ICS EVENTS
Social meetings start at 3:00 PM on the third Sunday of the month, September thru May (except this February meeting will be at 7PM on Saturday, February 19), at the Friendship Heights Village Center, 4433 South Park Ave., Chevy Chase, MD (See map on back cover)
Saturday, February 19: Festa di Carnevale!! (See page 3). Please note, this is a Saturday evening program. Disregard the wrong date in the January issue.
Sunday, March 20: Cam Trowbridge will speak on Guglielmo Marconi, about whom he has just written a new book.
There will be no Italian lessons and no movie at the February 19 Festa di Carnevale

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE
Once again, dear members, we had a strong turnout for our social meeting. On January 16 we were treated to a lively and well-received lecture by Professor Vytenis Gureckas of Catholic University’s School of Architecture and Planning who selected five modern Italian architects and their signal works for our edification. These ranged from buildings in the Fascist period (Casa del Popolo by Giuseppe Terragni) to Renzo Piano’s recent Parco della Musica in Rome’s Eur section. Vyt started off by addressing us in Italian before launching into English to complete his presentation. We were also happy to have Joseph Grano available to announce the recently passed Congressional Resolution commemorating the 500th anniversary of Andrea Palladio’s birth that he had worked so hard to bring to fruition. Mr. Grano is working with us to co-sponsor a presentation by Mr. Calder Loth, the pre-eminent American expert on Palladio sometime this spring...stay tuned. Now we turn our attention to having some fun. It’s time for Carnevale! Joining together with several other groups in the DC area, we are making plans for a great costume party, aimed at an adult audience, for the evening of Saturday, February 19, at Friendship Heights, 7pm to 11:30pm. We had a planning meeting attended by representatives from Italians in DC; Piazza Italia, the Washington, DC Italian Language and Culture Group; D.I.V.E.; and the Washington, DC Italian Language Meetup. Also present were bon vivants Aldo Grossi and Elisabetta Pirode who will spice up our party with a demonstration (and instruction) of some groovin’ dance steps from Venezuela. Tasks were assigned, and work is well underway. It should be a memorable event, with prizes for the best costumes and/or masks. In addition, we will be holding an unusual raffle to support our ICS scholarship program in which the prizes are two pairs of tickets to a performance by the Washington National Opera Company of Giacomo Puccini’s Madama Butterfly. So please be sure to come and tell your friends to join us. And let’s hope there is no snowmaggedon this time!

Ron Cappelletti, president

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On January 5, 2011, largely through the tireless efforts of ICS member Joe Grano, as well as countless others, Congress passed House Concurrent Resolution 259, honoring Andrea Palladio. The full text is below.

One Hundred Eleventh Congress
of the
United States of America
AT THE SECOND SESSION

Begun and held at the City of Washington on Tuesday, the fifth day of January, two thousand and ten

Concurrent Resolution

Whereas 2008 was the 500th anniversary of the birth year of the Italian architect Andrea Palladio;
Whereas Andrea Palladio was born Andrea di Pietro in Padua on November 30, 1508;
Whereas Palladio, born of humble origins, apprenticed as a stonemason in his early life;
Whereas under the patronage of Count Giangiorgio Trissino (1478-1550), Palladio studied architecture, engineering, topography, and military science in his mid-twenties;
Whereas in 1540, Count Trissino renamed him 'Palladio', a reference to the wisdom of Pallas Athena, as well as the Italian form of the name of the Roman writer of the fourth century, Rutilius Taurus Aemilianus Palladius;
Whereas Palladio's designs for public works, churches, mansions, and villas rank among the most outstanding architectural achievements of the Italian Renaissance;
Whereas Palladio's surviving buildings are collectively included in the UNESCO World Heritage List;
Whereas Palladio's treatise, 'The Four Books of Architecture', ranks as the most influential publication on architecture ever produced and has shaped much of the architectural image of Western civilization;
Whereas 'The Four Books of Architecture' has served as a primary source for classical design for many architects and builders in the United States from colonial times to the present;
Whereas Thomas Jefferson called Palladio's 'The Four Books of Architecture' the 'Bible' for architectural practice, and employed Palladio's principles in establishing lasting standards for public architecture in the United States and in constructing his own masterpiece, Monticello;
Whereas our Nation's most iconic buildings, including the United States Capitol Building and the White House, reflect the influence of Palladio's architecture through the Anglo-Palladian movement, which flourished in the 18th century;
Whereas Palladio's pioneering reconstruction and restoration drawings of ancient Roman temples in 'The Four Books of Architecture' provided inspiration for many of the great American classical edifices of the 19th and 20th centuries, in the period known as the American Renaissance;
Whereas the American Renaissance marked the high point of the classical tradition and enriched the United States from coast to coast with countless architectural works of timeless dignity and beauty, including the John A. Wilson Building, the seat of government of the District of Columbia;
Whereas the American architectural monuments inspired both directly and indirectly by the writings, illustrations, and designs of Palladio form a proud and priceless part of our Nation's cultural heritage; and
Whereas organizations, educational institutions, governmental agencies, and many other entities have been celebrating this special 500-year anniversary, including the Italian National Committee for Andrea Palladio 500, the Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura Andrea Palladio, the Palladium Musicum, Inc., the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, and the Institute of Classical Architecture and Classical America, as well as other Italian and Italian American cultural organizations, such as the Italian Heritage and Culture Committee of New York, Inc., and the Italian Cultural Society of Washington, DC, Inc., with a wide variety of public programs, publications, symposia, proclamation ceremonies, and salutes to the genius and legacy of Palladio: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That Congress--
(1) recognizes the 500th anniversary of Andrea Palladio's birth year;
(2) recognizes his tremendous influence on architecture in the United States; and
(3) expresses its gratitude for the enhancement his life and career has bestowed upon the Nation's built environment.
FESTA DI CARNEVALE

Costume Party, with Masks & Prizes for the Best!

REFRESHMENTS • MUSIC with a DJ
OPEN DANCING
Venezuelan Dance Demo by “Aldo and Elisabetta”

Saturday, February 19
7pm–11:30pm

Friendship Heights Village Center
4433 S. Park Avenue,
Chevy Chase, MD

Suggested contribution: $15/person
Raffle to support ICS scholarship: $5/ticket
Prizes: 2 pairs of tickets to “Madama Butterfly”
Washington National Opera
(worth $300/pair)

Hosted by the Italian Cultural Society of:
Washington, DC • Italians in DC • D.I.V.E. •
Piazza Italia-Washington, DC
Italian Language and Culture Group •
Washington, DC / Italian Language Meetup Group
Insieme alla sorella gemella Paola (nota pittrice, 1909 – 2000) Rita nasce a Torino il 22 aprile 1909. La famiglia Levi Montalcini appartiene a quel ceto ebreo intellettuale che fiorisce nella Torino della prima metà del novecento. Il padre è ingegnere elettrico e la madre pittrice. L’ambiente familiare è vittoriano e Rita deve chiedere il permesso del padre per poter frequentare l’università e impegnarsi in una carriera professionale nelle scienze. Mentre Paola studia pittura con Felice Casorati e diventa un’artista di valore, Rita nell’autunno del 1930 decide di studiare medicina all’università di Torino. La sua scelta è determinata in parte dalla circostanza che la sua amata governante muore di cancro.

A vent’anni entra nella scuola medica dell’istologo (studioso della struttura microscopica dei tessuti animali o vegetali) Giuseppe Levi, dedicandosi agli studi del sistema nervoso che avrebbe proseguito per tutta la vita. Nel 1936 si laurea in medicina e chirurgia con 110 e lode. Nel 1938 in quanto ebrea è costretta ad emigrare in Belgio dove continua a studiare il differenziamento del sistema nervoso. Poco prima dell’invasione tedesca del Belgio La Montalcini ritorna a Torino. Dopo l’8 settembre l’invasione tedesca costringe la famiglia a spostarsi a Firenze. In 1944 gli Alleati costringono le truppe tedesche a lasciare Firenze; Rita diventa medico presso il Quartier Generale anglo-americano. Dopo la guerra torna a Torino, dove riprende lo studio del sistema nervoso, inizia a fare ricerca negli embrioni di pollo e si rivolge allo studio dello sviluppo dei neuroni isolati dal tessuto cerebrale dell’embrione.

Nel 1947 il biologo Viktor Hamburger, che influenzò molti suoi lavori, la invita a Saint Louis e le offre la cattedra di docente del corso di Neurobiologia al Dipartimento di zoologia della Washington University, dove continua le ricerche embrionali sulle galline. La Montalcini conta di rimanere negli USA solo per pochi mesi, ma la permanenza si estende a una trentina d’anni. Nel 1951-52, durante la sperimentazione di un trapianto di tumore di topo sul sistema nervoso dell’embrione di un pulcino, realizza gli esperimenti fondamentali che la conducono alla scoperta del fattore di crescita nervoso, noto come NGF (Nerve Growth Factor), una proteina che contribuisce alla crescita e differenziazione del sistema nervoso dell’embrione di un pollo. In 1952, durante la sperimentazione di un trapianto di tumore di topo sul sistema nervoso dell’embrione di un pulcino, realizza gli esperimenti fondamentali che la conducono alla scoperta del fattore di crescita nervoso, noto come NGF (Nerve Growth Factor), una proteina che contribuisce alla crescita e differenziazione del sistema nervoso dell’embrione di un pollo.

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Along with her twin sister Paola (a noted painter, 1909-2000) Rita was born in Torino on April 22, 1909. The Levi-Montalcini family belongs to that class of intellectual Jews that flourished in the first half of the 1900s. Her father was an electronic engineer and her mother, a painter. The family environment was Victorian, and Rita had to ask permission of her father to attend the university and devote herself to a professional career in the sciences. While Paola was studying painting with Felice Casorati and was becoming an accomplished artist, Rita, in the autumn of 1930 decided to study medicine at the University of Torino. Her choice was influenced by the death of her beloved governess of cancer.

At 20 she entered the medical school of Giuseppe Levi, an histologist (scholar of the microscopic structure of animal or vegetable tissues), dedicating herself to studies of the nervous system, that she would pursue for her entire life. In 1936 she graduates in medicine and surgery with the equivalent of summa cum laude. In 1938, as a Jew, she is forced to emigrate to Belgium, where she continued to study the differentiation of the nervous system. Shortly before the German invasion of Belgium, Montalcini returned to Torino. After September 8, the German invasion forces the family to move to Florence. In 1944, the Allies, force the German troops to leave Florence. Rita becomes a doctor at the Anglo-American headquarters. After the war she returned to Torino, where she resumes her studies of the nervous system. She begins to do research on chicken embryos and turns to studying the development of neurons isolated from embryonic brain tissue.

In 1947 the biologist Victor Hamburger, that influenced many of her studies, invited her to St. Louis and offers her the teaching chair in Neurobiology in the Department of Zoology of Washington University, where she continues embryonic research on chickens. Montalcini plans to remain in the US just a few months, but her stay extends to about thirty years. In 1951-52, during the experimental transplant of a rat tumor onto the embryo of a chick, she carries out the fundamental experiments that lead her to the discovery of Neural Growth Factor (NGF), a protein that contributes to the growth and differentiation of sensory and sympathetic nerve cells.
delle cellule nervose sensoriali e simpatiche.

Nel 1954, in collaborazione con il suo allievo biochimico Stanley Cohen, giunge all’isolamento e all’identificazione della proteina, abbandonando nel veleno dei serpentini e nella ghiandola salivare dei topi. La sua scoperta “andava contro l’ipotesi dominante nel mondo scientifico che il sistema nervoso fosse statico e rigidamente programmato dai geni”. Per circa trent’anni continua le ricerche su questa molecola proteica e sul suo meccanismo d’azione, per le quali nel 1986 riceve il Premio Nobel per la medicina insieme al suo studente Stanley Cohen. Nella motivazione del Premio si legge: “La scoperta del NGF all’inizio degli anni cinquanta è un esempio affascinante di come un osservatore acuto possa estrarre ipotesi valide da un apparente caos. In precedenza i neurobiologi non avevano idea di quali processi intervenissero nella corretta innervazione degli organi e tessuti dell’organismo”.

La scienziata dedica una parte del premio Nobel alla comunità ebraica romana per la costruzione di una nuova sinagoga. Nel 1987 è insignita della National Medal of Science, la più alta onorificenza nel campo scientifico degli USA.


Cresciuta in “un mondo vittoriano nel quale dominava la figura maschile e la donna aveva poche possibilità”, la Montalcini dichiara d’averne “risentito, poiché sapevo che le nostre capacità mentali – uomo e donna – son le stesse: abbiamo uguali possibilità e differente approccio”. Rinuncia per scelta ad un marito e una famiglia per dedicarsi completamente alla scienza. Riguardo alla propria esperienza di donna nell’ambito scientifico, sostiene che le donne costituiscono un immenso serbatoio di potenzialità al pari degli uomini. Personalmente, i colleghi e collaboratori l’accettano nei loro ranghi come loro pari.

Con lo scopo di promuovere l’educazione e la formazione dei giovani, con la sorella Paola nel 1992 istituisce in memoria del padre la Fondazione Leven Montalcini, rivolta in particolare al conferimento di borse di studio universitarie a giovani studentesse africane (progetto “Un convitto per le ragazze Tuareg”), con lo scopo di preparare giovani donne alla vita scientifica e sociale del proprio paese.


In 1954, in collaboration with her student, biochemist Stanley Cohen, she succeeds in isolating and identifying the protein, plentiful in snake venom and the salivary gland of rats. Her discovery “opposed the dominant hypothesis in the scientific world that the nervous system was static and rigidly programmed by genes”. For about thirty years she continued research on this protein molecule and its operating mechanism, for which in 1986 she received the Nobel Prize for medicine along with her student Stanley Cohen. The statement of the reason for the Prize reads: “The discovery of NGF at the beginning of the 1950s is a fascinating example of how a perceptive observer can extract valid hypotheses from apparent chaos. Before this, neurobiologists had no idea what processes were involved in the correct innervation of organs and organ tissue”.

The scientist dedicated part of her Nobel Prize to the Jewish community of Rome for the construction of a new synagogue. In 1987 she was decorated with the National Medal of Science, the highest honor of the United States in the field of Science.

Contemporaneously with her career in the US, from 1961 to 1969, she directed the Centro di Ricerche di neurobiologia del Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche (CNR) in Rome and from 1969 to 1979 she directed the Laboratorio di Biologia cellulare of the CNR. From 1989 to 1995 she worked at the Istituto di neurobiologia of the CNR as a “superoxpert”, focusing on the spectrum of action of the NGF.

Having been born in “a Victorian world in which the male figure was dominant and a woman had few chances” Montalcini says that she has “felt the effects of it, since I knew that the mental abilities of men and women were the same: we have the same possibilities and a different approach”. By choice she gives up a husband and family to dedicate herself completely to science. With regard to her own experience as a woman in the scientific sphere, she holds that women make up an immense reservoir of potential equal to that of men. Personally, her colleagues and collaborators have accepted her as equal in their ranks.

In order to promote the education and training for young people, along with her sister Paola, in 1992 she established the Levi Montalcini Foundation, dedicated to the award of university scholarships to young African women (the “college education for Tuareg girls” project) for the purpose of preparing young women for the scientific and social life of their own country.

In 2009, having reached the age of 100, she became the first Nobel Prize winner to surpass a century of life. In 2001 she was nominated senator for life by Carlo Azeglio Ciampi and she is the oldest senator for life in office. In addition to these honors, she has received numerous other recognitions, among which five honorary degrees. She has been elected to the major international scientific academies, the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, for physical sciences, the Accademia Pontificia (first woman admitted), the Accademia Nazionale delle Scienze known as “of the XL”, the National Academy of Sciences of the US, and the Royal Society.

Romeo Segnan is a member of the board of the Italian Cultural Society

See numerous Youtube interviews of Montalcini on the web.
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MEDIEVAL SAINTLY RELICS IN ITALY
by Luciano Mangiafico

In the Middle Ages, the role of religion was an integral, visible part of life and elements of Christianity lived side by side with superstitions, old folk tales, legends, and the remnants of the ancient heathen gods worship. The Church vitality thus derived from ancient religious practices, Greek-Roman Gallic polytheism, and Christian beliefs with many variants.

The Church discouraged some of these beliefs, ignored others, and adopted and incorporated some into its liturgy. For example, Christ’s resurrection celebration in the springtime took the place of the pagan German Eostre festival, St Valentine’s Day marked the end of winter in England, the pagan goddess of victory became St. Victoria, and the Roman twin gods Castor and Pollux turned into St. Cosmas and St. Damian. In 431, Cyril, the Archbishop of Alexandria gave the Virgin Mary the title of “Great Goddess”, previously used for the Greek-Roman goddess Artemis-Diane, and the Church Council of Ephesus declared her “Mother of God” the same year. The Feast of the bodily Assumption of Mary into heaven, August 13, which was established in the 6th century, was the same day as that of the ancient festival honoring the Egyptian goddess Isis and the Greek Artemis.

During the Medieval Age life was seen as a constant, life-long struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil, God against Satan. One worshipped God, venerated saints, feared Satan’s enticing snares, and used the intercession of the Virgin Mary and the saints to ward off temptation and get God’s graces and his ear for favors.

In this context, the relics of saints, their earthly remains, clothes, other effects, and anything associated with them became important to Christians since it was believed that veneration of such relics would predispose the deceased holy persons to intercede with God on behalf of the believer. Thus early on, when the Roman authorities were persecuting the members of the “new Christian sect”, its members preserved the remains, clothing, and effects of Christians whose life was exemplary in the service of Christ and their fellow human beings and who could, and some would, be declared saints by the church.

Probably, beginning about the 6th century, holy objects, and indeed the mortal remains of saints began to be dismembered, stolen, and traded so that every church could have some relic, which not only would attract the faithful, but in some cases contribute to the economic fortunes of the locality.

The necessity of having some relics spread and by the year 800, no church could be consecrated unless its premises had saintly relics, which were generally placed in a glass-walled container either above an altar or under it. Thus started the practice for the priest officiating Mass to kiss the altar at the Mass’s beginning as a sign of respect for such relics.

The movement of relics to Europe picked up in the period 1000-1200 with the opening of trade routes to the Middle East and the Crusades. It reached its apogee, when during the Fourth Crusade the Crusaders armies were diverted to Constantinople and in 1204 sacked the city, >>>>>

looting or buying most of the works of art and other valuables, including the many relics that were in the city’s churches. These last included pieces of the cross on which Christ had been nailed, the soldier’s lance that had pierced his side (now in Vienna), the cane that had scourged Him, the piece of bread Jesus had given to Judas and the wine chalice used at the last supper, the crown of thorns Jesus was made to wear, and various other objects linked to Jesus and the remains of some of his disciples.

Thieves also often stole relics, sometimes on commission. Sometimes the clergy, when fallen on hard times sold them, and to meet the demand counterfeiters had a field day, passing animal bones or those of unknown dead unfortunates as those of saints or other well-known holy persons.

The Church and the civil authorities frowned on the use of relics to promise cures for illness, to pray for miracles, or to collect donations, and as early as 386 an imperial decree forbade, to no avail, the sale of the remains of martyrs. In 1119, an abbot, Guibert of Nogent, even wrote a book on the subject calling for the end of the continuing fixation with relics. He noted that more than one church claimed to have the severed head of St. John the Baptist and said sarcastically that St. John must have been like a hydra, when one head was cut another grew to take its place. However, both civil and church efforts to stop the craze did not work since the majority of the population believed in the efficacy of relic veneration and attributed to them miraculous properties.

Rome, as the seat of the pope and the headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church, has many relics, including the remains of St. Peter and St. Paul (crucified in Rome c. 65 AD). St. Peter is buried in the Vatican crypt below the main altar of St. Peter’s Basilica, while St. Paul is buried in the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls. The skulls of both of these saints are in the Basilica of St. John in Lateran.

The Church of St. Croce in Gerusalemme has pieces of the True Cross, one nail used to crucify Jesus, a piece of the cross headboard which bore the inscription INRI, (the Latin initials for Jesus of Nazareth, King of Jews), a large fragment of the Good Thief cross, fragments of Jesus’ crib, the scourging pillar, and the holy sepulchre, two thorns from the crown of thorns Jesus wore (the rest of the crown of thorns is in the Saint Chapelle in Paris), and the finger bone of St. Thomas, the very one which probed the resurrected Jesus’ side, where the lance had struck him. St. Helen, Emperor Constantine’s mother, brought these relics to Rome in 325. In 326, she also brought to Rome the marble stairway from Pontius Pilate’s palace in Jerusalem. This, now called The Holy Stairs, is incorporated in the interior of a church across from the Basilica of St. John in Lateran.

At least four other of Jesus original disciples remains are in Rome: St Bartholomew is in the church of the same name, St. Philip and St. James in the Church of the Holy Apostles, and St. Matthias, the disciple who replaced Judas, in the Basilica of St. Maria Maggiore.

The remains of St. Andrew, another of the apostles, who was crucified in Greece around the middle of the first century, have been since 1210 in the Norman Cathedral of Amalfi,
south of Naples. Some parts of these remains, including a tooth, an arm bone, a shoulder blade, the kneecaps, and some fingers are in St. Andrews, Scotland. This saint is the patron of Russia, Romania, Greece, and Scotland; indeed very popular!

St. Nicholas remains, our popular Santa Claus, are in Bari, Puglia. St Nicholas was the bishop of Myra in what is now Turkey and the Baresi took his remains in 1087 when the Ottoman Turks overran Myra. Bari then replaced St. Stephen as the city patron saint and built a Norman- Romanesque church to house the remains. Venice claims that it has the true remains of St. Nicholas, brought from Constantinople, and that they are in the Church of St. Nicola al Lido, Venice's beach island. The town of Nikolausberg in Germany, named after this saint, also claims to have parts of the remains.

The small hill town of Loreto (about 10,000 population) near Ancona, Marche, claims to have the house in which the Virgin Mary lived as a young girl and where the Annunciation occurred. The brick house- 31' by 15' now encompassed within a large Renaissance church, is said to have been "flown " miraculously by angels in 1291 first to Tersato, Croatia, and then in 1294, when the Muslims invaded Albania, to the small town of Recanati and soon after, on December 10, 1294, to Loreto. Needless to say, the Madonna of Loreto is the patroness of aviators.

Both Bologna and Itri, a small town south of Rome, have churches with Byzantine style icons which legend says were painted by St. Luke. St. Luke was the author of one of the four Gospels and a companion of St. Paul. He is the patron saint of medical doctors and of painters. Incidentally, the remains of St. Luke are in the Cathedral of Padua (not to be confused with St. Anthony Basilica). This church was first built in 313, rebuilt in 1117, and again between 1551 and 1754. St. Luke’s coffin was opened in 1998 and results of the scientific examinations concluded that the remains are those of an old man from Turkey or the Middle East. St. Luke was in his eighties when he died.

The Bologna painting is in the Church of the Madonna of St. Luke way up on a hill overlooking the city. It arrived in Bologna in May 1160, brought by a pilgrim by the name of Teocele who had been given it by the priests in the Church of St. Sophia in Constantinople and told it should rest in the Monte della Guardia, the name of the hill in Bologna. The current church was built in the 18th century where the original one was located, and the sanctuary is connected to Bologna, down in the plain, by 666 covered arcades and 15 wayside chapels, running a length of two and a quarter miles, apparently the longest arcade in the world (also 18th century).

The Madonna of Civita’ in Itri, south of Rome, which St. Luke also allegedly painted, was found on October 10, 796 on Mount Civita’ by a deaf-mute shepherd looking for a lost animal. The shepherd was apparently cured of his handicap to the amazement of the town people, when he ran back down the mountain to tell of his find. The Church and a monastery are on top Monte Civita’.

There are other Madonna and Child paintings attributed to St. Luke in other localities: two in Malta, one in Poland (Czestochowa), three in Germany, and another nine in Italy, including four in Rome.

The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Turin claims to have the Holy Shroud, the linen sheet in which Jesus was wrapped before burial and which bears the imprint of His body. The Church now believes that this relic is not authentic, since the linen has been dated through radiocarbon analysis to the 1300-1400 century. The Holy Shroud first appeared in France in 1357 in the possession of the widow of Geoffre de Charny, a French knight, and passed subsequently into the possession of the House of Savoy, who brought it to Turin. Another Holy Shroud, much smaller than the Turin cloth, the Edessa Cloth, which some sources say had been pawned to Venice by the Byzantine emperor as guaranty for a debt (other sources say it was looted by the Venetians in 1204), was sold to French King Louis XI in 1205 and was in the Sainte Chapelle in Paris until it disappeared at the time of the French revolution.

Padua, not far to the west of Venice, has St. Anthony (1195-1231) remains in its Basilica of St Anthony. St. Anthony who was born in Lisbon, Portugal, died in Padua. The church was begun in 1238 and finished in 1310. Some parts of the saint's remains are on display in glass cases: his tongue, jawbone, and vocal cords, the instruments that in his lifetime made his preaching of God’s message so powerful.

Venice’s patron is St. Mark, one of the four Gospel writers, who was martyred in Alexandria, Egypt in 68 AD. St. Mark’s remains were stolen by Venetian traders and smuggled out of Alexandria by hiding them from Muslim officials under a stratum of pork meat. In Venice, the more famous St. Mark replaced St. Theodore as the Venetian Republic patron and a great church, the Basilica of St. Mark, was built in his honor. The remains went missing after a fire in the church but were found again in 1094 and have been inside the Basilica since then. A British writer, Andrew Chugg, contends in his book The Lost Tomb of Alexander that the remains in Venice are not St. Mark but Alexander the Great. Virtually all scholars discount this view.

Another church in Venice, St. Geremia, holds the remains of St. Lucy. St. Lucy (283-304) was martyred in Syracuse, Sicily, and her remains were removed from Syracuse to Constantinople when Sicily became an Arab domain. In 1204, the remains ended up in Venice, where they were housed in a Church of St. Lucy, which stood until 1861 on the site of the current railroad station. In November 1981 two armed men entered St. Geremia in daylight and stole St. Lucy’s remains. They were recovered a month later in a villa near Venice and returned to the church. The Cathedral of Syracuse holds the dress and shoes of the saint and a fragment of her arm, said to have been stolen from Venice by Syracusans intent on reclaiming their patroness’ relics.

Naples has many saintly relics in its hundreds of churches, but most important are those of its patron saint, St. Januarius, (Gennaro) a bishop martyred in 305 in nearby Pozzuoli. Faithful collected two vials of his blood and eventually these found their way to the Cathedral of Naples. Documents dating back to 1389 indicate that the coagulated, solid blood in one of the vials (the other has only a few desiccated drops) liquefied twice a year. The blood vials are still shown to the faithful the first Saturday of May and on September 19, St. Januarius feast day. Neapolitans believe
that when the blood fails to perform its miracle, something bad will happen to the city. The last two instances when the blood failed to liquefy were in 1944, when Vesuvius erupted and the German army was occupying the city, and more recently in 1993 when Naples elected a Communist mayor.

St. Januarius playing politics?

Near Naples, in the beautiful town of Ravello on the Sorrento coast, St. Pantaleon provides competition to St. Januarius. St. Pantaleon was martyred in 303 and a vial of his blood was conserved in Ravello liquefies on his feast day, July 27. Another vial of his blood is in a church in Istanbul, other relics are in St. Denis in Paris, and his head is in Lyon. France.

The small town of Manoppello in the Abruzzi region claims to have the veil that St. Veronica offered to Jesus to wipe sweet and blood on his way to Calvary. The Veronica Veil, which has Jesus visage on it, is said to have been kept in the old St. Peter’s in Rome and to have been transferred to the Carthusian Monastery in Manoppello for safekeeping during the Renaissance. The piece of cloth measures 6.7” by 9.4’.

Pope Benedict XVI visited the town to view the relic in September 2006. The Vatican also has an alleged Veil of Veronica. Is it a forgery or a copy?

The city of Lucca, not far from Florence, has the so-called Volto Santo (Holy Face), a wooden crucifix with the carved body of Jesus. Tradition says that Nicodemus carved it and that the face was finished by angels. Nicodemus was a favorite of Jesus, who helped Joseph of Arimathea place Jesus’ body in the tomb. The crucifix was found in a grotto in Palestine and brought to Lucca by sailors in 742.

The scramble to possess items associated to with the body of Jesus, as Nicodemus did, is naturally harmless. Interest among the collectors is much more a matter of money.

In a December 800 by Emperor Charlemagne. This was placed in the Cathedral of Torcello, an island in the Venetian lagoon.

Rome apparently had one, given to Pope Leo III in December 800 by Emperor Charlemagne. This was placed in the Church of St. John in Lateran, Rome’s mother church, but was apparently looted by German soldiers when Rome was sacked in 1527. The holy relic reappeared in 1557 in the small hilltop town of Calcata, some 30 miles north of Rome, where the thief had hidden it. Calcata then became a pilgrim attraction until in 1900 the Church, to resolve unseemly controversies about who had the true foreskin, threatened excommunication to those who venerated the alleged relic. This did not stop the pilgrims and in 1954 the Church imposed a permanent excommunication on those who persisted in venerating it. Nevertheless, until 1982 the jeweled box containing the Holy Prepuce was paraded yearly in a procession in the streets of Calcata.

On January 1, 1983 the parish priest who had in his custody and kept the container in a shoebox in the back of a closet in his home, announced that the box had been stolen and the annual celebration could not take place any longer. Was it indeed stolen? Sold? Or reclaimed by the Vatican? Nobody knows.

The remains of some saints who died in the Middle Ages apparently are still uncorrupted, that is their flesh has not deteriorated and it exhales pleasant odors. Some of these saints are:

--- St. Cecilia martyred around 177. Her hidden burial site was located in 821 and her body was still uncorrupted. The remains were reburied in the Church of St. Cecilia in Rome. Apparently the body had turned to dust by 1599, when the tomb was last opened. The skull of St. Cecilia is believed to be in the Cathedral of Torcello, an island in the Venetian lagoon.

--- St. Agatha of Catania (Sicily) martyred in 251 by having her breasts cut off. Iconography shows her holding a tray with her breasts; as her breast were mistaken by believers for bread, bread is blessed on her feast day, February 5; --- St. Rose of Viterbo, north of Rome, who died in 1252; --- St Claire of Assisi, St Francis’ friend, who died in 1253; --- St. Sperandia of Cingoli (Marche), who died in 1276; --- St Zita of Lucca (Tuscany), who passed away in 1278. Interesting how most of the saints who died during the Middle Ages and whose bodies remained uncorrupted were women!

NOTE: The above article is an excerpt from a book draft by the author, tentatively titled The Italian Cultural Companion.

Luciano Mangiafico is a US diplomat who served as Consul in Milan and later Consul General in Palermo

MIKE BONGIORNO’S CORPSE IS STOLEN!!
(Were they looking for relics?)

Mike Bongiorno, celebrated and much beloved TV host in Italy died on September 8, 2009 and his body was buried in a cemetery at Dagnente, a small district near Arona. In another bizarre incident from the annals of Italian crime, his remains were unearthed and stolen during the night of January 24. The theft was discovered by an elderly gentleman who visited the cemetery daily. Carabinieri are investigating the theft and experts from the Parma-based RIS forensic unit were flown in by helicopter. “It’s a sign of the times we live in. There’s no respect for anyone any more”, said Fr Mauro Pozzi, parish priest of the church of San Giovanni Battista at Dagnente. The theft recalls a similar incident that took place in 2001 not far from Arona involving another prominent Italian: the theft of the remains of the bankier, Enrico Cuccia, whose corpse was recovered in a barn in the Val Susa. A film “L’Ultimo Crocino” was made of the latter incident.

(excerpted from Corriere della Sera)
LOCAL EVENTS OF INTEREST

National Gallery of Art: Neorealismo: a series of films spanning the decade when the political and social order in Italy was still fermenting; it features a variety of formal approaches by ten acclaimed directors. East Building concourse auditorium - National Gallery of Art, thru Feb. 26 http://www.nga.gov/programs/film/Neorealismo.shtm


Piazza Italia, Washington DC Italian Language & Culture Meetup Group: Social gatherings every Monday & Friday at Vapiano restaurant. See www.meetup.com/DCItalian

The Washington DC Italian Language Meetup Group: Helping people with an interest in Italian language and culture connect with one another, both online and in person. See www.meetup.com/italiano

SKIING ANYBODY?

Need a partner for weekday trips to the slopes? We are forming a group of active skiers to hit the slopes when snow is abundant and prices are low.

Please contact Paolo Vidoli at pvidoli@verizon.net

Trip to see Italian Immigrant History and Tosca Opera in Philadelphia

The ICS’s “Overnight Trip Committee” has prepared two options for organizing a trip to attend a performance of Puccini’s Tosca by the Philadelphia Opera Company, at the beautiful Academy of Music:

TOSCA by Giacomo Puccini at the Academy of Music, Sung in Italian with English translations

(See: http://www.operaphila.org/10-11/production4.shtml)

The ICS Board needs your input as to which option it should go forward with in setting up the Tosca trip. Based on the option selected, further information will be provided for trip registration and payment collection.

The two options are:

1. DAY TRIP: Sunday, May 1: Bus from ICS Office, Bethesda, lunch in Philadelphia, opera matinee (2:30 pm), warm dinner on bus during return by 8:30pm. Estimated cost per person, about $200.

2. OVERNIGHT TRIP: Saturday, April 30: Bus from ICS Office, Bethesda, lunch near Italian Market in Philadelphia, tour and presentation of Italian immigrant history of that area, dinner at Italian restaurant. Overnight at a nice hotel. Sunday, May 1,, Mass at National Shrine of St. Rita of Cascia (optional), visit to Termini Brothers Pastry Shop, lunch on your own, Opera (2:30 pm), warm dinner on bus during return by 8:30pm. Estimated cost per person, about $400.

Minimum number required for either option: 20

These trips are open to both ICS members and non-members. Those interested and likely to participate, are requested to end us the below information, either by: Mail to “Opera Trip, c/o Italian Cultural Society, 4827 Rugby Ave, Suite 301, Bethesda, MD 20814”, or email John Kelly at jmkelly31@verizon.net by Monday, February 14.

Name: ___________________________ Tel #: _______________________

Number of people in your party: ______________ Option preference (#1 or #2): __________
ICS membership application

Mail application to:
c/o ICS Treasurer
4827 Rugby Avenue
Suite #301
Bethesda, MD 20814

Please make check payable to:
The Italian Cultural Society

Name ____________________ Occupation ____________________
Address ____________________
City ____________________ State ___________ Zip ___________
Address change ☐ New member ☐ Renewal ☐
Email: ____________________ Ph.: ____________________

Type of membership
☐ Single $ 35.00 ☐ Theater ☐ Incontri a cena
☐ Family $ 50.00 ☐ Literature ☐ Conversation
☐ Student, full time $ 20.00 ☐ Opera ☐ Travelling
☐ Platinum Sponsor $ 1,000 ☐ 20-40s ☐ Dancing
☐ Gold Sponsor $ 500.00 ☐ Children (3-13) ☐ Cultural progr.
☐ Silver Sponsor $ 250.00 ☐ Museums ☐ Fund Raising
☐ Outdoor activities

Please mark the group you are interested in

meeting location

friendship heights village center
4433 South Park Ave., Chevy Chase, MD 20815

ICS the italian cultural society of washington, dc., inc.
(202) 333-CIAO
www.ItalianCulturalSociety.org

4827 Rugby Avenue, Suite #301
Bethesda, MD 20814
Return Service Requested

The expiration date of your membership is shown on the address label. Please renew using the form at top of this page.