

# RIVISTA



2023

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# Review of the year

Peter Jones CMG, Chair, looks back on a busy year



The British Italian Society enjoyed a bumper programme this year, which included thirteen events culminating in a wonderful and well-attended Leconfield Lecture and a lively Christmas dinner at the end of November. I should like to thank everyone involved in arranging, organising and running these and all parts of our programme.

I also want to express enormous thanks, personally and on behalf of the Society, to Richard Northern, my distinguished predecessor as Chair, and to Silvia Pieretti, our outgoing Treasurer. Both have given great service to the Society over many years in those roles, and I'm delighted that both are staying on as Trustees. Silvia has been succeeded as Treasurer by Luca Marin.

It could not have been a more memorable start for my time as Chair. Professor Martin Kemp, who had given the 2020 Leconfield Lecture over Zoom, returned to deliver a brilliant, unforgettable Leconfield Lecture at the Italian Cultural Institute about Leonardo's painting *Salvator Mundi*. This neatly rounded off a year which had begun in January with Annalisa Conway's informative talk about *Leonardo's Vineyard* in Milan. In between we covered a wide range of themes from *The Fall and Rise of the Campanile of San Marco* in Venice to *Chaucer's Italy*, *Giulio Romano's designs for silverware at the Gonzaga court* in Mantua and a *Biography of Water*. Professor John Foot's account of the *Rise and Fall of Fascism in Italy* (and its legacy) elicited moving accounts from the audience of their own family memories and experiences; and a talk by Marco Varvello and Enrico Franceschini in October about *British Perceptions of Italy and Vice Versa* proved both entertaining and thought-provoking. We also took advantage of the presence of Professor Marco Leonardi in London in the autumn to add a talk by him on current Italian economic policy. We are grateful to all our speakers for giving us such a varied, interesting and professional set of lectures. Several of our talks were sold out well in advance. So, please book early for events in 2024.

We also arranged two visits in the summer. The first was to the Robertaebasta Gallery, a taste of Milan in a London townhouse, where we received a warm welcome and generous hospitality from the gallery's owner, Roberta Tagliavini and her manager Mattia Martinelli, before touring rooms filled with antiques and colourful examples of 20th Century design. The other visit, kindly arranged for us by the Italian Embassy, was a private guided tour of the unique art collection at the Ambassador's Residence in Grosvenor Square.

The Society made grants during the year to support worthy artistic, academic and other projects in line with its aims. These included a donation of £750 to Bedford Music Club for their *Festival of Italian Music and Culture*, which takes place in April 2024; a contribution of £500 towards the production of the play *Hide & Seek* in translation at the Park Theatre, Finsbury Park in March 2024; a donation of £750 to the *Festival of Italian Literature in London* in April 2023 and a contribution of £500 towards the production of the play *Sorry We Didn't Die at Sea* at the Park Theatre in September 2023.

We look forward to awarding early in 2024 our biennial British-Italian Society Prizes to the winners of the 2023 competitions for undergraduate and postgraduate students.

We are grateful to our Patron, Ambassador Inigo Lambertini, for the generous support he and his team have given us this year. We also warmly thank Dr Katia Pizzi, outgoing Director of the Italian Cultural Institute and a long-standing friend of the Society, for her active and valued collaboration.

I should like to acknowledge the excellent service which Rhuna Barduagni continues to provide to the Society and its members, and to thank Philippa Leslie for producing another great edition of this magazine.

We have another varied and impressive programme of events arranged for 2024. I look forward to meeting you all there.

Peter Jones  
Chair, British Italian Society

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## Disclaimer

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## VALE

**John Jinks**, secretary to the BIS for 10 years (2006-2016) died in October. The Society recalls with much gratitude his commitment and efficiency and his work to support the members.



# Leonardo's Vineyard and Casa Atellani in Milan

a talk by Annalisa Conway

Her intriguing research was traced by Rivista's editor, Philippa Leslie

That Leonardo's vineyard is little known is surprising. Especially as it lies in the garden of Casa Atellani in Milan, literally over the road from the building housing the most famous painting in the world: Leonardo's Last Supper, in the convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie. Annalisa Conway recounted to the Society the story of the vineyard and its famous owner.

The story begins when Leonardo da Vinci, aged 30, moves from Florence to Milan, considered a very exciting city in 1482, ruled by the powerful Sforza, famous art patrons.

For his arrival in Milan, Leonardo carries a letter of introduction to Ludovico Sforza (now part of the 12-volume *Codex*

*Atlanticus* of Leonardo's drawings and writings, in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana). The introductory letter was not handwritten – Annalisa notes that it will have been by a copyist. In it, Leonardo lists all his abilities and skills as a military engineer, noting that he could create all sorts of machines both for the protection of a city and for a siege (Venice is a nearby aggressor). Historians reflect that it's the best cv the world has ever seen!, but only mentions that he can sculpt and paint 'as well as any other'. Leonardo sees himself as an inventor, and throughout his life makes drawings of weapons.

## Leonardo as court painter

Leonardo becomes Ludovico's court painter, working with the De Predis brothers. He creates two versions of *The Virgin of the Rocks* (1480s-1508) – one for a chapel which no longer exists and one now in the National Gallery, London. A perfectionist, he takes 25 years to complete the painting. Of his portraits, the *Lady with an Ermine* 1489-1491 (presumed to be Cecilia Gallerani, Ludovico's 16-year old lover) is now in Krakow; and Beatrice d'Este (?1490-96), Ludovico's young wife, is in the Louvre. The *Portrait of a Musician* (1483-87) is the only Leonardo portrait still in Milan, in the Ambrosiana. On occasion, Leonardo travels with Ludovico to his model farm at Vigevano.

Santa Maria delle Grazie is completed in 1482 and some

years later Leonardo paints *The Last Supper* in its refectory (1495-98). It was supposed to be a fresco, but perfectionist Leonardo doesn't want to follow the practice of working with fresh wet plaster, preferring to work on dry plaster, to take more time working with tempura. But 50 years later the painting began to deteriorate. (Miraculously, in the Second World War when Milan was bombed, this was the only wall in the building left standing.)

Because of the amount of work Leonardo is doing for Ludovico, the Duke, aware that he loves nature and agriculture, formally gifts him in 1498 the vineyard behind Casa Atellani

In Milan, Castello Sforzesco, constructed in 1498 and recently restored reveals Leonardo's ceiling fresco in the Sala delle Asse. It has a wonderful canopy of leaves and branches, knotted and twisted. One of Leonardo's favourite motifs is knots, and they appear in most of his paintings. They are a pun on his name – 'vinci', 'vincolo' means tie.

Because of the amount of work Leonardo is doing for Ludovico, the Duke, aware that he loves nature and agriculture, formally gifts him in 1498 the vineyard behind Casa Atellani (the details are in the deeds of the house).

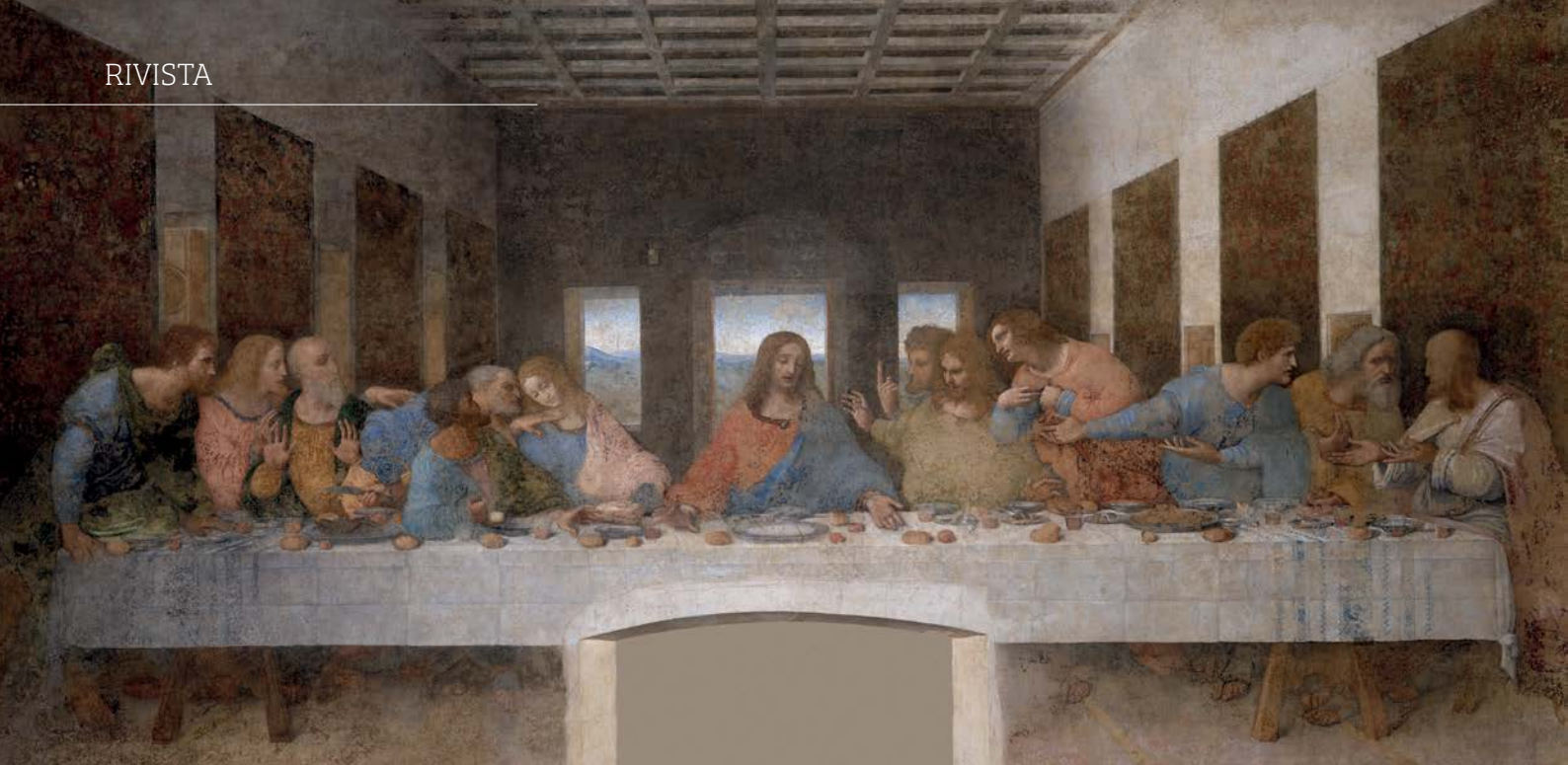


Left: *The Virgin of the Rocks* (Vergine delle rocce), restored between 2008 and 2010 and now in the National Gallery, London, shows the Virgin Mary and child Jesus with the infant John the Baptist and angel Uriel. Opposite: courtyard, entrance, steps and Zodiac Room fresco at the restored Casa Atellani









Above: *The Last Supper* (1495–1498) measures 460 cm × 880 cm (180 in × 350 in) and covers an end wall of the dining hall at the monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan; below left: Statue of Leonardo in Milan's *Piazza della Scala*.

Some years earlier, Ludovico had given the house, over the road from Santa Maria delle Grazie, to the Atellani family. The property included the vineyard of 2.5 acres.

In 1499 Louis XII of France decides to invade the Duchy of Milan, which forces Ludovico to flee. He is caught, imprisoned, never manages to get his Duchy back, and spends his final years 1500-1508 in prison in France, dying there at the age of 56.

Leonardo also has to flee, leaving Milan for Venice and entrusting his vineyard to the father of his servant, Villani. The French claim it, but by 1508 Leonardo is able to get it back and stays another 7-8 years in Milan, before moving to the service of Francis I of France in 1516. When he dies, the vineyard is left jointly to his pupil, Caprotti, and to his servant. It is subsequently entrusted to a monastery, and remains intact for 300 years.

After his death in 1519, Leonard's notes and drawings were split up – there are over 1,000 in Milan, 600 in the Royal Collection, Windsor, others scattered in Paris, Madrid, Turin.

In 1521, Francesco II Sforza (d.1535) finally gets the Duchy back – these are turbulent times – and becomes Duke of Milan (his portrait is in one of the rooms of the Casa, the Sala del Luini). After his death, the French again grab the Duchy, followed thereafter by the Spanish who rule Milan from 1550 for two hundred years and gain the Casa too.

### **The restoration of Casa Atellani**

Fast forward to the 20th century: by 1920, the Casa is uninhabited and uninhabitable. And on the market.

Step forward the wealthy Ettore Conti, whose niece is married to Piero Portaluppi, an architect. Conti engages him to restore it. Portaluppi preserves the

Renaissance details, creates pleasing proportions, uncovers some wonderful frescoes in the rooms, for example, the Zodiac Room, the Sala del Luini, and restores the 17th century panelling in Conti's studio. Another architect-historian Luca Beltrami, who had been restoring Castello Sforza, is a passionate admirer

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Leonardo mentions three wines in his writings – Malvasia, Passerina and Moscato. He also notes that 'the discovery of a good wine is increasingly better for mankind than the discovery of a new star.'

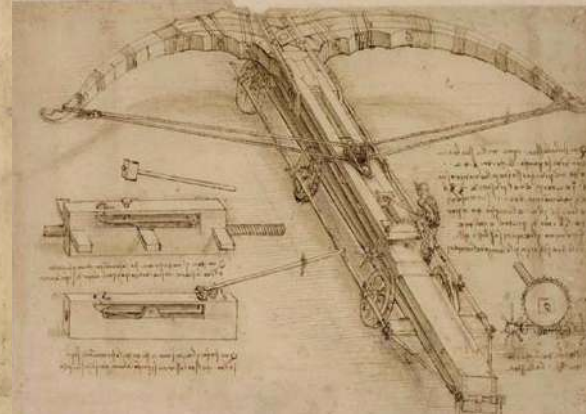
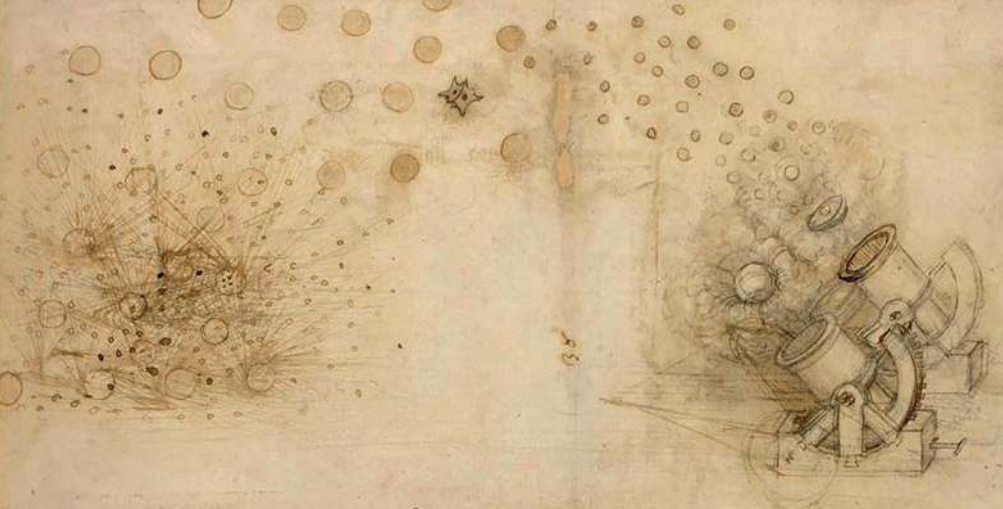
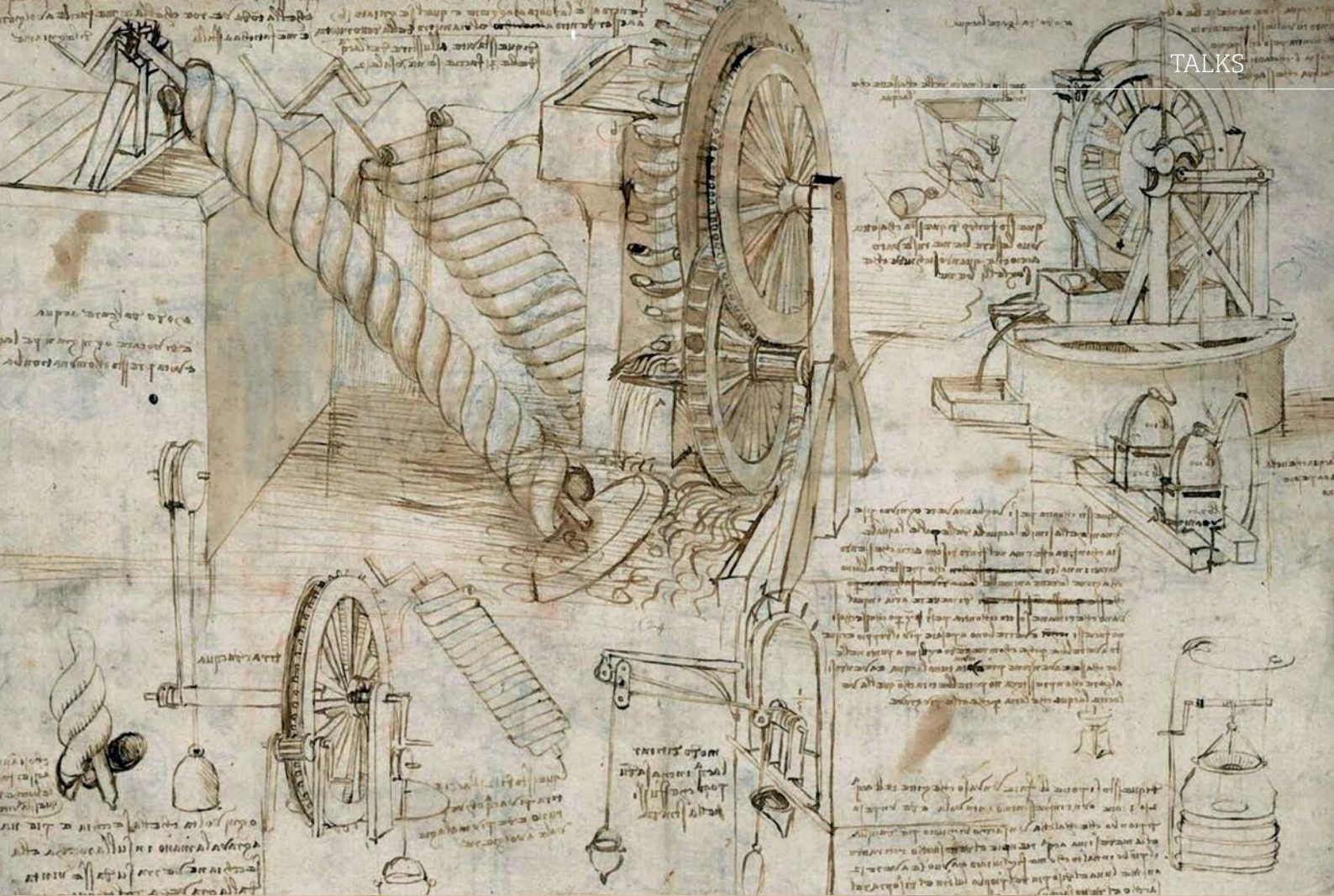
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of Leonardo and by chance comes across the story of the Casa. He is able to rescue a part of the vineyard, which had been threatened by a nearby construction plan.

Then, in the 2000s, the vineyard is further restored by wine expert Luca Maroni. The house, meanwhile, had gone to the descendants of Portaluppi. Maroni's team set up an archeological dig in the garden to try to discover what vines would have been







Pages from Leonardo's *Codex Atlanticus*

tendered by Leonardo. Their researches identify a white wine, a variant of Malvasia di Candia Aromatica which came – still comes – from the Colle di Piacenza. The Atellani had land in the area, so Annalisa thinks the deduction reasonable. Leonardo mentions three wines in his writings – Malvasia, Passerina and Moscato. He also notes that ‘the discovery of a good wine is increasingly better for mankind than the discovery of a new star.’ And being drunk is not advisable: ‘When wine is drunk by a drunkard, that wine is revenged on the drinker.’

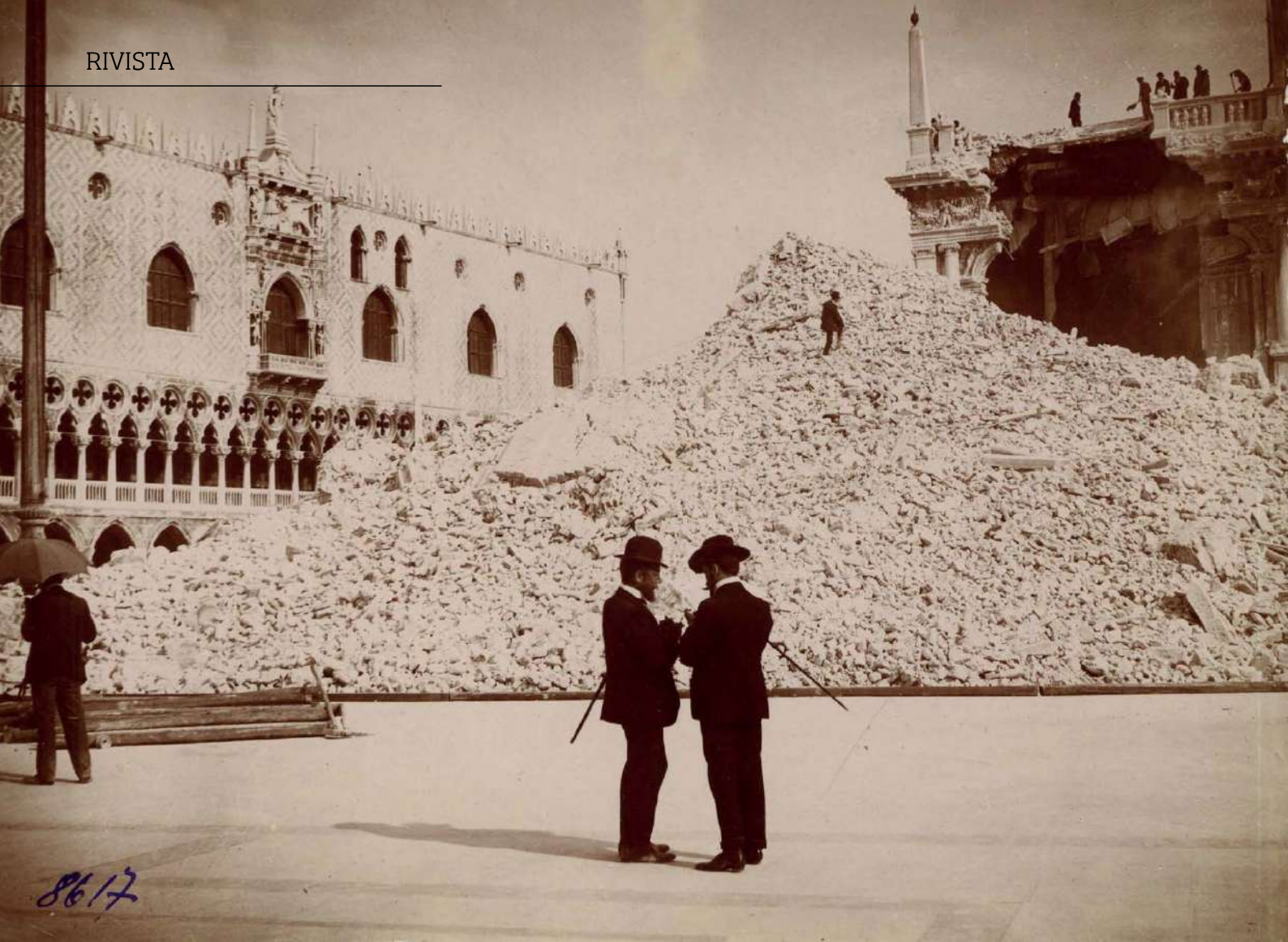
In December 2022 Casa Atellani was purchased by Bernard Arnault, and visits to the Casa are possible. Annalisa notes that you can buy a bottle of Leonardo's wine there!

Richard Northern, in his closing thanks, was delighted to learn about the Casa Atellani – near to where he had lived for four years as Consul in Milan, unaware of its existence. He also referenced the online *Londra Notizie Venticuatro* which covers news about Italy and Italian events in London and noted that the Society looks forward to collaborating with them in the future.

**Annalisa Conway**, blogger, author, and BIS member, grew up in the Veneto and studied languages at the University of Padua. Since retiring as a legal interpreter she spends her time travelling and writing a blog about lesser known Italian places of interest, covering art, history, a food and wine. Her website is 'littleitaliansuitcase'.







# “As it was, where it was...”:

## The Fall and Rise of St Mark's Campanile, Venice

A joint event with the British Italian Society and the Venice in Peril Fund at the Society of Antiquaries, Burlington House, London, 20 February 2023

**Jonathan Punt reports on what happened to Venice's most famous landmark**

**Guy Elliott (Chairman, Venice In Peril Fund) introduced Sarah Quill, renowned for creating the most notable photographic archive of the structural substance and everyday life of Venice and the Venetians – her work widely deployed by publishers and relied upon by academics.**

Any relationship with native Italians will inevitably include encounters with the phenomenon of *Campanalismo*. Derived from *campanile*, usually meaning bell tower, or belfry, *campanile* is also a synonym for “home town”. As Sarah Quill explained, *Campanalismo* goes beyond the dictionary sense of ‘parochialism’, encompassing enduring emotions of belonging, sense of personal identity, and philosophy for life at a level that can be spiritual. It is immediately comprehensible why the collapse of St Mark's Campanile at 09:47 on Monday 14 July 1902 induced

a collective sense of loss in the Venetians, equivalent to a sudden bereavement arising from the death of ‘*el paròn de casa*’ (the master of the house).

There had been structures amounting to watchtowers and lighthouses on the site from an earlier period when the present piazzetta was a harbour serving the fishermen, salt traders, merchants, and warriors using the city emerging from islands in the Lagoon. A tower started in the 10th century received the first belfry, complete with copper plating, in the 12th century. Several early towers fell





Main picture opposite: Standing among the ruins of the bell tower in 1902 (unknown photographer); above left: *Stones of Venice* (1902-1905) by Pinckney Marcus-Simons; above right: weather vane in the form of the archangel Gabriel; above: Postcard showing the Tower before the collapse, c.1890; right: the reconstructed tower viewed from The Grand Canal

victim to seismic earth tremors and fires caused by lightning strikes. Following a particularly destructive fire in 1489, a brick built campanile was commenced to the design of Giorgio Spavento the *proto* (architect and buildings manager) of St Mark's Basilica. Financing difficulties, interruptions due to wars in the 15th century, and an earthquake (1511), resulted in delays. The enterprise, with its Istrian stone belfry (1512 to 1514), copper-plated wooden statue of the Archangel Gabriel (1513), and gilded spire was not completed until 1514 under Spavento's successor, Pietro Bon. In the 16th century Bon's successor, the sculptor and architect Jacopo Sansovino, was responsible for the adjacent classical Loggetta (1546).

### Cumulative damage over centuries

Lightning strikes repeatedly damaged the Campanile. In 1745 a strike caused a large crack, with falling masonry resulting in deaths amongst those below in the Piazza. In 1776 a lightning rod, the first in Venice was installed, further to the experiments of Benjamin Franklin. The Campanile remained subject to damage by earth tremors, vibration from the ringing of its bells, salt water corrosion of the bricks, and its height of 98.6 metres being too great for the foundations. The latter's construction included Roman period bricks that had been brought from the mainland, and alder pine piles driven into dense clay, overlaid with two layers of planks and topped with multiple layers of stone.

The eventual collapse on 14 July 1902 was not without prior warning signs. In 1873/1874 removal of lean-to stalls had disclosed the poor condition of the base, but restoration was limited to repair of surface damage. Between 1892 and 1898 reassuring reports from engineers and architects led to limited replacement of weather-worn bricks. In early July 1902 the girder supporting the roof of the Loggetta was removed leaving a 40 centimetre high fissure at the base of the tower. On 7 July the tower trembled when a replacement girder was hammered into place. The following day glass crevice monitors had broken. By 12 July a large crack around most of the height of the brick shaft on the north-east side





Magnificent view across Venice from the Campanile de San Marco; above: the bells of Campanile: only the largest, the Marangona, survived the collapse

developed, from which plaster fragments fell. No immediate threat was perceived, but precautionary exclusion barriers were placed. The following day the tower was closed to visitors; bell ringing was reduced to twice *per diem*; the midday cannon was not fired; and concerts in the Piazza were cancelled. At 09:30 on 14 July the Piazza was evacuated, pre-empting falling stonework by just 17 minutes and the total collapse at 09:53. The only casualty was the tabby cat owned by the custodian of the Tower.

Amongst the many possible

**At 09:30 on 14 July the Piazza was evacuated, pre-empting falling stonework by just 17 minutes and the total collapse at 09:53. The only casualty was the tabby cat owned by the custodian of the Tower.**

contributions to the catastrophe, it was later identified that the custodian had removed brick from the base of the Tower to construct a fireplace in his lodgings there. The Loggetta was destroyed; a gaping hole was produced in the north aspect of the Biblioteca Marciana; adjacent shops were destroyed. There were notable structural survivors, including the Maragona bell, the largest, and only salvageable, of the five bells. The Basilica di San Marco and the Palazzo Ducale were protected from falling debris by a porphyry column (the Pietra del Bando) which had been brought to Venice from Acre in 1258 and formerly used to

display the heads of executed traitors and proclamations. Capitals from the Loggetta and Sansovino's bronze statue of Mercury were preserved, although the latter's fingers had to be reattached. As remarkable, were the survival of a 16th century Murano glass chalice and the Archangel Gabriel, found standing upright. Representatives of the world's press were close at hand to file reports with the London Times, the Observer, and the New York Times.

At an emergency meeting of the Communal Council on the evening of 14 July 1902, Mayor Filippo Grimani announced that construction of the Campanile and the Loggetta should be "*Com'era e Dov'era*".

The restoration was undertaken by the Venetian-born architect and Roman archaeologist Giacomo Boni. Removal of the 40 metre high pile of rubble took six months. Reconstruction commenced on 25 April 1903 (St Mark's Day) blessed by the Cardinal Patriarch of Venice, Giuseppe Sarto (later Pope Pius X), and the laying of the cornerstone by Prince Vittorio Emanuele. The foundation was extended with larch piles and Istrian stone. A total of 1,203,000 bricks were laid. The allegorical statuary of Venice as Justice was retrieved, restored and replaced. The twin winged lions of St Mark were remade and installed, the originals having been irretrievably vandalised during the Napoleonic invasion (1797/98). The Maragona was reinstalled, along with four new bells personally financed by Pope Pius X. The Loggetta was reconstructed from retrieved stone fragments and Sansovino's bronze statues. Unused material was afforded a 'funeral' in the Lagoon.

## The Campanile restored

The work was completed on 5 March 1912 with the placement of the restored Archangel Gabriel. The new Campanile was inaugurated on 25 April 1912, symbolic of the City's patron saint and 1,000 years since the first tower on the site. The restoration was met with mixed views, some expressed in satirical terms.

The total cost of the project had been 2,200,000 lire (£88,000 - ca. £12.4 million in 2023). This was met by contributions from the City Council (500,000 lire), the Venetian Province (200,000 lire), King Emanuel III and the Queen Mother (100,000 lire), together with donations from other Italian Communes and Provinces, individuals, and international appeals led by the press.

The mantra, '*Com'era e Dov'era*', was repurposed when the disastrous fire of 29 January 1996 at La Fenice necessitated rebuilding the theatre as an exact replica.

Richard Northern (Chairman of Trustees, British Italian Society) thanked Sarah Quill, standing before a background of one of her photographs, which displayed both her considerable talent and the incomparable beauty of La Serenissima.

**Sarah Quill** has worked between Venice and London since the 1970s, building up an extensive photographic archive of Venetian architecture, sculpture and daily life. A new,



extended edition of her *Ruskin's Venice: The Stones Revisited* published in 2015, has been translated into Italian. She lectures regularly, and is a trustee of the Venice in Peril Fund.

**Jonathan Punt** is a former Consultant and Senior Lecturer in Neurosurgery, and recently retired from a second career as a Barrister.



# Water: a Biography

a talk by Dr Giulio Boccaletti

**Tom Richardson reports on Dr Boccaletti's account of water, a crucial resource**

This was our first meeting at the Medical Society of London's headquarters, and a very pleasant venue it was. Dr. Boccaletti has a CV a mile long, but is currently an Honorary Research Associate of the School of Enterprise and the Environment at Oxford University. As his talk progressed I realised where the 'Enterprise' fitted in, because (to paraphrase Mrs. Thatcher) he brought us not just the problems of global water supply that we read about so much but an approach to their solution and a sense of optimism. At a less exalted level, he is a proud Bolognese, and he plays the ocarina, which my ancient encyclopaedia tells me used to be known in the States as a 'sweet potato'.

## The interrelationship between water and mankind

At breakneck speed he gave us a well-illustrated series of vignettes on the interrelationship between water and mankind over the centuries. We had the Babylonian world map of the first millennium BC, with water all around the world, and descriptions of a great flood that came not just from Genesis but from Chinese and native American traditions. A Greek amphora of the sixth century BC illustrated his argument that water facilitated and affected the distribution of power. Farmers – who were also soldiers in time of war – planted crops with their water, bought weapons with the proceeds, and over time influenced the spread of democracy in Greece. In medieval Bologna, Dr. Boccaletti's theme was an early industrial revolution, the watermills that powered the city's silk trade. From medieval Italy, with its rediscovery of Justinian's legal code, to the 17th century Treaty of Westphalia, and so to the years that led to the drafting of the US Constitution and the rules that governed interstate commerce, states paid a lot of attention to the management and resolution of disputes over the supply and allocation of water resources.

These historical vignettes concluded



with FDR's Tennessee Valley Act of 1933 and the enormous stimulus it gave to the building of reservoir capacity, the growth of electrification based on hydro power, and the lifting of poor people out of poverty. And this in turn brought Dr. Boccaletti to his central theme. Yes, he said, climate change is causing water shortages in many places. The drastic reduction in snow run-off, for instance, had led to a 60% drop in river water volumes in Italy this year. But "water isn't scarce, access to water is", even (he argued) in unprepossessing places like Somalia. Old ways of managing water no longer worked so well. We need more storage capacity, more pipelines, more flood basins, in short much more investment. But there was plenty of fresh water on the planet, even if a lot of it was at present locked in ice.

Judging by the questions that followed, many of us were surprised by Dr. Boccaletti's optimism. He claimed, for example, that there was no evidence that water disputes led necessarily to war: not the Indus, not even the Jordan. We didn't, alas, have time to talk about the Nile or

Euphrates, nor more generally about what new technologies he had in mind to find more water, transport it to where it was needed and mitigate the downside outcomes of mega-projects like China's Three Gorges Dam, such as the effect of damming on downstream silt. There was another follow-up talk crying out to be heard. Meanwhile I'm sure that his book of the same title will provide some of the answers to one of the most important issues of our time.

**Giulio Boccaletti** is an expert on natural resource security and environmental sustainability. He has a research background at MIT, Princeton and Oxford, and is also a global ambassador for water at global environmental organisation The Nature Conservancy.



**Tom Richardson** is a former Ambassador to the Republic of Italy.





# Chaucer in Italy

a talk by Richard Owen

**Jane Everson was intrigued by the fascinating world Chaucer discovered in his travels in 14th century Italy**

Chaucer is the Father of English Literature – or is he? That was the challenge that Richard Owen threw out in the course of his wide-ranging talk on Chaucer’s contacts with Italy and Italians.

## Documents covering Chaucer’s life reveal his character

He sowed a seed of doubt at the beginning of his lecture, by summarising a short story which Giovanni Boccaccio includes in his *Decameron*. A very similar tale is told by Chaucer in the *Canterbury Tales*. Does that make Boccaccio the father of this tale?

Leaving the audience to ponder this problem, Richard Owen turned to consider the details of Chaucer’s life, and the evidence we have for his activities and movements, from his birth in London in 1342 until his death, also in London, in October 1400. Although we have no autobiographical or biographical records, which can make it hard to grasp

the character and image of the real life Chaucer, his public life as a courtier, customs official and diplomat is well documented, including for his travels to Italy, and such documents convey an individual of sharp intellect and a witty sense of humour.

## The Italy that Chaucer discovered

In order to understand fully Chaucer’s experience of the peninsula, it is essential, as Richard Owen stressed, to understand the politics and society of fourteenth-century Italy. This was, of course, not one united country (like Chaucer’s England) but a whole constellation of individual states. They ranged from the powerful *signorie* and city states in the north – Milan, Genoa, Florence – to the swathe of territories across central Italy nominally ruled by the Papacy, to the Kingdom of Naples and the separate Kingdom of Sicily in the south of the peninsula. These

were states characterised by intense political and economic rivalry, and almost perpetually involved in warfare with one or another. But Italy was also characterised by a highly developed sense of business and enterprise, trading right across Europe and the Mediterranean, and so marked by a notable cosmopolitanism and cultural interchange. In addition Italians were at the cutting edge of intellectual and scientific enquiry and inventions, news of which was carried across Europe both through the common Latin language and by traders. This was the Italy that Chaucer discovered in the course of his visits to Italy and through contacts with Italians in London – a rich, stimulating and vibrant world.

Alongside the exchange of goods such as wool, exported from England for weaving and finishing in Italy before being returned north, there was also an important trade in books. It is not clear whether Chaucer first encountered the literary works of his older





Opposite: *St Mary's Church in Arquà Petrarca*, where Francesco Petrarca lived for the last four years of his life (1370–74); above left: portrait of Boccaccio c. 1550; above right: *Francesco Petrarch* sketch by Altichiero, c. 1370–1380; inset: The last tale of Boccaccio's *Decameron* became Petrarch's *De Patientia Griseldis*, which later became Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*; right: Chaucer depicted as a pilgrim on horseback

contemporaries, Petrarch and Boccaccio, while still in England, or whether it was the stimulus of his first journey to Italy that sparked off his interest. Certainly there were many Italians resident in London when Chaucer was growing up – Lombard bankers especially, but also merchants dealing in various goods, including wine – and Chaucer's father and grandfather were vintners, so regularly in contact with Italian wine dealers. Chaucer mixed with Italians and learnt the language.

Chaucer became a page to the wife of Lionel of Antwerp, the second son of Edward III, and subsequently a courtier to the King himself. This indication of the high social status of Chaucer's family was confirmed when Chaucer married, in 1366, Philippa, a lady-in-waiting to the queen who was also related to the third wife of John of Gaunt, son of Edward III.

### Chaucer in Milan

There is evidence for three visits to Italy by Geoffrey Chaucer. The first was in 1368, when Chaucer probably attended the celebrations for the wedding of Lionel to Violante Visconti, daughter of the Duke of Milan. Records certainly show that Chaucer travelled through Dover in July of that year, and as the wedding celebrations lasted for several months,

he had plenty of opportunity for a trip to Milan. The city would certainly have impressed the English courtier: the Roman remains were still visible, the palaces of the Visconti including the Castello Sforzesco dominated the city, along with the equestrian statue of Bernabò the bride's uncle. Chaucer would have left Milan in October 1368 when Lionel died, but memories of Milan and the violent family life of the Visconti must have made a lasting impression and surfaced again in the 'Monk's Tale'.

### the influence of Petrarch and especially Boccaccio on Chaucer's writings, is undeniable

One can only speculate on whether Chaucer met Boccaccio and Petrarch at this time. Certainly both were in Milan and nearby Pavia in the 1360s, and in the 'Clerk's Tale' Chaucer refers to a scholar and poet of Pavia. This must be Petrarch, since the 'Clerk's Tale' is a retelling of Petrarch's reworking of Boccaccio's original story of Griselda, the concluding tale of the *Decameron*.

### Diplomatic visits to Genoa and Florence

Definite evidence exists for Chaucer's second trip to Italy, in 1372–73, when he travelled to Genoa and Florence on a combined diplomatic and trade mission. Genoa was a key port providing transport for crusaders to the Holy Land, but Genoese ships also voyaged to England, and sometimes Chaucer might be called on to intervene in port disputes, a topic which informs the 'Shipman's Tale'.

Florence and Florentine bankers were crucial for the provision of loans to King Edward III for the prosecution of war in France, and Chaucer was tasked with negotiating new loans for the King. In Florence he would have seen the splendid buildings already erected and in train – the campanile of Giotto for example; the wonderful frescoes of the Bardi chapels in Santa Croce and Santa Maria Novella, sponsored by the banking family. We do not know whether on this occasion Chaucer met Boccaccio, whose name he never mentions, in spite of drawing on several of Boccaccio's works. By 1373 Boccaccio was in poor health and had retired to Certaldo outside Florence.

Chaucer's third visit came in 1378, when he was sent again to Milan by the new king Richard II, to meet Duke Galeazzo Visconti. He was also probably closely involved in diplomatic efforts to overcome the papal schism, and to bring to an end the War of the Eight Saints. By this time Chaucer was clearly a major player in European diplomacy and an important customs official for England.

Richard Owen felt that Chaucer's involvement with Italy was not well known among Italians, but the influence of Petrarch and especially Boccaccio on Chaucer's writings, is undeniable, so that we might indeed want to call Petrarch and Boccaccio, along with Chaucer, fathers of English Literature.

**Richard Owen** was *The Times* correspondent in Rome for fifteen years. His non-fiction books include *DH Lawrence in Italy* and *Hemingway in Italy*.



**Jane Everson** is Emeritus Professor of Italian Literature in the School of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures at Royal Holloway





# Blood and Power

## The Rise and Fall of Italian Fascism

a talk by Prof John Foot

**Richard Northern notes the impact of fascism from an unpolemical account**

John Foot, Professor of Modern Italian History at Bristol University, returned to give a talk to the Society in May 2023. Professor Foot's talk, about the origins, impact and legacy of the fascist *ventennio* in Italy, was based on his recently published book *Blood and Power*, in which he had drawn on his decades of detailed research into the period 1915-1945. He reminded us that Italy had invented fascism. Mussolini had led the first fascist government in history. It therefore had global significance and importance.

The origins of fascism lay in the aftermath of the First World War, which had produced a generation of Italian men accustomed to carrying arms, hardened by their experiences in the trenches and facing economic hardship. In addition, Italian politics and society were polarised,

with many fearing the possibility of a takeover by Bolsheviks. Mussolini's new movement preached hatred of the traditional political classes and love of the *Patria*. He promised to build a 'New Roman Empire'. The Italian experiment contributed to the rise of fascism in Germany and elsewhere, and to the Second World War.

### **The swift rise of fascism**

The rise of fascism was remarkably swift. The movement developed from scattered bands of local activists in 1920 to the assumption of complete control of the state following the March on Rome in 1922. The fascists achieved this coup principally through individual and collective acts of violence. They never won an election. "Politics and violence

became inseparable," as John explained. Brutal targeted attacks on key institutions, particularly trade unions and cooperatives, and on prominent individuals, served to intimidate and deter opposition. The fascists had no regard for the law or the norms of liberal democratic society. Their main instrument was the *squadristi*, a tiny number (no more than 50,000 at their peak) of armed men from small provincial towns, organised in small independent groups with local leaders, who later became the fascist hierarchy. Most were veterans of WWI and were motivated more by a thirst for violence than by ideology. They were often supported by local landowners. Their methods were illegal; but the organs of the state, including the police and the army, ignored or condoned their activities. Liberal politicians proved





Opposite: Italo Balbo, Benito Mussolini, Cesare Maria de Vecchi and Michele Bianchi in the October 1922 'March on Rome', which led to Mussolini's National Fascist Party ascending to power; above: portrait of Mussolini circa 1939; Italian troops in the trenches during the First World War (AI colourised); right: *Blood and Power* by John Foot

complacent. They assumed naively that they would be able to co-opt or control the fascists, but were soon swept aside.

### Squadristi and blackshirts: the oppressive reality of everyday life

John told the wider story of the ascent of Italian fascism principally through a series of personal stories of individuals, ordinary and extraordinary, mostly victims, but also perpetrators, witnesses or bystanders. These case studies served to illustrate the impact and the modus operandi of the *squadristi* and the blackshirts. They identified targets, often elected politicians or community leaders, whom they then attacked, humiliated and sometimes killed or drove into exile. These personal histories drew on the copious files and photographs kept by the fascist authorities on individuals during this period, which survive in local archives. They also demonstrated the oppressive reality of everyday life under fascism in the 1920s and 1930s. The victims included the popular Mayor of Bologna, Francesco Zanardi, and Guido Miglioli, a radical Catholic from Cremona. On the other hand, Nicola Bombacci a prominent communist, became a strong supporter of Mussolini and suffered a similar fate in 1945. These examples demolished any

notion that Mussolini's rule had been benign or beneficial. John showed too that, although some *squadristi* had been Jews, anti-semitism was a feature of Italian fascism from the outset (and not adopted later under pressure from the Nazis). Nor was fascism completely eradicated after

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**Their main instrument was the *squadristi*, a tiny number (no more than 50,000 at their peak) of armed men from small provincial towns, organised in small independent groups with local leaders, who later became the fascist hierarchy.**

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the fall of Mussolini in 1945: many leading fascists continued to serve in senior post-war roles. Fascism, and nostalgia for fascism, had deep roots in Italian society.

### Strong reactions to family experiences

The lecture gave a clear, coherent and unpolemical account of the rise and fall of fascism in Italy in the 20th century. The event had been sold out well in advance;

and the lengthy question and answer session which followed showed how engaged the audience had been. Members spoke movingly about their own families' historical experiences of fascism, positive and negative. John reported that his own great grandmother in Bologna had not been unenthusiastic about fascism.

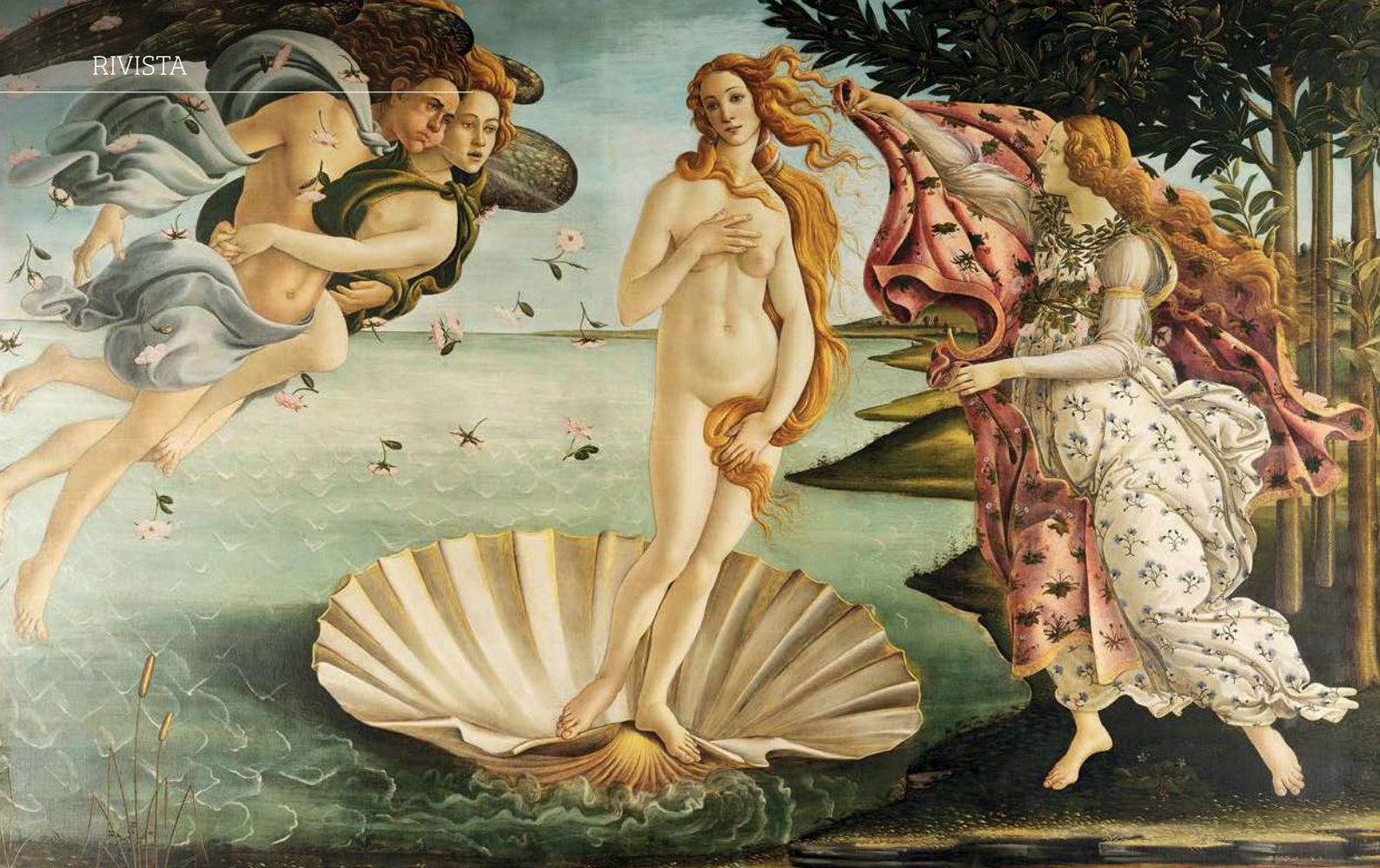
The legacy of fascism was being reassessed in Italy as the generation of former partisans died out. But historical study has revealed the brutal reality and the real impact of the rise of fascism in Italy at the time.

**John Foot** is Professor of Modern Italian History at the University of Bristol. Author of numerous books on Italian history and culture, his *Blood and Power: the Rise and Fall of Italian Fascism* was published in 1992 by Bloomsbury and by Laterza in Italian as *Gli Anni Neri: Ascesa e Caduta del Fascismo* in 2022.



**Richard Northern** is a former Chairman of the British Italian Society and former diplomat.





# Shadows, light and an angel

A surprising reference to the 15th century Botticelli in a 19th century church

A special report from Sarah Quill

Last April, a long-planned visit to Lake Como finally took place after several postponements caused by the Covid pandemic. Originally scheduled for 2020, it was organised by the philanthropic Tim Guinness who invited twenty English artists to take part in a project to raise funds for the restoration of the Anglican church in Cadenabbia. I was fortunate enough to be included in the group, which was asked to create pieces inspired by the landscape, life or history of the area, to be sold in London later in the year to raise funds for the much-needed restoration of the church.

The lakeside Anglican Church of the Ascension at Cadenabbia, designed by Giuseppe Brentano and built in 1891, is one of the most elegant churches on the shores of Lake Como. It welcomes hundreds of visitors each year, and holds services in English every Sunday from May to September, as well as providing a popular site for christenings and wedding

blessings. It is highly valued both by the local community and its congregation, whose members have taken on as much of the renovation work as can be managed by themselves. Recent surveys, however, have revealed the extent of deterioration of the fabric of the building, which is now in urgent need of repair.

During our four-day visit, the artists were free to choose any aspect of Lake Como to reproduce in painting, photography or mixed media; and the interior of the church itself seemed as good a place to start as any. My eye was caught immediately by the *sgraffito* wall decorations etched at either side of two stained-glass windows on the north wall. (The Italian word ‘sgraffito’ denotes a decoration or design that is scratched or incised onto a top layer of plaster, to reveal parts of a contrasting darker layer beneath.) During the Renaissance, *sgraffito* was widely used to decorate buildings and palace facades. In

the late nineteenth century, following the rise of the Arts and Crafts movement, there was a revival of interest in the technique, which continued into the early twentieth century.

## **Sgraffito and the influence of Botticelli**

One of the early twentieth-century *sgraffito* designs in the Lake Como church, the figure of an angel, seemed oddly familiar, and brought the work of Botticelli to mind. As soon as I was able to compare my photograph with a reproduction of Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* (painted 1485–6), the resemblance was clear. There are a few differences ... one can’t help thinking of James Bond’s greeting to Andrea Anders in *The Man with the Golden Gun*: “Miss Anders! I didn’t recognise you with your clothes on ...” In the Church of the Ascension, Botticelli’s nude Venus, goddess of divine love, has been translated by the *sgraffito* artist into an angel, winged





Main picture opposite page: Sandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus* (c. 1484–1486), Uffizi, Florence; far left: The *sgraffito* angel; above: the Church of the Ascension on the shore of Lake Como; left: water damage in the church

and robed. The *contrapposto* stance and the positioning of the limbs are identical, apart from the left arm. In Botticelli's mythological *Venus*, the pose is inspired by the *Venus Pudica* of ancient Greco-Roman sculpture. Venus's left hand and long tresses cover the pudenda, whereas the angel on the north wall of the church clasps the Bible. The overall stylistic impression is Pre-Raphaelite and Art Nouveau. The name and dates of the artist who created these works are unknown, although it seems likely that they were carried out before the outbreak of the First World War. It was a period when Botticelli's work was enjoying a revival of interest in England.

One of the strangest developments in the history of art must be the neglect, over several centuries, of the work of Sandro Botticelli (1445–1510). Esteemed in his lifetime as one of the great Italian masters of the early Renaissance, Botticelli's reputation declined over a period of more than three hundred years, until

his 'rediscovery' in England by critics, collectors and Pre-Raphaelite artists in the mid-nineteenth century.

In the early 1800s, Botticelli's work was virtually unknown in England. After his *Mystic Nativity* was acquired and brought to England, it sold for a mere 24 guineas, and was then sold on for £80. The new owner lent it to the Art Treasures Exhibition in Manchester in 1857, where it was exposed to the public for the first time, and the artist's work began gradually to become familiar to a wider audience.

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### In the first decades of the 20th century, more books were written about Botticelli than any other painter

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Articles appearing in the 'Fortnightly Review' in 1868 and 1870 had a lasting influence on artists associated with the Aesthetic Movement, in particular Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, and William Morris.

In 1878 the National Gallery bought Botticelli's *Mystic Nativity* for £1,500 – sixty times the price it had fetched four

decades earlier, and by the mid-1880s, the cult of Botticelli was at its height. It became a fashionable vogue in England, lampooned by George du Maurier in his cartoons for *Punch*; while in their operetta *Patience*, Gilbert and Sullivan parodied the affectations of languid young men associated with the Aesthetic Movement and the 'greenery-gallery' of the Grosvenor Gallery, which exhibited works by the Pre-Raphaelites and other artists of the period. During the first two decades of the twentieth century more books were being written about Botticelli than any other painter.

Over the years, the *sgraffito* works in the Anglican church at Cadenabbia, now described as being of national importance, have suffered badly from water leakage from the church roof and they are in serious need of repair, as is the steeple, which is also in need of attention.

The works created by the twenty artists involved in the Lake Como art project were exhibited in London in November 2023. The proceeds will go partly towards the restoration of the Church of the Ascension, and partly to secure the ongoing functioning of the church throughout its season of regular services between May and September.





# Animating the Table

## 2023 Charles de Chassiron Memorial Lecture

Philippa Leslie reports on a talk by Prof Guido Rebecchini about Art and Nature in Giulio Romano's inventions for Silverware at the Gonzaga Court

**This is the sixth in the series of Lectures honouring the work and dedication of Charles de Chassiron (1948-2018), BIS Chairman from 2005 to 2015. British diplomat, educated at Cambridge and Harvard Universities, in his distinguished career he saw service in South America, Estonia, and two postings in his beloved Italy.**

The focus of this highly entertaining and enjoyable talk by Professor Rebecchini was on Giulio Romano's practice as a designer of objects for the Gonzaga table in Mantua.

He began by explaining that Giulio Romano (1499-1546), building on his antiquarian knowledge and on Raphael's design drawings, used this as a springboard for creative licence. In most of his inventions for objects he manipulated natural elements to devise hybrid forms that could be read at different levels – as manifestations of his power of invention, as witty conceits stimulating conversation, and as celebrative references to his patrons. In this way, his pieces of

silverware can be seen as animating the table and turning it into a space for the communication of intellectual, cultural and political content. As a designer of buildings, frescoes, stage sets, and even costumes, through his design of domestic objects Giulio Romano aimed at creating a 'total work of art' which became a paradigm of civility and an example which was followed by the European courts of the sixteenth century.

Professor Rebecchini opened his talk noting that the topic is a very niche subject, but that it leads to broader aspects of Italian art. He first introduced Giulio Romano, his approach and work at Palazzo Te, and then his work as silverware designer.

Who was Giulio? What did he look like? There's a possibility that this most accomplished and talented pupil of Raphael is depicted in the background of Raphael's portrait in the Louvre. He is described by Vasari as 'inventive, versatile, prolific'.

After Raphael's death, Giulio executed his Stanze in the Vatican, and took on other projects that Raphael had started, completing them efficiently. An example of Raphael's influence can be seen in Giulio's *Stoning of St Stephen*. Giulio worked in the Villa Madama, Rome (1518-20), decorating it, and in the Villa Lante on the Gianicolo (now the Finnish Embassy) around 1520. With these projects he





Opposite: Skilled silverwork underway at the Factum Foundation ([factumfoundation.org](http://factumfoundation.org)); above left: Ewer in the shape of a sea monster above right: Tongs formed by a Duck's Bill; left: *The Court of Gonzaga* by Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506)

sophistication of the Gonzaga. These objects were fixed in time – plates, jugs, ewers, vases – quite traditional. Giulio knows of the possibility of these valuable objects disappearing (through fundraising for wars, for example) and they are displayed here as having a status. All have now been lost, but many drawings remain. The drawing of the *Salt Cellar with Satyrs*, 1525, now in Prague, is a disconcerting object. Created in solid gold, it is audacious, it animates the table and it prompts a conversation! It is not simply a salt cellar, but is there to bring an interaction, to make an object that is alive.

**The drawing of the Salt Cellar with Satyrs, 1525, now in Prague, is a disconcerting object. Created in solid gold, it is audacious, it animates the table and it prompts a conversation!**

The Sala was used for banquets and the space is immersive, interactive.

Giulio draws a great deal, and has fun! The form takes precedence, creates contrasts, such as in the examples of a silver bowl made of leaves and a *Salt Cellar in the shape of a Tortoise*, also in silver, which looks as if it will crawl off the table!, both now at Chatsworth.

was developing a reputation for artistic versatility.

In 1524 Giulio moves to Mantova, taking the position of court artist. He becomes a grand character there, even building his own palazzo. He is asked to build Palazzo Te, employing all the arts, and completes it very efficiently, which pleases the Gonzaga. The commission is for a leisure country villa, close to the city, where the Gonzaga will receive and entertain important guests, whilst showing off Mantova's artistic achievements. Giulio's designs include tombs, one of which was for a dog presented in the same pose as a condottiere.

### Witty, artistic, creative solutions

Giulio's character is revealed in his work – he is witty, he offers playful artistic solutions. The Palazzo is full of irony, but it is also beautiful. For example, there are horse frescoes which offer an interaction between stage designs and

natural elements – a playful engagement. *The Wedding of Psyche and Cupid* on the Palazzo's ceiling depicts the passing of time, but Apollo is shown from behind! Giulio presents traditional iconography in unexpected ways which he creates to be in tune with the building. In *The Sala of the Giganti* the gods are shown as fearful – another element of playfulness, where the viewer is standing as spectator being crushed by the architecture – a play between fiction and space; the grotesques, too, are realised as amusing figures.

Titian paints a portrait of Giulio in 1536 in the Palazzo Te, presenting him as a designer, wearing luxurious clothing, a gentleman showing off his project.

### The enduring impact of his drawings

What objects would have been displayed in the Palazzo? In the *Sala di Psyche* – a table is depicted in the middle wall – the objects were to display the culture and





The objects interact and engage, such as the *Salt Cellar as a Shell* now in the British Museum, which Giulio created for Margherita Paleologo.

For the table setting, each guest had a salt cellar, its size depending on the guest's status. The natural elements become part of the function, as in the *Vase with Two Spouts* (British Museum) where one is a

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### ...a new language for the art of the table

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duck, the other an eagle. Giulio starts with the form and adapts it to the function, as he does in the *Ewer Shaped as a Dolphin and Tongs formed by a Duck's Bill*, a brown pen and ink drawing in the British Museum. The concept is that the animal bites what you want to eat.

Or note the humour in the *Bedwarmer*, now in Christ Church, Oxford, which is a grotesque.

The *Salt Cellar Supported by Three Goats* (in the Courtauld) shows the goats bending their necks to reach in to taste the salt! The

pose adds dynamism to the image.

The importance of these drawings is that they were extraordinarily coveted by rulers across Europe. They gave Europe a new language for the art of the table.

Titian's portrait of *Jacopo Strada*, 1556, Kunsthistorisches, Vienna, depicts the polymath and merchant of works of art, who had received his early training as a goldsmith from Giulio Romano, and who bought all of Giulio's drawings after his death. He put them in an album which detailed many of his inventions. This movement of the drawings across Europe inspired others. But they themselves were intended to inspire goldsmiths to create the real objects, so it is frustrating that they did not. Prof. Rebecchini mentioned that his team works with a company which specialises in reconstructing models, with the result that the models now look like the drawings.

It is presumed that Giulio had a goldsmith to work with him on the project in Palazzo Te. The *Three Goats Salt Cellar* drawing, now in the Courtauld, shows that in reality their forms could not have supported the vessel. And so when the current model was created, it had to be modified.



© Fotum Arte  
The recreated *Salt Cellar Supported by Three Goats* and the original drawing (inset)

Thus, a close examination of these wonderful drawings brings much pleasure, and an appreciation of what can be created by enhancing, indeed playing with, the forms of simple objects.

The fascinating talk prompted many questions from the spellbound audience: why are there disegni but no objects? The answer: The majority were executed, but melted down for cash when needed or when fashions changed. We think of metal as stable, but it is ephemeral. How many drawings are there? About 300, plus we have the inventories of the Gonzaga. At that time, the Duke had about 400 silver objects, but they were not all by Giulio. How did audiences react? The objects were disconcerting. But out in the countryside there is a culture of leisure, of 'divertimenti' (the role of the 'cortegiano'). And so they were seen as something pleasurable, and less regulated by etiquette. In the Renaissance, gardens were created to offer a surprise – how was this reflected by Giulio? It involved his sophisticated use of the culture of nature.

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#### Guido Rebecchini

is Reader in Sixteenth Century Southern European Art at The Courtauld. His research focuses on sixteenth-century Italy, and he has published on the arts at Mantua, Florence and Rome, including patronage, collecting, and artistic practices. His latest book is *The Rome of Paul III: Art, Ritual and Urban Development* (Harvey Miller).



**Philippa Leslie** is Rivista's editor.



# L'album di famiglia

a new book by Valentina Olivastri

Andrea Del Cornò recommends this charming tale

An old family photo album is at the centre of Valentina Olivastri's latest novel *L'album di famiglia* (Youcanprint Press, 2021). Elegantly written and with a narrative plot which unfolds slowly but purposefully through its pages, *L'album di famiglia* transports the reader to the sleepy backwater of Borgo, a small village in rural Tuscany ... 'on the way down, the gaze hovers to the left in vegetation that fears no vertigo and a valley of hillocks, a canopy of woods dipped in black here and there, where the light descends in garlands... To the right stands an imposing wall, mottled with a grass the locals call *morraiola* and which tries in vain to besiege a disused washhouse. It's still beautiful, with its parade of nettles and those lichen mosaics covering a lion's head whose canine curls keeps the two stone basins apart'.

As in the author's previous two novels the leading character is a woman, Edith Philippa Everard de Winton Strange – this is the far from short name she goes by – who is a successful professional, independent, but a somewhat malcontent and unsettled young journalist. The novel opens with Edith deciding to leave London and move to Borgo, where she had spent several childhood summer holidays. A sentimental choice.

Borgo (recalling the 'Borgo' of Antonio Tabucchi's novel *Piazza d'Italia*) is a small hilltop medieval village, where the air 'tastes of Sunday', and its inhabitants spend time together and enjoy the most authentic pleasures of life. In the surrounding hills, among the olive groves, a neglected and crumbling church unknowingly preserves a hidden artistic treasure. At this, the reader will no doubt again hear a chime from Tabucchi's work.

In Borgo, the clocks tick differently from those in London, and time proceeds at a different pace, in stark contrast with chaotic and hectic London life. And in Borgo, Edi – as the people of the village affectionately call her – rediscovers



memories from a distant past, but also enjoys mixing with the locals, finding herself ready to embrace new fleeting romantic adventures and relishing a fresh chapter in her life.

Other well-portrayed characters interact with Edi. There is Fosca, full of Tuscan dialect (which adds verve to the narrative), who had looked after Edi when she was a child and instilled in her an appreciation for cooking and for genuine Tuscan cuisine. Next, we encounter Luca, owner of a traditional *trattoria*. Luca also cooks and serves at the tables and has a remarkably low opinion of diners wishing to make credit card payments, accepting only cash. Finally, there is Lorenzo. From their first encounter Edi is romantically attracted to him.

Edi soon feels at home in a place where life moves slowly at an idyllic and reassuring pace. Without warning, however, two unexpected, unrelated and unpredictable events shake the apparent calm and tranquillity of Borgo. First, Lorenzo's uncle, Ludovico Franceschi, a dissipated, egocentric and unrepentant *dongiovanni*, dies. Second, on a day trip to nearby Arezzo, Edi fortuitously picks up a photo album at a bric-a-brac market. Seemingly innocent, the photo album – which gives the title to the novel – is the accidental custodian of a long-kept family secret which, once revealed, will dramatically change the meaning of the unfolding events.

At this point the reader will realise that betrayal is perhaps the only human action which can alter the past. Betrayal casts a

new light on the past, forcing us to look at it in a different way, and no one, neither the victim nor the perpetrator, comes out of it unscathed.

Valentina Olivastri is a *toscana* 'doc' and in *L'album di famiglia*, Tuscany and the Tuscan landscape play an important role and are delightfully described. Equally important are the many references to the region's culinary richness, a region where food and cuisine are intensely cultural. A beautiful and fitting illustration on the book's cover evokes the winding streets of Borgo and the luminosity and warmth of a Tuscan summer. It captures Edi's arrival in Borgo, when all appears peaceful and serene.

The author, a former librarian at the Bodleian Library, has written a charming novel in a flowing and graceful style which carries the reader towards its satisfying ending. The final chapter surely prompts us to pause and reflect. At times we stubbornly feel that happiness is unfathomably out of our reach. It is only by slowing down and looking around us with a different mindset that we can come to realise that happiness is often within ourselves. Happiness lies in the ability to appreciate the simple and beautiful things around us that life never fails to offer. And it remains true that '*the world will never starve for want of wonders; but only for want of wonder.*' (G.K. Chesterton, *Tremendous Trifles*)

## Dr Valentina Olivastri

(Bodleian Library) recently published her sixth novel *L'album di famiglia* – available from online book retailers.



Andrea Del Cornò is Italian Specialist at The London Library and Subject Librarian (Italian Literature & Language) at the Taylor Institution Library, University of Oxford.





# The Emperor Augustus in Albania

A turning point in Roman history

Historian and archaeologist Carolyn Perry in Apollonia

Lying just across the Adriatic from Italy, it's no surprise that the region of modern day Albania was important to the ancient Romans. It was the gateway to the East, and the famous Via Egnatia which stretched from the shores of the Adriatic all the way to Byzantium, resounded with the hobnail boots of Roman soldiers and the cart wheels of merchants.

But the ancient cities of Albania were not just 'through routes'. Many Roman citizens chose to spend time there or to acquire estates. One of the cities that held a particular importance for Rome was Apollonia. Originally an Illyrian settlement, Apollonia was re-founded by Greeks coming from Corcyra (Corfu) and Corinth in the 7th century BCE. The city prospered and grew in importance, partly because of its strategic location on the navigable River Aous (Vjosa) and because it was one of the termini of the Via Egnatia, but also because of its rich hinterland which included plentiful supplies of bitumen, important for caulking ships.

## Apollonia put under the protection of Rome

The historian Polybius tells us that the city put itself under the protection of Rome towards the end of the 3rd century BCE during the Illyrian Wars, and it became a base for the Roman army. Part of the Roman Province of Macedonia from 148 BCE, the city received many settlers and visitors from Italy, including Octavian (later Augustus), future Emperor of Rome, who resided in the city for several months.

One of the attractions of Apollonia, apart from it being '*magna urbs et gravis*' (according to Cicero) was its reputation as a centre of learning, and in particular of rhetoric. Greek rhetoric was highly regarded and young Roman aristocrats were often sent to Greece to study: military prowess was not enough, political life needed oratorical skills too.

It was Julius Caesar, great-uncle of Octavian, who sent him to Apollonia. Caesar knew the city well; he had used it

as a base during the Civil War of 48 BCE (much of which was fought in Albania) and had rewarded the city for its loyalty to him.

In fact, Caesar's plan was for Octavian to accompany him on his expedition to Parthia, but he recognised that Octavian needed more experience and so sent him to Apollonia to train with the legions that were based there, and also to benefit from the school of oratory. Octavian took with him Apollodorus of Pergamum, his teacher of declamation, and was also accompanied by various friends and comrades. The most famous of these was Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, his great friend, and later most steadfast and gifted military commander. This is the first time we hear of Agrippa, and he is involved in this wonderful anecdote preserved by Suetonius in his *Life of Augustus*.

Suetonius tells us that while at Apollonia, the two friends went to the studio of the astrologer Theogenes. Theogenes first read the future of Agrippa, and predicted a career





Opposite page and above left: the Forum at Apollonia; below left: Stone relief from Apollonia above: *The Death of Julius Caesar* by Vincenzo Camuccini, c. 1805; left: statue of Augustus

for him that was almost unbelievable. Octavian, fearing that his future could not possibly be as great, refused for a while to disclose his time of birth. When he was eventually persuaded, Theogenes threw himself at the feet of the future Emperor, needing to say nothing more.

### The letter contained devastating news – Caesar had been assassinated in the Senate...

Octavian had been in the city for four months when a freedman arrived with a letter from his mother Atia, Caesar's niece. The letter contained devastating news – Caesar had been assassinated in the Senate by Cassius, Brutus and accomplices. She asked her son to return to Rome straightaway, to fulfil his destiny. Octavian consulted with his friends and the leading men of Apollonia. Some advised him to join the army that had been preparing for the Parthian War and then to go to Rome and avenge Caesar. However, Octavian decided to return to Rome and make his decision there, when he had taken stock of the situation.

### This most fortunate of cities

Nicolaus of Damascus in his *Life of Augustus* tells us that the inhabitants of Apollonia came "in multitudes" and asked Octavian to stay, concerned for his safety, and offered him the city to do as he wished. Though not persuaded, after becoming Augustus he showed

great favour to the city, conferring on it the status of '*civitas immunis et libera*,' meaning the city could enjoy its own laws and elect its own magistrates, and "made it one of the most fortunate cities".

Perhaps for this reason, the city seems to have enthusiastically adopted the Imperial cult. Recent work shows the excavated monumental Roman agora (Forum) of Apollonia to have been the centre of activity of the cult. During the 2nd century CE, the agora was remodelled with various structures, including a shrine for cult rituals and a monumental building with an intriguing inscription. The inscription reveals that local citizen, Quintus Villius Crispinus Furius Proculus who had held several positions in the city, including that of organising Games, erected the building to the memory and honour of his brother Villius Valentinus Furius Proculus. It records the military career of his brother, and notes that 25 pairs of gladiators fought at the building's inauguration. Portrait busts of members of the Imperial family were found in the inner chamber and portico of the building.

The Games referred to may be the Sebasteia, celebrated in the Greek east

in honour of the Emperor, as part of the Imperial cult. We know that the Greek theatre at Apollonia was remodelled for the purpose of gladiatorial combat, a practice now thought to be deliberate regional policy introduced by the Roman authorities in connection with the Imperial cult.

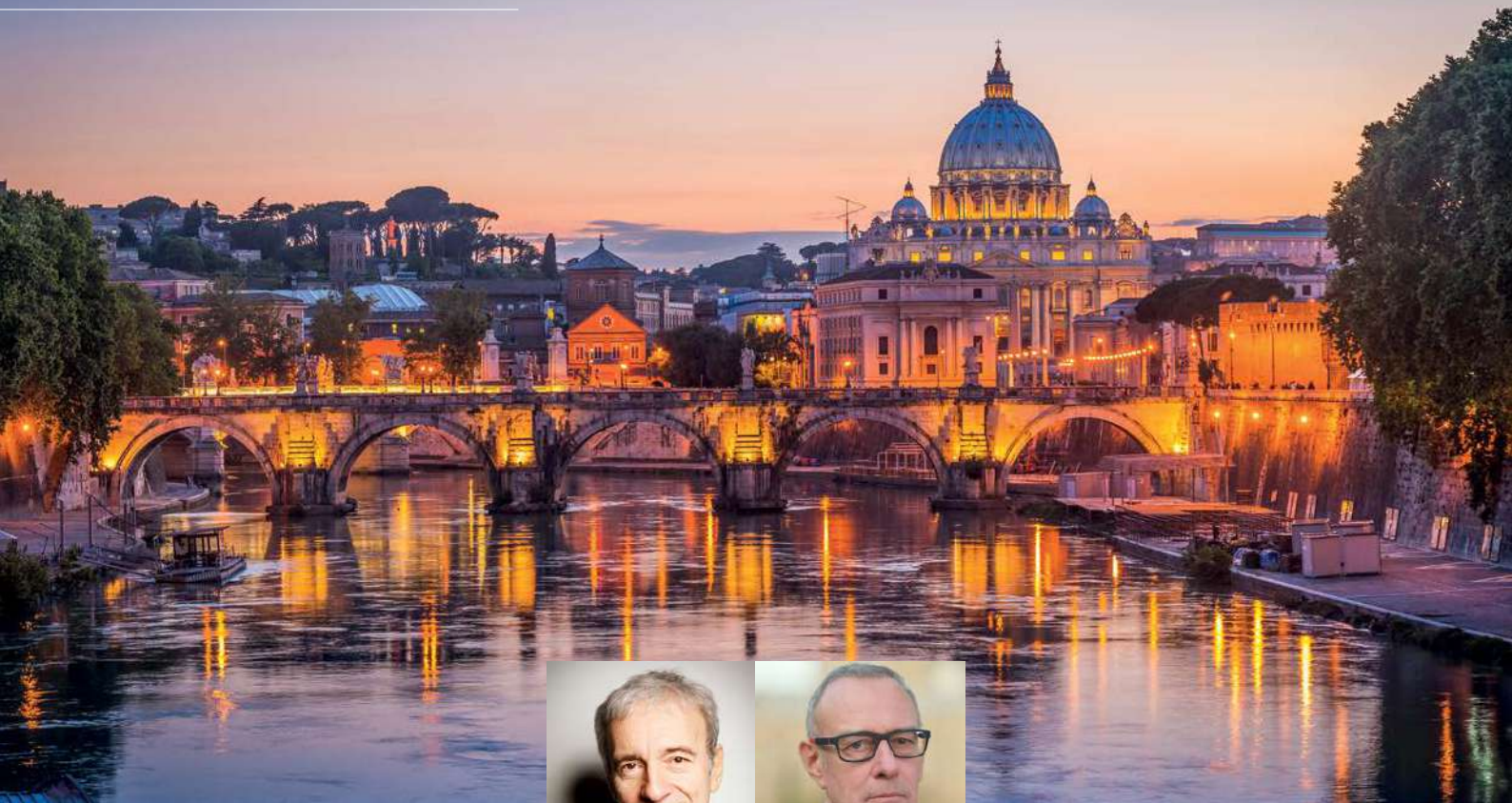
But the favour of the gods did not last. In 234 CE a severe earthquake hit many of the cities on the Adriatic coast, including Apollonia. The course of the river Aous changed, and was no longer navigable to the city. The destruction, coupled with the loss of its harbour, saw the decline of this once 'fortunate city', and now a visit to the archaeological site shows only a fraction of this once bustling settlement. Luckily, thanks to the written sources, and continued excavations, we are able to get a glimpse of an important turning point in Roman history and to imagine Octavian strolling through the porticoes with his great friend Agrippa, little knowing what was to come.

**Carolyn Perry** is a lecturer and museum consultant. She taught Ancient History and Mythology in the Department of Mediterranean Studies at Queen Mary College, University of London

and has excavated in Italy and Albania. She established the Arab World Education Programme at the British Museum and is a trustee of the International Association for the Study of Arabia. Carolyn also lectures on aspects of the ancient Mediterranean and Islamic world and Ancient Mediterranean history and mythology.







## Britaly:

When we are in Italy, we miss London, when we are in London, we miss Italy

Eugenio Bosco reflects on the presentation of Italian journalists  
 Enrico Francheschini and Marco Varvello

As a true British-Italian (having lived in Italy for over 30 years and in London for 25) with deep connections with both countries, the content of this lecture by the two well-known Italian journalists and writers Enrico Franceschini and Marco Varvello resonated very well with me. This highly entertaining lecture – delivered with flair and humour – made me and the audience laugh and reflect on what makes Britons and Italians so different and yet admire each other so much.

Enrico Franceschini is a journalist and writer who has travelled the world for more than forty years as a foreign correspondent for the Italian daily 'La Repubblica', working in New York, Washington, Moscow, Jerusalem, and in London, where he is now living. Marco Varvello has been working for RAI Italian Radio and Television since 1987 and, after a stint as news correspondent in London 1997-2005 and

having worked in Germany and the US, has been the UK Bureau Chief for RAI since 2014.

The two argued that our two countries seem to have become more similar in recent times: with five prime ministers in the last four years and three in the space

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in the space of one summer, the United Kingdom seems to have taken some of the perennial Italian instability...

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of one summer, the United Kingdom seems to have taken some of the perennial Italian instability; and with a very serious, pragmatic banker as Prime Minister for a couple of years, for a while Italy looked

more similar to what the UK used to be. If we add that many Brits have a passion for all things Italian and that many Italians proudly call themselves 'anglophiles', it could be said that not even Brexit will be able to separate us.

There are in fact quite a few things the British and the Italians could learn from each other... As Franceschini noted, there are three things Italians should learn from the British:

- fair play – meritocracy is not to be found too much in Italy but is still widely practised in the UK;
- the sense of humour – very different in the two countries. Italians tend to take themselves too seriously and what makes them laugh is different. For the Italians it's rooted in the 'commedia dell'arte', Pulcinella and Arlecchino (ie, they tend to find it funny when someone is hit by a big stick, etc),





Iconic landmarks of Rome and London at dusk; Italian journalists Enrico Francheschini and Marco Varvello (inset)

whereas the British sense of humour is different and more subtle, and the Brits don't take themselves so seriously;

- the understatement – Britons tend to minimise everything, from pain to joy – for instance it's not uncommon for someone who is really unwell to state they are 'just fine' or even very well, while for Italians it is quite usual to say they are almost at the end while just experiencing a bad cold or the 'flu... Perhaps the British attitude – noted Franceschini – is well summarised by a quote from Kipling inscribed above the entrance of Wimbledon's centre court "if you can meet with Triumph and Disaster and treat those two imposters just the same."

But what should the British learn from the Italians? According to Franceschini:

- how to drink without ending up on the floor – Italians drink of course but they always eat at the same time, which helps...
- not to go out in winter in shorts – Italian mothers would be horrified to see British children going out in cold and wet weather the way they do;
- to be slightly less polite/kind/courteous – they should be able to say what they really think

which could avoid some possible misunderstandings. To demonstrate the point, he quoted a series of sentences widely used by the British – the famous British understatement which doesn't quite mean what it seems to suggest: *I hear you* (I don't accept what you are suggesting) *with the greatest respect* (means I completely disagree); *quite good* (means – not good at all); *you must come for dinner* (you will never be invited); *I have a few minor comments* (a major review is needed) *could you consider other options?*; (your proposal is completely unworkable).

Varvello concentrated on a quick analysis of recent years, particularly on Brexit and how the Italian media see Britain based on his recent time in the UK, but also drew from his experience of his first stay in the UK in the 1990s.

He recalled how struck he was by the reaction to Lady Diana's death in 1997 and the collective effect it had on the population – with the allegedly cold Brits seen crying and hugging each other.

He also made reference to New Labour and a new, young and energetic PM bringing a sense of optimism with the Good Friday Agreement, the minimum

wage and other positive developments, but also being in the end defined by the post-9/11 period and the Iraq war.

He described his second time in the UK 2014 as a completely different picture, with the Scottish referendum and 'the Brexit saga' – this was a game changer in the perception Italians had of the UK. While the Lega and Fratelli d'Italia were supportive of Brexit, the general public in Italy could not make sense of what was seen as a self-harming decision. Many Italians wondered: What happened to the so-called pragmatic British? Brexit changed everything in the perception of Italians, the UK was once the land of opportunities but no more... Now everything is difficult, from studying to work and even the well known and much-loved Italian bookshop in London had to close due to Brexit-related difficulties. On the other hand – reflected Varvello – Brexit also somehow represented for him a form of personal blessing as it allowed him to avoid the usual clichés (eg concentrating too much on the royal family and other issues traditionally expected by an Italian audience).

**Enrico Francheschini** is London correspondent for *La Repubblica*;

**Marco Varvello** is UK Bureau Chief for RAI (*Radiotelevisione Italiana*)

**Eugenio Bosco** is co-Vice-Chair of the British Italian Society





# National recovery and resilience plan

Will it transform Italy's economy?

Richard Northern reports on Professor Marco Leonardi's October talk

We were fortunate to be able to take advantage of Professor Marco Leonardi's presence in London in October to hear a first-hand account of the progress made in implementing Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (known as the PNRR in Italian).

The PNRR is an ambitious programme to modernise and transform the Italian economy through long-term structural reform and investment. Not long ago such a programme would have been inconceivable: economic reform proposals invariably fell victim to short term political pressures, to opposition from vested interests or to Italy's chronic incapacity to spend available national or EU funds on development and social projects, particularly in the South. Professor Leonardi said that navigating complex bureaucratic procedures and complying with safeguards against criminal diversion

sometimes proved so daunting that it seemed to public servants easier and safer to do nothing. But the economic shock of the Covid pandemic had made new thinking and a longer-term policy possible for the first time. In 2021-22 two Italian governments, under Giuseppe Conte and then Mario Draghi, drew up and began implementing the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) with support and funding from the European Union.

Marco Leonardi, Professor of Economics at the University of Milan and visiting Professor at the LSE, had worked in the Prime Minister's office as an economic adviser during the Renzi and Gentiloni governments and was Head of Economic Policy and Planning at the Ministry of the Economy in the Draghi government. He had therefore been directly involved in developing and implementing this historic policy.

## Part of a wider EU programme to improve European competitiveness

Professor Leonardi explained that the PNRR formed part of a wider EU programme to improve European competitiveness for the coming decades. A radical transformation would be needed, if Europe were to keep pace with economic superpowers like China and the US. The programme had three overarching strategic objectives: 1) to effect a transition to a sustainable green economy, 2) to encourage digitalisation and technological innovation, and 3) to promote social inclusivity. Detailed plans are grouped under six sectoral missions. Within each mission, priority is given to projects which support gender parity or provide economic opportunity for young people. The Italian government has set itself an additional target of devoting at least 40% of PNRR investment to the Mezzogiorno.





Opposite: Italian and EU flags fly in front of the Pirellone Tower in Milan; above left: the business district of Milan; above right: the Church of San Martino among the “Prosecco hills” of Veneto

Within the EU, Italy is by far the largest recipient of PNRR funding, with an allocation of 191.5 billion euros over six years (2021-26). This allocation is in addition to existing EU funding for development and social programmes in Italy. Brussels provides the funds in instalments released every six months. The clearance of each instalment is dependent on the Italian government producing evidence to show that it has reached milestones set for disbursement of the previous instalment and on providing a detailed plan for projects to be funded in the next stage. So far, the negotiation process over the release of each instalment has gone relatively smoothly. Although Brussels exercises close oversight of the programme, both Italy and the European Commission have a strong interest in making a success of it. So both have shown a willingness to compromise.

### The complexity and wide range of the programme

Responsibility for some of the expenditure is devolved to local government in Italy. The programme is extremely complex and wide-ranging, involving projects at local community and regional as well as national level. For example, money is available for local government to spend on urban planning and on transport (provided it both improves mobility and reduces emissions), on public health, including plans for new sports facilities, and on education, where efforts are being made to transform teacher training and boost research. A large portion of the funding is reserved for digitalisation, particularly for the digitalisation of public

services, an area where Italy lags behind its peers. This allocation should be easier to spend, since it will involve funding commercial partners to carry out major projects, which will be relatively few in number but large in scale and impact.

Unfortunately, political support for the structural economic reforms required for successful implementation of the plan in Italy has not been guaranteed. Moreover, emergency economic measures to deal with the pandemic, and then the energy crisis following the invasion of Ukraine in 2021, both threatened to disrupt or delay important reforms, which the Conte and Draghi governments had embarked on. Then a change of government cast doubt on whether the programme might continue at all. Giorgia Meloni's Fratelli d'Italia party had been critical of the PNRR and its priorities while in opposition. Professor Leonardi said that the Meloni government might put further funding at risk and undermine Italy's credibility in Europe, if it tried to reopen and renegotiate the package originally agreed.

### Italy is working with the EU to implement the plan – its future economic prospects depend on it

The signs are, however, that Meloni's administration have accepted the plan they inherited on taking office. They have so far worked cooperatively with the EU to implement it, despite grumbling from time to time about the need for adjustments. They recognise the need to take care not to put the continuation of EU funding on this scale at risk. Italy's future economic prospects depend on it.

Professor Leonardi proved an authoritative lecturer with a unique perspective. He succeeded in explaining how such a comprehensive and detailed economic programme had been developed in a remarkably short time. He illustrated the framework of the plan (and its 527 objectives) in several slides, which brought some clarity to a complex and technical subject. The Professor did not underestimate the real challenges to be overcome in implementing the plan successfully, while keeping us firmly focussed on the transformative vision underpinning it. We look forward to hearing his assessment in a few years' time of the outcome of this ambitious plan and its impact on Italy's economic performance.

**Marco Leonardi** is visiting professor at the LSE and professor of Economics at the Università degli Studi, Milan. His interests are in labour and education economics.



He was economic adviser to the Prime Minister's Office in the Renzi and Gentiloni Governments; then adviser to Economy Minister Gualtieri and head of the Economic Policy Planning and Coordination Department in the Draghi Government. With EGEA (European Geography Association) he published *Le riforme dimezzate* (2018) and *Partita Doppia* (2023).

**Richard Northern** is a former Chair of the British Italian Society and former diplomat.



Leconfield Lecture 2023

# Leonardo's Salvator Mundi:

Let's actually look at the picture...

a talk by **Professor Martin Kemp**

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Peter and Beatrice Crossley were there





In November Professor Martin Kemp led us into the world of Leonardo's *Salvator Mundi* and left us deeply influenced by the experience.

No longer can we take for granted the tiny details and the effects in a Leonardo painting; so infused are they with spirituality and meaning. Martin was the one man in the world trusted to provide objective research on *Salvator Mundi* before its New York sale in 2017 to a Saudi Crown Prince for 450 million dollars and shared with us his experiences as he uncovered the evidence that the painting was indeed conceived by Leonardo da Vinci.

### The painting's complicated history

The history of the painting is hideously complicated. Charles I had two *Salvator Mundi*s and one was reproduced by a Dutch engraver in 1650. Leonardo was very much copied, especially by his pupils and Martin showed us some of the 50 *Salvator Mundi* images of widely varying styles and qualities. One of the most famous was by the Leonardo pupil Gian Giacomo Caprotti better known as Salai: it was signed by him and dated 1511. At that time it was known as 'Christ Benedicens' or 'Christ in the manner of God the Father' but the name *Salvator Mundi* was adopted from the 17th century onwards.

The painting now identified as the Leonardo had suffered terribly from overpainting when it was identified in 1900 in the collection of art critic and publisher Sir Theodore Cook. To all intents and purposes it looked like a 'drug-crazed hippy'. The Cook family later sold the painting to the Kunst gallery in 1958 and eventually it was sold in 2007 in New Orleans to two dealers who apparently paid 1,000 dollars thinking it was a copy. Diane Modestini in New York was tasked with the cleaning and having removed the overpainting she was the first to think that it was by Leonardo. She received a lot of abuse but Martin considered this unfair because it was normal for old masters to need extensive retouching to repair centuries of damage. In 2008 Martin was approached by the National Gallery to inspect the painting. Seeing the painting in the conservation studio he was immediately moved by its presence because it created the emotional impact of a 'real Leonardo'. Always the scientist, he tried not to jump to conclusions and asked to research the painting.

Martin went back to first principles by applying what he called 'connoisseurship plus', the 'plus' being the scientific methods he was exposed to when studying natural sciences at Cambridge. He showed us how the technical refinements in the painting were at a much higher level than copies; that the treatment of the hair, the clothing and patterns on the crossed stoles on Christ's chest and the detailing of the rock crystal orb in his hand were all anticipated in his drawings and studies. The painting is the only one with 'pentimenti' (alterations) at the thumb and design of the patterning on the stoles. This is consistent with Leonardo's slowness of execution and frequent changes of mind. Rock crystal figures large in the painting. In Christ's left hand is a large rock crystal orb. Leonardo was considered an expert in semi-precious stones and his drawings show studies of refraction and inclusions in rock crystals. The *Salvator orb* has many very carefully painted inclusions. The fact that it is rock crystal changes the whole meaning of the painting. It represents the crystalline sphere of the heavens and the three stars in the crystal reflect the Ptolemaic view of the heavens where the stars are fixed. This signifies that Leonardo is making his Christ not just 'saviour of the world' but 'saviour of the universe'. Such iconography is unique to Leonardo and highlights the devotional intent of the painting. For the same reason he does not follow the laws of optics in the representation of the folds of the tunic showing through the orb which under the laws of refraction would be much distorted. Leonardo seems to follow the writings of Albertus Magnus who said that there is a double truth; the geometry of the eyes and the supreme truth in heaven which is beyond our understanding.

### Leonardo's optical exactitude

In other ways however Leonardo pays great attention to optical exactitude. For example he sought to create a depth of field effect by making the outline of the right hand of Christ sharper in detail than the face because it is closer to the viewer. Elsewhere Leonardo softens the edges of the image of Christ just as in his paintings of St Anne and St John the Baptist where there are no hard edges except on the arm which has most certainly been retouched. *Salvator Mundi* has very few hard edges and there is the sign that Leonardo pressed his hand on the painting to soften



the edge under the right eye. This is not seen in any of the copies. It emphasises the sense of mystery because Leonardo seems to be reminding the viewer that in the spiritual world the human senses are fallible.

Martin concluded that this painting displayed the characteristic intellectual, visual and Leonardo-like thoughts that copyists simply did not get. He was therefore certain that Leonardo himself conceived the painting. The many aspects of the painting that are not found in copies are consistent with Leonardo's drawings and studies and ultimately the picture conveys the intellectual and spiritual messages that were the essence of Leonardo's world view.

It is sad to realise that the painting has now disappeared, assumed to be in the hands of the buyer. Attempts to have it displayed in the Louvre next to the Mona Lisa for a temporary exhibition came to nought. One's only solace is that thanks to the amazing findings of Professor Martin Kemp we can at least share his sense of wonder and discovery when looking at images of this most elusive work of Leonardo.

**Professor Martin Kemp** is the leading Leonardo da Vinci scholar. He has been Emeritus Professor of the History of Art at the University of Oxford since 2008.



**Peter Crossley** is a retired ex entrepreneur and journalist. **Beatrice Crossley** is a neurologist, doctor and consultant on medical regulatory affairs.





# St Francis of Assisi

The Director of the National Gallery, Dr. Gabriele Finaldi,  
reflects on the recent, highly successful exhibition

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Interview by Philippa Leslie

**This was a ‘first’ for the National Gallery – an exhibition about Francis. Why Francis?**

Francis is a figure of enormous cultural, historical and spiritual importance. He is Italian by birth – although possibly a bit French, too - but the growth of his fame and of his ‘myth’ means that he has a universal status, he belongs to everyone. His concerns regarding how to live the Christian faith, his approach to poverty in the world and his love of neighbour and the natural world, have shaped Christendom and continue to be inspiring in our time. Remember too, that Francis composed some of the earliest recorded poems in Italian;

the order he founded produced great scholars, built astounding churches and religious building all over the world; the Franciscans commissioned some of the most beautiful art of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, think of Giotto, Cimabue, Simone Martini, but also Rubens and Tiepolo later on; the Franciscans still take care of the Holy Places in Palestine.

**How do you put such an exhibition together?**

We began working on it in 2016 and our intention right from the start was to do an exhibition that was both about Francis as a historical figure and about the art that he had inspired. But it was also about what

Francis means today. We talked to several contemporary artists as well as to scholars of the history of the Franciscans, notably Professor André Vauchez, the distinguished French academic. I co-curated the exhibition with a highly talented young Dutch curator, Dr Joost Joustra, who was working at the National Gallery at the time. We made a large selection of objects we wanted to include which we then whittled down to about 50. The lead image was Zurbarán’s *Saint Francis in Meditation* from the Gallery’s own collection.

**Who came (numbers)?**

Over the 12-week run, about 220,000 people. They included art lovers, pilgrims,



Opposite page: Caravaggio's *St Francis in Ecstasy* (c1595).

© The National Gallery Collection, London



Zurbarán's *Saint Francis in Meditation* (c1635-1640).



Sassetta's *Saint Francis meets a Knight Poorer than Himself and Saint Francis's Vision of the Founding of the Franciscan Order* (c1440-1450).

many first-time visitors, as well as some distinguished guests: President Mattarella of Italy, Prince Hassan of Jordan and Cardinal Nichols of Westminster.

#### **You worked with the Mayor of Assisi and others – what was their most appreciated contribution?**

The Mayor of Assisi, Stefania Proietti, is very impressive, passionate about her home city and passionate about Francis, too. She was keen to be involved in the exhibition, which was much appreciated, and we visited his house together. The Sacro Convento Franciscans were also very helpful and loaned us some of their artefacts.

Many visitors were deeply impressed at viewing the fragment of St Francis' habit, which came from Santa Croce in Florence. It is a relic, and therefore has historical and spiritual significance. There was much discussion about it – bringing a religious relic into a secular context. It was thanks to the Franciscans (the Community of the Friars Minor Conventual of the Basilica of Santa Croce, Florence) and the support from D.ssa Cristina Acidini, the President of the Fondazione Santa Croce, that it could be effected.

#### **Your favourite object in the exhibition?**

It kept changing! But maybe the Caravaggio (*St Francis in Ecstasy*, from the Wadsworth

Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT) very generously loaned by the Museum and the Sassettas in our own collection (from an altarpiece in San Francesco, Borgo San Sepolcro near Arezzo), which on looking and looking again, made me appreciate them even more.

#### **Lasting impression of visitor reactions?**

People were struck by the range and timespan of the objects in the exhibition. With the inclusion of film excerpts (Zeffirelli and Liliana Cavani, for example), Francis came to life and visitors responded quite emotionally. Through his simplicity and love of all created things, St Francis seems to cut through time and space.

© The National Gallery Collection, London





# “We want to be pioneers”

The sustainable fashion vision of Federico Marchetti

(Italian language version on p34)

## Why pay attention to the durability of clothing?

Today more than ever, clothes identify us, they tell us who we are, they reveal our desires and our passions. A long lasting garment is not only apparel created with care, with materials that do not deteriorate, it is also a beloved garment, which we like to wear, rediscover year after year, pass on to our children. When a garment is beautiful it has a long life, with a story behind it that is worth knowing.

## How can this help us and our planet?

We need to revolutionise our idea of what fashion is, not just think about the latest trend, following what seems essential at the time but which only lasts a season. The overproduction of clothing is a very serious problem for the health of the planet. Fashion is responsible for the pollution of the seas, where large amounts of indestructible microplastics from the production of CO<sub>2</sub> end up

and for the fact that all unsold goods are discharged into huge landfills that are poisoning Africa, India and many countries to which we send the items we don't want or have purchased and perhaps worn only once. *'Buy better, buy less'* is a mantra that should accompany us every time we go shopping. Let's think about whether we really need that garment and consider how it can harm the planet. Together, these two considerations make us conscious and active consumers.

## What steps are you taking to inspire others to follow your lead?

The Fashion Task Force that I chair as part of the SMI commissioned by King Charles III was born out of the need for concrete action. We cannot change the world with a single gesture but we can do many gestures to help make the Earth a more liveable place. With this idea I have brought together a group of visionaries who believe

that taking action today is more important than future dreams - a group which wants to experiment with sustainable processes that forge ahead to reach 2030 with many actions already implemented. We started from opposite extremes. On the one hand we introduced the Digital Passport which leaves consumers free to decide, to understand if a product meets sustainability criteria, if the materials used are up to these standards, if the garment is repairable, and if someone decides to resell it, how to leave a trace of themselves in that garment.

On the other hand we worked on regenerative agriculture, we went back to the basics. With Brunello Cucinelli we went to the Himalayan plateaux to revitalise a magical place which had abandoned a thousand-year-old knowledge of how to produce quality cashmere. We succeeded in recreating a sustainable micro-environment, giving the local population the possibility of returning to a production





Left: Federico with King Charles III; above: Kashmir goats in the Himalayas – along with with Brunello Cucinelli, Federico has founded the *Himalayan Regenerative Fashion Living Lab* which combines traditional techniques and new technology to create a sustainable fashion business, supporting community farmers through to the whole supply chain; right: Federico and Brunello at Buckingham Palace.

of which they are masters. With Giorgio Armani we are working on producing sustainable cotton in Puglia, in an area where in ancient times it was cultivated and processed. Every year we will add tangible and achievable initiatives which will create replicable routes and increase the number of participants in the Task Force.

### What production standards do you insist on?

We believe in transparency, commitment, research, innovation. We are aware of 'green washing' and we wish to be an open book. We never declare an action before we have done it. We consult

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The fluxes of innovation are my favourite place, my natural habitat...

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with experts and identify the common practices that all brands can use and make part of their operation. To use the comparison with Nature, we are ants, not cicadas, and we are convinced that the policy of taking small steps will be fundamental. We want to be pioneers and we hope very much that our path will be followed by many others. In this way, fashion will find a new momentum and a real reason for its existence. It will return to sustainability and to some extent abandon the appearance and the fast fashion which has driven it in recent

years. However, it is only now that we speak of quiet luxury which is tending towards recapturing this quintessence and quality.

### How has King Charles been a supporter?

King Charles III is the driving force that started this entire sustainability process. It was his idea to bring together the commitment of private enterprises with the public commitment of different countries and institutions; the original idea and rock-solid commitment since 1970 on sustainability and environmental protection were his too. The various Task Forces working on the project refer to him and having a King as a founder and inspirer can make a big difference. We've seen it too in the various COPs, the United Nations conferences on climate change, in which we have participated. The attention that has been dedicated to us is an important signal and an incentive to continue.

### Are you optimistic for the future of sustainable clothing?

I am an optimist by nature, I have been an entrepreneur in the world of fashion and luxury ecommerce for many years and if I hadn't believed in the future and in the possibility of change, I wouldn't even have started building my company. Twenty four years ago I succeeded in upending the world of fashion and I am convinced that I will succeed this time too. The fluxes of innovation are my favourite place, my

natural habitat, the place where I like to be, and sustainability is that place today. I recounted my story in *'The adventures of an innovator'* which I wrote with journalist Daniela Hamaui to encourage young people to believe in themselves and to motivate them. They ask of us more commitment and less bla bla and even if for them fast fashion is currently the only affordable way to dress and have fun, I believe that we must work hard for them, to enable them to express their personalities and their ideals in a new way. The first to do this were the luxury brands, where it is easier to control the whole process, but when fast fashion also becomes sustainable the revolution will be complete.

### Have you a message for us all?

We can and we must commit to this cause, not delegate choices to others - we become the protagonists of change. We need to start with small steps, from the choices we make every day. Let us not buy clothes whose origin we do not know, we need to make sure that they have been produced without exploiting the workforce, we need to choose sustainable, quality materials and always give our clothes away to others or take them back to the store when we no longer want them, not throw them out.

We must all become activists in the cause to protect the environment and respect nature.

*Translated by Sarah Nodes*





# “Vogliamo essere pionieri”

La visione della moda sostenibile di Federico Marchetti

## Perché prestare attenzione alla durabilità di abbigliamento?

Oggi più che mai i vestiti parlano di noi, raccontano chi siamo, svelano i nostri desideri e le nostre passioni. Un abito che dura nel tempo non è solo un capo creato con cura, con materiali che non si deteriorano, è anche un vestito del cuore, che ci piace indossare, riscoprire anno dopo anno, trasmettere ai nostri figli. Un abito quando è bello ha una vita lunga e una storia alle spalle che vale la pena di conoscere.

## In che modo questo può aiutare noi e il nostro pianeta?

Dobbiamo rivoluzionare la nostra idea della moda, non dobbiamo più pensare all'ultimo trend, inseguire quello che ci sembra irrinunciabile ma che dura solo una stagione. La sovrapproduzione di capi d'abbigliamento è un problema gravissimo per la salute del pianeta. La moda è responsabile dell'inquinamento dei mari dove finisce una gran quantità di microplastiche indistruttibili, della produzione di CO<sub>2</sub>, e soprattutto tutta la merce invenduta arriva in enormi discariche che stanno avvelenando l'Africa, l'India e molti paesi dove spediamo tutte le

cose che non vogliamo o che abbiamo acquistato e indossato magari solo una volta. *Buy better, buy less* è un mantra che dovrebbe accompagnarci tutte le volte che facciamo shopping. Pensiamo se quel capo ci serve realmente e consideriamo quanto può essere dannoso per il Pianete. Le due cose insieme ci rendono dei consumatori consapevoli e attivi.

## Quali passi state intraprendendo entrambi per ispirare gli altri a seguire il Vostro esempio?

La Fashion task force che presiedo all'interno della SMI voluta da Re Carlo III è nata all'insegna della concretezza. Non possiamo cambiare il mondo con un solo gesto ma possiamo fare tanti gesti che alla fine contribuiranno a rendere la Terra un luogo più vivibile. Con quest'idea sono riuscito a riunire un gruppo di visionari che crede che agire oggi sia più importante che abbandonarsi ai sogni futuri, una pattuglia che vuole sperimentare un percorso sostenibile che bruci le tappe e arrivi al 2030 con molte azioni già implementate. Abbiamo iniziato dai due estremi opposti. Da una parte abbiamo introdotto il Passaporto Digitale che rende i consumatori liberi di decidere,

di capire se un prodotto rispetta i criteri di sostenibilità, se i materiali usati sono adeguati a questi standard, se il capo è riparabile, e in caso qualcuno decidesse di rivenderlo come lasciare una traccia di sé in quel vestito. Dall'altra parte abbiamo lavorato sull'agricoltura rigenerativa, siamo andati all'origine di tutto. Con Brunello Cucinelli siamo risaliti sugli altipiani dell'Himalaya per rivitalizzare un luogo magico ma che aveva abbandonato una conoscenza millenaria come la produzione del cachemire di qualità. Siamo riusciti a ricreare un microambiente sostenibile e dato alle popolazioni locali la possibilità di tornare a una produzione di cui sono mastri. Con Giorgio Armani ci stiamo invece occupando di produrre cotone sostenibile in Puglia, in una zona dove anticamente si coltivava e lavorava questo materiale. Ogni anno aggiungeremo delle iniziative molto tangibili e realizzabili creando un percorso replicabile e allargando i partecipanti alla Task force.

## Su quali standard produttivi insistete?

Crediamo nella trasparenza, nell'impegno, nella ricerca, nell'innovazione. Sappiamo che c'è molto green washing ma noi



vogliamo essere dei libri aperti. Non dichiariamo mai le cose prima di averle fatte. Ci consultiamo con esperti della materia e cerchiamo di individuare delle linee comuni che tutti i brand possono utilizzare e rendere parte del loro percorso. Volendo stare sulla Natura direi che siamo delle formiche, non delle cicale e siamo convinti che la politica dei piccoli passi sarà fondamentale. Vogliamo essere dei pionieri e speriamo che la nostra strada venga seguita da molti altri. Se sarà così la moda troverà un nuovo slancio e una vera ragione d'essere. Tornerà alla sostanza e abbandonerà un po' l'apparenza e la velocità che l'ha guidata negli ultimi anni. Dall'altra parte ora si parla solo di quiet luxury che è una tendenza ma soprattutto un richiamo all'essenza e alla qualità.

### **In quale modo e' stato un sostenitore il Re Carlo?**

Re Carlo III è il motore che ha dato l'avvio a tutto questo processo di sostenibilità. È sua l'idea di mettere insieme l'impegno dei privati con quello pubblico dei diversi Paesi e delle diverse istituzioni, sua l'idea originaria e suo l'impegno granitico fin

dal 1970 sulla sostenibilità e la protezione dell'ambiente. Le diverse task force che lavorano al progetto fanno riferimento a lui e avere un Re come capostipite e ispiratore può fare la differenza. Lo abbiamo visto anche nelle diverse COP, le conferenze delle Nazioni Unite sui cambiamenti climatici, a cui abbiamo partecipato. L'attenzione che ci è stata dedicata è un segnale importante e uno sprone a continuare.

### **Siete ottimisti per il future dell'abbigliamento sostenibile?**

Sono ottimista per natura, sono stato per tanti anni un imprenditore nel mondo dell'e-commerce di moda e lusso e se non avessi creduto nel futuro e nella possibilità di cambiare le cose non avrei neppure iniziato a costruire la mia azienda. Sono riuscito ventiquattro anni fa a ribaltare il mondo della moda e sono convinto che ci riuscirò anche questa volta. I flussi d'innovazione sono il mio luogo preferito, il mio habitat naturale, il posto dove mi piace stare, e la sostenibilità è oggi quel luogo. Ho raccontato tutta la mia storia nel libro "Le avventure di un innovatore" che ho scritto insieme alla giornalista Daniela

Hamai per motivare i giovani a credere in loro stessi, per motivarli. Loro ci chiedono più impegno e meno bla bla e anche se per loro il fast fashion per il momento è l'unica possibilità abbordabile per vestirsi e divertirsi, credo che dobbiamo impegnarci per loro, per metterli in grado di esprimere la loro personalità e i loro ideali in maniera nuova. I primi a partire sono stati i marchi del lusso dove è più facile controllare tutto il percorso ma quando anche il fast fashion diventerà sostenibile la rivoluzione sarà compiuta.

### **Avete un messaggio per tutti noi?**

Tutti possiamo e dobbiamo impegnarci, non delegiamo le scelte ad altri ma diventiamo noi protagonisti del cambiamento. Facciamolo tutti i giorni, partendo dalle piccole cose, dalle scelte quotidiane. Non compriamo vestiti di cui ignoriamo la provenienza, assicuriamoci che siano stati prodotti senza sfruttare la mano d'opera, scegliamo materiali sostenibili, di qualità e regaliamo sempre i nostri vestiti o riportiamoli in negozio quando non li vogliamo più. Diventiamo tutti attivisti del clima e del rispetto per la natura.

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# Angela Caputi

## Fifty years of creativity and craftsmanship

Jeweller Angela Caputi describes her career in a male dominated world

Angela Caputi is in her atelier in Florence, surrounded by an array of her splendid, innovative necklaces and earrings in vivid colours and wonderful, fantastic shapes. Tall, energetic, chic, she talks about her mission and engagement and is full of passion for her creative output. Of great personal warmth, she believes in a unity between spirit and culture and says that today, globally, there is no dialogue discussing this concept. An internationally celebrated jewellery designer, she grew up in Florence from the age of five.

### **A new culture, where women would have similar opportunities to men**

She started out studying how to treat disabled children, helping them with movement techniques. Then she married young, but was widowed early and had to care for her two small children. Obviously,

she needed time to dedicate to her family but despite this, with the support of her parents and siblings, she managed to make time for her work and activity. In this new and unexpected role she saw,



and experienced, that women had no liberty, that in the work place there were no equality laws. She wanted to transmit to other women a sense of a new culture, where women would be accepted as having similar opportunities to men. In this vein, she created a 'spirito di cultura per le donne'.

She reflects: women didn't put on suits to go to work – but they needed a uniform that would give them a status, a protection, as suits did for men. So their 'uniform' could be earrings and necklaces – as a sort of battle to overcome the problems of submission. Could she create a kind of freedom of expression through jewellery? It would demonstrate independence, and creativity – and joy. She started working with "Murrine" from Murano (Venice), but they made the jewellery extremely delicate and very heavy. Then, searching for a suitably malleable material, she discovered the properties of resin, with the advantage that it could be worked with to create small items in wonderful shapes and colours.

The aim was also to establish jewellery that was affordable. She worked with artisans using traditional hand-crafted techniques and synthetic resins made in Italy, and set up a small shop in the



Oltrarno in Florence in 1975 with a laboratory above – and launched her first collection of earrings and necklaces. Freedom! Liberty! To her delight, an early necklace became the ‘moda’ – fashion.

Alessandro Bertoni



In this new and unexpected role she saw, and experienced, that women had no liberty, that in the work place there were no equality laws.

It was the start of what today is an enterprise that creates jewellery sold in many countries and which attracts many aficionados. To date, thousands of models have been created.

Angela continues to work with her assistants in the laboratory, developing new styles and shapes. She never sketches the designs – she explains that she has to make each piece by hand, to shape it and make it beautiful, to give a sense of pleasure, and then to make the buyer happy.

### The cultural process of encouraging fantasy

She has a strong philosophy about the contribution women make to the world. “I feel an affection of women towards me, and vice versa. I aim to do everything ‘con calma’ – we are not men. The difference is that we seek what is beautiful.” She values exchanging reactions to her pieces, and helping a client to choose, and sees this as part of the cultural process, of encouraging

fantasy, of recognising the liberty of choice, of sharing in the creation.

Next year she will celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of her business – it will mark the hard work and the success of an Italian woman who has made her own path, searched to bring about a freedom for women through artistic creations worn with joy, and who has inspired others to appreciate beauty in many forms.

*Philippa Leslie*

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