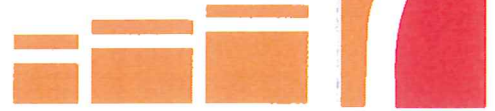


# PARROĊĊA SAN ĠILJAN



'duqu u taraw kemm hu tajjeb il-mulej' salm 34:7

13 ta' Jannar 2025

Lill-Eċċellenza Tiegħu Reverendissima  
Mons. Charles J. Scicluna  
Arċisqof ta' Malta  
Kurja Arċiveskovili  
Furjana

26/2025

Eċċellenza,

## Rikors tal-W.R. Kappillan Fr. Paul Mizzi, Kappillan ta' San Ġiljan

Bir-rispett kollu qed nagħmel rikors f'isem l-Għaqda Dilettanti Knisja ta' Lapsi li hija VO registrata, sabiex ikunu jistgħu japplikaw għall-fondi li qed jiġu offruti mill-Kunsill Malti tal-Arti biex jiġi rrestawrat il-kwadru tal-Assunta li jinsab fis-sagristija tal-Knisja ta' Lapsi. Dan il-kwadru għandu bżonn restawrazzjoni urgenti b'mod speċjali n-naħa ta' isfel.

L-istess Għaqda għażlet lill-Atelier del Restauru biex jagħmlu ix-xogħol ta' restawr. Ma' dan ir-rikors qed tiġi annessa l-*Method Statement* u l-istima, kif ukoll l-istorja fil-qosor ta' dan il-kwadru.

Nitlob li jinħareġ digriet li jagħti permess biex isir dan ix-xogħol biex ikunu jistgħu japplikaw għal dawn il-fondi sa mhux aktar tard mit-28 ta' Jannar.

Għaldaqstant, ma' dan ir-Rikors għandek issib anness l-Approvazzjoni tal-Kunsill Pastoral Parrokkjali u tal-Kunsill Ekonomiku Parrokkjali.

Dan jiddependi mill-fondi li se jingħataw u jekk jingħataw.

Nitlob il-barka tiegħek.

  
Fr. Paul Mizzi  
Kappillan

Prezentat fil-Kurja Arċiveskovili  
Ilum 14 ta' Jannar 2025

  
Donku Bugja, Kancellier

Dok A: *Method Statement*  
Dok B: Stima  
Dok C: Storja fil-qosor  
Dok D: Approvazzjoni Kunsill Pastoral Parrokkjali  
Doc E: Approvazzjoni Kunsill Ekonomiku Parrokkjali

Uffiċċju Parrokkjali  
115, Triq Lapsi  
San Ġiljan STJ 1260  
Malta

Tel: +356 21 380 270  
<http://www.stjuliansparish.org>  
Email: [parrocce.san.giljan@maltadiocese.org](mailto:parrocce.san.giljan@maltadiocese.org)



QUOTATION FOR THE CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION OF THE  
HISTORICAL PAINTING BY ANTONIO FALZON

DEPICTING *THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN*

*WITH SAINT PAUL AND SAINT JULIAN*

LAPSI CHURCH – ST JULIAN'S PARISH

10<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2025

ATELIER DEL RESTAURO  
CONSERVATION & SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS OF WORKS OF ART



## QUOTATION

Date: 10/01/2025

Quotation number: 25008

Atelier del Restauro Ltd.  
MIDLAND, B3 Burmarrad Road  
Naxxar NXR 6345

e-mail: [info@atelierdelrestauro.com](mailto:info@atelierdelrestauro.com)

VAT NUMBER MT 23561505

+356 79534766

### Client's details

<b>Name &amp; Surname:</b> Mr. Niki Papagiocopulo o.b.o Ghaqda Dilettanti Knisja ta' Lapsi San Giljan A.D. 2003	
<b>Home/ office number:</b> Tel:	<b>Mobile number:</b> 79703139
<b>Address:</b> Lapsi Church Lapsi Street St. Julians	<b>e-mail:</b> knisjalapsi@gmail.com
<b>Other Information:</b>	

### Artifact's details

<b>Object:</b> Oil on canvas painting	<b>Title:</b> <b>The Assumption of the Virgin with Saint Paul and Saint Julian</b>
<b>Artist:</b> Antonio Falzon (signed) [1805-1865]	
<b>Period:</b> 19 <sup>th</sup> century	<b>Location:</b> Church of Lapsi
<b>Dimensions:</b> 263m x 188m	<b>Inspected by:</b> Valentina Lupo
<b>Notes: Light arrangement:</b> Normal and raking light	<b>Notes:</b>



Figure 1 - General images of the painting



*Figure 2 – The painting is located inside the Church of Lapsi which served at the Parish Church  
before the building of the modern church*



*Figure 3 - General image of the painting*





Figure 4 – The painting was mounted on the main altar some years ago, as it was once the titular painting. This was done because the current titular painting was undergoing restoration at the time.



*Figure 5 - General image of the painting*



**Historical background (history written and provided by Mr Niki Papargiorcopulo) ,**

The painting of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, with St. Paul and St. Julian, painted by Maltese artist Antonio Falzon, was installed behind the main altar of the Vice-Parish Church of St. Julian's on 14 August 1855, the eve of the Solemnity of the Assumption. The painting, described as "of great artistic merit" by a report in L'Ordine, features the Blessed Virgin ascending into heaven surrounded by angels, with St. Paul on the left and St. Julian on the right. It was praised for its colors and skill, with Professor Mario Buhagiar noting its connection to the Nazarene tradition.

Antonio Falzon (1805–1865) was a prominent Maltese artist, known for his work in the Nazarene style, which sought to revive early Renaissance ideals. He studied in Rome under Tommaso Minardi, a founder of the Purist school, and was also a disciple of Vincenzo Hyzler. Falzon's style was influenced by his connections to leading figures of the Nazarene Brotherhood, such as Friedrich Overbeck. His work is characterized by its delicate colour modulation and clear light, as highlighted by Buhagiar.



*Figure 6 - Detail of the artists signature - Antonio Falzon*

The installation of the Assumption painting marked a significant shift in the church's dedication, from St. Julian to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This change coincided with the growing devotion to the Assumption, which had gained popularity in St. Julian's, as evidenced by the festivities and celebrations reported in local newspapers.

However, the devotion to St. Julian remained strong, and the church later returned to being dedicated to St. Julian. The Assumption painting remains a testament to the period when the church was dedicated to the Assumption, with artistic works and traditions still reflecting this chapter in its history.



*Figure 7 - General detail of the Assumption*

### **State of Conservation**

The oil painting is executed on canvas and currently appears, from the front, to be in a relatively stable state of conservation. However, the primary issues concerning its preservation are concealed, as they originate from the back of the painting. At the time of inspection, the painting remained hanging, and the back was not directly observed. Nevertheless, it is evident that the structural support of the painting has contributed to several significant deterioration factors.

A past lining intervention was carried out on the painting, but this has led to substantial conservation challenges. The bottom part of the lining is almost completely detached from the original canvas support. Evidence of insect infestation in certain areas suggests that the lining was applied using a flour-based glue paste adhesive, a material prone to



attracting pests. These insects have likely caused damage to the canvas support, leaving parts of the paint layer without adequate backing. As a result, the painting is now highly fragile, with areas where the paint layer is unsupported and vulnerable to further loss.

Several surface deformations were observed, which appear to stem from the detachment of the original canvas from the lining. Additionally, the adhesion of the lining was likely uneven, further exacerbating the deformations. These structural issues have caused visible cracks, paint layer detachments, and localised losses.

The varnish coating applied during a previous intervention has aged and oxidised over time, contributing to overall discolouration. While the painting's colours still appear relatively vibrant, it is anticipated that the removal of the aged varnish will reveal even more vivid and brighter tones, restoring the original visual impact intended by the artist. Traces of previous restoration efforts, including infillings and retouchings, were also observed during the examination.

The painting features the artist's signature, concealed within the helmet in the bottom middle part of the painting. This is characteristic of Antonio Falzon, who often embedded his signature discreetly in the fabric and other details of the figures depicted in his works. This painting is regarded as one of Falzon's most significant and largest works and serves as an exemplary representation of the Nazarene movement.

**The painting's historical and artistic importance has made it a focal point for educational initiatives. The Department of Art History at the University of Malta organises annual on-site visits for students to study and appreciate this masterpiece. These visits allow students to engage with the painting's artistic techniques, historical context, and conservation challenges.**

The planned restoration will address these critical conservation issues, ensuring the painting's structural stability and safeguarding it for future generations. This intervention will not only restore the painting's original beauty but also provide essential support to its fragile canvas, preventing total loss in the future.

Furthermore, we would like to collaborate closely with the Department of Art History at the University of Malta to conduct an in-depth study of the painting. This will facilitate further research into the painting's historical significance, artistic techniques, and

condition. It will also serve as an invaluable educational resource, enriching the academic and cultural knowledge of both students and researchers.

Through this project, the restoration will preserve an important cultural heritage artefact, ensuring that it continues to inspire and educate future generations while maintaining its rightful place as a significant work of Maltese art and a testament to the legacy of Antonio Falzon and the Nazarene movement.



*Figure 8 - Detail of the manuscript showing overpainting and a very fine text*

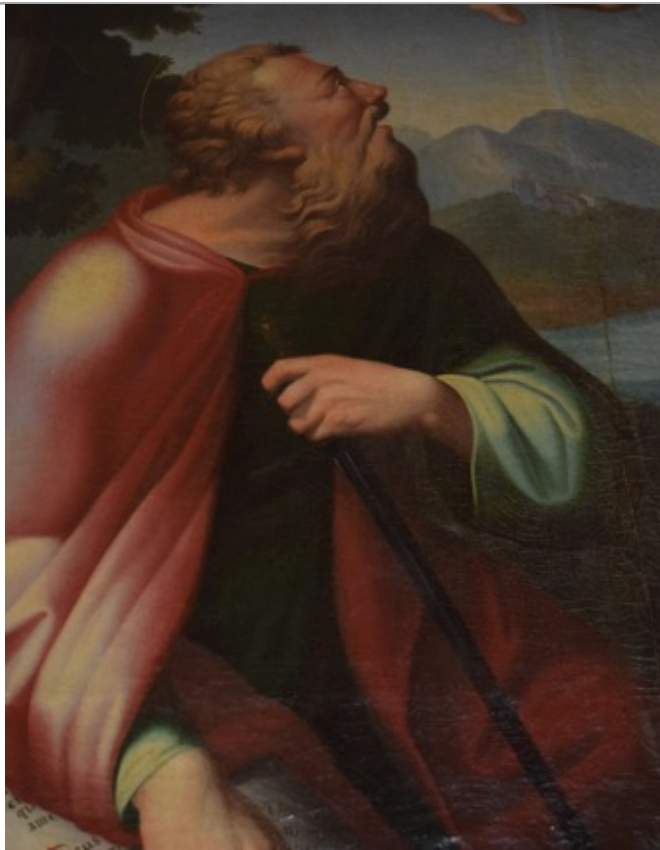




*Figure 9 - Detail of the angels on the top left of the painting*

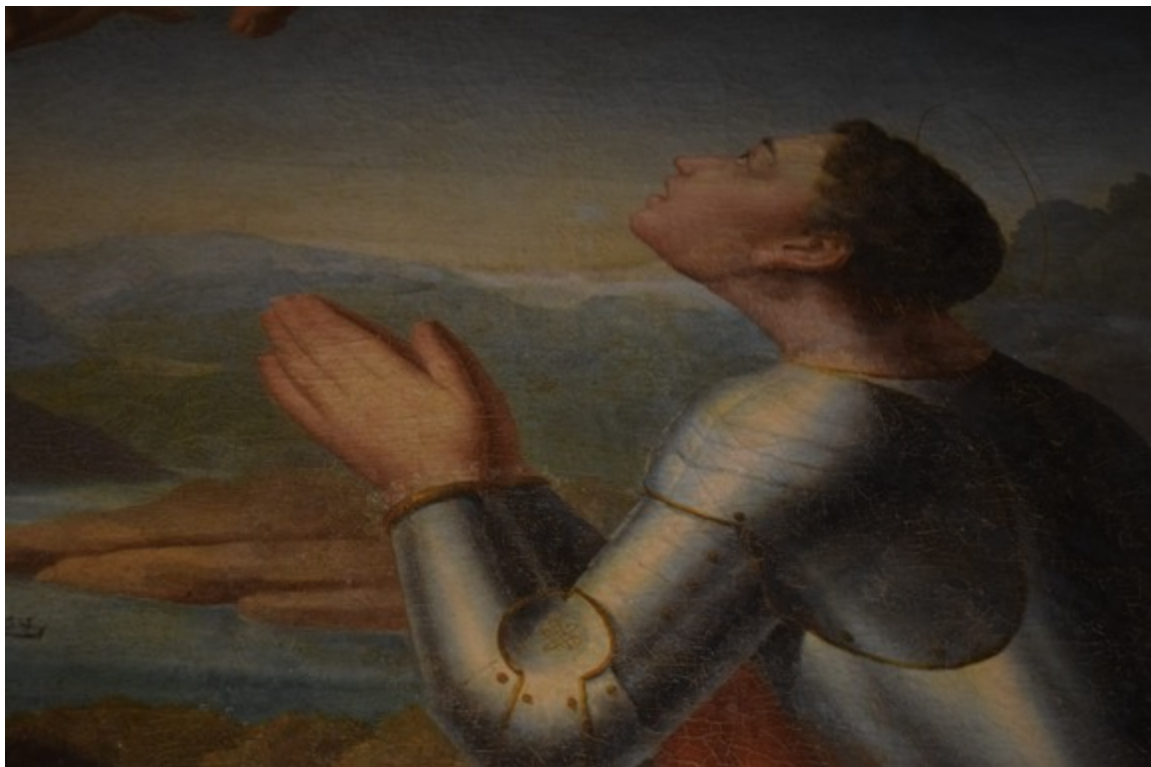


*Figure 10 -Detail of the angels on the upper right side of the painting*



*Figure 11 - The monumental figures of Saint Paul and St Julians*





*Figure 12 - Details of the faces of Saint Paul and Saint Julian*



*Figure 13 - Damages to the paint layer on the bottom and left part*





*Figure 14 – Detail of the bottom part of the painting indicating heavy deterioration with signs of insect activity, The canvas is detaching from the old lining support*



*Figure 15 - Important deformations on the bottom part of the painting showing a lining support which was adhered in a non-homogenous way, it is now also detaching*

## QUOTATION FOR THE PROFESSIONAL CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION OF THE PAINTING

Treatments	Price in Euros including materials
1. Documentation and photography in normal, raking and UV light 2. Low suction cleaning of the back 3. Report writing	160
4. Cleaning of overpainting 5. Cleaning of oxidized varnish 6. Cleaning of flyspecks using mechanical methods	3400
7. Facing 8. Humidity tests front and back 9. Treatment of the deformation	320
10. Removal of old lining canvas 11. Cleaning of the previous adhesive from the back of the canvas 12. Removal of any insect residues.	2400
13. Consolidation of the canvas support 14. Adhesion of paint layer under vacuum	850
15. Tear repair and patches 16. Canvas inlays and reconstruction of the bottom part 17. Sizing of the new canvas 18. <b>RE-LINING</b> intervention using a conservation standard adhesive under vacuum	2280
19. Removal of facing 20. Mounting the painting on the stretcher frame – <i>in the case the present auxiliary frame is not in a good physical condition to support the canvas a new auxiliary frame needs to be manufactured, not included in the price.</i>	540
21. Infilling of Lacunae with Gesso di Bologna 22. Infilling of cracks with micro-crystalline wax 23. Leveling and imitation of the pictorials surface	1700
24. Reintegration of losses in the paint layer using gouache 25. Application of retouching varnishing 26. Retouching using Maimeri® varnish colours including reconstruction of areas where a complete loss of colour and form is present. 27. Application of final protective varnish with a UV filter.	3430
<b>TOTAL EXCL. 18% VAT</b>	<b>15,080 euros</b> <b><u>Further discounted to</u></b> <b><u>14,326 euros</u></b>
<b>+ 18% VAT</b>	<b>2,578.68 euros</b>
<b>TOTAL INCLUDING 18% VAT</b>	<b>16,904 euros</b>



This quotation is valid for a period of 6 months from the date of issue.  
It is calculated that 11 months of work are needed to carry out the whole project from commencement of works.

The following costs will be included:

1. Documentation photography carried out before during and after treatments
2. Specialized professional work carried out by experienced conservator-restorers
3. All the equipment and materials to carry out the treatments such as solvents, consolidants, adhesives, retouching colours, varnishes etc... are conservation-standard materials bought from specialized conservation and restoration material suppliers namely C.T.S.srl Italy, AntaRes Italy, Conservation by Design (CXD) England.
4. Preliminary state of conservation report and treatment proposal

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*We would like to thank you for your trust and interest in our work. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions regarding the proposed treatments and quotes.*

METHOD STATEMENT FOR THE CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION OF THE HISTORICAL PAINTING  
BY ANTONIO FALZON DEPICTING *THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN WITH SAINT PAUL AND SAINT  
JULIAN* - LAPSI CHURCH – ST JULIAN'S PARISH



**METHOD STATEMENT FOR THE CONSERVATION AND  
RESTORATION OF THE HISTORICAL PAINTING BY  
ANTONIO FALZON**

**DEPICTING *THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN***

***WITH SAINT PAUL AND SAINT JULIAN***

**LAPSI CHURCH – ST JULIAN'S PARISH**

**10<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2025**

**ATELIER DEL RESTAURO**  
CONSERVATION & SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS OF WORKS OF ART

## Method statement the conservation and restoration of the painting

The aims and objectives for the conservation and restoration project will include:

- Providing an accurate record of the present condition of the painting
- Developing a methodology, following standard conservation and restoration practices to conserve the painting by:

-Documenting the painting before, during and after conservation and by providing photographs of the entire conservation process.

-Understanding the causes and nature of the mechanisms of deterioration through research and investigation

- To implement preventive conservation measures to inhibit further deterioration
- To make available a detailed report of all the restoration and conservation interventions carried out.

The conservation and restoration program will consist of interventions according to current conservation ethics and principles which include recognizability, reversibility, compatibility and minimal intervention.

## Photographic and graphic documentation

- Photographic documentation

Before, during and after, general and detailed shots will be taken in diffused and raking light using an SLR digital camera. The photos will be taken both in RAW and JPEG format.

- Optical investigations of portions of surfaces
  1. Shots in raking light chosen on the basis of representativeness.
  2. Non-invasive optical investigations - photographic shots in UV-Fluorescence

## Humidity tests



Tests will be carried out to understand whether the canvas support is sensitive to heat and water based substances, so as to identify the appropriate procedures for the treatments.

## Cleaning

Different cleaning tests will be carried out to devise an appropriate cleaning methodology:

Mechanical methods – will be effective to remove surface deposits such as dust, grime, fly specks and wax from candles

Chemical methods – which involve the dissolution of chemical mechanisms for the removal of oxidized varnish from the painted surface - The removal of overpainting where present will be preceded by tests to determine the overpainting resistance to the cleaning solution and the response of the original painted surface. Once the identification of the materials to be cleaned is made, it will be possible to formulate a cleaning method which is tailor-made to a particular problem. Both water-based methods and solvent-based cleaning will be tested. The approach will be carried out using the WOLBERS AND OR CREMONESI CLEANING methods through different tests by respecting the pH of the pictorial surface using different organic solvents (ACETONE, ETHANOL, LIGROIN®), water based solutions with different concentrations of acids (CITRIC ACID salts) and bases (TRIETANOLAMINE® ) will also be tested.

Following the above preliminary tests the supporting agents and/or thickeners that will help to create the solvent or reactant system will also be identified. An organic solvent gel system intended to have a very specific solvency parameter will be preferred as the rate of evaporation is reduced and the flow is restricted. This has the advantage that less polar solvents can be applied to the surface. The risk of swelling a vulnerable oil paint is reduced and health and safety aspects for the conservator are considerably improved. A high molecular weight polyacrylic acid CARBOPOL ® can be used as a gelling agent.

## Removal of old infills

In the case that old infills are present, mechanical cleaning of the infills will be carried out using a surgical blade, following the softening of the infills using distilled water.

## Consolidation of the pictorial layers and canvas support

For the adhesion of the detachments between the painted surface and the canvas a conservation standard adhesive will be selected after different tests will be carried out.

The adhesive will be applied to the back of the painting. The consolidation treatment will be carried out under vacuum. *Adhesive test will be carried out with the possible use of the following: Beva 371 or Plexisol*

## Facing

Facing will be applied to to the painting in-situ, in order to protect the painting during transportation. Additionally, facing will also be applied to protect the pictorial layer from any flaking or lifting of paint during handling and the conservation treatments on the verso. The facing will be applied in large pieces of square shaped Japanese paper slightly overlapping each other. A cellulosic adhesive will be used due to its easy reversibility.

## Removal of old auxiliary frame and old lining canvas

Following further investigations of the painting' back, a better of understanding of the state of conservation of the painting' support and auxiliary support could be had. This will determine the procedures and treatments to be carried out on the painting's support. The lining canvas will need to be removed because it is highly oxidised and eaten by insects. The removal will be carried out using fix blades in very small portion. This will be a very time consuming treatment, once removed we will proceed to remove the old lining adhesive from the back of the original

canvas this will be the most time consuming intervention because the adhesive is impregnated inside the original fibers of the canvas.

### Mending of tears and inlays

In the case that tears are present these will be dampened and brought into position under light weights. The tears will then be individually aligned using weights and bridged with threads of a polyamide adhesive. The threads will be fixed by using a heating spatula in order to melt the adhesive by means of a thermoplastic stable polymer with high elasticity (POLYAMIDE® ) melted using a heating spatula at the edges of the tear. This will provide strength during the stretching process work as well as long-term stability decreasing the risk of future deformations of the canvas support.

If lacunae of the canvas support are present, **canvas inlays** will be prepared having a compatible material with the original fabric. Canvas inlays will support the in-fills to be executed from the front of the painting. The outline of each lacuna will be drawn on a piece of Melinex following with the weft and warp of the original canvas. The drawing will be then transferred on the new canvas and traced by means of a pencil keeping the warp and weft in line with those of the prepared canvas, the shape will be then cut out. The inlays then will be transferred to their respective lacunae and will be adhered using a synthetic adhesive, *polyamide*, using a heating spatula.

We propose that **patches** made of a very thin and elastic synthetic fibre are adhered to the back of the painting using a conservation standard adhesive, *Beva Film*, to support the infills and tear repairs made.

### Re-lining of painting

Following the detachment of the painting's auxiliary frame together with the additional wooden panels, the painting's support will be assessed. Considering the state of conservation of the painting it is suggested that a lining or strip-lining intervention will be carried out.

A **lining** intervention is considered necessary to give the painting a stable support in the case the canvas support has become frail and deteriorated with time. Lining a painting refers to



applying a new canvas support to the back of a stretched canvas painting. The reasons for this type of treatment mainly included: the weakness of the canvas and the high humidity experienced locally.

In this case, a lining canvas, having a similar weave and properties as the original canvas, will be treated by wetting with water and sizing with glue. Once dry it will be stretched and tensed well over the stretcher frame.

The lining canvas will be adhered to the back of the original canvas, using a synthetic adhesive which is of a stable nature and reversible, in the case that in the future a new lining intervention would be required. Synthetic adhesives also avoids the risk of insect infestation and fungal growth. (PLEXISOL B550® or BEVA OF GEL ®). The choice of adhesive will be made once the back of the painting will be inspected and also according to the results of the humidity tests.

Alternatively, if the painting' support is found to be in a stable condition, **Strip-lining** will be implemented in order to extend the painting' tacking margins, making the stronger and aiding in the process of re-stretching the painting onto their stretcher frame.

The treatment consists in adhering strips of canvas to the perimeter of the painting from the back. The chosen canvas will be of a similar weave to the original. The treatment will be carried out methodically by means of a synthetic conservation standard adhesive, which will be applied to both the original and to the strips of canvas. The adhesion of the strips of canvas to the painting will be carried out using the *sottovuoto* technique, by placing the painting under light vacuum for a few minutes.

The canvas for either the lining or the strip lining will be chosen out of these high quality linen canvases supplied by CTS: 2297 tela lino, 2297 tela patina, 1111 tela lino, tela lipari.

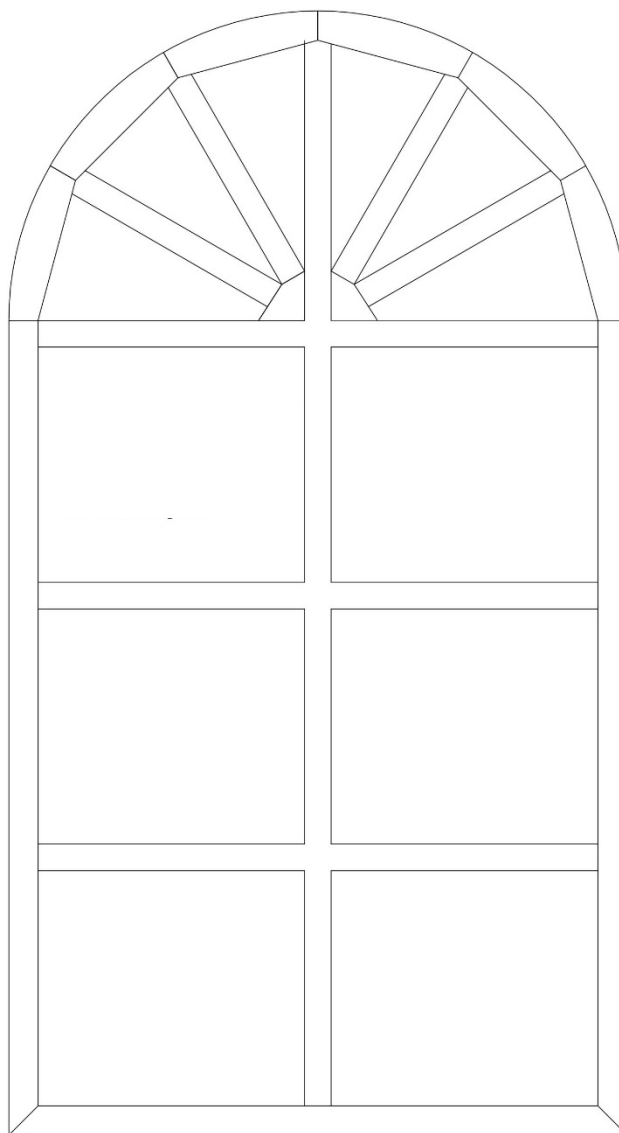
## Re-stretching of the painting

Following the treatment of the support, the painting will be re-stretched onto the auxiliary frame using stainless steel staples, according to modern conservation practice.

Since the wooden support physical structure is not suitable to maintain the painting in good tension, it will be advised to change it to a new expandable auxiliary frame, to ascertain the prolonged conservation of the canvas.



*Figure 1: Example of newly constructed expandable auxiliary frame*



#### Stretcher frame specifications

**Wood:** Spruce or Tulipwood (Spruce Picea sp. / (Liriodendron tulipifera)).

**Frame section:** Approximately 10.0 x 4.5cm (or as requested). The frame is made from 2- 3 laminations.

**Frame joint:** Corners - Mitre bridle joint, cross members and circular pieces– mortice and tenon.

**Frame front:** Bevelled. In the case of circular parts a tapered wood strip will be attached to the front perimeter (1.0 cm width, 0.6 cm thickness)

**Expandable system:** Stainless steel studs, washers and nuts.

**Surface finish:** Sanded (abrasive paper grade 220)

**Stained:** On request

**Varnished/waxed:** On request

*Figure 2: drawing and specifications for the new expandable stretcher frames proposed by Atelier del Restauro*



## Infills of losses

After resolving all the physical issues of the painting, the aesthetic problem resulting from lacunae of the pictorial layers will be treated. Infilling of the losses will be required to obtain a homogenous surface layer.

Primarily the painting will be viewed in raking light and the micro lacunae will be filled with Gesso di Bologna and using a small brush. The lacunae containing the inlays will be stuccoed with gesso di Bologna and animal glue (*rabbit skin glue*) to compensate for the low edge present. When dry, the infills are levelled to the surface of the painting using a fixed blade, the edges and excess of gesso will be then cleaned with a cotton swab dampened in water.

## Re-integration of losses

The chosen integration method will establish the former unity of the painting, using reversible colours, which will not alter in time preferably using water colours (Windsor & Newton) and completing the work using glazes of Maimeri ® varnish colours. A layer of retouching varnish is first applied. Varnishing will be carried out using conservation retouching Le Franc and Bourgeois Varnish. The varnish will be applied in order to:

- Saturate the colours of the painting before starting the reintegration phase.
- Seal the in-fills in place.
- Create an intermediate layer between the retouching to be carried out and the original paint layer.

<b>RETOUCHING VARNISH - RETOUCHER LE FRANC &amp; BOURGEOIS</b>
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### RETOUCHING VARNISH

Before starting the retouching with the maireri varnish colours, the painting must be coated with a retouching varnish. Normally one / two coats are applied with a brush, depending on the absorption. Then, after the retouching phase the final layer of varnish will be applied.

VERNICE RITOCO SOPRAFFINE ART. 1188

To be applied by brush

### Application of protective coating / varnish

A final reversible and non-yellowing varnish layer will be applied to seal off the retouching, saturate the original colours and to protect the painting's surface from deteriorated agents. The coating applied will be of a stable nature and it will re-establish the richness of the paint layer allowing a proper tone. It will also keep dirt and dust particles including polluting agents off the picture layer. A layer of gloss varnish followed a matt varnish will be applied, a preferred varnish brand will be the high quality varnish brand of Le Franc & Bourgeois®.

### CHOSEN FINAL VARNISH - TABLEAUX LE FRANC & BOURGEOIS

#### FINAL VARNISH

Once the retouching is completed, one will proceed with the final varnishing, which, based on the desired effect, bright or satin or matt, will involve the spray application of one of the following varnish.

THE CHOSEN SURFACE FINISH WILL BE DECIDED AFTER VARNISH TESTS ARE CARRIED OUT

VERNICE FINALE BRILLANTE SOPRAFFINE  
ART. 1186

For slightly shiny effect and spray applications

VERNICE FINALE BRILLANTE J. G. VIBERT  
ART. 1251

For a brilliant effect and spray applications

VERNICE FINALE OPACA ART. 1188 (SATINE)

For an opaque/matt effect and spray applications

VERNICE FINALE OPACA ART. 828

For an opaque/ matt shiny effect and spray applications

VERNICE FINALE OPACA ART. 159 (SPRAY)

For opaque effect on single portions

***The Assumption of the Virgin with Saints Paul and Julian***  
**by Antonio Falzon (1805-1865)**  
**A change in the titular dedication of the Vice-Parish Church of St Julian**

**Niki Papagiorcopulo**

According to a report in the local newspaper *L'Ordine*,<sup>i</sup> a new titular painting representing the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven with St Paul and St Julian, the work of Maltese artist Antonio Falzon, was installed in its place behind the main altar of the Vice-Parish Church of St Julian's, on the 14 August 1855, the eve of the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven. The article, published in the 17 August edition of the same year, includes a detailed description of the painting, described by the writer as being "of great artistic merit." The painting was divided into two parts: the upper register depicted the Blessed Virgin ascending into heaven, surrounded by a choir of angels - described as "exceedingly tender and majestic in their placement." In the lower register of the painting, the Apostle of the Gentiles, St Paul, was depicted on the left hand side, kneeling in an act of reverence toward the Virgin Mary. On the right, St Julian the Hospitaller, with a stag at his side, was portrayed in a state of ecstatic contemplation of the mystery of the Assumption.

The author recounts how the painting was admired by many noteworthy individuals and praises its originality, colors, and all its elements, which he claimed testified to the skill and mastery of artist Antonio Falzon.

Professor Mario Buhagiar, in a study he conducted on the paintings of the Church dedicated to Immaculate Conception and the Old Parish Church of St Julian's, published on the occasion of the centenary of the Parish of St Julian's<sup>ii</sup>, asserts that this is one of Falzon's finest works and remarks that the painting is 'notable for its gently modulated colours' and the limpid quality of light'. Buhagiar also holds that the painting belongs to the Nazarene tradition of Vincenzo Hyzler.

The Nazarene Brotherhood and the Purist School were two rival movements that sought to eliminate the excesses they believed the Baroque style had introduced, promoting the Early Renaissance style instead. The Nazarene movement was founded by a group of young German artists in 1809 with the aim of reviving the Medieval spirit in art. The brotherhood became popularly known as the Nazarenes due to the interest its exponents showed in Biblical attire.<sup>iii</sup>

**Antonio Falzon – The Artist**

Buhagiar holds that Antonio Falzon (1805–1865) studied in Rome under Tommaso Minardi, founder of the Puristi school, with whom he apparently forged bonds of friendship, and was a disciple of Vincenzo Hyzler. It seems Falzon also had connections with one of the six original founders of the Nazarene Brotherhood, all of whom hailed from the Vienna



Academy-Friedrich Overbeck (1789–1869). Overbeck was the leading figure of the brotherhood and the mentor of Giuseppe Hyzler.

### **Dr Michele Parnis M.D. – The Benefactor**

The same *L'Ordine* report provides the name of the painting's benefactor, as indicated by an inscription on the lower-left corner of the painting that reads: *Michele Parnis M.D. – Donavit 1855*. Above this inscription one can also see the coat of arms of the Parnis family. The author of the newspaper report lauded Dr Parnis, stating that the Vice-Parish Church of St Julian owed much of its recent progress to him. The report concludes by expressing the hope that others would follow his example.

Parnis is first mentioned in the role of church procurator in the pastoral visitation report by Bishop Publio Maria Sant to the Parish of Birkirkara in 1849. Sant visited the church on the 23 April 1849. The report refers to him as an expert in medicine and aromatic herbs, indicating that he likely also practiced as a pharmacist.<sup>iv</sup> Later, Bishop Gaetano Pace Forno confirmed him in the same role.

As church procurator, Dr Parnis was one of seven influential residents who petitioned Bishop Sant to expand the church. He was also a signatory of a petition made in 1853 to obtain a bell for the church and another made to Governor Reid requesting additional support for the livelihood of the priest providing pastoral service at St Julian's Church – Dun Ġużepp Xerri. This request was repeated later to Governor Le Marchant, and Dr Michele Parnis was once again among the signatories.<sup>v</sup>

Parnis was a distinguished citizen of the island. Just as he was prominent in the religious sphere, he was active socially. He began practicing medicine in 1837 and was the first doctor to inform the authorities of the cholera epidemic that broke out that year. In 1852, he left private practice to join the government as a District Medical Officer for Sliema and St. Julian's, remaining in this role until his retirement. He was also a member of the Società Medica d'Incorragimento. Furthermore, he took an active interest in the political and social state of the country.

### **A Change in the Church's Dedication**

The installation of the painting signified a notable change in the church's dedication, transitioning from St Julian the Hospitaller to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In his 1886 *Descrizione Storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo*, Achille Ferris refers to three churches in the locality of St Julian's. These were the church dedicated the Immaculate Conception, built by the Prior of Lombardy, Fra Raffaele Spinola, near his palace; the Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, built in a place named 'tal-Ballut', under the patronage of the Confraternity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel of Valletta; and a church dedicated to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This clearly indicates that when the titular dedication of the church was changed, it was not only the titular painting that changed but also the church's dedication—at least from the perspective of historians like Ferris. He explains that this church was also called 'Ta' Lapsi' and adds that the name likely came about due to a painting placed on one of the side altars in the church, depicting the Ascension of Our Lord, a work by Raffaele Caruana.<sup>vi</sup>

Roughly 250 years earlier, on the 8 October 1634, the Vicar Capitular<sup>vii</sup>, Monsignor Salvatore Pontremoli, during a pastoral visit to the same church, explained that this name originated from a strong tradition. On the solemnity of the Ascension, around 2,000 people from surrounding areas gathered at the church, where several masses were celebrated. After offering their devotions, people would go down to the shores and take their first swim for the summer. Due to the popularity of this tradition, first vespers and sung high mass started being celebrated on this day.<sup>viii</sup>

Ferris adds that this church was originally dedicated to St Julian. The first church was built around 1580 and was enlarged in 1682. Following a pastoral visit by Bishop Sant in 1848, it was granted the title of vice-parish church and was further expanded in 1852, with Bishop Sant contributing 150 scudi toward the project.<sup>ix</sup> It was blessed by the Provost of Birkirkara, Dun Ġużepp Debono, on the 20 February 1853, who was delegated to do so by the ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>x</sup>

### **The Reason behind the Change**

One might ask why this church, which had been dedicated to St Julian since Bishop Gargallo's visit in 1601, suddenly became dedicated to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Various sources hint at an effort to change the titular dedication of the church during the period when St Julian's became a vice-parish. Among these sources, several references to the feast of the Assumption celebrated on the 15 August at this church are noteworthy. These references clearly show that the feast of Santa Marija had taken root, despite the devotion to St Julian, which Ferris himself described as 'antichissima.'

### **The Titular Feast of the Assumption**

The Malta Mail newspaper of 19 August 1842, mentions a visit by Governor Sir Henry Bouverie to the summer residence of the Honorable Mr Aspinall in St Julian's during the feast of Santa Marija. That day, houses were illuminated, fireworks were let off, and the traditional greasy pole was held. Many participated in this traditional sport, attempting to win the ten-dollar prize. The Governor was so moved by the spirit of the event that he personally offered another prize to the person who placed second.<sup>xi</sup>

Over the years, the feast of Santa Marija gained popularity. The local newspaper *L'Ordine* often reported on this celebration. For instance, in its 21 August 1852 edition, it noted that on the eve of the Assumption, the Cathedral, St John's Co-Cathedral and many parishes and villages, including St Julian's, were illuminated for the occasion. Spinola Palace, then serving as a summer residence to the Jesuits, stood out.<sup>xii</sup> Two years later, the same newspaper provided a detailed report of the feast celebrated in the newly enlarged church, where many people attended liturgies to which the Jesuits and their students lent their participation. Once again, the illuminated Spinola Palace featured prominently during the festivities.<sup>xiii</sup>

### **The 1855 Feast of the Assumption in St Julian's**

The 1855 feast was particularly special, marking the inauguration of the new titular painting. The celebration was preceded by fifteen days of devotional preparation, known as the 'kwindicina', during which the *Salve Regina*, and litanies were sang and the Sacramental

benediction was imparted. On the solemnity itself, the Jesuits sang Matins and Lauds in the morning, followed by a Mass celebrated by Rev. P. Schembri. Numerous masses were offered throughout the day, with over 300 people receiving holy communion. Evening functions included the recitation of the Rosary, a panegyric by Rev. Dr Carlo Falzon, and the Via Crucis. This was followed by Vespers, recitation of the *Salve Regina*, litanies, the *Tantum Ergo*, and concluding with the Sacramental benediction.

In 1857, the feast was celebrated with illuminations<sup>xiv</sup>, and two years later, Vice-Parish Priest Xerri led the celebrations, which included solemn vespers, a sung mass, and a panegyric. The church was adorned splendidly, and many attended, thanks to the zeal and dedication of Xerri, who devoted his life to this church. In 1860, the feast was celebrated with liturgies, illuminations, fireworks, and the traditional game of the greasy pole,<sup>xv</sup> although it was held on the Sunday following the 15 August. Vice-Parish Priest Xerri even petitioned Pope Pius IX to allow the same liturgy of the Assumption to be celebrated on the Sunday following the 15 August.<sup>xvi</sup>

This Marian devotion appears to have been introduced when Dun Ġużepp Xerri was chosen to provide pastoral service as the vice-parish priest of St Julian's, during a time when this church was granted a degree of autonomy from the Collegiate Church of St Helen in Birkirkara. Fr Alexander Bonnici, in his extensive research on our parish published on the occasion of its first centenary, seems to have reached the same conclusion.<sup>xvii</sup> It was Xerri, who before coming to St Julian's had been the Procurator of a Confraternity dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows at the Collegiate Church of St Helen<sup>xviii</sup>, who brought this Marian fervor to St Julian's. This eventually led to the change in the church's titular dedication.

### **A Return to St Julian**

Despite this, to date, there is no evidence of an external feast in honor of Santa Marija following 1860. The church also ceased to be referred to as being dedicated to the Assumption. The devotion to St Julian, deeply rooted since Bishop Gargallo's visit, never waned among the people of St Julian's. The ancient tradition associated with the spring in St Julian's Bay was still being practiced in 1853. Evidence of this is found in a letter written by an Englishman in *The Malta Times*, who failed to grasp the significance of this tradition and thus described it as 'a barbarous custom.'<sup>xix</sup>

When the time came for the church dedicated to St Julian to be elevated to parish status, the people's desire seemed to be the restoration of St Julian Hospitaller as the titular dedication. The devotion to this saint, which had commenced nearly 300 years earlier in this church and gave the locality its name, was never to be changed again.

The feast of St Julian began being celebrated with pomp and grandeur. In 1877, it took place on Sunday, 26 August, with church functions animated by an orchestra under the direction of Mro. Malfiggiani. External celebrations featured illuminations, the greasy pole, fireworks, and marches by La Nazionale Vincitrice, as well as bands from Birkirkara and Floriana.<sup>xx</sup>

However, records indicate that the feast of Santa Marija continued to be celebrated in the church. Registers of the *Procura della Veneranda Lampade delle Chiesa Parrocchiale di San*



*Giuliano*<sup>xxi</sup> show payments made to Maestro Alberto Vella for music during the feast of the Assumption, up until 1903. Occasionally, illuminations were also held, as noted in 1897. However, by this time, it was clear that the titular feast was that of St Julian, with the feast of the Assumption becoming one of several liturgical celebrations in the church, such as that in honour of the Virgin of the Rosary, the Ascension, and others.

Artistic works in Lapsi Church still bear witness to the period when the church was dedicated to the Assumption, including inscriptions of the symbol of the most holy name of Mary on the church's main nave and pulpit, as well as on the holy water fonts beside the side doors. Outside the church, on the southern part of its parvis, stands a stone statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary ascending into heaven with an inscription granting indulgences to those who recite a Hail Mary in front of it. This statue, restored in 2001, is popularly attributed to Salvatore Dimech, known as 'is-Sarc'.

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  - <sup>iii</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/art/Nazarene-Brotherhood>.
  - <sup>iv</sup> A(rchbishop's) A(rchives) M(alta), *V(isitatio) P(astoralis) 1848-1849*, 188r.
  - <sup>v</sup> WINSTON L. ZAMMIT, *Dr Michele Parnis M.D. in Lapsi* (August 2008), 28-29.
  - <sup>vi</sup> ACHILLE FERRIS, *Descrizione Storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo*, Malta 1866, 326-7.
  - <sup>vii</sup> A cleric chosen by a cathedral chapter to manage a bishopric during a vacancy.
  - <sup>viii</sup> AAM, VP (Pontremoli, 1634).
  - <sup>ix</sup> ACHILLE FERRIS, *Descrizione Storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo*, Malta 1866, 326-7.
  - <sup>x</sup> *L'Ordine* 21.VIII.1852.
  - <sup>xi</sup> *The Malta Mail* 19.VIII.1842.
  - <sup>xii</sup> *L'Ordine* 25.VIII.1852.
  - <sup>xiii</sup> *Ibid*, 18.VIII.1854.
  - <sup>xiv</sup> *Ibid*, 21.VIII.1857.
  - <sup>xv</sup> *Ibid*, 24.VIII.1860.
  - <sup>xvi</sup> ALEXANDER BONNICI, *The Vice Parish and Parish of St Julian's: 1849-1942*, in *1891-1991 The centenary of a parish ST JULIAN'S*, Stanley Fiorini (Editor), Malta 1992, 149-181.
  - <sup>xvii</sup> *Ibid*, 154.
  - <sup>xviii</sup> WINSTON L. ZAMMIT, *Dun Ġużepp Xerri DD (1823-1897). L-Ewwel Kappillan ta' San Ġiljan*, Malta 1997, 5.
  - <sup>xix</sup> *The Malta Times* 02.VIII.1853.
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  - <sup>xxi</sup> A(rkivju) S(an) Ġ(iljan), *Libro Esito: Amministrazione della Procura della Ven. Lampade della Chiesa Parrocchiale di San Giuliano*, Vol 1, 1-31.

# PARROĊĊA SAN ĠILJAN



' duqu u taraw kemm hu tajjeb il-mulej ' salm 34:7

13 ta' Jannar 2025

Lill-Eċċellenza Tiegħu Reverendissima  
Mons. Charles J. Scicluna  
Arċisqof ta' Malta  
Kurja Arċiveskovili  
Furjana

Eċċellenza,

## Rikors għal proposta ta' restawr tal-kwadru tal-Assunta

Il-Kunsill Pastoral Parrokkjali ma jsib l-ebda oġġezzjoni li jsir dan il-proġett ta' restawr, fejn l-Għaqda Dilettanti Knisja ta' Lapsi tkun tista' tapplika għall-fondi li qed jiġu offruti mill-Kunsill Malti tal-Arti sabiex jiġu rrestawrat il-kwadru tal-Assunta li jinsab fis-sagristija tal-Knisja msemmija.

L-ispejjeż ta' dan il-proġett qed joffrihom il-Kunsill Malti tal-Arti.

Jitlob għalhekk li r-rikors imressaq mill-Kappillan għal din il-proposta tiġi milqugħa.

**Fr Paul Mizzi**  
Chairperson  
Kunsill Pastoral Parrokkjali

**Simone Wightman**  
Segretarja  
Kunsill Pastoral Parrokkjali

# PARROĊĊA SAN ĠILJAN



'duqu u taraw kemm hu tajjeb il-mulej' salm 34:7

13 ta' Jannar 2025

Lill-Eċċellenza Tiegħu Reverendissima  
Mons. Charles J. Scicluna  
Arċisqof ta' Malta  
Kurja Arċiveskovili  
Furjana

Eċċellenza,

## Rikors għal proposta ta' restawr tal-kwadru tal-Assunta

Il-Kunsill Ekonomiku Parrokkjali ma jsib l-ebda oġġezzjoni li jsir dan il-proġett ta' restawr, fejn l-Għaqda Dilettanti Knisja ta' Lapsi tkun tista' tapplika għall-fondi li qed jiġu offruti mill-Kunsill Malti tal-Arti sabiex jiġu rrestawrat il-kwadru tal-Assunta li jinsab fis-sagristija tal-Knisja msemmija.

L-ispejjeż ta' dan il-proġett qed joffrihom il-Kunsill Malti tal-Arti.

Jitlob għalhekk li r-rikors imressaq mill-Kappillan għal din il-proposta tiġi milqugħa.

**Alexander Arena**  
**Chairperson**  
**Kunsill Ekonomiku Parrokkjali**