

Poche Parole

Supporting Italian Arts, Culture, and Language Since 1953



AUGURI DI BUONA PASQUA

MESSAGE FROM THE ICS BOARD

Dear ICS Members,

We entered the month of April with a very special activity for the youngest ones: the Easter Egg Hunt at Villa Firenze. The Easter Egg hunt which benefited the Center for the Advancement of Innovative Health Practices was organized in partnership with the Embassy of Italy and was hosted by the Ambassador of Italy, Mariangela Zappia in her residence. The Italian American Food Coalition also contributed in offering this event, and Ferrero North America was the sponsor, who provided the chocolate. The Center for the Advancement of Innovative Health Practices has as its mission to create a healthy, just, and resilient trauma-informed society where all people have the necessary support to thrive. The event was sold out and was a huge success.

If you missed it but wish to donate for the cause, we are still accepting donations on our [website](https://www.italianculturalsociety.org).

The Italian Cultural Society is committed to the principles of Humanism and as such we are promoting and supporting those initiatives that will bring relief and help to the humans in need. Our support to the Ukrainian Red Cross is still ongoing, should you choose to help it in this tragic moment of their history. We are reminded daily that it is a privilege to cultivate and teach Italian language, literature, and art and at the same time we are aware that its intrinsic meaning is dependent on the good that we can do for all.

In April we are getting ready to welcome two new Board members, professor Donatella Melucci from Georgetown University and Mr. Phil Contrino. We look forward to having them join our Board of Directors.

Our gala committee has been feverishly at work to add the final touches to what is going to be our best gala ever. Come and enjoy dining at its finest at the Embassy of Italy on June 10th. Italian fashion is going to be all the talk as we award Domenico De Sole, former CEO of Gucci in conversation with Sara Forden, the author of the acclaimed House of Gucci.

Tickets are selling fast so reserve your spot before it is gone.

I wish you all Buona Pasqua!

Annelise Brody Morani
Chair of the ICS Board of Directors

ITALIAN EMBASSY EASTER EGG HUNT



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THE GENTLEMAN BANKER:

A CONVERSATION WITH GIORGIO CHIARVA ON AMADEO PETER GIANNINI

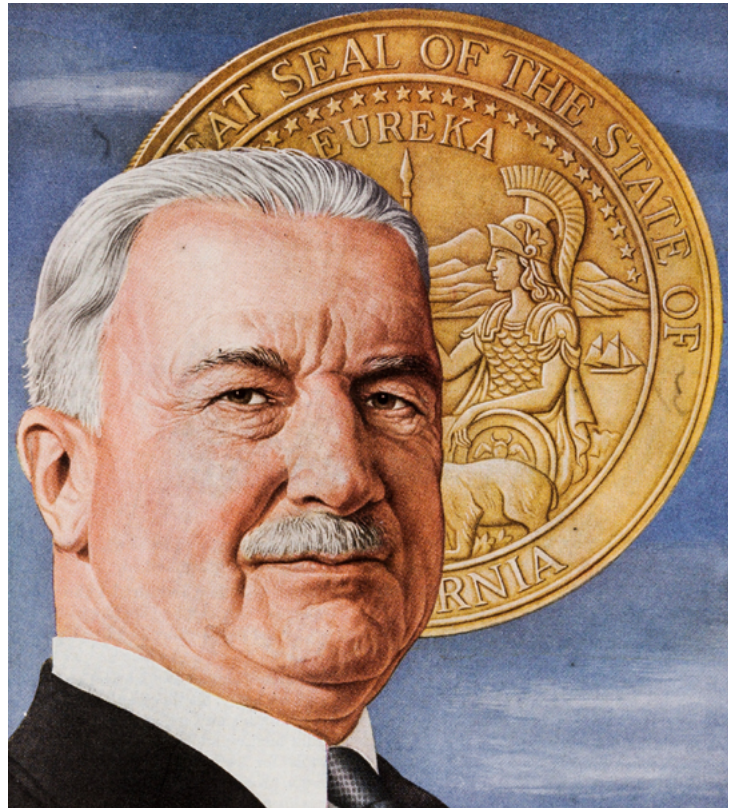
By Derek A. Ginoris

This month we had the pleasure of honoring Amadeo Peter Giannini's golden legacy by diving into Giorgio A. Chiarva's book, "The Gentleman Banker," with an interview led by Sara Gay Forden! In this interesting webinar, spectators were granted the opportunity to dive deep into the author's inspirations and his fixation on this remarkable Italian American figure.

When asked what initially motivated him to write the novel, Chiarva explained that he was astonished by the fact that Giannini managed to turn the small-scale Bank of Italy into what we now recognize as one of the largest banks in the world – Bank of America. In fact, it was during the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906 that Giannini's career experienced amazing growth as he became one of the first bankers to offer services to middle-class Americans at a time where only the upper class were granted such benefits. Chiarva acknowledges that in this period, he began allowing lenders to secure loans with non-traditional methods that ultimately permitted them to rebuild what had been destroyed during the disaster. In doing so Giannini demonstrated a deep understanding of his community's necessities as well as a selfless sympathy for his fellow Americans which originated from his own family's experience in building something from nothing as immigrants, Sara Gay Forden notes.

The Golden Gate Bridge, Charlie Chaplin's first movie – "The Kid," and Disney's "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" were all successful projects initiated with loans that Giannini offered lenders without a collateral. Rather, he would receive a portion of tolls and movie ticket sales respectively as modes of repayment for these loans. Chiarva recalls a quote the kind businessman would cite to his lenders: "If you succeed, I succeed. If you lose, I lose." His benevolent mindset would lead to further accomplishments in the broader American community, especially for women. At a critical time during the Women's Suffrage Movement, Giannini became one of the first employers to offer positions for women! In 1911, about a year after his decision, the State of California became the sixth US state which granted women the right to vote equally with men.

After the intriguing Q&A Session, Prof. Donatella Melucci of Georgetown University gave spectators insight on the



translation of the book from Italian to English. The process was handled by recent graduates from Georgetown University who studied under Prof. Melucci in both her Business Italian and Translation courses. Martina Benedetti Marshall and Danielle Guida both spoke about how personal this project was for them as young women with strong Italian American roots who identify with Giannini's selfless character. Thereafter, minimal edits were made by Prof. Melucci before the manuscript was sent over to New Academia Publishing. Anna Lawton, founder of the publishing house, explained that she decided to personally read and edit the text herself before sending it off to be printed.

Special thanks to the National Italian American Foundation, the Italian Department at Georgetown University, and New Academia Publishing for collaborating with the ICS to make this wonderful event possible! The biographical novel is available for purchase through our website or through that of New Academia Publishing.

A CORNER OF VENICE IN BOSTON

THE ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

By Dario Penzo

The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, in Boston, is one of the most famous museums in the United States, not only for its beautiful collection but also, and above all, for the theft of some works of art that has remained unsolved. But, when walking into the museum for the first time, visitors easily forget all the mystery behind the heist, amazed by the beauty and tranquility of the Courtyard, the beating heart of the museum.

This building is one of many examples of Venetian Gothic Revival architecture, which became popular in the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century. Woven into its fabric are objects from many different periods and places, including Venetian sculpture and architectural elements. Designed by architect Willard T. Sears under direct guidance from Isabella Stewart Gardner, the Museum reflects Venetian architecture, but it does not directly reference any specific Venetian palazzo.

Even though Sears was the architect of the Museum, Mrs. Gardner was directly involved in choosing and placing the architectural elements and fragments in the Courtyard. Gardner admired many of the palaces along the Grand Canal but introduced them to Boston in an unexpected way, bringing inspiration from their facades into the interior of her courtyard. The Gardners loved Italy, and Isabella was especially passionate about Venice, where she and her husband Jack would often stay at the Palazzo Barbaro on the Grand Canal. The Palazzo became a major source of inspiration for Isabella in the creation of her museum.

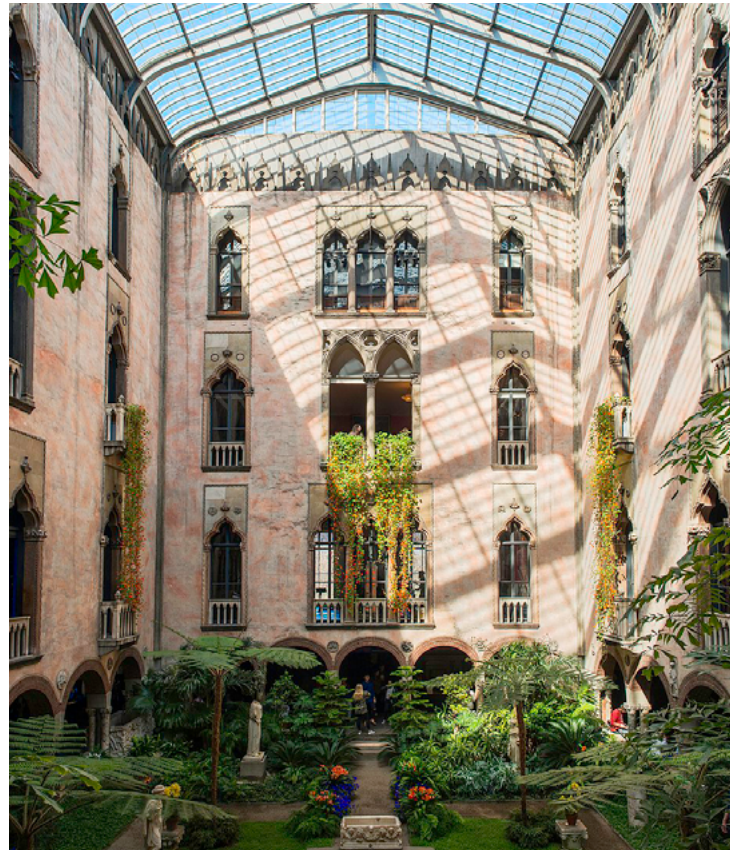
In the summer of 1897, Isabella and Jack traveled through Venice, Florence, and Rome to gather architectural fragments for their eventual gallery. They purchased columns, windows, and doorways to adorn every floor, as well as reliefs, balustrades, capitals, and statues from the Roman, Byzantine, Gothic, and Renaissance periods. Palazzo Barbaro, became the gathering place of a group of American and English expatriates, including the painters John Singer Sargent, James McNeil Whistler, and Ralph Curtis, and the art connoisseur Bernard Berenson.

As construction of her museum continued through 1900, Gardner realized that she needed more architectural elements to complete the interior facades. So she imported even more objects, shipping items from the

same dealers she had worked with previously in Venice, and often choosing them on the basis of photographs alone. The eight balconies on the East and West sides of the Courtyard originally embellished the Ca' d'Oro, one of the most important palaces along the Grand Canal.

Mrs. Gardner purchased the balconies from the Venetian antiques dealer Francesco Dorigo, from whom she also acquired other architectural elements. This piecemeal approach to installing the architectural elements and fragments is evidenced by the Courtyard's idiosyncratic assemblage of windows, balustrades, capitals, and columns. They vary in size and design given they were originally installed in different palaces throughout Venice, many of which were disassembled by the end of the nineteenth century and dispersed across the world.

So, if you visit Boston, step into the Courtyard and marvel at the various similarities and differences. From the arches to the windows, the balustrades to the columns, each element has its own story to tell, making it an architectural treasure!



ITALIAN LANGUAGE PROGRAM & MORE

Dear friends,

Spring term just started with new and traditional courses and students are still in time to join. Beginners, Elementary, Intermediate, Lunch time Conversation, Advanced courses and others in English and in Italian, including Latin and Yoga in Italiano (from your home or at the park.) Cooking classes are back in person, and online. The upcoming one, on Saturday 9th, will teach you a traditional Easter Menu, and will take place in a private home.

Stay tuned for the Summer schedule, which is going to be online very soon. We will offer again a TWO WEEK -INTENSIVE SUMMER PROGRAM, for those of you who want to learn or improve quickly, maybe before your summer trip! Finally, Weekend Immersion courses for travelers are on June 25-26 • August 20-21.

For your children, you can plan on our

next workshop/parents night out “La festa della mamma”, and one or more weeks of Summer Camps with Maestra Fiorenza and Maestra Tsehay.

Courses for Travelers and for those simply interested in a virtual tour in specific regions:

Discover Abruzzo: Apr. 26; May 3-10
Discover Sardegna: May 3-10-17
Discover Emilia Romagna: May 6-13-20
Discover Liguria: May 7-14-21
Discover Veneto: May 13-20-27

to discover geography, art and history, traditional food and wine from each place. In English and including some Italian, depending on the audience.

Some of them take place on Friday evening and can be a fun occasion to hang out with new and old friends, to kick off the weekend. Some are only online and some hybrid, with food and wine pairing for students in Bethesda.

As our May cultural event, we will be connected with Beppe Severgnini again! He will present his collection of essays, Italian Lessons: Fifty Things We Know About Life Now. Happy Spring Break and Buona Pasqua,

Francesca Casazza
CEO & Executive Director



AWARDS & SCHOLARSHIPS

The Italian Cultural Society sponsors a variety of special awards to honor Washington, D.C. area elementary, high school and university students who excel in the study of Italian language.

The Maria Guarrera Wilmeth Award honors two (or more, occasionally) outstanding students from a Washington metropolitan area high school in which the study of Italian language is part of the curriculum.

The Maura Guida Maffia Award honors a student who is interested in taking an ICS course and needs some encouragement or financial support.

The Elena and Antonio De Luca Award honors one university student who has excelled in the study of Latin and/or Greek.

The Luciana Montanari-Mendola Awards honor a university/conservatory student and a high-school age pianist.

The Anna Menapace Award & The Patricia Segnan Award honor painters or art students.

The Young Scientist Award recognizes the accomplishments of Italian scientists working in the Washington area.

The Cesarina Horing Awards honor students at three prominent universities in the Washington, D.C. area that offer a major in Italian.

Learn more about our awards on our website on:
<https://italianculturalsociety.org/awards-scholarships/>.

ELECTION OF THE ICS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

PROFESSOR DONATELLA MELUCCI, CANDIDATE



Donatella Melucci was born and raised in Italy where she earned her University degree in Foreign Languages and Literatures from the University of Bari. She received a doctorate in Rhetoric Composition & Linguistics from

Arizona State University.

Now she is a full-time Teaching Professor at Georgetown University. Her fields of specialization are syntax and methodologies for teaching Italian as a second/foreign language. Her studies have also focused on the use of technology in foreign language classes.

She has presented several research papers at conferences in Italy and in the United States. Among her publications, she co-authored a custom workbook to accompany Ciao!, a textbook for elementary Italian. In 2009 she co-authored Da Capo, 7th edition, a language textbook for intermediate Italian.

In 2009 she translated from Italian to English a book titled Ricchezza Franciscana (Franciscan Wealth), written by Giacomo Todeschini, from Italian to English, which was published by The Franciscan Institute Publications, NY. In 2014 she co-authored Piazza: Luogo di incontri 1st edition, a language textbook for beginner/intermediate Italian.

Donatella has already collaborated several times with the Italian Cultural Society for a number of events, helping in the mission of spreading the Italian language and culture.

PHIL CONTRINO, CANDIDATE

Phil Contrino was born in Catasauqua, PA and graduated at DeSales University. He now lives in Silver Spring with his wife Hillary and their 6-month-old son Marcello. He works at a trade association for movie theater owners, the National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO), and a large part of his job has been organizing events at film festivals such as SXSW, Sundance, and the Toronto International Film Festival.

Prior to joining NATO, Phil worked with BoxOffice.com for more than seven years. While with BoxOffice, he built a data/prediction business, maintained relationships with trade publications in India and China, and was quoted regularly by CNN, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Variety, The Hollywood Reporter, and many others. Phil joined NATO in December 2015.

Since he joined the ICS, Phil is attending many cultural courses and has helped with movie-themed programming events.



CAPORETTO: A BOOK BY ALESSANDRO BARBERO

By Mike Farrell

For those interested in the history of Italy in the twentieth century the name “Caporetto” holds a particular fascination. How did a single military battle manage to become part of the Italian vocabulary (“What a Caporetto!” or “That was a Caporetto!”) as a symbol of total and unthinkable defeat? Alessandro Barbero, the well-known Italian historian of medieval life and of military history, is the latest scholar to visit the subject in his book entitled simply *Caporetto*.

In 1917, toward the end of the first world war, Caporetto (known now as Kobarid) was a bucolic little town on the Isonzo River, tucked into steep mountains in the northwest of what is now Slovenia. But in October of that year the town and its surrounding area were transformed. Based on painstaking research in contemporary Italian, German and Austrian records, Professor Barbero explains how and why in those catastrophic days three hundred thousand Italian soldiers were killed, wounded, or captured by the Austro-Hungarian and German armies at Caporetto, or simply fled the scene and deserted during the so-called enemy “breakthrough” (“Durchbruch” for Germans) on the Isonzo.

The reasons for the debacle were many and diverse. For one, Barbero points to the degraded physical and moral state of the Italian forces on the eve of battle after years of combat in the lower Isonzo or Carso region. Caporetto occurred only after as many as eleven military campaigns against the Austro-Hungarians in that area. The failed project of Italian military commanders – fanciful to begin with -- to seize Trieste, then Lubiano and even Vienna left their regiments exhausted and without needed armaments to carry on the fight. Something else too had occurred: a new pact between the Austrian Emperor and Kaiser Wilhelm of Prussia brought crack German troops to the battlefield with powerful artillery and commanding officers (like a certain Rommel) expert and proven in battle. It did not take long for them to identify as the weak point in Italian defenses the relative scarcity of troops in the northern Isonzo region. The stealthy and nocturnal movement of the reinforced enemy into the mountains around Caporetto gave them the additional advantage of surprise.

For Barbero, as well, defects in the structure and composition of Italy’s forces practically assured the success of the hostile attack in late October. A key one was the absence of a professional officer corps. Unlike “the professionalism of the German army,” a “very high percentage of Italian officers on the battle lines were barely qualified if at all. . . . [L]ieutenants and captains in 1917 were almost all civilians pulled from their jobs or studies and turned into military officers.” The same

was true at the highest levels. Mirroring an Italy still in large part socially “backward, with a ruling class based wholly on personal connections,” no “mechanism [existed] for the selection and promotion of officers to the General Staff based on professionalism, unlike in the German army.”

Caporetto, Barbero concludes, was a debacle in the enormity of the loss of life and in the humiliation Italy suffered there. But he rejects accusations made after the war (usually by former commanders eager to shift blame from themselves) of “cowardice” of the troops in the trenches or of a “character” weakness of Italians in combat or self-defense. Proof enough otherwise was the fighting in the Veneto region soon after the retreat from Caporetto, when the armies of King Vittorio Emanuele regrouped and doggedly blocked the advance of the German and Austro-Hungarian forces farther into Italy. “Those same German and Austrian divisions that broke through the front at Caporetto and routed the Italians,” Barbero tells us, “were stopped between November and December on the Piave and the Grappa [Rivers] in battles so bloody that their commanders broke off the offensive.” Not long after, the Great War ended.

Barbero ends with a critical point. Although Caporetto was not a battle like Waterloo or Gettysburg that “decided the outcome of a war and changed the course of history,” its consequences were dire for the political life of Italy that followed. At once the call began to hold the “culprits” (the “usual suspects”) responsible, communists and socialists included, so that the initial “thesis of the cowardice of the soldiers was tacitly shelved in favor of the assumption, even more insidious, that the government and political parties had been responsible.” Unsurprisingly, therefore, historians have seen a causal link between Caporetto and the rise of fascism in the nineteen-twenties. Barbero even quotes “[the former head of the General Staff] Marshal Cadorna writing to a German counterpart on the day after the assassination of [socialist party head] Matteotti and the advent of new extreme fascist laws.” “[I]f the powerful present [fascist] government had been in place during the war,” Cadorna maintains, “the disaster [at Caporetto] never would have happened.”



CAPORETTO: UN LIBRO DI ALESSANDRO BARBERO

Di Mike Farrell



Per chi si interessa della storia d'Italia del ventesimo secolo il nome "Caporetto" esercita un fascino particolare. Come comprendere un'unica battaglia militare divenuta parte del vocabolario italiano ("Che caporetto!"; "E stata una caporetto!") come simbolo della sconfitta totale ed impensabile? Alessandro Barbero, il rinomato storico italiano del medioevo e della storia militare, si è dedicato a questo tema nel suo libro intitolato semplicemente *Caporetto*.

Nel 1917, verso la fine della Grande Guerra, Caporetto (oggi Kobarid) era un comune bucolico sul fiume Isonzo circondato da montagne al nord-ovest della Slovenia d'oggi. Nell'Ottobre di quell'anno però divenne tutt'altro. Il professore Barbero, sulla base di scrupolose ricerche su molti documenti contemporanei – italiani, tedeschi ed austriaci – ci spiega come e perché in quei giorni catastrofici attorno a Caporetto trecentomila soldati italiani vennero uccisi (gassati inclusi), feriti, o catturati dai soldati

degli eserciti austro-ungarico e tedesco. Oppure alcuni di loro fuggirono e disertarono senza sparare un colpo durante il cosiddetto "sfondamento" ("Durchbruch" per i tedeschi) al fiume isontino.

Le cause della disfatta, secondo Barbero, furono molte e diverse. Qui ne riporto alcune. C'era, per prima cosa, lo stato di degrado psicologico e morale delle truppe italiane dopo anni di battaglie. Prima di Caporetto c'erano state campagne militari, almeno undici, contro le forze nemiche nella regione del basso isontino o del Carso. Il progetto degli ufficiali militari di poter conquistare Trieste, poi Lublino ed eventualmente Vienna era fallito. Ma le battaglie avevano lasciato i reggimenti esauriti e quasi privi di forza per proseguire la lotta. Inoltre c'era stato uno sviluppo drammatico: grazie ad un accordo tra l'imperatore austriaco ed il Kaiser Wilhelm di Prussia, erano arrivati sul campo reparti d'élite dalla Germania con potente artiglieria e comandanti tedeschi (come un certo Rommel) esperti di battaglie. In poco tempo infatti questi scoprirono il punto debole delle difese italiane -- la relativa scarsità di truppe nella regione attorno a Caporetto. Movimenti notturni e nascosti delle truppe tedesche nelle ripide montagne diedero così loro il vantaggio della sorpresa nell'assalto.

Alla fine, per Barbero, ci furono gravi mancanze nella struttura

e nella composizione delle forze italiane che quasi garantirono il successo dell'azione offensiva scatenata dal nemico sulle montagne in Ottobre. Notevole era la mancanza di ufficiali di professione nelle forze italiane, mentre "la professionalità dell'esercito tedesco era . . . alta." "Una percentuale altissima di ufficiali [italiani] era composta da personale poco o per niente qualificato," perché "tenente e capitani, da noi, nel 1917 erano quasi tutti civili strappati ai loro uffici o ai loro studi e tramutati in ufficiali." Ai livelli massimi c'era la stessa mancanza. Rispecchiando un paese in genere "arretrato, con una classe dirigente tutta basata sulle conoscenze personali," fu assente "un meccanismo di selezione e promozione degli ufficiali di Stato Maggiore sulla base della professionalità," come accadeva invece nell'esercito tedesco."

Caporetto, Barbero conclude, fu una debacle sia nell'enormità della perdita di vite umane e nell'umiliazione ivi subito dall'Italia. Ma lui rifiuta allo stesso tempo l'accusa fatta nel dopoguerra (spesso dai ex-comandanti pronto a spostare la colpa sugli altri) della "vigliacheria" nelle trincee o d'un difetto nel "carattere" italiano nel combattimento in guerra. Come controprova basta per lui guardare gli eventi che seguirono nel Veneto, dove i soldati del re Vittorio Emanuele si raggrupparono lungo le sponde del fiume Piave e bloccarono accanitamente l'ulteriore avanzata del nemico in Italia. Dice Barbero: "Le stesse divisioni tedesche e austriache che avevano sfondato il fronte a Caporetto e incalzato gli italiani fino al Piave, fra novembre e dicembre vennero fermate . . . in combattimenti così sanguinosi che i loro comandi decisero di sospendere l'offensiva." Dopo non molto la guerra mondiale finì.

Barbero conclude la sua analisi con un punto molto importante. Anche se Caporetto non fu una battaglia come quelle di Waterloo o Gettysburg "che decidono l'esito di una guerra e cambiano il corso della storia," ci furono tuttavia gravi conseguenze della disfatta nella vita politica dell'Italia nella dopoguerra. Quasi subito cominciò la ricerca dei "colpevoli" ("the usual suspects"), comunisti e socialisti compresi, e "la tesi iniziale della viltà dei soldati fu tacitamente archiviata e sostituita con l'assunto, ben più insidioso, che del loro cedimento erano responsabili il governo e i partiti." Si comprende dunque perché qualche storico ha tracciato una linea più o meno diretta che va da Caporetto alla nascita ed ascesa del fascismo in Italia. Barbero cita infatti il Maresciallo Cadorna quando scrive a una contraparte tedesca "all'indomani del delitto Matteotti [dai fascisti] e delle leggi 'fascistissime'." Cadorna sostiene: "Se durante la guerra vi fosse stato in Italia il forte governo attuale [cioè il fascismo], il disastro [di Caporetto] non sarebbe avvenuto."

ABOUT POCHE PAROLE

Poche Parole is published each month from September through May. Deadline for ad and article submissions is the 22nd of the month preceding publication of the issue. Please send submissions to events@italianculturalsociety.org. Advertisers appearing in Poche Parole have paid a fee. Publication of any advertisement in Poche Parole does not reflect ICS endorsement or guarantee of the advertiser's services, products or statements. Material contained in articles is the sole responsibility of the author and does not indicate ICS endorsement.

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ABOUT ICS

The Italian Cultural Society of Washington D.C. (ICS) is your home for cultural and social events in the Washington metropolitan area, and for courses to learn or improve your Italian. Our community is growing and involving the entire US.

OUR MISSION

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.

OUR HISTORY

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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Please deliver Poche Parole by: Email only ☐ Email and US Mail ☐

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☐ Bronze Sponsor \$500

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