

# TREASURES OF MALTA

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MALTA TOURISM AUTHORITY



## Illustrations in Lotenzo Zahra's article

Dear Sir,

I read with much pleasure the most interesting article about 'The Church of St Anthony the Abbot' by Lorenzo Zahra. I was however perplexed by the description of the illustrations on pages 52 and 53.

The chalice, even without checking the marks, is stylistically late baroque and should be dated from the mid-18th century, not as described as being early 17th century.



In the early 17th century a chalice would resemble the one illustrated on the front cover and page 52/3 of 'Flair' November issue. For comparison's sake I attach illustrations of chalices from the early 17th century from Carl Hernmarek's 'The Art of the European Silversmiths 1430-1830', p. 324.

The sanctuary lamp should also be dated (again without seeing the marks) to the early-mid 18th century.

Please understand that my objective in pointing these out is purely for good information.

Alaine Apap Bologna

## St. Alphonse Maria de Liguori

Dear Sir,

With reference to the article in Treasures of Malta Christmas 2008 Edition on The Birgu Painting of St. Alphonse Maria de Liguori, I wish to make some observations.

According to the article in question the painting of St. Alphonse Maria de Liguori which once belonged to the Vittoriosa resident Guzeppi Bonici, is definitely the work of Antonio Zammit (1830-1890c). This is confirmed by Achille Ferris in

*Descrizione Storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo* (pg 270), by Pietro Paolo Castagna in *Lis storia ta' Malta bil Gzejer Tahha* (Vol. 1 Part 2 pg 232) by the late Emmanuel Fiorentino in his book *Il-Pittura F'Malta fis-Seklu dsarax* (pg 95) and finally by Guzeppi Theuma in his book *L-Arti fil-Knejjes minn Mitt Pittur Malti* (pg 214). Antonio Zammit hailed from Cospicua and was trained under Tommaso Madiona. It is surely not the work of a Flemish artist or the work of a foreign artist as the author has mentioned in the article.

The author also mentions a painting depicting *The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* in St. Catherine's Chapel in St. Lawrence parish church which he attributed to Mattia Preti. May I point out again that the painting in question is a copy by Gian Nicola Buhagiar after Annibale Carracci. This is confirmed by Dr. Keith Seiberras in his book *L-Arti Barokka f'Malta* (pg 97). *The Martyrdom of St. Lawrence* is the only painting by Mattia Preti to be found in St. Lawrence parish church Vittoriosa.

In conclusion may I congratulate the author on an interesting article.

Areno Deguara

From Simon Mercieca: *I would like to thank Mr. Areno Deguara for his interest in my article. Unfortunately, Achille Ferris and Pietro Castagna had the bad habit of giving facts without accrediting their sources. Certain errors were repeated and perpetuated with the result that their errors eventually ended up being considered as historical truths. Neither Castagna nor Ferris discuss the history of this painting but telegraphically writes that it is the work of Antonio Zammit. This attribution is extremely interesting when one considers that it is being made by contemporaries, but there is the risk that Ferris copied this information from Castagna, as it was first published by the latter in his 1865 edition in Volume 3 at page 121. However and without entering into the merits of Castagna's contribution, nor shedding doubts about his attribution regarding the authorship of this particular painting, it should be pointed out that both his and Ferris' book contain serious historical errors including facts about contemporaneous events. The Curia documentation I looked at contained no information about the author of this work. I concur with Mr. Deguara about what he said regarding the painting of the Marriage of Saint Catherine. This painting of St. Alphonse was put on the altar dedicated to St. Catherine and this is attested by the Curia documentation. Given the size of the present painting, this means that this painting had served for a short time as a 'sotto quadro' on this altar.*

## The Villages of Malta

Sir,

I would like to bring to attention the following points, regarding Brian Blouet's 'The Villages of Malta' in *Treasures of Malta No 43*, where he attributes once again St. Helen's Church in Birkirkara (begun 1726) to architect Domenico Cachia.

This attribution, first put forward by Quentin Hughes—*The Building of Malta 1530-1795*—has been practically done away with as far back as 1985 by the late Leonard Mahoney in his *A History of Maltese Architecture*, in which he also, though inconclusively, puts forward the name of Capomastro Salvo Borg, as the architect for the Birkirkara church.

Now in the payments record books still treasured in the same church's museum, an entry for the month of August 1728, reads as follows, in the original Italian language:

*Al Capomastro Salvo Borg per suo disegno del nuovo tempio a bon conto scudi 35.*

Perhaps this last quote does not need any further comment.

Philip Xuereb

From Brian Blouet: *I cannot blame my error on Quentin Hughes. Going back to his fine book, The Building of Malta, (1956), which laid the foundations for so much study of Malta's architectural history, his language relating to Domenico Cachia, is reserved, simply stating that the architect "began" St. Helen in Birkirkara, a building "completed" in 1745 which could simply mean that Cachia was consulted about the project at an early stage. In the publication, Quentin Hughes and Conrad Thake, Malta: The Baroque Island, Midsca Books, 2003, St. Helen Parish Church, Birkirkara, 1727-1745, is attributed to Salvo Borg (1662-1735). Philip Xuereb has produced documentation from the Birkirkara parish archive to suggest that the "attributed to" may be dropped. In the "Villages of Malta", the aim of the article was to show how Maltese architects and craftsmen, working in Maltese materials, adapted European architectural ideas and gave them a form distinctive to the islands. Philip Xuereb, by quoting documentation of the contribution of Salvo Borg broadens the base of the Maltese contribution. We are all grateful to him for that.*

## Church of St Anthony the Abbot in Birgu

Sir,

Your Christmas 2008 issue featured a highly informative article by Mr Lorenzo Zahra on the small historical church of St Anthony the Abbot in Vittoriosa, irretrievably destroyed