ICS EVENTS
Social meetings start at 3:00 PM on the third Sunday of the month (except this December and January), September thru May, at the Friendship Heights Village Center, 4433 South Park Ave., Chevy Chase, MD (See map on back cover)

Sunday, December 11: FESTA DI NATALE
Please note that the date listed in the November issue was in error. Babbo Natale hopes to see you on December 11. See page 2 for December 11 program.

Sunday, January 22: (Note the date) Davide Prete, sculptor/architect/jewelry designer, will speak and exhibit his jewelry creations. See his website: www.davideprete.com/eng/62/jewelry.html

There will be no Italian Lessons and no Movie of the Month on December 11

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Those of you who attended the November meeting were treated to Francesco Scaduto-Mendola’s reading of his Sicilian ancestor, Barone Antonio Mendola’s account of the baron’s nephew’s young daughter actually locked up in a tower to keep her from marrying her worthless cousin, and who escaped through a small window and proceeded to run off and disastrously marry him anyway…and we were shown a photograph of the actual sinister-looking tower to boot. Talk about being transported to a different era!

Our next meeting on DECEMBER 11, NOT DECEMBER 18, will be the occasion of our annual Festa di Natale. This year Babbo Natale will wear his own mustache and La Befana will be channeled by a new host. Babbo’s cheerful elves will help distribute the presents, and the party will be our usual joyful seasonal celebration, hopefully with an elaborate presepio, hands-on entertainment for the children, and seasonal music with soprano Adrianna Sgarlata.(See p.11) Please be sure to join us for this happy event. And speaking of events, in this issue on page 11 are listed the many Italy-flavored events occurring in the near future in the DC area (special thanks to Anthony Galizia for listing them on his Piazza Italia website calendar.) Meanwhile, we wish you all pleasant holidays.

Ron Cappelletti, president

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ICS Christmas party – Festa di Natale
Sunday, December 11, 2011, join us at 3 pm
for an afternoon of music, traditions and foods.

3:15 – 3:45 pm
Soprano Adrianna Sgarlata Schweizer will sing and lead us in Christmas music

3:00 – 3:45 pm
Children’s program making paper presepio figurines to take home:
classroom A:
(Space is limited, call 301-467-3362 for reservations)

3:45 – 4 pm
Babbo Natale, la Befana and the Elves will distribute your presents for the children. Parents, please tag your children’s gifts and deliver them to the Elves at the door by 3 pm.

4 – 5:30 pm
Italian Potluck means a real feast!
ICS will provide dessert, drinks and a pasta station.
Last names A-M – salads or antipasti
Last names N-Z – meat or casseroles
DISH TO BE SHARED WITH 7 PEOPLE

PLEASE DO NOT BRING DESSERTS!
WELCOME TO NEW ICS MEMBERS

It is with great pleasure that I introduce those Members who have joined us recently. As I welcome them I hope that they will take advantage of all that the Society has to offer and that they will contribute with their knowledge and expertise to the success of the Society’s mission:

Mark Mohr, Anna Andreasen, Lourdes Tinajero, Richard J. Di Buono

Benvenuti!

Cesarina Horing, Membership Chair

ITALIAN LANGUAGE PROGRAM

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ICS Poche Parole Publication
Arrigo Mongini, Editor
Nick Monaco, Assistant Editor
Romeo Segnan, Paolo Vidoli, Italian Editors

Poche Parole is published each month from January through May and September through December. The deadline for the submission of all articles and ads for a newsletter issue is the 25th of the month preceding publication of the issue. Please send submissions via the Internet to e-mail address: icspoparole@verizon.net or on a computer diskette/CD to:
Editor, Poche Parole
4827 Rugby Avenue, Suite 301
Bethesda, MD 20814

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Antenna Italia

is now on the AMICO website. Get news from Italy and information on Italian and Italian-American events as well as music & commentary in streaming audio. Log on any time at Pino Cicala’s web site
www.italianamericancommunications.org

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VERCELLI ED IL RISO

di Cathy Delahay


Durante il periodo romano Vercelli era la prima città del Piemonte per ricchezza di istituzioni pubbliche e per commerci. C’erano bagni pubblici, templi, monumenti, un teatro ed un acquedotto. Situata lungo un’importante via per scambi commerciali, lo sviluppo della città ha continuato a ritmo incalzante. Poi (nel IV secolo) proprio come le fortune di Vercelli sono salite con quelle di Roma, così sono cadute alla caduta dell’impero romano d’occidente.

Si sa poco di Vercelli durante il periodo tardo antico ed alto medioevale. Dal VI al VIII secolo la città è rimasta sotto il dominio della tribù longobarda. Come membro della nuova Lega Lombarda, Vercelli è diventata un comune indipendente nel 1120. Il governo ha promulgato alcuni statuti molto avanzati per questo tempo, come l’abolizione della servitù della gleba. Nel 1219 hanno iniziato i lavori per la realizzazione dell’Abbazia di Sant’Andrea e nel 1228 Vercelli ha fondato la prima università nel mondo finanziata con denaro pubblico. Il XIII secolo era un periodo di prosperità, e Vercelli ha ottenuto il controllo sul territorio compreso tra le Alpi, il Po, la Sesia e la Dora Baltea, grazie al potere della chiesa che aveva reso possibile l’acquisizione di questi terreni.

Sfortunatamente, proprio come è accaduto nel suo rapporto con Roma antica, le fortune di Vercelli sono salite e sono cadute con quelle della chiesa durante il XIV secolo. Dopo le lunghe lotte tra Guelfi e Ghibellini, Vercelli è passata sotto il dominio del Vicovare di Milano nel 1334 e ha perso per sempre la sua autonomia. La città è passata al Ducato di Savoia nel 1427. La città è stata presa due volte dai francesi nel XVI secolo e due volte dagli spagnoli nel XVII secolo. Durante il periodo napoleonica, Vercelli è diventata parte dello Stato Francese, ma è ritornata sotto lo Stato Sabaudo nel 1814. I Vercellesi si batterono sempre per loro libertà, e parteciparono con grande valore nelle lotte risorgimentali. Dopo l’Unità d’Italia (finiti i combattimenti) lo sviluppo della città è stato molto lento, e Vercelli è tornata all’agricoltura.

Utilizzando macchinari moderni in una terra ricca di corsi d’acqua e canali, Vercelli è diventata la principale produttrice di riso in Europa. Come la città di Vercelli ha una storia antica, così è vero per l’introduzione del riso in Italia. Il riso era coltivato in Cina e nell’Asia orientale dal 6.000 a.C. Da lì si è diffuso in India e nel Asia Sudorientale. È stato portato in Europa per la prima volta dall’Islam grazie alla propagazione dei corpi religiosi. Durante il periodo medievale, il riso è stato introdotto nelle aree della Gallia e della Bretagna. Successivamente, durante il periodo napoleone, il riso è stato introdotto in altre parti dell’Europa. Dopo l’Unità d’Italia, il riso è stato introdotto in altre aree del Piemonte e ha diventato una fonte importante di ricchezza per la regione.

VERCELLI AND RICE

by Cathy Delahay

Vercelli is one of the provinces of Piemonte. The city is situated in the plain of the Po valley on the bank of the Sesia river. Founded by a tribe of Liguri in 600 BCE, Vercelli is one of the oldest urban sites in Italy. After the Ligurians there were the Celts and the Gauls, and then (in 49 AD) the city became a Roman “municipium” and the Vercellesi obtained full Roman citizenship.

During the Roman era Vercelli was the primary city of Piemonte for the richness of its public institutions and its commerce. There were public baths, temples, monuments, a theater, and an aqueduct. Situated along an important trade route, the development of the city has continued at a pressing rhythm. Then (in the 4th century) just as the fortunes of Vercelli rose with those of Rome they fell when the western Roman empire collapsed.

Little is known about Vercelli during late antiquity and high middle ages. From the sixth to the eighth centuries the city remained under the Lombard tribe. As a member of the new Lombard League, Vercelli became an independent town in 1120. Its government promulgated several laws that were very advanced for that time, such as the abolition of serfdom. In 1219 work was started for the Abbey of St. Andrew and in 1228 Vercelli founded the first university in the world financed with public funds. The thirteenth century was a period of prosperity and Vercelli obtained control of the territory between the Alps, the Po, the Sesia, and the Dora Baltea thanks to the power of the church, which had made possible the acquisition of these lands.

Unfortunately, just as it happened in its relation to ancient Rome, the fortunes of Vercelli rose and fell with those of the church during the 14th century. After the long fights between Guelphs and Ghibellines, Vercelli came under the rule of the Viscount of Milan in 1334 and lost its autonomy for good. The city passed to the Duchy of Savoy in 1427. The city was taken twice by the French in the 16th century and twice by the Spanish in the 17th century. During the Napoleonic period, Vercelli became a part of France, but it returned to Savoy in 1814. The people of Vercelli were always fighting for their freedom and they participated with great valor in the battles of the Risorgimento. After Italian unification (after the fights were over) the development of the city was very slow and Vercelli returned to agriculture.

Using modern machinery in a land rich in rivers and canals Vercelli became the principal producer of rice in Europe. Just as the city has an ancient history so does the introduction of rice in Italy. Rice was cultivated in China and East Asia since 6000 BCE. From there it spread to India and Southeast Asia. It was brought by Persians from India to the Middle East. Then the Arabs introduced rice in...
dai Persiani dall’India nel Medio Oriente. Poi gli Arabi hanno introdotto il riso in Egitto nel 600 dC; e da lì nel Nord Africa, nel sud della Spagna, in Sicilia e nel resto d’Italia, nella Francia e nel Portogallo. Nel XV secolo (più di sette millenni dopo la sua nascita in Cina) la risicoltura ha messo radici nella pianura vercellese. Tutto è iniziato sul terreno coltivato dai monaci dell’Abbazia di Santa Maria di Lucedio. Poco dopo la fondazione dell’abbazia nel 1123, i monaci hanno cominciato a scavare canali per drenare l’acqua dalle loro terre paludose. La presenza dei canali, in combinazione con il clima temperato, ha creato un luogo ideale per la coltivazione del riso. Nel corso degli anni la proprietà dell’abbazia si è estesa ben oltre le terre prossime al monastero. Alla fine del XV secolo, i monaci coltivavano riso su 2.700 ettari (6,670 acres) di terreno che sono diventati 50.000 (123,550 acres) dalla metà del XVI secolo. Oggi l’Italia produce più della metà del riso d’Europa. Con la meccanizzazione 5 persone fanno ora ciò che una volta veniva fatto da 500. Migliaia di lavoratori hanno infatti lavorato duramente nelle risaie della pianura vercellese. Dalla metà del XIX secolo fino al 1960, questo lavoro è stato fatto da un gruppo di donne chiamate “mondine.”

Le mondine erano lavoratrici stagionali (da aprile a giugno) che dovevano proteggere le delicate piantine di riso durante le prime fasi del loro sviluppo. Con l’acqua fino alle ginocchia e con la schiena curva, hanno dovuto trapiantare in risaia le piantine e togliere le erbacce. Hanno lavorato lunghe ore, dormivano su materassi in caserne e la loro paga era per lo più in riso (un chilogrammo al giorno). Questa era una vita difficile! Il film del 1949, “Riso Amaro”, ci dà un assaggio della vita delle mondine. Le mondine ora hanno il loro posto nella storia della pianura vercellese. Le loro fatiche hanno arricchito la gente di Vercelli proprio come l’acqua che si muove attraverso i canali ha arricchito il paese. Questa è una bellissima zona, in cui l’antica città di Vercelli e l’antica pianta di riso si sono unite per produrre una storia moderna di successo. Vercelli è il maggior mercato risiero d’Europa. La Borsa Italiana del Riso si trova a Vercelli, ma la ricchezza più duratura della città è veramente nella sua storia ancora visibile nei suoi monumenti. Solo per citarne alcuni: i templi e i monumenti romani; la Torre medievale dell’Angelo; la più antica università del Piemonte; e la celebre Basilica di Sant'Andrea, capolavoro assoluto del romanico-gotico nel Nord Italia. È lo stesso nella pianura vercellese. Sì, questo è dove si è sviluppata la coltura moderna del riso, ma è anche una terra arricchita dalla gente che l’ha coltivato nel corso dei secoli.

L’acqua nelle risaie riflette (in modo di sogno) gli antichi edifici di Vercelli, come l’Abbazia di Lucedio. Davvero, la storia si combina con la bellezza nella pianura vercellese – un luogo meritevole di una visita.

Egypt in 600 AD and from there to North Africa, the south of Spain, Sicily and the rest of Italy, France and Portugal. In the 15th century (over seven millennia after its birth in China) rice cultivation put down roots in the Vercelli plain. It all started on the land cultivated by the monks of the Abbey of Santa Maria di Lucedio. Shortly after the founding of the abbey in 1123 AD, the monks started to dig canals to drain the water from their swampy lands. The presence of the canals, along with the temperate climate, created an ideal location for the cultivation of rice. Over the years the properties of the monks extended well beyond the land near the monastery. At the end of the 15th century the monks were cultivating rice on 2700 hectares (6,670 acres) of land that became 50,000 hectares (123,550 acres) by the middle of the 17th century. Today Italy produces more than half of the rice of Europe. With mechanization, 5 people now do what was at one time done by 500. Thousands of workers have in fact labored hard in the rice fields of the Vercelli plain. From the middle of the 19th century till 1960, this work was done by a group of women known as “mondine.”

The mondine were seasonal workers (from April to June) who had to protect the delicate shoots of rice during the first phase of their development. With water up to their knees and curved backs they had to transplant the shoots to the rice fields and remove the weeds. They worked long hours and slept on mattresses in dormitories and their pay was mostly in rice (a kilo a day). This was a difficult life! The 1949 film “Bitter Rice” gives us a taste of the life of the mondine. The mondine now have their place in the history of the Vercelli plain. Their toil has enriched the people of Vercelli just as the water that moves through the canals enriched the country.

This is a very beautiful area, where the ancient city of Vercelli and the ancient rice plant have gotten together to produce a modern story of success. Vercelli is the most important rice market of Europe. The Italian rice exchange is located in Vercelli, but the most durable riches of the city are its history still visible in its monuments. Just to cite a few: the Roman temples and monuments, the medieval Torre dell’Angelo, the oldest university in Piemonte, and the famous Basilica of St. Andrew, an absolute masterpiece of the Romanesque-Gothic style of northern Italy. It is the same in the Vercelli plain. Yes, this is where the modern cultivation of rice developed, but it is also a land enriched by the people who have cultivated it over the course of centuries.

The water of the rice fields (like a dream) reflects the ancient buildings of Vercelli, like the Abbey of Lucedio. Indeed, history is entwined with beauty in the Vercelli plain, a place worth visiting.
CONGRATULAZIONI LEO!

Leo Doran, nipote di Ugo e Sandra Finzi, è il primo studente ad aver frequentato i corsi integrativi di lingua e cultura italiana per studenti madrelingua, offerti dall’Italian Cultural Society Language Program, dalla prima elementare fino al terzo liceo, per un totale di 13 anni.

Molto guidato, insieme ai fratelli, dai nonni Finzi, ha seguito i corsi con amore e diligenza. Terminata anche l’High School americana alla Walt Whitman, ora frequenta l’Università di Georgetown.

Congratulazioni e auguri per un brillante avvenire.

L’Insegnante: Liliana Lanzano

L’Italian Cultural Society, la direttrice dell’Italian Language Program, si associano ed augurano a Leo continuato successo negli studi universitari, certi che la lingua e la cultura italiane rimangano sempre un immenso patrimonio culturale nella sua vita.

CONGRATULATIONS LEO!

Leo Doran, grandson of Ugo and Sandra Finzi, is the first student to have completed the courses of Italian language and culture for native Italian speakers, offered by the Italian Cultural Society Language Program, from first grade through Italian Lyceum, for a total of 13 years.

Very much guided, along with his brothers, by the Finzi grandparents, he took the courses with love and diligence. Having finished high school at Walt Whitman he is now studying at Georgetown University.

Congratulations and best wishes for a brilliant future

Liliana Lanzano, his teacher.

The Italian Cultural Society and the director of the Italian Language Program join in congratulating Leo and wish him continued success in his university studies. We are certain that Italian language and culture will always remain an important legacy in his life.

SOME ICS MEMBERS AND FRIENDS STAGE A DEMONSTRATION AT THE US CAPITOL

On November 16, 2011, on a rainy day in Washington, D.C., five people conducted a demonstration in front of the Longworth House Office Building, across the street from the U.S. Capitol, protesting the lack of a resolution in Congress to honor Italy on the 150th anniversary of its birth as a country and also the lack of a Gold Medal presentation ceremony for “The Artist of the Capitol.” Proof of this is in the photo on page 11.

This demonstration was called in response to the lack of effectiveness of legislators to respond to the two major Italian American organizations based in Washington and the Italian American caucus of the Congress regarding these issues after months of letter-writing and phone-calling.

ICS member Joe Grano, leader of the demonstration stated: “It is my intention to demonstrate on Capitol Hill, on a regular basis, until these two issues are resolved. I hope some of you can join me. Please call or write me for more information Joe Grano 202-364-2526”. joegrano@netzero.com

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MONA LISA IS KIDNAPPED!
(the second of two parts)

by Luciano Mangiafico

We pick up the story from the November issue. At that point, 30 hours after the theft, the museum staff and the Paris police finally realized that the Mona Lisa had been stolen, but nobody had a clue that Vincenzo Peruggia, a former worker at the Louvre was the thief.

Louis Lépine (1846-1933), the police chief of La Seine District, was confident that the painting would be found and opined that the thieves would soon ask for a ransom; when this did not happen, he then considered that the theft had taken place to embarrass the government. Alphonse Bertillon (1853-1914), the real-life French Sherlock Holmes, was also called to assist in the case. Bertillon had become famous as a police detective by instituting the “mug shots” procedure and had developed the science of anthropometry to identify criminals through physical characteristics. The plumber Sauvet was unable to identify Peruggia from photos of Louvre’s employees or criminal mug shots, and Bertillon, using the new science of fingerprints, was unable to match prints taken left on the glass case and frame with those of Louvre employees.

The police were stumped, believing that the heist had been conducted by a group of master thieves on commission from a buyer; some thought that a potential buyer could be U.S. financial titan J.P. Morgan and asked him to comment, while others believed that the painting had been stolen on commission from the German Kaiser Wilhelm II to embarrass France. Or, alternatively, it was speculated, were Jews involved as a delayed revenge for the Dreyfus Affair?

With his customary forcefulness, Lepine ordered the Louvre closed for a week while forensic policemen studied the scene and security was beefed up. When the museum reopened on August 29, people that in the course of their normal life had never visited one mobbed the place. Two visitors from Prague who happened to be in Paris, Franz Kafka (1883-1924) and Max Brod (1884-1968) also visited the Louvre and went to see the blank spot on the wall where the Mona Lisa had been. The Mona Lisa, a masterpiece by a genius but little regarded by the general public, because of the theft had gained its status from a valuable work of art to an icon.

Meantime, the newspapers were having a field day and on August 29 the Paris-Journal wrote that a thief had turned in to them a statuette stolen at the Louvre. He stated that he had found it easy to steal moderate size objects from the museum and had walked out with the item hidden under his waistcoat. He told the paper that he had taken two other pieces from a museum gallery and had sold them to a friend of his who was a painter. The following day, the paper identified the thief of the statuette as Honoré Joseph Géry Pieret, a Belgian bi-sexual adventurer also known as Baron Ignace D’Ormesan, and displayed in its window one of the stolen items.

The Police now began hunting for the baron’s “friends” and soon concentrated on French poet Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) and Spanish painter Pablo Picasso (1881-1973). The two were part of a wild bunch of poets, and artists

LA GIOCONDA RAPITA!
(seconda di due parti)

di Luciano Mangiafico

Riprendiamo la storia dal numero di novembre. A quel punto, 30 ore dopo il furto, il personale del museo e la polizia di Parigi finalmente si accorsero del furto della Gioconda, ma nessuno aveva l’idea che Vincenzo Peruggia, gia’ lavoratore al Louvre, fosse il ladro.

Louis Lépine (1846-1933), il commissario di polizia del distretto della Senna, era sicuro che il quadro sarebbe stato trovato e che il ladro avrebbero presto chiesto un riscatto; quando questo non avvenne, ritenne che il furto era stato combinato per mettere in imbarazzo il governo. Alphonse Bertillon (1853-1914), il vero Sherlock Holmes francese, fu chiamato per aiutare nel caso. Bertillon era diventato famoso per aver istituito la pratica delle fotografie segnaletiche e aveva sviluppato la scienza di antropometria per identificare i criminali tramite caratteristiche fisiche. L’idraulico Sauvet non era stato in grado di identificare Peruggia dalle foto degli impiegati del Louvre o dalle foto di criminali, e Bertillon, usando la nuova scienza di impronte digitali, non era riuscito a confrontare le impronte sul vetro e sulla cornice con quelle degli impiegati del Louvre.

La polizia era stupefatta, credendo che il furto fosse stato perpetrato da un gruppo di ladri professionisti su commissione di un compratore, alcuni pensavano che un possibile acquirente potesse essere il titano della finanza J.P. Morgan e lo intervistarono sull’argomento, mentre altri credevano che il quadro fosse stato rubato su commissione dall’Imperatore tedesco Guglielmo II per mettere in imbarazzo la Francia. Oppure, si speculava, erano forse gli ebrei coinvolti a titolo di vendetta a posteriori per l’Affare Dreyfus?

Con il suo solito vigore Lepine ordinò la chiusura del Louvre per una settimana mentre la polizia scientifica esaminava il luogo e la sicurezza fu rinforzata. Quando il museo riaprì il 29 agosto, persone che nel corso della loro vita normale non avevano mai visitato un museo, presero d’assalto il Louvre. Due visitatori da Praga che per caso si trovavano a Parigi, Franz Kafka (1883-1924) e Max Brod (1884-1968) andarono a vedere il posto vuoto sulla parete dove era stata esposta la Gioconda. La Gioconda, capolavoro di un genio ma scarsamente considerata dal pubblico, grazie al furto, aveva cambiato il suo stato da opera d’arte di valore a opera simbolica.

Nel frattempo gli giornali passavano delle giornate campali e il 29 agosto il Paris-Journal scrisse che un ladro aveva consegnato a loro una statuetta rubata dal Louvre dicendo che gli era stato facile rubare oggetti di taglia modesta dal museo e che se ne era ustionato con l’oggetto nascosto sotto il panciotto. Al giorno il ladro disse anche di aver preso altri due pezzi da una galleria del museo e di averli venduti ad un suo amico pittore. Il giorno dopo il giornale identificò il ladro della statuetta quale Honoré Joseph Géry Pieret, un avventuriero belga bisessuale conosciuto anche come barone Ignace D’Ormesan, e mise in mostra uno degli oggetti rubati.

La polizia iniziò la caccia agli “amici” del barone e ben presto punto la sua attenzione sul poeta francese Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) e sul pittore spagnolo Pablo Picasso (1881-1973). I due erano parte di un gruppo scapestrato di poeti ed artisti che intendevano rivoluzionare le tradizioni artistiche e a parole incitavano la distruzione di tutti i musei “poiché paralizzano l’immaginazione”.

7
set on revolutionizing artistic mores and urging rhetorically the destruction of all museums “since they paralyze imagination”.

Although the two had had nothing to do with the theft of the Mona Lisa they were not totally innocent for the theft of the statuettes. Picasso, who was in the French Pyrenees with Georges Braque (1882-1963) and other artists, headed back for Paris and consulted with Apollinaire about how they should get rid of two of the stolen statuettes Picasso had purchased from the “baron”.

For a while they panicked and planned to flee abroad, but then decided to pack the stolen goods in a suitcase and in the dead of night toss it in the Seine. Thus on the night of September 5, they made the trek from Montmartre to the Right Bank walking some three miles taking turns carrying the heavy suitcase. Every shadow looked like a skulking policeman, and afraid of getting in worse trouble, they soon aborted their mission and returned to Picasso’s apartment. The following morning Picasso turned over the statuette to the Paris-Journal. Apollinaire was arrested on September 7 and Picasso ordered to appear before an investigating magistrate a couple of days after.

In court the two contradicted each other’s stories, and Picasso denied that he even knew Apollinaire; for his part, the poet had already confessed that he had sheltered the infamous baron, purchased the stolen art objects, and even signed a manifesto to burn the Louvre! Both Picasso and Apollinaire, however, were released on September 12, but were cautioned to remain in Paris while further investigations continued. The painting still missing, National Museums Director Homolle was fired by month’s end.

Meantime, Peruggia kept the painting in his Paris room wrapped in a red cloth, hidden at time under his table, his bed, or in a closet with the painted side turned toward the wall so that it looked only like a piece of wood. Even when the Suredet finally visited the apartment to question him in November 1911, they had no inkling that they were only feet away from the Mona Lisa! Peruggia later stated that he had told the Lancelotti brothers about his plans for the theft and that Vincenzo Lancelotti had kept the painting hidden for six weeks before Peruggia took it back.

In the late fall of 1913, more than two years after the heist, Peruggia saw in an Italian newspaper an advertisement by a Florentine art dealer, Alfredo Geri, that he was a “buyer at good prices of objects of art”. In November 1913 Peruggia wrote to Geri telling him that he had the Mona Lisa and wanted to restore it to Italy and signed his letter “Leonardo Vincenzo”. Encouraged by Geri, Peruggia then traveled to Florence by train, carrying the canvas in a trunk with a false bottom. On December 10, 1913, he visited Geri’s store in and offered it for sale for 500,000 lire (about $1 million) on the proviso that it would be hung in the Uffizi Gallery and not returned to France. Geri played along and said he would have to contact the Uffizi director, Giovanni Poggi, and both would have to see the painting to authenticate it. The following day Peruggia met Geri and Poggi at his room, number 20, at the Hotel Tripoli-Italia (now it is the Hotel Gioconda, Via Panzani 2, Florence) and showed them the painting. There was no question that it was the original, but they asked to take it to the Uffizi for further examination. Peruggia agreed, and also

Sebbene i due non avessero nulla a che fare con il furto della Gioconda, non erano del tutto innocenti del furto delle statuette. Picasso, che si trovava nei Pirenei francesi con Georges Braque (1882-1963) ed altri artisti, rientra a Parigi e si consulta con Apollinaire per cercare di liberarsi delle due statuette rubate che Picasso aveva acquistato dal "barone".

Per un po’ furono presi dal panico e pensarono di fuggire all’estero ma poi decisero di mettere gli oggetti rubati in una valigia e gettarli nella Senna nel pieno della notte. Così, la notte del 5 settembre, si incamminarono da Montmartre verso la riva destra del fiume, camminando per circa 3 miglia (5 km) e portando a turno la pesante valigia. Ogni ombra sembrava un poliziotto furtivo e, temendo di mettersi in guai peggiori, presto abortirono la missione e se ne tornarono nell’appartamento di Picasso. Il mattino seguente Picasso consegnò la statuetta al Paris-Journal. Apollinaire fu arrestato il 7 settembre e Picasso dovette comparire davanti a un giudice istruttore un paio di giorni dopo.

In tribunale i due dierono versioni contradditorie e Picasso perfino negò di conoscere Apollinaire; intanto il poeta aveva gia’ confesato di aver dato ospitalità all’infame barone, di aver acquistato oggetti d’arte rubati e perfino di aver firmato un manifesto per incendiare il Louvre! Comunque, sia Picasso che Apollinaire furono rilasciati il 12 settembre ma fu loro ingiunto di rimanere a Parigi mentre proseguivano le indagini. Poiché’ intanto il dipinto della Gioconda non era stato ancora ritrovato, il diretore dei Musei Nazionali, Hormolle, fu licenziato.

Nel frattempo Peruggia tenne il dipinto nella sua stanza di Parigi coperto con un panno rosso, nascosto talvolta sotto alla tavola, talvolta sotto al letto o in un armadio con la parte dipinta rivolta verso il muro in modo che sembrasse un pezzo di legno. Persino quando la Suredet venne nel novembre 1911 nell’appartamento per interrogarlo non si rese conto che si trovavano solo a pochi metri dalla Gioconda. Più’ tardi, Peruggia disse che aveva informato i fratelli Lancelotti dei suoi piani di commettere il furto e che Vincenzo Lancelotti tenne il dipinto nascosto per sei settimane prima che Peruggia lo riprendesse.

Nel tardo autunno del 1913, piu’ di due anni dopo il furto, Peruggia vide in un giornale italiano un annuncio di un venditore d’arte di Firenze, Alfredo Geri, che diceva di essere un “acquirente che paga bene oggetti d’arte”. Peruggia scrisse a Geri dicendogli che lui aveva la Gioconda e voleva riportarla in Italia e firmò la lettera col nome di “Leonardo Vincenzo”.

Incoraggiato da Geri, prese il treno per Firenze portando il quadro in una valigia con un doppio fondo. Nel dicembre 1913 andò’ nel negozio di Geri e gli offrì il quadro per Lit 500,000 (circa un milione di dollari) purche’ esso venisse appeso nella Galleria degli Uffizi e non restituito alla Francia. Geri fece finta di acconsentire e disse che avrebbe preso contatto con Giovanni Poggi, direttore degli Uffizi, e che entrambi avrebbero dovuto visionare il dipinto per autenticarlo. Il giorno seguente Peruggia incontrò Geri e Poggi nella sua stanza d’albergo, la No. 20 dell’Hotel Tripoli-Italia (ora Hotel Gioconda, Via Panzani, 2 a Firenze) e mostrò loro il dipinto. Non c’era dubbi che quello fosse l’originale ma essi chiesero di portarlo agli Uffizi per ulteriori esami. Peruggia acconsenti’ e lascio’ il dipinto per visitare la citta’. Fu arrestato al suo rientro in albergo.

Peruggia fu processato nel giugno 1914. Durante il processo disse che aveva scelto quel quadro perché’, per le sue dimensioni, era facile da nascondere e perché’ cercava di vendicarsi dei francesi che chiamavano “mangiaspaghetti” gli immigranti italiani. Il suo avvocato sostenne che l’accusa
left the hotel to sightsee around town. He was arrested when he returned to the hotel.

In June 1914, Peruggia was tried. During his trial, he stated that he had chosen the painting because its size made it easy to hide and that he was trying to get back to the French for referring to Italian immigrants as “mangiaspaghetti” (spaghetti eaters). His lawyer argued that the prosecution should be dropped since the alleged crime had not been committed in Italy and because Peruggia had given up the painting voluntarily rather than requesting a ransom. Nevertheless, he was found guilty, sentenced to 380 days jail; the sentence was then reduced to seven months four days, time already served, and he was released. By the end of the trial, interest in the affair had waned since the crisis started by the murder of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife at Sarajevo (June 28, 1914) was leading to the start of World War I.

Peruggia served in the Italian Army in World War I, married in 1921, and then returned to France where he opened a small painting supplies store in the Savoy region, not far from Geneva. He prospered and died in 1925, likely from paint lead poisoning.

Meantime in 1913, before the painting was returned to the Louvre, it was exhibited at the Uffizi in Florence, at the Galleria Borghese in Rome, and at the Brera Gallery in Milan. On December 30, 1913 the painting left Italy and travelled back to Paris by special train. When it arrived the following day, the train was met by the highest French authorities and the Mona Lisa returned to her Louvre spot in the Salon Carré, reappearing there on January 4, 1914.

In 1932, Karl Decker, an American reporter, claimed in an article in the Saturday Evening Post that in January 1914, after the Mona Lisa was back at the Louvre he had been told the true story of the theft but sworn to secrecy until his informant, who had commissioned the theft, had died. The informant, an Argentinean named Eduardo de Valfierno, who self-styled himself “Marquis Valfierno” was a con man who allegedly sold copies of stolen paintings in the black market, passing them as the originals. His associate, Yves Chauldron, an able painter and conservator, did the paintings.

Valfierno modus operandi involved finding willing buyers, and delivering to them the Chauldron copies, furnishing the buyer newspaper clippings detailing the theft from a museum. When the buyer subsequently complained that the “stolen painting” had been recovered and was back in the museum, Valfierno convincingly would tell the client that the museum authorities, to cover their ineptitude, had hung a fake in the place of the stolen original.

Decker alleged that in 1910 Valfierno and Chauldron moved their operation to Paris and later hired Peruggia to steal the Mona Lisa, not really caring what the thief did with it as long as they were able to sell the forged copies Chauldron had made. The plan worked perfectly since Valfierno was able to sell a number of Mona Lisa, including six to U.S. citizens for $300,000 each!

No reliable evidence that this tale is true and Karl Decker did not make it out of whole cloth has turned up thus far… but it is still makes for a rollicking story on the ingenuity of forgers and crooks, even if it is fictional.
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LOCAL EVENTS OF INTEREST

National Gallery of Art: guided tours of the Italian renaissance collection, West Building, main floor rotunda Mon.- Sat. 2:30, Sun. 1:30

Italian Language guided tours: West Building, Dec 13, & 17, 12:00 PM and East Building, Dec. 13 & 17 2 PM. Call 202-842-6247 for RSVP

“Antico: the Golded Age of Renaissance Bronzes”, East Building, ground floor, thru April 8, 2012

More details on these events and exhibits can be found on the National Gallery website www.nga.gov.

Italian Trade Commission & Bella Italia: “Accenti d’ Italia”, a reception to introduce a two week exhibit of Italian products at the Bella Italia store, one of 14 nationwide chosen by the Commission (Istituto Nazionale per il Commercio Estero) to participate in this program promoting Italian exports. There will be Italian food samples and operatic selections. Sat., December 3, 6 - 9 PM, 4934 Hampden Lane, Bethesda, see http://www.bellaitalianline.com/events/event-detail.asp?eventID=104 and Call 301-654-2667 by Dec1 for RSVP

American Film Institute: “Don Giovanni” Opera in Cinema from La Scala in Milan, Wed, Dec 7, 12 (Live); Wed, Dec 7, 7:00; Sat, Dec 10, 10:00 a.m.; Sun, Dec 11, 10:00 a.m. (Encores) 8633 Colesville Rd. Silver Spring, MD, tickets, $20.see http://www.afi.com/silver/new/nowplaying/2011/v8i4/operaincine ma.aspx

Cantata Chamber Singers: “Holiday in Venice”, a program of choral music with the Continuum Brass Quintet. St. Mark’s Episcopal Church, 301 A St. SE, Washington, DC, Sunday, Sept 11, 3 PM, See http://www.cantate.org/ConcertNotes.html Tickets $30 or $15 through Goldstar

Italian Cultural Institute: “Encounter with Simone Weil” film and post film discussion with Julia Haslett, producer director editor, in conjunction with the Washington Jewish Film Festival. Embassy of Italy, 3000 Whitehaven St, NW, 5:00 & 7:30 PM screenings http://www.iicwashington.esteri.it/IIC_Washington/webform/Sche daEvento.aspx?id=361 for tickets

COMING EVENT - 2012 Trip to Italy: ICS is endorsing another trip to Italy organized by Bethesda Travel! After the success of the 2010 trip to Puglia, Bethesda Travel has designed a unique itinerary for ICS members and friends. The Road Less Traveled: Scenery, Culture, Gourmet Food & Wines of Central Italy will include a carefully designed itinerary to Tivoli, with stops in Abruzzo and Le Marche, as well as exploration of Umbria. Fine foods, excellent wines, fabulous scenery! Cultural events will include the Mastrogiurato festival in Lanciano, and a detailed visit to Assisi. Trip dates are 30 Aug - 08 Sep, 2012. A bargain deal (buon mercato) when you consider the cost of $4,375 p/p includes: air travel, accommodations, charter transportation in Italy, most meals, wine tastings, local guides, taxes, fuel surcharges. Itinerary and details are posted on www.bethesdatravel.com. The trip is open to all ICS members, families, and friends. There will a briefing on this trip in early 2012 by Guido Adelfio (president of Bethesda Travel) at one of the ICS Social Meetings. Look for the announcement in Poche Parole - we invite everyone to attend the trip briefing

ADRIANNA SGARLATA

Adrianna Sgarlata is a graduate of George Mason University's College of Visual and Performing Arts with a Bachelor of Music, concentration on vocal performance. She has been studying voice for nine years and is currently pursuing a Master of Music at George Mason. Ms. Sgarlata is a coloratura soprano who has performed in many operatic roles, including Pamina in the Magic Flute, and Lauretta in Gianni Schicchi. She was Miss Virginia of 2006 and has an impressive record of community service to numerous charitable and service organizations. She has sung in several languages, including, of course, Italian
ICS membership application

Mail application to:

C/O ICS Treasurer
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Bethesda, MD 20814

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