

# A Rock, a saint, a dragon, a dynasty, a window and three stamps

Gibraltar stamps and a miniature commemorate the 1700th anniversary of the martyrdom of St George and the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of St George. *GSM* correspondent Peter Jennings, FRPSL, FRGS, a Knight of Merit with Star, Sacred Military Constantinian Order of St George, attended the launch as a guest of the Gibraltar Philatelic Bureau



**G**ibraltar issued three engaging stamps on St George's Day, 23 April, to mark the 1700th anniversary of the martyrdom of St George, patron saint of England, and of the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of St George.

The 40p stamp depicts the Cross of the Constantinian Order. Its points bear the initial letters of the words in *hoc signo vincis*, from the legendary appearance of the Cross to the Emperor Constantine, which makes the Constantinian Order one of the oldest in chivalry. The earliest document pertaining to the Knights of Constantine dates to the year 1190.

Today, the Order has as its purpose the propagation of the Catholic faith and the glorification of the Holy Cross, together with many charitable works. The British Delegation supports The Passage for homeless people situated near Westminster Cathedral in London.

The £1.20 stamp (local registered letter fee) shows the image of St George and the Dragon on a stained glass window in St Joseph's parish church, Gibraltar, which

was made in London in 1985 to replace an original window severely damaged when the ammunition ship *Bedenham* exploded outside the Gibraltar dockyard in 1951.

The 30p stamp depicts the Cross of St George as shown on the English flag. The striking miniature sheet (incorporating all three stamps) shows a dramatic illustration of the fierce battle between St George and the Dragon by a local artist, Christian Hook.

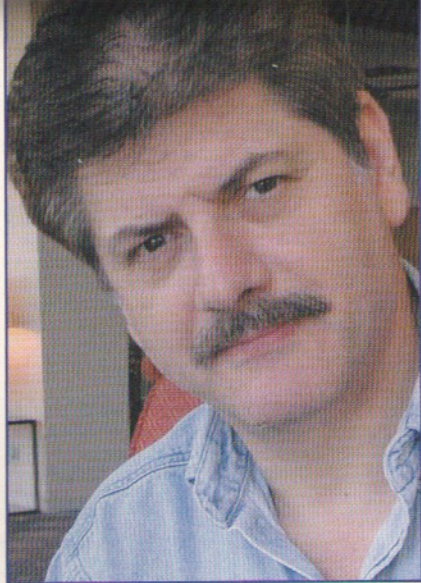
## Impressive ceremony

The stamps were launched during an impressive ceremony held in the nearly 200-year-old Gibraltar Garrison Library by Prince Carlo of Bourbon Two Sicilies, Duke of Calabria and Grand Prefect of the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of St George. Cardinal Mario Francesco

*Gibraltar's stamps and miniature sheet marking the 1700th anniversary of the Martyrdom of St George, Patron Saint of England and the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of St George*

*First issues of Naples, bearing the arms of the Two Sicilies, (1 January 1858) and Sicily (1 January 1859)*





Stamp designer Anselmo Torres (Picture by Peter Jennings)

Pompedda, Grand Prior of the Constantinian Order, and Anthony Bailey, vice delegate and chancellor of the British and Irish Delegation of the Constantinian Order, also took part in the event.

Among the dignitaries present were Ernest Britto, Minister for Posts and chairman of the Gibraltar Philatelic Bureau, Bishop Charles Caruana of Gibraltar, Mgr Coronato Grima, parish priest of St Joseph's, and Nigel Fordham, Head of the Crown Agents Stamp Bureau, who act as agents for Gibraltar stamps in the United Kingdom.

The stamps were designed by the eminent local artist Anselmo Torres from an original idea that cleverly combines the themes of St George and the Constantinian Order. The idea originated with Mgr Grima and Anthony Lombard, a distinguished local lawyer, one of only four Gibraltarian members of the Constantinian Order. During his 48-hour visit to Gibraltar the Duke of Calabria invested the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, Peter Caruana, QC, and Bishop Charles Caruana of Gibraltar into the Order.

Speaking after the official launch, Christopher Riddell, chief executive officer of the Gibraltar Post Office, emphasised: 'Gibraltar is the only United Kingdom Overseas Territory to have commemorated the martyrdom of St George, the Patron Saint of England, on a postage stamp. The stamp issue represents a proud addition to Gibraltar's philatelic tradition.'

The Duke of Calabria told *GSM*: 'I am very happy to have been invited to Gibraltar together with Cardinal Pompedda for the launch of this important stamp issue to mark the 1700th anniversary of Saint George. These outstanding stamps and miniature sheet will help to promote the Constantinian Order worldwide.'

Cardinal Pompedda, Prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Segnatura and President of the Court of Cassation of the Vatican City State, added: 'The stamps are a vivid reminder of the story of St George and the Constantinian Order battling against evil.'

## Kingdoms united

The history of Italy and the Constantinian Order is intertwined. In 1816 the Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily were united under the title of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies—King Ferdinand II (8 November 1830 to 22 May 1859) was succeeded by King Francis II (22 May 1859 to 7 September 1860).

Naples issued its first postage stamps— $\frac{1}{2}$  g. (grano) 1g., 2g., 5g., 10g., 20g. and 50g.—on 1 January 1858, bearing the arms of the Two Sicilies, composed of the horse for Naples, the three legs with the head of Medusa for Sicily, and the three fleurs-de-lis for Bourbon. Sicily issued its first stamps— $\frac{1}{2}$ g., 1g., 2g., 5g., 10g., 20g. and 50g.—on 1 January 1859. In November 1860 Sicily, with Naples, became part of the Kingdom of Sardinia.

Garibaldi and his redshirts landed in Sicily on 11 May 1860 and entered Naples, from which the King had fled, on 7 September. On 21 October Naples and Sicily voted by plebiscite to join the Kingdom of Sardinia as a further step towards a united Italy. Garibaldi hailed Victor Emmanuel II of Sardinia as King on 26 October. The King entered Naples on 7 November 1860. The  $\frac{1}{2}$  t. (tornese) stamp issued on 6 December 1860, under Sardinian authority, is the last stamp inscribed 'Posta Napoletana'. On 17 March 1861 King Victor Emmanuel of Sardinia was declared to be King of Italy.

The unification of Italy deprived the Constantinian Order of its territorial possessions, but the Royal House retains the Majesty as the Order is dynastic. On several occasions, the Holy See has confirmed the continuation of the Order and its Grand Master in the person of the Head of the Royal House of Bourbon Two Sicilies.

The Grand Master today is Prince Don Ferdinando of Bourbon Two Sicilies, Duke of Castro. The Grand Master's heir is his son Prince Carlo Maria of Bourbon Two Sicilies, Duke of Calabria and in accordance with the Statutes of the Order he acts as the representative of the Grand Master as he did in Gibraltar, 22 to 24 April, for the stamp launch. The seat of the Grand Majesty is that of the Grand Master, and the Grand Chancellery is in Naples. The Order's Secretariat operates from Rome.

**GSM Correspondent Peter Jennings, FRPSL, FRGS, Knight of Merit with Star, Sacred Military Constantinian Order of St George, with the Duke of Calabria, Grand Prefect of the Constantinian Order and Cardinal Mario Francesco Pompedda, Grand Prior, in Gibraltar on St George's Day, 23 April (Picture by Donovan Torres)**



The Order maintains delegations in Belgium, Great Britain and Ireland, the Principality of Monaco, Poland, Switzerland and the United States, and is represented in many other countries, as well as in every region of Italy.

## 300th anniversary

Today Gibraltar is a United Kingdom Overseas Territory. Britain acquired the Rock of Gibraltar under the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713. It had been stormed by Anglo-Dutch troops in 1704 during the War of Spanish Succession. The Gibraltar Philatelic Bureau is working on a very special set of stamps to be issued during 2004 to mark this important 300th anniversary.

The key clause in the Treaty of Utrecht ceded Gibraltar to Britain in perpetuity but stated that, should Britain ever renounce her claim, sovereignty of Gibraltar would pass to Spain. The Treaty does not allow for the sharing of sovereignty. The border between Spain and Gibraltar was closed in 1969 by General Franco and remained closed after his death in 1975 until 1985 when it was fully re-opened.

Despite its size, about six square kilometres (2.2sq miles), the Rock of Gibraltar is strategically important. It stands at the mouth of the Mediterranean, at the foot of the Iberian peninsula, and only 20km (12 miles) from the north coast of Africa. It has a NATO base, including a port and an airstrip.

The British and Spanish Governments held discussions during 2002 about the joint sovereignty of Gibraltar and, faced with continuing uncertainty the Chief Minister, Peter Caruana, QC, announced that a referendum would be held on 7 November that year. The people of Gibraltar voted by an overwhelming 99 per cent against the principle that Spain and the United Kingdom should share sovereignty over Gibraltar.

*Next month. Distinguished stamp designer Anselmo Torres explains the background to his Gibraltar St George's stamps and miniature sheet during an exclusive interview with Peter Jennings. Stamp concepts and progressive artwork for the issue will be shown for the first time.*