



## VISIT OF THE FIRST LADY MEHRIBAN ALIYEVA

Restoring the catacombs of Sts. Marcellinus and Peter, Rome



### **The visit of the First Lady Mrs Mehriban Aliyeva, President of the Azerbaijan Heydar Alieyev Foundation.**

On June 2, 2014 the President of the Pontifical Council for Culture and of the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology, Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, host Dr. Mehriban Aliyeva, President of the Azerbaijani Heydar Alieyev Foundation, in a visit to the Roman catacombs of Sts. Marcellinus and Peter *ad duas lauros* (Rome, Casilina, 641), in order to present the final results of the first series of interventions of restoration – funded entirely by the foundation chaired by Mrs. Aliyeva – a restoration that aims at the recovery of the extraordinary corpus of paintings of this catacomb, which has over 87 frescoed rooms.

The generous allocation of funds was made available under a specific agreement signed by the Heydar Alieyev Foundation and the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology in June 2012.

During the month of January, the interventions were concluded in the following locations, traceable chronologically to the fourth century: the cubicle of Susanna and the gravedigger, the pit of Daniel, the arcosolium of the banquet of Sabina and the arcosolium of Orpheus. Right now, thanks to the second installment of funding, the restoration of the cubicle of the Madonna with two Magi is taken up. The very encouraging results of the first group of renovations just concluded is also the merit of highly qualified conservators, under the direction of scientific and technical managers of the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology, a result of the use of most advanced conservation techniques, above all that of cleaning by laser, which has permitted the removal of tenacious blackish coatings otherwise resistant to the more traditional techniques of cleaning.

The project of the restoration of the complex *duas lauros* as a whole is expected to be completed by 2015, and is the subject of major initiatives which hope for the value enhancement of the catacombs, both for the exceptional area above the ground characterized by the majestic structure of the Mausoleum of Augusta Helena and restored by the Special Superintendence for Archaeological Heritage of Rome done with the objective of increasing its use by the public.

In this virtuous circle of promotion, the contribution of the Heydar Alieyev Foundation which is a manifestation of the sensibility, generosity and untiring hard work of the President, Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva, stands out as an audacious and far-sighted gesture, the product of

a modern vision according to which cultural heritage should be understood as the common heritage of humanity in the broadest sense and without geographic, religious and cultural limits, and to be protected and valued as such. It is therefore highly desirable that the occasion of the visit be an occasion to express to Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva the deepest gratitude for what is being done in the catacombs of Sts. Marcellinus and Peter by His Eminence Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, on behalf of the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology, and more generally on behalf of those who love cultural heritage. It is also hoped that the collaboration seen in the restoration of the *ad lauros duas* complex, will continue in the vast and challenging terrain of culture.



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