

**PRESS RELEASE**

**27th August 2021**

**Layers of protective material shield the Għajn Tuffieħa Roman Baths from further deterioration**

The Għajn Tuffieħa Roman Baths have been backfilled with layers of different protective materials in order to conserve them for future generations, in the first ever intervention of its kind by Heritage Malta.

Structures on site provide shelter from sun and rain, however they offer no protection against heat, wind and water seeping beneath. Besides erosion caused by the elements, along the years damage has also been caused by small animals foraging in the area, plant roots, and people's footsteps albeit the site is not open to the public except occasionally.

It was therefore decided to preserve the site in its current state in order to slow down the deterioration process and ensure stability. This could only be achieved by backfilling it temporarily to provide a similar environment to that where it lay for some 2000 years prior to its discovery, in order to avoid further loss of material.

Plans for the conservation of the Roman Baths had been drafted for quite some time. In fact, two years ago, as a precautionary measure, a trial was conducted by backfilling a small area on site, devoid of Roman mosaic, with the same materials used in the latter intervention.

Following a detailed analysis of the site, in the month prior to this intervention emergency conservation works were carried out by Heritage Malta's conservator-restorers. These included consolidation works, plastering of cracks and plant removal. Detached mosaic pieces were put back in place so as not to be lost and so as to recreate the pattern. Every step was documented, including 3D modelling by Heritage Malta's archaeologists.

The stratigraphy employed in the site's backfilling is recognisable and reversible, enabling future archaeologists and conservator-restorers to distinguish the materials from the original site. Both local and imported materials were used. These were separated from the original surface and from each other through the use of geotextile.

The Għajn Tuffieħa Roman Baths were discovered by accident in 1929, when workers were digging a trench to supply nearby fields with fresh water from a natural spring in the area. They informed Sir Temi Zammit, the Museums Director at the time, who excavated the site in 1929 and 1930 and who believed that the bathing complex dates back to the first or second century after Christ.

The complex, whose location was probably chosen in order to fully exploit the natural source of water in the vicinity, consists of pools and chambers. One of the chambers was kept warm and is, in fact, elevated, resting on a number of arches where fire would heat up the water.

Heritage Malta's Chief Executive Officer, Noel Zammit, said that this is a clear and practical example of how the national agency for cultural heritage gives a future to the nation's past. "The current situation was not allowing the site to be preserved properly, leading us to decide to deprive ourselves of it in order to enable future generations to enjoy it instead. We cannot retrieve what has been lost from the site with the passage of time, but we can prevent further losses," said Mr Zammit, stressing that the backfilling is only a temporary measure and that Heritage Malta will not disregard this site but will continue to take care of its upkeep until the time comes for it to be uncovered again without any risk for the preservation of the site itself.

### **Il-Banjijiet Rumani ta' Għajn Tuffieħa jitgħattew b'materjal protettiv biex jibqgħu kkonsevati**

Il-Banjijiet Rumani ta' Għajn Tuffieħa tgħattew b'saffi ta' materjali protettivi differenti biex jibqgħu kkonsevati għall-ġenerazzjonijiet tal-ġejjieni, f'dak li hu l-ewwel intervent tax-xorta tiegħu li qatt sar minn Heritage Malta.

Għalkemm f'dan is-sit storiku hemm strutturi li jilqgħu kontra x-xemx u x-xita, dawn ma joffrux ħarsien kontra s-sħana, ir-riħ u l-ilma li joskula minn taħt. Minbarra l-elementi, tul is-snin fis-sit saret ħsara wkoll minn annimali zġħar u t-tħaffir tagħhom, l-għeruq tal-pjanti, u wkoll il-mixi tan-nies, anke jekk dan is-sit ma jinfetaħx għall-pubbliku ħlief f'okkażjonijiet speċjali.

Għaldaqstant ġie deċiż li s-sit jiġi ppreservat fl-istat li jinsab illum sabiex il-proċess ta' deterjorazzjoni jkun iktar kajman u jkun hemm ukoll stabilità. Dan seta' jsir biss billi s-sit jerga' jitgħatta temporanjament biex jerga' jkun f'ambjent simili għal dak fejn dam mal-2000 sena qabel ġie skopert, ħalli meta jerga' jinkixef ma jkunx intilef iżjed materjal minnu daqskemm kieku tħalla mikxuf.

Il-pjan għall-preservazzjoni tal-Banjijiet Rumani kien ilu jitfassal. Fil-fatt, sentejn ilu, bħala prekawzjoni u b'kawtela, saret prova billi ntgħażlet parti zġħira mis-sit fejn m'hemmx mużajk tal-perjodu Ruman u tgħattiet temporanjament bl-istess materjali li ntużaw fl-intervent li sar dan l-aħħar.

Wara li saret analiżi dettaljata tas-sit, matul ix-xahar ta' qabel dan l-intervent saru diversi xogħlijiet ta' konservazzjoni ta' emergenza mill-konservaturi-restawraturi ta' Heritage Malta. Dawn kienu jikkonsistu fi lqugħ, konsolidament, tikħil ta' qsim u tneħħija ta' pjanti. Partijiet tal-mużajk li kienu nqalgħu tqiegħdu lura f'posthom biex ma jintilfux u jerga' jinħoloq id-disinn li kien inqala'. Kull biċċa xogħol li saret ġiet dokumentata, anke permezz ta' 3D modelling mill-arkeologi ta' Heritage Malta.

Biex tgħatta s-sit, intuzat stratigrafija li tintgħaraf u li hija reversibbli. Dan bl-għan li arkeologi u l-konservaturi-restawraturi li jagħmlu interventi fil-ġejjieni jkun jistgħu jidentifikaw il-materjal bħala li mhux parti mis-sit originali. Dan il-materjal jalterna bejn materjal Malti u materjal miġjub minn barra. Dawn il-materjali ġew separati minn mal-wiċċ originali kif ukoll bejn is-saffi tagħhom infushom permezz ta' geotextile.

Il-kumplex tal-banjijiet Rumani f'Għajn Tuffieħa nkixef b'mod aċċidentali fl-1929, meta xi ħaddiema kienu qed iħaffru trinka biex iwasslu l-ilma mill-għajn naturali li hemm fl-inħawi sal-għelieqi tal-bdiewa fil-madwar. Huma infurmaw lid-Direttur tal-Mużewijiet ta' dak iż-żmien, Sir Temi Zammit, li skava s-sit fl-1929 u fl-1930 u li kien tal-fehma li l-kumplex imur lura għall-ewwel jew it-tieni seklu wara Kristu.

Il-kumplex, li loku aktarx intgħażel proprju biex jiġi sfruttat is-sors naturali ta' ilma fil-qrib, jikkonsisti fi kmamar u pixxini. Waħda mill-kmamar kienet tinzamm sħuna. Fil-fatt kienet elevata u tistrieħ fuq għadd ta' arkati fejn kien jitqabbad in-nar biex jissaħħan l-ilma.

F'kumment dwar l-intervent li sar, il-Kap Eżekuttiv ta' Heritage Malta, Noel Zammit, qal li dan huwa eżempju ċar u prattiku ta' kif l-aġenzija nazzjonali għall-wirt kulturali tagħti għajnejni lill-imgħoddi tagħna. "Is-sitwazzjoni preżenti ma kinitx qed tippermetti li dan is-sit jiġi ppreservat kif jixraq, u għalhekk ħadna d-deċiżjoni li aħna niċċaħħdu mis-sit biex ikunu jistgħu jgawduh il-generazzjonijiet tal-futur. Dak li laħaq intilef mis-sit matul iż-żmien ma nistgħux ingibuh lura, imma nistgħu niżguraw li ma nkomplux nitilfu minnu," qal is-Sur Zammit, filwaqt li saħaq li dan is-sit tgħatta biss temporanjament u mhux sabiex jintesa, u Heritage Malta se tibqa' tmantnih u tiegħu ħsiebu sakemm jasal iż-żmien li jerga' jinkixef għall-pubbliku mingħajr periklu għall-preservazzjoni tas-sit innifsu.