



The Eucharistic Tabernacle at the Parish Church of Haż-Żebbuġ

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ORITWARJU

HAŻ-ŻEBBUĠ U Ż-ŻEBBUĠIN

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The Parish Church at Haż-Żebbuġ as seen today may owe its design to two architects Vittorio Cassar and Tumas Dingli and although there have been a number of additions its façade was probably constructed around 1635.¹ The old Church visited by Dusina in 1575 which was built circa 1372-1380 occupied the same area as the present day building.² However by 1530 this church was unable to accommodate the growing population of Żebbuġ and in 1599 plans were in progress for a larger building and in 1621 Parish Priest Angelo Fiore presented a petition to this effect to Bishop Cagliares and by 1655 much was accomplished.³

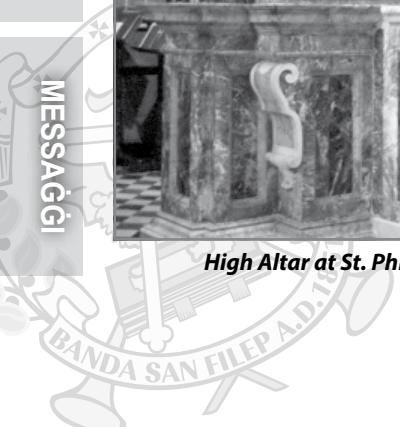
The Eucharistic Tabernacle has taken on a number of shapes and sizes over the advent of time. However the Tabernacle of the Old Testament took on the form of a structure where the people of Israel would meet and pray to their God.(Exodus 25:8-9) In the New Testament, initially the Holy Species was held in the custody of the faithful, wrapped in simple linen cloth and kept close to the breast. Since then the development of the Tabernacle has experienced one may say, dramatic changes. The Tabernacle and its importance as seen today may very well be the result of two major events; The Protestant Reformation⁴ and the Council of Trent

1545-1563 the latter was first convened by Pope Paul 111 (Alessandro Farnese 1534-1549)⁵, along with the dedicated efforts of two main protagonists, Gian Matteo Giberti 1495-1543 and Carlo Borromeo 1538-1584.

In 1574 Mgr. Pietrus Dusina was sent to Malta by the Holy See. His stay lasted from June to August of that same year. Dusina acting as Apostolic Visitor was instructed to visit the churches of Malta and Gozo in order to implement the decrees which had been laid down by the Council of Trent



High Altar at St. Philip Parish Church Haż-Żebbuġ¹⁴



and to see whether they were being followed.⁶

Regarding his visit to the Parish Church of *Haż-Żebbuġ* Mgr. Dusina records that the Blessed Sacrament was in a wooden place bare from ornamentation located behind the Main Altar therefore he ordered a wooden box to be made along with a gilded silver pyx so that the Eucharist may be conserved honourably.⁷ Also that in order to show proper decorum he instructed that a wall be built to separate the Altar from the Sacristy thus concealing the entrance to the Belfry.⁸

In 1700 another interesting note was recorded during the Pastoral visit conducted by Mgr. Cocco Palmeri where he makes reference to a wooden Tabernacle lined with silk and a silver key.⁹ It was in the early eighteenth century that Francesco Zahra was to design the new marble Altar along with *marmista* Francesco Cerroti¹⁰ which would be put in place by *marmista* Claudio Durante circa 1734¹¹ this replaced the gilded wooden Tabernacle and *skanelle* fashioned by L. Gafa three years earlier.¹² The impressive High Altar at *Haż-Żebbuġ* dominates the apse and carries a grand Exposition Throne which was still new to Malta. However this would change and Zahra would later be responsible for a number of similar designs.¹³

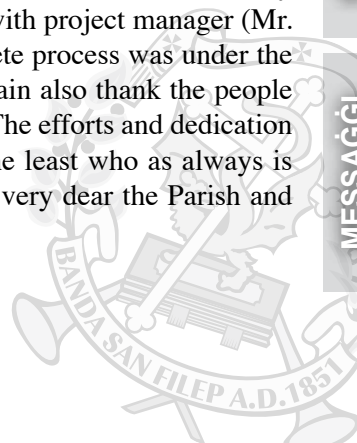
The relief of the Tabernacle door represents the Lamb of Christ and on the reverse is the Pelican feeding its young. The interior is impressively deep and this probably reflects the number of pyxes it holds which are brought out decorously as they sit on the extension tray.

It was during the twentieth century when the parishioners of *Haż-Żebbuġ* gave generous donations in order to remodel and enhance the interior of this grand Tabernacle thus rendering it

more impressive with the added decoration.¹⁶ Once again in the twenty-first century this impressive Tabernacle has undergone extensive restoration which had taken at least four months and where even the long extension tray was also replaced due to the wear and tear that it has suffered over the past years. A major part of this recent work was carried out by dedicated local parishioners and professional silversmiths along with project manager (Mr. Anton Caruana) who was brought in to supervise, and the complete process was under the close direction of Archpriest Daniel Cardona.¹⁷ We must once again also thank the people from *Żebbuġ* who were as always generous with their donations. The efforts and dedication of our Archpriest Fr. Daniel Cardona are commendable to say the least who as always is wholeheartedly involved and is the driving force and who holds very dear the Parish and parishioners of *Haż-Żebbuġ*.



**Tabernacle High Altar at St. Philip Parish Church
*Haż-Żebbuġ*¹⁵**



Referenzi

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- ⁶ Aquilina, George, Fiorini, Stanley, eds., *Documentary Sources of Maltese History*. Malta 200. xiii-xiv, xvi
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- ⁸ *ibid*
- ⁹ PV 27A Davide Cocco Palmeri 1699-1700 f. 1
- ¹⁰ Sciberras, Keith, *Roman Baroque Sculpture for the Knights of Malta*. 2nd rev ed., Malta 2012. 231, 355
- ¹¹ Ciappara, Salv, *Grajjet Haż-Żebbuġ*, [trans, Sammut, Frans] Malta2001. 71
- ¹² *ibid*: 73
- ¹³ Sciberras, Keith, *Francesco Zahra 1710-1773: His Life and Art in mid 18th century Malta*. Malta2010. 49
- ¹⁴ Courtesy: Haż-Żebbuġ Parish Church 07.07.2011
- ¹⁵ Courtesy: Haż-Żebbuġ Parish Church 7.07.2011
- ¹⁶ Personal communication: Archpriest Charles Attard, Tony Cortis 20.04.2011 and 31.08.2011
- ¹⁷ Personal communication: Archpriest Daniel Cardona, 15.03.2017



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