

## Giuseppe Preziosi

From Dr Simon Mercieca, director, Mediterranean Institute, University of Malta

THE well-researched article on Giuseppe Preziosi by Dr John Attard Montalto (*The Sunday Times*, March 28) sought to give an identity to an 18th century upstart, who found his fortune outside his native Corsica.

Preziosi was not the sole Corsican to make headway abroad. He was one of the many Corsicans who had left his native land to seek his luck in military enterprises. If, for one moment, one has to put aside the figure of Napoleon Bonaparte, Giuseppe was perhaps one of the most successful 18th century Corsican migrants. Malta had served all through the 18th century as an important base for the military exploits of a number of Corsican corsairs, some of whom had even decided to settle here.

However, the research of foreign settlers in Malta presents a challenge to any researcher, as the latter has to overcome a number of problems. Information on migrants is sparse as it is to be found in different archives. Giuseppe Preziosi falls under this category. Fortunately, enough information regarding this individual has survived which can help the researcher to reconstruct his life and also to furnish answers to some of the biographical questions put forward by Dr Attard Montalto in his article.

In fact, as stated by Dr Attard Montalto, Giuseppe Preziosi was born in Corsica. He was the son of Geronimo Preziosi and Maria Bianca and was born around 1674. Moreover, as stated by Dr Attard Montalto, Giuseppe was married thrice. At least the last two marriages are well documented and were with well-established families. The Maltese archives give an identity to all his three wives.

Not much information has survived on Preziosi's first marriage except that his first wife was Flora. His second marriage was with Maria, daughter of Giovanni Battista Olivier and Imperia Mensionat. The marriage took place in Malta on June 6, 1705. Maria died six years later, on June 1, 1711. It was Maria's death which seems to have encouraged Preziosi to take the final decision leave the island and undertake the expedition in favour of the Duke of Tuscany.

On July 4, 1714 he married Rosalia, daughter of Dr Giovanni Francesco Buonamico and Ursola. The bride's father had been one of the established surgeons on the island and the son of a French migrant, who was also a surgeon, from Nantes in France. Giovanni Francesco's father was also named Francesco.

By the time Ursola got married, Giovanni Francesco had already passed away but his daughter was still able to bring a fabulous dowry, which Preziosi

sought to employ for his commercial endeavours.

Moreover, Giuseppe was not the sole member of the Preziosi family to settle in Malta. The parish registers indicate at least another member of the Preziosi family to have taken up residence here. He is Geronimo Preziosi who settled in Malta around 1735. He is recorded in the marriage registers of Senglea to be from Corsica and without doubt he was a close relative of Giuseppe's.

As indicated in the opening of this letter, Giuseppe Preziosi was part of a larger movement involving other Corsicans who had sought a livelihood in the services of foreign armies and foreign powers. In Malta, as illustrated by Dr Attard Montalto, Preziosi falls perfectly well in this paradigm as he was strongly active in international politics.

Of interest is the fact that this chapter of Corsican migration to Malta was closed with the arrival of the French Republican Army in 1798.

The stories of another important Corsican family, the De Natale, and in particular their half-brother Guglielmo Lorenzi, are intimately linked with the history of French interest both in Malta and Corsica. The story of Lorenzi, in particular his involvement against the besieged French forces, is well known.

The family story of Lorenzi's half-brothers and that of De Natale's family is less known. Like the Preziosis, the De Natales also sought to give their services to foreign powers, and in return they sought to help their island of Corsica get its independence from Genoese rule. However, their genuine efforts had been put astray by French diplomacy and preponderance.

Incidentally, unlike De Natale, it does not seem that Preziosi was involved in the struggle conducted by their Corsican compatriot Pasquale Paoli in favour of their island against Genoa. The fact that the Preziosi family had good relations with Grand Master Pinto did not suffice to involve them in the diplomatic entanglements in which Pinto got involved in relation to the future of Corsica. Perhaps Preziosi was too old and detached from his native island's politics to involve himself in this story.

This information has been based on research I have undertaken in connection with the writing of a number of entries for the *Dictionary of Corsican History*, currently being prepared and edited by Professor Laurent Serpentine. The article was mainly drawn up on the database of Maltese families which is being constructed by the Department of History at the University of Malta with the help of Paris IV-University.

S. MERECIECA  
Msida.

## Save Briffa's works at Nadur

From Mr Mark Sagona, BA (Hons.), MA

THE CHURCH of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the centre of Nadur is perhaps one of the least known of our churches. It is, however, embellished with some interesting works of art. These include paintings by Lazzaro Pisani (1854-1932). But the most notable artistic intervention is the painterly decoration of the entire ceiling, produced in the mid-20th century by Joseph Briffa (1901-1987), one of Malta's most gifted artists.

Entering the church, one becomes aware of scaffolding up in the nave and in the dome. Many will think that there are ongoing restoration works. On the contrary! The scaffolds have been there for years now – intended not for the safeguarding of the works of art but to avoid falling pieces from the ceiling hitting the congregation!

From what can be made out from beneath, the nave ceiling is in a most heartbreaking and pitiful state. Water has been seeping through the roof for a long time. As a result, the pigment of the pictorial decoration is being eaten away and Briffa's figures are being gradually obliterated. In other places, the canvas has detached itself from the ceiling. Half of the central painting, for example, is just dangling down! One can only wonder what the scaffolding of the dome is hiding from the spectator's view. It is only incredible how bitter fate has been in the regards of Briffa's works.

Seen from the outside, it is evident this is a result of the neglect that governs the fabric of the church. In

many parts, especially in the dome, crevices are gaping open and the walls and roofs are in dire need of plastering and protective agents. With every downpour, water is seeping through in abundant quantities. Indeed, if the situation is left to rot in this way, not only the interior paintings will be lost; the entire structure may be in danger of collapsing.

The reason behind this seems to be the fact that the church is privately owned. Apparently, the owners have little interest in preserving Briffa's ceiling decoration. In the present situation, the Nadur parish, the Nadur council and the Gozo diocese could, in some way, contribute to the preservation of this church. Not many churches can boast of works by this important artist.

Unless one wants to see yet another work of art literally crumbling down, urgent restoration needs to be undertaken. The loss of Briffa's works would be another blow to the national heritage and to Gozo's patrimony in particular. The list of lost heritage in Gozo, especially in recent years, is long enough. It is only our duty and responsibility to preserve what has been handed down to us for future generations.

I hope that these comments will eventually bring back Briffa's works at Nadur to their pristine glory, thereby also doing justice to the oeuvre of an artist who needs to be much better appreciated.

M. SAGONA  
Victoria, Gozo.

## Unrecognised talent

From Ms Michelle Castelletti, musician

IS Malta's accession to the European Union something which is going to be celebrated by all? I have my doubts, even though I was a keen activist (like many other artists).

I would like to know how the concerts and festivities were organised. I think that this should have been a feast to be enjoyed by all those who, in one way or another, could have participated.

Celebrating the new millennium was a great feast for the entire world – and invitations were out for all who wanted to take part in the festivities held in Malta. I now ask – why was this celebration treated differently and limited to a "chosen" few? What criterion was used for this choice?

I am going to be involved in a small way, as are a few of my friends in other activities – so this is by no means a case of sour grapes, as some might think. However, I am utterly disappointed because there is a lot of Maltese talent which is being unrecognised and/or discarded. I think that it's unfair, especially when some Maltese artists have been asked by other countries to take part in the celebrations for their accession into the EU!

I have discussed this with many and I am sure that I am writing on the behalf of quite a few artists as well as groups (of various genres) who would have loved to take part in something of such national importance. It hurts to feel left out, especially when you yourself would have given so much to your country, culturally – as well as in the "fight" to join the EU.

I sincerely hope someone can answer my query – and that it will not go unnoticed (as often happens).  
M. CASTELLETTI  
Ta' Xbiex.

From Mr Anthony Farrugia

ABOUT a year ago the restoration of the Victory monument in Vittoriosa was completed. It was professionally restored to its original state and I find no difficulty in repeating what many people said, namely that it was a job well done.

However it seems that it was decided that the metal sword in the statue's right hand would not be replaced.

I have no doubt that this decision was taken because the metal will eventually be corroded and will damage the statue. On the other hand the sword is part of the monument and I am sure that a non-cor-

rosive metal can be used for the sword.

This might be a small detail but together with the shield bearing the coat-of-arms of Grand Master Perellos on the left arm would give this Victory monument a more correct meaning.

I take this opportunity to encourage the authorities concerned to restore the other monument in Victory square which, although erected in 1883 – that is, 183 years after the Victory monument – has a great artistic value, and an epic style in fashion at the time.

A. FARRUGIA  
Siggiewi.

### Corrections

IN Mona Farrugia's article "Someone Else but still herself" (April 18) details should read: Producer: Howard Keith, co-producer: Paul Zammit Cutajar, artist management: Bridge Productions. Bridge Productions would also like to clarify that "It was also stated in Ira's thank you list on the CD that in Howard Keith, Ira 'found a friend, an inspiration and a mentor'."

THE e-mail address of Professor Rei Shiratori, the Maltese consul-general in Tokyo, given in Edward Sammut's article, carried last Sunday, should read: rei\_ipsj@md.mesh.ne.jp

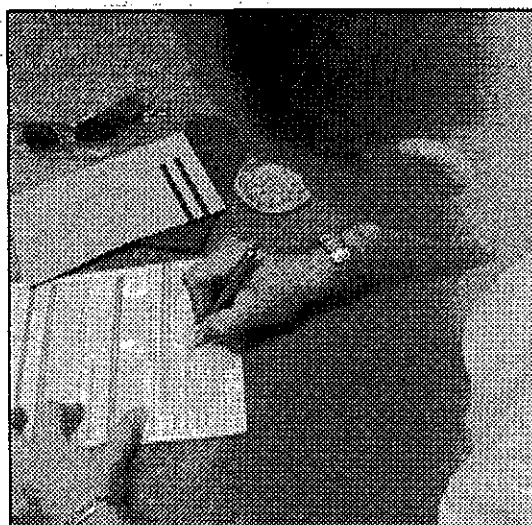
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