable, all new stonework shall be worked to templates to match the original.
- For those areas where the stone is frail and extensive powdering is occurring, the use of consolidants shall be resorted to. Such areas are to be first desalinated using poultices and then ethyl silicate-based or ammonium oxalate based consolidants applied by brush 'wet on wet' or through the use of poultices.



- On completion of cleaning and stone repair, re-pointing works should be undertaken. The process involves the removal of existing loose mortar/joints, washing down and re-pointing. The existing pointing is to be raked out to a depth of not less than 15mm. Where joints are defective to a greater depth, then all the loose mortar is to be removed, irrespective of the depth. This is to be done utilising small mason hand tools. Special attention should be taken not to damage the stone, any special features and cornice bands. Once the raking is complete the joints are to be flushed with clean water to remove all the loose material and prepared for pointing. Mixing of pointing mortar is to be done by means of gauging vessels to ensure consistency of the mix at all times. All joints are to be thoroughly filled with mortar to ensure that no voids are left within any one section of the pointing works. Where joints are deeper than 20mm, the mortar should be applied in two separate operations, one to pack the joint and the other to complete the joint finish.
- A new layer of lime-based paint shall be applied onto the façade depending on the findings of the documentation conducted on the present renders.
- All apertures shall be thoroughly inspected once scaffolding is erected. Metal gratings shall be cleaned from any rust and loose paint, treated with a rust inhibitor and re painted. Insertions within the stone shall be isolated from the fabric. Timber apertures which are of a more recent nature shall be replaced with new timber apertures manufactured with double glazing and UV filtering glazing which will allow for a better control of the environmental conditions within the building.
- Pest control measures shall be installed to minimise the damage being caused mostly by pigeons. Systems other than anti-roosting spikes may be reverted to.
- A new lighting scheme for the façade shall be designed and installed together with street level signage.

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NOTE

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- The technical inspections were based on visual observations and no in depth scientific analyses were carried out.
- Should the macro or micro environments of the elements subject of this report be altered in any way, the observations may become irrelevant and a revision necessary.
- The recommendations made in this report are there to guide the client to take informed decisions for the treatment and care of the monuments in question.
- One must keep in mind that the guidelines outlined in this report were drawn up in the best manner possible to address the present situation.