

# THE OBSCURE SCERRIS FROM SICILY

## LOOKING FOR

My forgotten great grandmother Giovanna "Joanna" Scerri

- Birth date and place of Giovanna "Joanna" Scerri
- Death date for Giovanna "Joanna" Scerri
- Parents and ancestors of Giovanna "Joanna" Scerri
- Possible Sicilian link of Giovanna "Joanna" Scerri
- Marriage date of Giovanna "Joanna" Scerri and Vincenzo Mallamo
- Any information on Scerris, their ancestors or descendents from Pachino or other places in Sicily
- Any information on Scerris / Mallamos, their ancestors or descendents from Egypt

If there ever was an ancestor more elusive than Giovanna Scerri or Joanna, as she was known, he or she would not exist ...

The Scerri family is the big unknown in my family tree. My great grandmother Joanna "Giovanna/Gianina" Scerri was the mother of grandmother Rosa, Nonna Rosa as she was known to us. Joanna married Nicola Borg in Alexandria, Egypt, somewhere between May 1900 and May 1904. Both Joanna and Nicola were widowed at the time.

Joanna's first husband was Vincenzo, a printer. He died young, at the age of 35, leaving Joanna behind with four small children: Eduardo, Ines, Adriana and Vincenza. Vincenza was probably the youngest child and an infant when her father died.

Nicola's first wife was Rosaria Zahra, who died tragically at the age of forty. Nicola had eight children with Rosaria: Annetta, Joseph, Oresta, Alfredo, Maria Rosaria, Celestina, Angelo, Beniaminus. Beniaminus and Vincenza Mallamo were to marry later.

My grandmother Rosaria Josephina Laurenzia was the only child of Joanna and Nicola's union. She was born in May 1904 in Alexandria, Egypt. Unfortunately we know close to nothing about her childhood or her parents. I believe Joanna was no longer alive, when my grand parents married in 1923. I know, however, that she died before 1928, as she was not alive, when her son Eduardo died in 1928.

Nicola Borg, Joanna's second husband (and my great grandfather) was Maltese and spoke Maltese next to Italian, our family language until one generation ago. He also was registered as a British Subject. Joanna, according to my father was Maltese from Sicily and spoke Italian only. I am not sure, if her mother was of Sicilian origin. Her father definitely was not, as Scerri is definitely a Maltese surname, the "italianized" version of Xerri.

According to statistics, there are more Maltese living outside of Malta than in Malta. This explains itself, when you look at the size of the island and research its natural resources. As a seafaring nation, Maltese moved around in the world and settled in many foreign harbours. In the generation of my great grandparents and great great grandparents many Maltese came live in Egypt. The Maltese colony in Sicily was established around 1762 in Pachino. The Maltese came by invitation by the sovereign, who was hoping, that the immigrants would bring prosperity to a poor region near Siracusa.

According to the article "The Maltese colonisation of Pachino, Sicily" by Giuseppe Fiaccoli, the first Maltese families settled in the small village of Pachino around 1762, followed by more Maltese immigrants between 1770 and 1778. The Scerris were amongst the second group according to parish records. Fiaccoli indicates, that "Maltese migration toward Sicily, especially in the new fief of Scibini, was encouraged by the embargo on trade with Malta, imposed in 1754 by the King of the Two Sicilies, Carlo III di Borbone, a measure that broke off relationships between Maltese and Sicilian fishermen." He claims, that the families originated from the Island of Gozo: "Some evidence seems to suggest that probably most of the Maltese who settled in the Sicilian village came from the island of Gozo. These include the similarity between the surnames of families living in Pachino immediately after its foundation, and those that appear in Gozitan parish registers from 1554 to 1628, namely ... Scerri, Schembri, ..." . Ray Bondin, cited in the article, believes that "most of the Gozitans who settled in Pachino came from Xewkija and Xagħra, a hypothesis based on the introduction of the veneration for St Elias in the Sicilian village. A statue of the saint was also found in the main church of Xewkija, in front of which mothers brought their sick children in the hope of a speedy recovery."

## **Names**

**GIANNINA SCERRI (BEF 1874 - before 1923, Alexandria, Egypt).**

My great grandmother - the mysterious Giannina, Giovanna or Joanna.

**VINCENZO MALLAMI (Abt. 1861 - 1897, Alexandria, Egypt).**

First husband of Giannina. Printer. Probably from Calabria or Sicily.

**NICOLA BORG (1857, Alexandria, Egypt - 1940, Alexandria, Egypt).**

Second husband of Gianinna. Son of Angelo Borg from Malta, probably from the island of Gozo. Mother is unknown. Married in first marriage to Rosaria Zahra, in third marriage to Anna Matovic. Eight children from the first marriage, one from the second. The last marriage remained without issue.  
Spoke Italian and Maltese.

**ROSARIA LAURENZIA JOSEPHINA BORG (1904, Alexandria, Egypt - 1968, Sao Paulo, Brazil).**

My grandmother. Daughter of Giovanna Scerri and Nicola Borg, half-sister to Anetta Borg, Alfredo Borg, Joseph Borg, Celestina Borg, Angelo Borg, Maria Rosaria Borg, Beniaminous Borg, Orestea Borg, Ines Mallamo, Eduardo Mallamo, Adriana Mallamo and Vicenza Mallamo. Spoke Italian and French.

SEND US YOUR INFORMATION

### **Sources**

Fiaccoli, Giuseppe. *The Maltese colonisation of Pachino, Sicily*. Malta Times. February 28, 2016. online article.

[www.timesofmalta.com/The-Maltese-colonisation-of-Pachino-Sicily.604049](http://www.timesofmalta.com/The-Maltese-colonisation-of-Pachino-Sicily.604049)  
(accessed 23.12.2017).

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