Poche Parole
Supporting Italian Arts, Culture, and Language Since 1953

FROM VENICE TO CAIRO
A CONVERSATION WITH PROF. LAURA BENEDETTI ON ZACCARIA PAGANI’S JOURNEY IN THE 16TH CENTURY

By Derek A. Ginoris

Last month’s cultural event was a particularly spectacular and unique conversation on Mediterranean Diplomacy in the early 1500’s! Professor Laura Benedetti of Georgetown University took the crowd 500 years back in time to Venice, discussing the great power’s trade relations with Mamluk Egypt, an impressive nation with incredible wealth. Her research began when she stumbled across an old venetian manuscript that appeared to be a sort of travel log, detailing an ambassador’s journey to resolve political conflict and free imprisoned diplomats whose incarceration resulted from a misunderstanding regarding trade alliances. This ambassador was none other than the esteemed Domenico Trevisan, an honored military statesman who was revered for his ability to problem solve and pacify hostile situations.

Venice and Egypt had long enjoyed symbiotic trading relationships which originated in the early 1300’s. This sudden conflict erupted following the interception of diplomat Pietro Zen’s letters with Shah Ismael of Persia, a sworn enemy of Egypt. These documents detailed a possible alliance against the Mamluk Sultanate, which led to great discord between the Venetian diplomats and Egyptian statesmen. Pietro Zen and his other comrades were imprisoned in horrid conditions which prompted their lengthy thread of letters to Venice pleading for help. For many years their cries were left unheard until Venetian government officials finally decided to intervene. It wasn’t until 1512 that Domenico Trevisan embarked on his courageous journey to save them, accompanied by a fairly large crew which included a man named Zaccaria Pagani. It is he who was placed in charge of writing a travel log which he formats as a diary and details important information regarding the group’s mission.

Pagani gives us an intriguing look into the unique world the men were immersed into, visiting a distant land filled with never-before-seen wonders. He proves to be a curious thinker, recounting his discovery an interesting fruit which he describes in the following words: shaped like a cucumber with a peel that comes off like a fig. Pagani was describing what we now recognize as a banana, a fruit which had not yet arrived in Europe! Other than these abstract observations, Pagani also details the perplexing manner in which Trevisan pacified relations with the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt whose large dominion extended from northeastern Africa all the way into the Middle East. When he first encounters the Mamluk Sultanate, he demonstrates
his knowledge of cultural customs and intricacies regardless of language barriers. Before presenting a letter translated from Venetian into Egyptian, Trevisan demonstrates his respect by partaking in a physical ritual, bowing towards him, placing it on his head, and then handing it to a servant without ever turning his back. To the surprise of all, the Mamluk Sultanate seems to be fond of him!

It isn’t long before the incarcerated Venetian diplomats are released at last from their chains and rejoice in their newfound freedom. They join Trevisan and his crew on their journey back across the Mediterranean Sea to Venice, eventually reuniting with their families. Shortly after, the Ottoman’s engage in a war with the Mamluk’s and officially take over their empire in 1516. For decades, Trevisan refuses to comment on this situation regardless of requests made by his superiors. Even years after his journey, Domenico Trevisan proves his noble character and bright wit, all of which we recognize thanks to Zaccaria Pagani’s intimate accounts and Prof. Laura Benedetti’s noteworthy, in-depth analysis of the rediscovered manuscript.

**MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD**

Dear ICS Members,

A lot has been bubbling here at ICS. With Spring in the air and Covid restrictions easing out, many of our students and teachers have started to return and cheer up our premises with their presence. To open our doors after two years of closures was an emotional moment for us all. For a moment, we felt that life was good again and we poured our energies in planning out new classes, events, not to mention our annual fundraising gala.

I was looking forward to opening our newsletter with our in person gala announcement at the Embassy of Italy, just like we used to do, with this year’s exceptional guest, Domenico De Sole, the man who headed Gucci transforming the fashion industry. As we were tirelessly working at this most exciting event, which will take place on June 10th, the war in Ukraine broke out and our hearts broke.

ICS wholeheartedly stands with the Ukrainian people and we decided to suggest to donate to the Ukraine Red Cross to support the Ukrainians as they fight for their country in this darkest hour. You can help with your donations here: [https://italianculturalsociety.org/donate-to-support-the-ukrainian-red-cross/](https://italianculturalsociety.org/donate-to-support-the-ukrainian-red-cross/).

As we remain with our breath suspended about this very uncertain political situation and we hope and pray that this senseless war will resolve quickly, here is a reminder of our monthly cultural event in webinar format, on March 20th in collaboration with Georgetown university and NIAF. We are introducing “The Gentleman banker, The Life and Work of Amedeo Giannini”.

Amedeo Giannini was truly a visionary Italian American who founded the Bank of Italy, now Bank of America and especially after the 1906 San Francisco's earthquake specialized in micro loans at no interest, to thousands of Italian immigrants giving them a chance to start their business and thrive on US soil. He financed Charlie Chaplin, Walt Disney, Bill Hewlett and David Packards among others. The Golden Gate Bridge was built with the Bank of Italy's loan which was repaid from toll revenues.

Also this month, on March 13th we are offering a guided tour with our Venetian born instructor Dario Penzo, on the Murano glass exhibit at the Smithsonian museum: “Sargent, Whistler, and Venetian Glass: American Artists and the Magic of Murano.

For our smallest members we are looking forward to a fun filled [Easter Egg Hunt](https://italianculturalsociety.org/donate-to-support-the-ukrainian-red-cross/), on April 2nd at Villa Firenze, the residence of SE the Ambassador fo Italy, Mariangela Zappia. Please check our website for more info and to register.

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Quest'anno l'Italia sarà ben rappresentata il 27 Marzo alla cerimonia degli Oscar 2022. È stata la mano di Dio di Paolo Sorrentino è entrato nella cinquina del Miglior Film Internazionale, Luca di Enrico Casarosa (e Andrea Warren) è candidato come miglior film d’animazione, Massimo Cantini Parrini, con Jacqueline Durran, è nominato per i costumi di Cyrano di Joe Wright.

Enrico Casarosa è al suo esordio nella regia di un lungometraggio, prodotto dai Pixar Animation Studios in co-produzione con Walt Disney Pictures e distribuito dai Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures. Il regista genovese aveva già sfiornato l’Oscar dieci anni fa, con la nomination per il suo cortometraggio La Luna, adesso ci si avvicina di nuovo. Luca, la storia di un mostro marino che grazie al suo nuovo amico Alberto fa delle nuove avventure fuori dal mare, ha già vinto il titolo di film in streaming più guardato negli Stati Uniti del 2021 ed è il favorito dai bookmakers per la statuetta. guarda la nostra intervista con Enrico Casarosa nel nostro Canale YouTube.

Paolo Sorrentino ha già vinto l’Oscar nel 2014 con La grande bellezza. In cinquina con È stata la mano di Dio sono entrati il giapponese Drive My Car di Ryûsuke Hamaguchi, il danese Flee di Jonas Poher Rasmussen, Lunana: a yak in the Classroom di Pawo Choyning Dorji e La persona peggiore del mondo del norvegese Joachim Trier, tutti film presentati e premiati in festival prestigiosi. È stata la mano di Dio ha vinto il Leone d’argento, Gran premio della giuria, e il premio Mastroianni per l’esordiente protagonista Filippo Scotti a Venezia.

“Sono felicissimo di questa nomination. Per me è già una grande vittoria” ha detto Paolo Sorrentino “E un motivo di commozione, perché è un riconoscimento prestigioso ai temi del film, che sono le cose in cui credo: l’ironia, la libertà, la tolleranza, il dolore, la spensieratezza, la volontà, il futuro, Napoli e mia madre”.

“Per arrivare fin qui” prosegue “c’è stato bisogno di un enorme lavoro di squadra. Dunque, devo ringraziare Netflix, Fremantle, The Apartment, gli attori straordinari e una troupe indimenticabile. E poi i miei figli e mia moglie, che mi amano nel più bello dei modi: senza mai prendermi sul serio”, conclude.

Cantini Parrini è già stato candidato per Pinocchio di Matteo Garrone. Fiorentino, diplomato in costume e moda presso l’Istituto statale d’Arte di Firenze, ha proseguito gli studi al Polimoda affiliato al Fashion Institute of Technology di New York per poi conseguire la laurea in Cultura e Stilismo della moda all’Università degli studi di Firenze. Ha vinto il concorso al Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia a Roma, diventando allievo di Piero Tosi. È entrato poi alla sartoria Tirelli come assistente costumista ed ha esordito con la costumista premio Oscar Gabriella Pescucci.

“Un grande risultato per il cinema italiano” ha commentato il ministro della Cultura Dario Franceschini “che si conferma in ottima salute e capace, con il suo genio creativo, di raccogliere pubblico e consensi a livello internazionale. Un grosso in bocca al lupo agli artisti italiani in corsa per la statuetta più ambita del cinema mondiale".
The Board of Directors of the ICS cordially invites you to

GALA AWARDS DINNER 2022

Beyond the Runway

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Author of the book House of Gucci

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6:00PM
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Awards Ceremony for Scholarship Recipients
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We are thrilled with the prospect of seeing many of you again at the Embassy of Italy for our annual Gala. Tickets are available for purchase on our website. Sponsors and individual donors can further support our mission by reserving VIP tables, additional donations and sponsorships at any level.

THE GALA COMMITTEE
Dear friends,

Two years ago, on March 12th, the Italian Language Program launched its first online lessons on Zoom. On March 28th, our first ICS virtual event took place. This March, we are very happy to see you coming back to our headquarters. Your enthusiasm and motivation during these two years have been heartening, and we are also glad to include students from other parts of the US, maintaining activities online. I’m very pleased to share our Spring Schedule, aimed to prepare you for traveling to Italy and enjoying Italian food again.

Language courses, starting at the Beginners level are offered both online and in person. Some Intermediate and Advanced level courses also have the hybrid option.

Additional highly qualified instructors joined our team, and new courses are offered, like Italian Through Cinema (I Vitelloni by F. Fellini) (B1-B2); Italy today: reading, listening, and conversation on current events (A2-B2); Literature course – also for Italians – will continue with Freedom at the time of death in Boccaccio’s Decameron (C1-C2), just to mention a sample of our long list of classes. We will also offer the mini-series of courses in English and Italian (on request) focused on different regions: Discover Veneto, Emilia Romagna, Sardegna, Abruzzo, and Liguria. Finally, I would like to mention the Immersion Course the weekend of March 26-27 for those planning to travel to Italy.

Yoga, Tango both for Beginners and Advanced levels, Latin and Cooking classes: March 26th on Zoom, on Emilia Romagna specialties with Simo’s Kitchen, and April 9th, in person, in a private house, to learn a traditional Easter menu. The Spring Schedule outlines additional courses, including book clubs, conversations, and cultural classes. Registration is open. The starting date for our Spring Term is March 29th.

Early Bird discount for Summer Camps ends on April 1st, so sign up soon!

And do not miss Fiorenza’s themed workshop: La Festa del Papà, on March 18th. See the Kids and Teens’ page.

APPLICATIONS FOR OUR SCHOLARSHIP AWARD are open! A young Italian scientist, two pianists (of any nationality), a student of Classics, an artist, two high school students of Italian - will receive awards from the ICS, thanks to the generosity of our donors.

I look forward to seeing many of you at our events and new initiatives in the next weeks.

Buona primavera a tutti!

Francesca Casazza
CEO & Executive Director

EXCLUSIVE TRUNK SHOW, G. MISENO GIOIELLI

On April 1st, at 6:00 pm you can be part of an exclusive sale of luxury jewelry at a discounted price. Miseno, already in the US market, at Neiman Marcus, is presenting their new collection of 18k gold, handcrafted jewelry, many completed with diamond, pearl and semi-precious gemstone embellishments that captures the influences of the sea and other elements of nature. Miseno partners with the ICS, devolving 5% of the income to our organization, to fund the Maria Wilmeth Scholarships, which award students of Italian in the High Schools where Italian is part of their curriculum. If you are interested in purchasing this type of jewelry, contact us to receive an invitation.

Take a look at Miseno USA web page

The Italian Cultural Society of Washington D.C.
UPCOMING EVENTS

THE GENTLEMAN BANKER


This biographical novel recounts the extraordinary life of the Italian-American founder of Bank of Italy, which later became Bank of America, the world’s largest bank at the time. Amadeo Peter, or “Appi” for his San Francisco friends, was an innovator and humanist who always put the common good above personal gain.

He dedicated his life to helping businesses succeed in the San Francisco area, especially after the 1906 earthquake. He revolutionized the banking system by making micro-loans to hundreds of Italian immigrants and other citizens who lacked collateral. It was the first time that a loan was granted without interest and repaid through box office revenues.

As a sharp venture capitalist, Giannini persuaded Henry Kaiser to convert his enterprise from the construction of roads and bridges to ships, which were built in record time and used to transport the troops to Europe during WWII. Giannini’s bank contributed millions to Italy’s reconstruction, one year in advance of the Marshall Plan. From 1932 until his death in 1949, Giannini was the most powerful banker in the world.

This cultural event is a webinar in collaboration with Georgetown University’s Department of Italian, and NIAF. You can RSVP for this event here.

If you are interested in rewatching the previous Chiarva’s Italian Book presentation with the director Giuliano Montaldo, you can find it on The ICS YouTube Channel.

ITALIAN EMBASSY
EASTER EGG HUNT 2022

April 2nd, 1:30 - 4:30 P.M.
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An invitation-only event for AIFC and ICS members and friends. Kids up to 13 years old accompanied by up to two adults can attend the event. A minimum donation of $50 per child is required for admission.

https://italianculturalsociety.org/egg-hunt/
THE DISCOVERY OF A NEW MONA LISA IN ROME
IT COULD BE LEONARDO’S

By Dario Penzo

Another Mona Lisa resurfaces from the warehouses of Palazzo Montecitorio and the debate breaks out among the experts on its attribution to Leonardo. The discovery of the alleged second Mona Lisa was made in 2019 at the headquarters of the Chamber of Deputies. After years of studying its authenticity, experts consider that the painting could be another version of Leonardo da Vinci’s masterpiece kept at the Louvre in Paris.

La Repubblica, the Italian newspaper, reopened the debate recently through its report on the painting. According to Francesco D’Uva, the Quaestor of the Chamber of Deputies, it is a work of particular value that deserves to be exhibited in the Aldo Moro room of Montecitorio. The parliamentarian considers the work a copy of the painting made by Leonardo’s workshop, perhaps even with the collaboration of the Renaissance genius himself.

The work, which measures 70 centimeters by 50, was made on wood probably in the 1500s and transported on to canvas in the eighteenth century likely in France, as would suggest what is noted in French on a little note glued to the frame. The copy of the Mona Lisa was kept for a long time in France and then inventoried from 1814 in the Torlonia collection in Rome. The circumstances that brought the painting to France are not known at the moment, nor its whereabouts prior to the Torlonia.

The analysis made during a recent restoration of the canvas would have confirmed its dating in the first half of the sixteenth century (Leonardo died in 1519). The painting was restored by Cinzia Pasquali, an expert on Leonardo, who has lived in Paris for over 25 years and works at the Louvre. She is the mind behind what has been called the “restoration of the century”: the “St. Anne with the Virgin and Child”. When she noticed the similarities with the “real” Mona Lisa, she called Vincent Delieuvin, chief curator of the paintings for the Louvre.

On the parliamentary website Arte Camera there is a report where the canvas is defined as “A copy that aspires to diligently replicate her model”. The art historians Antonio and Maria Forcellino, in a contribution to the catalog of a Roman exhibition on Leonardo that was held in 2019, emphasized its quality. According to them, certain features of the landscape and the glazes of the complexions “are of a transparency that echoes in a precise manner the executive technique of Leonardo operated in the Louvre painting”, as such, “the pictorial technique is so refined as to suggest that Leonardo himself put his hand to the chiaroscuro definition of the face.”

Of the opposite opinion, the art historian Rossella Vodret, former superintendent of Rome, who had catalogued the painting in 2005, has described it as not of a high quality. In the report she also says that: “It is plausible that the work comes from Leonardo’s workshop but it is a heresy to say that this is the hand of the Master”. This is an opinion shared by many, above all Sgarbi, a well-known Italian art historian and commentator who defines it as “furniture stuff”. According to Sgarbi, this copy was “painted at least 70 years after [Leonardo’s] death” and has “no artistic value.”

Despite the doubts about the attribution, the fact remains that this second Mona Lisa could be worth millions, or at least this is the sale value of other very famous copies of the Gioconda. Posterity will have the arduous sentence of understanding if it is just “much ado about nothing”.

The Italian Cultural Society
of Washington D.C.
Di Dario Penzo

Riaffiora dai Magazzini di Palazzo Montecitorio un’altra Gioconda e scoppia il dibattito tra gli esperti sull’attribuzione a Leonardo.


A posteri l’ardua sentenza di capire se si tratti solo di “tanto rumore per nulla”.

Le analisi fatte durante un recente restauro della tela ne avrebbero confermato la datazione nella prima metà del Cinquecento (Leonardo muore nel 1519). A restaurare il dipinto è stata Cinzia Pasquali, esperta di Leonardo, che vive da oltre 25 anni a Parigi e lavora al Louvre. È l’autrice di quello che è stato definito il “restauro del secolo”: la “Sant’Anna con la Vergine e il Bambino”. Quando si è accorta delle analogie con la “vera” Gioconda, ha chiamato Vincent Delieuvin, capo curatore dei dipinti per il Louvre.

Sul sito parlamentare Arte Camera c’è una scheda che la riguarda e dove la tela viene definita «Una copia che aspira a replicare diligentemente il suo modello». Gli storici dell’arte Antonio e Maria Forcellino, in un contributo al catalogo di una mostra romana su Leonardo che si è tenuta nel 2019, ne hanno sottolineato la qualità. Secondo loro certi tratti del paesaggio e le velature degli incarnati «sono di una trasparenza che echeggia in maniera puntuale la tecnica esecutiva di Leonardo operata nel dipinto del Louvre», anzi, «la tecnica pittorica ... è così raffinata dal lasciar presupporre che lo stesso Leonardo abbia messo mano alla definizione chiaroscurale del volto».

Del parere opposto, la storica dell’arte Rossella Vodret, ex soprintendente di Roma, che aveva schedato il dipinto nel 2005 definendolo di qualità non alta. Nel rapporto dice inoltre che: “È plausibile che l’opera venga dalla bottega di Leonardo ma dire che sia la mano del Maestro è un eresia”. Parere condiviso da molti, su tutti prova a imporsi Sgarbi, noto storico d’arte ed opinionista italiano che la definisce «roba da arredamento».

Nonostante i dubbi sull’attribuzione rimane il fatto che questa seconda Gioconda potrebbe valere milioni, o almeno questo è la cifra di vendita di altre copie molto famose della Monna Lisa. Ai posteri l’ardua sentenza di capire se si tratti solo di “tanto rumore per nulla”.

su tavola probabilmente nel ’500 e trasportata su tela nel Settecento verosimilmente in Francia, come lascerebbe supporre quanto riportato in un foglietto di carta incollato al telaio, scritto appunto in francese, che menziona esplicitamente l’operazione di trasporto della pittura. La copia della Monna Lisa fu custodita a lungo in Francia e poi inventariata a partire dal 1814 nella collezione Torlonia di Roma. Non sono note al momento le circostanze che portarono il dipinto in Francia, né le sue vicende precedenti ai Torlonia.
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The Italian Cultural Society promotes the appreciation and knowledge of the Italian language and culture by creating opportunities through language programs, cultural events, and partnerships.

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Founded in 1953 by Professor Salvatore J. Castiglione, Chairman of the Italian Department of Georgetown University, the Society launched its Italian Language Program in 1974, with contribution of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

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