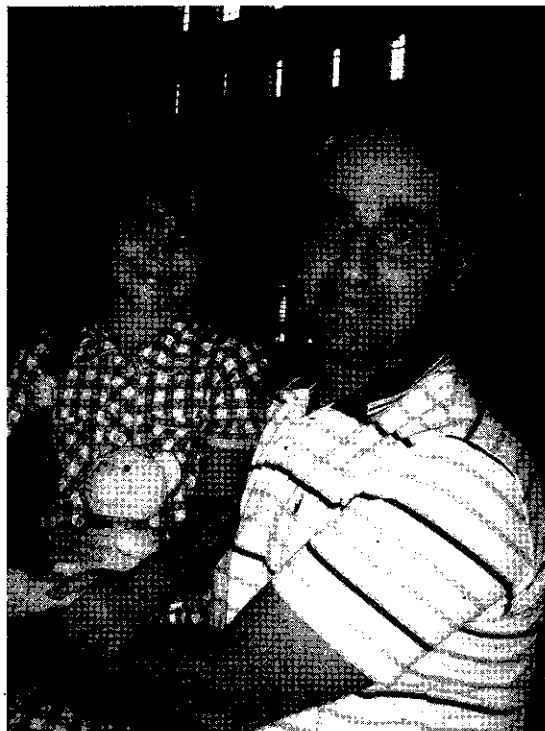


How I write

DR SIMON MERCIECA



Each and every historian, as any other writer for that matter, has his or her own style and 'political' inclinations. These will be naturally expressed in their writing. Until recently, our contemporary academic world was dominated by its own academic factions that were inspired by the political divide of right and left. As a student, one is influenced by the views of one's professors and political views. But as one grows up, like any other academic in the humanities, one begins to develop his or her own views. In my case, I express my ideas in a direct way. This forms part of my abrasive character.

I am not afraid to adopt an unconventional stance, even though sometimes this may convey the wrong impression that academically, I am on the "right side of the fence". Normally and until recently, it was extremely 'cool' for persons in the humanities to adopt a leftist approach in their writing and analysis. Historians are now passing through a process of revisionism and one is beginning to encounter more cases of excellent books which may appear conservative if not reactionary to some members of the public. The writings of Simon Schama, Niall Ferguson and Tristram Hunt are a case in point. But the adoption of this new approach goes beyond the political divide: Hunt, for example, is a member of the British Labour Party.

My work is primarily based on unedited research which I then publish either in the form of a book or as articles in scholarly books or highly specialized review journals. Idiosyncratically, I find no problem to write for local journals and the occasional feast-book programmes that are published by various local parish communities.

I have written a general book on the history of the Order of the Knights of St John in Malta and edited two books, one on Historical Mediterranean Arsenals and another on the Italian politician Francesco Crispi. But I do not wish to speak about my past publications. As a historian, I am not interested in the past but only in the future. I study the past to help people configure a better future. I am now working on my fourth book, this time in Maltese which will be published by PIN. It is the subject of my doctoral work and field of specialization; historical demography. For record purpose only, I have published over 35 papers in Malta and abroad. The latest publications appeared in Italy, Greece and the U.K.

In my case, I first seek to take a fresh approach to the history topic I am writing about, and in order to achieve this, I prefer to go to the original historical sources. I thoroughly research the archives and then publish my findings and thoughts on the subject. Normally, people rely on what they read in history books without being critical or analytical about what they are reading. But someone carrying out research work in archives is often faced with a totally different reality from the one that is sometimes depicted in books. Certain institutions are today under attack and often demonized. For example, let us take the Church. This is a case in point. I am currently researching its archives and minutely sifting through its documents, and in doing further in-depth analysis, I am unearthing a completely different picture and perhaps to the astonishment of some contemporary agitators, this institution was extremely beneficial to society. Obviously institutions evolve. Those that evolved with the times succeeded in surviving and continue to exist. Those that fail to read their times perish and experience a natural or untimely death.

But as a writer, I find reviewing books my biggest challenge, particularly when asked to review books published by colleagues or my former professors. I always seek to strike a balance and try to be fair to the authors without hesitating to give my views but my conclusions are drawn from what has been written and published, whilst summarizing what I believe to be the book's strengths.

Currently, I occupy the post of Director of the Mediterranean Institute at the University of Malta. This post has broadened my perspective on life and helped me to open an academic window on the world of music and the performing arts (dance and music) encouraging me to write academic papers on the history of Maltese music. Thanks to the current Rector, these areas of study have expanded and slowly, with the efforts of our dedicated staff, the University of Malta is becoming a world centre in this field of studies. Moreover, the Mediterranean Institute publishes the most important journal that is currently being published in Malta; *The Journal of Mediterranean Studies*. This is an internationally recognized journal that expresses the collective efforts of our professors, in particular Paul Clough and Carmelo Vassallo who, together with many others, dedicate time and energy so that our University has now a world class journal which is recognized by foreign academic reviewers.

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INTERVIEWED BY MARIE BENOÎT

Miranda Publishers win award with 'Pippa's Festa'

The *Gourmand World Cookbook Awards*, which was founded in 1995 by Edouard Cointreau to honour those who "cook with words", has awarded Maltese food writer Pippa Mattei first prize in the Entertaining Category for her second cookbook *Pippa's Festa*, published by Miranda in 2010.

In order to fully represent the diversity of food and drink publishing around the world, *Gourmand World Cookbook Awards* have 41 categories for cookbooks and 18 for drinks books. There are around 26,000 food and wine books produced each year.

The Award Ceremony, which was held at the famous *Folies Bergère Cabaret* in Paris on Thursday 3rd March, saw a total of 154 countries participating in various categories.

Pippa Mattei, together with her husband John, was present at the Award Ceremony, and thanked all those involved: her publishers Miranda for believing in her from the start, photographer Kurt Arrigo, art director Mark Thomson, her husband John who first taught her the secrets of the kitchen, and her son and daughter, Alex and Emma, for styling and editing the book.

Brothers Tony and Eddie Aquilina, who have nurtured a 8-year relationship with the author since the launch of her first book, *25 Years in a Maltese Kitchen*, have expressed their delight at this award: "Winning an international award for a cook book is a first for Miranda, and a first for Malta, we're very proud of our achievement!"

Pippa's Festa is a testament to the culture of celebration in Malta around the dining table, and the variety of influences that have come to shape local cuisine.

More information about the book can be found on www.miranda-books.com



CareMalta launches book to commemorate women's day centenary

CareMalta Group, together with Midsea Publications, have just published a new book entitled *100 Women, 100 Stories: A Journey Through Words* to celebrate the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day.

The launch was held under the auspices of Mrs Kate Gonzi who stated that "these narratives unfold a collective treasure of personal life stories reflecting years of history, tradition and culture in Malta over the last two generations. The stories portray a whole range of emotions - pain and joy, sadness and humour, love and betrayal, anguish and hope, weakness and resilience which these women have embraced and battled with throughout their lives."

The book is a collection of first-hand accounts of women who currently reside at one of the seven residential care homes operated by the CareMalta Group. The book is edited by Janet Silvio, who the Facility Manager at the Cospicua Home for the elderly, which is operated by CareMalta.

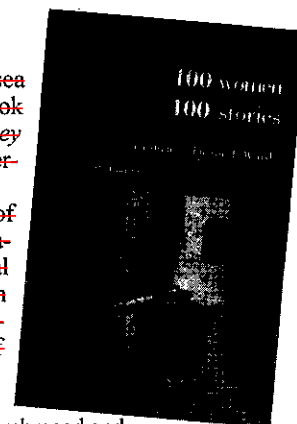
The women featured in the book come from different social backgrounds; some have barely had any schooling, others became professionals, whilst some other managed to set up their own business. The book introduces the reader to women who had to take care of their siblings when their mothers passed away, and women who raised large families... and others who led a different life to many of the contemporaries and never got married.

Speaking at the Press Conference to launch the book, Janet Silvio speaks about her experience. "These women gifted me with something special which I will treasure forever. Through their words, I relived the journeys they have made which made me understand and appreciate the love, faith and strength of character all these women shared," she said. "They have given me a key to unlock a door behind which I discovered a way of life which amazed and inspired me."

CareMalta CEO Natalie Briffa Farrugia revealed that the idea behind this book was first sounded on last year's women day. It was subsequently taken up by Janet Silvio who completed the project in 10 months. She stated that "the aim of this book is to honour the lives and contribution of the Maltese woman broadly represented by those whose lives were depicted in the book." Ms Briffa Farrugia went on to say that CareMalta employs over 560 female employees representing 81 per cent of its work-force and takes care of almost one thousand elderly women.

Mr Nazzareno Vassallo, Chairman of Vassallo Group, under which CareMalta falls, spoke about the important roles women have within the group occupying top positions within the company including board directors, CEOs and managers as well as other key positions at all levels within the Group. He spoke of initiatives taken by the Group to encourage female participation amongst them a new Work-Life Balance policy with attractive benefits to encourage all employees to better balance their work life with other responsibilities.

Dr Romina Bartolo, Executive Director of NCPE, Ms Helen Borg Bonnici, Vice-President of the National Council of Women and Mr Joe Mizzi from Midsea Publications were also present for the launch.



MALTA AND MAZZINI
PROCEEDINGS OF HISTORY WEEK
2005

