

# RIVISTA

2020



In this issue:

## **In love with Italian food**

Lina Wertmüller on film

Understanding Ravenna

Dante's divine light



R e a d N e ■ B I S C a

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Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino, in which he emulates Dante's use of the *terza rima*. Not only did Raphael, uniquely, include the figure of Dante twice in his murals, in *Parnassus* and in the *Disputa*, but some drapery sketches for the latter reveal Raphael's own attempt at poetry. In the *Disputa* and the *Sistine Madonna* Raphael's use of 'cloud' angels, seen and yet not seen, bleaching into formless light, was to be hugely influential.

### **T ' t a a ' ,**

By the Baroque period the 'optical clamour' of divine light was expressed in the decoration of soaring vaults and domes from Correggio's precocious *Assumption of the Virgin* in Parma Cathedral, with its bleached heads which disappear into a golden glow, to the work of the Florentine Ludovico Cardi (Cigoli) whose own depiction of the *Assumption* in Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome shows the Virgin standing on a moon mottled as Dante and Galileo described. Cigoli was a friend of Galileo who in turn had lectured before the Florentine Academy on the possible dimensions of the *Inferno*. Perhaps the most extraordinary vision of all is Gianbattista Gaulli's *Triumph of the Name of Jesus* in the Jesuit Church in Rome, a multi-media experience of painted and plastered figures exploding from the centre.

Francesca Caccini, Florence in 1587-1641, was championed by her musician father Giulio, and joined him at the Medici court. Her only surviving stage 1641, age

Medici, so two strong women – his mother Christine of Lorraine as regent and his wife Maria Maddalena of Austria – wielded the power for about 15 years, and needed a soundtrack to underline it. It was provided by Francesca, musician, servant, owned by the Medici, who would choose whom she married and where she lived...

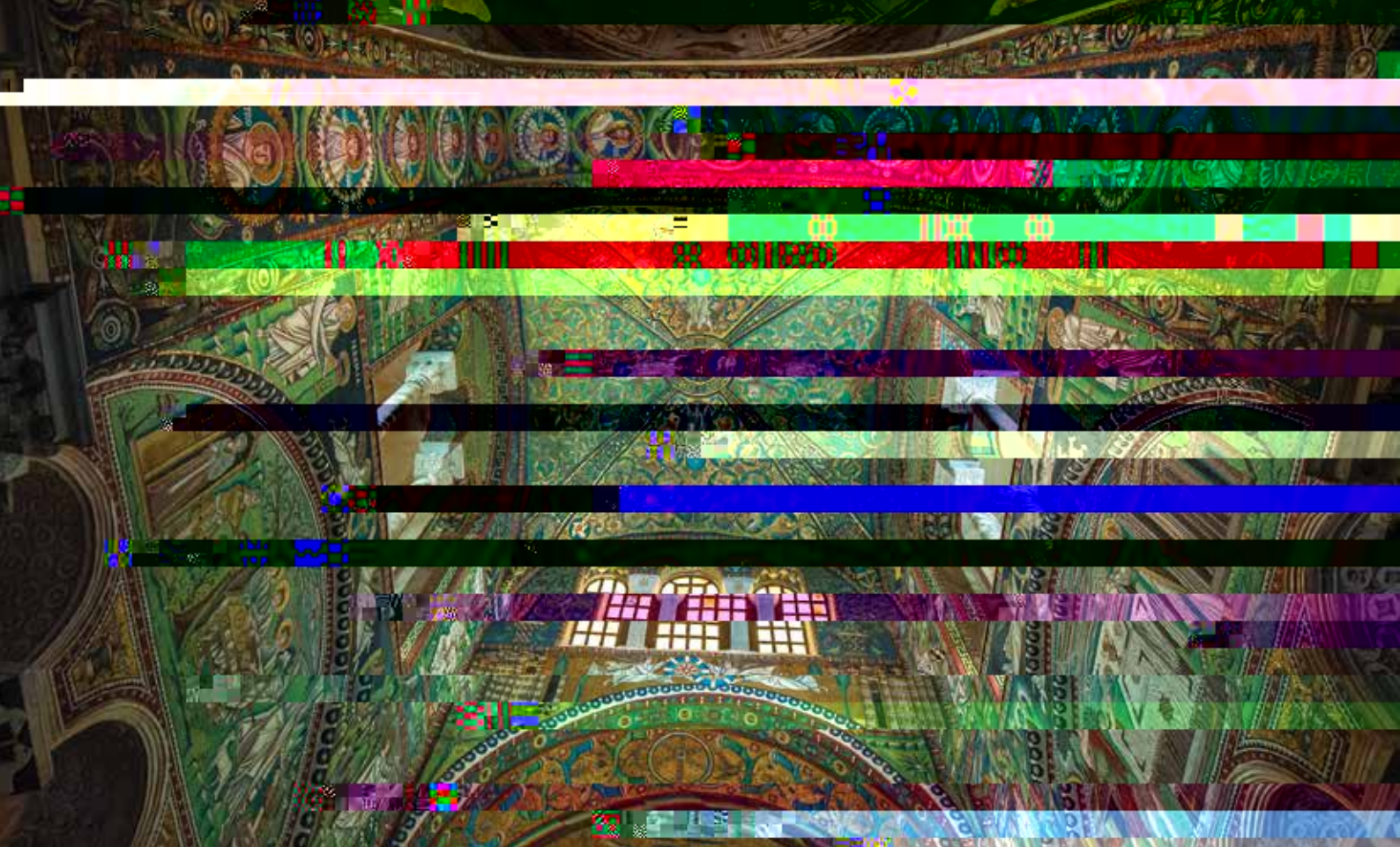
From a great body of work, only one other composition survives: *Il primo libro delle musiche a una e due voci*, dedicated to Signor Cardinale de' Medici, (whose name on the frontispiece is far larger than the composer's), from which Dr Beer played us a song *Lasciatemi qui solo*, a worthy rival of her contemporary Monteverdi.

prize for her cantata *Faust et Helene*, the first female winner of the competition. Because of the prize, she gained a contract with music publisher Ricordi. In Italy she completed several works, but failing health forced her home, where she died in 1918 at the age of 24.

**Finding artistic release  
by travelling south**

Dr Beer concluded by pointing out the irony that things got worse for women composers with the decline of ducal courts and convents where many girls, often orphaned or born out of wedlock, received a musical education. This coincided with the idea that women were incapable of writing great music and felt pressurised to confine their music to the family. Dr Beer remarked how so many Northern artists found release and inspiration by travelling south, mainly

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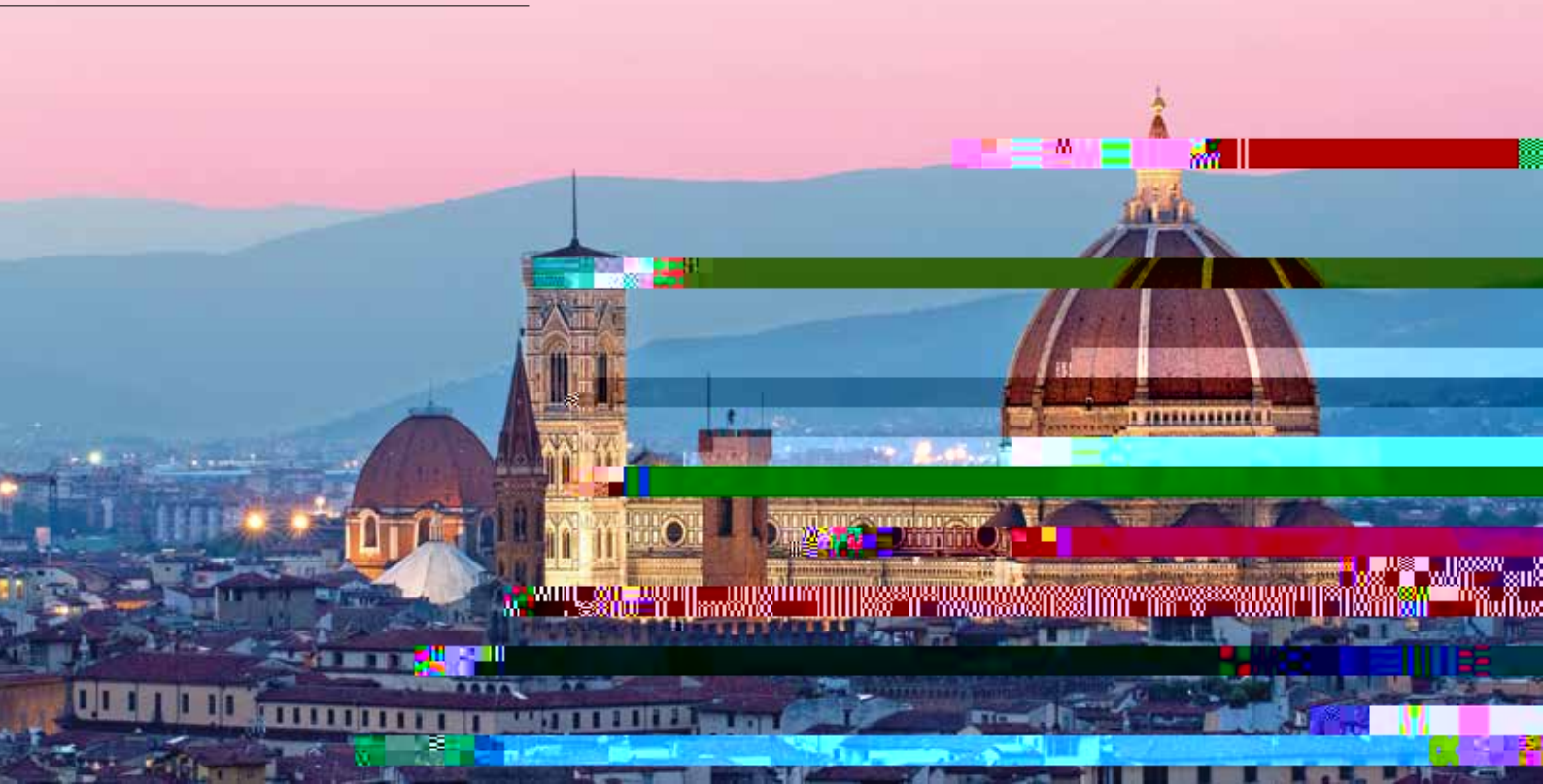
Bill Bryson wrote: 'I can't think of anything that excites a greater sense of childlike wonder than to be in a country where you are ignorant of almost everything.' For childlike wonder you can do no better than visit Ravenna. Here you have eight beautifully restored World Heritage sites, each with a typically plain exterior giving no hint of its jewel box interior adorned with glittering mosaics. This is a town of 160,000 which in ancient times had a population of 10,000 yet had over 50 richly endowed churches. Here is a town in a quiet backwater north of Rimini on the Adriatic coast which yet has all the trappings of greatness. How did it come to pass?

On his first visit to Ravenna Michael Starks was entranced. On his second visit he began to study the mosaics in more detail. On his third visit he began to consider their historical context.

only survive but prosper in the turbulent







# B :

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Da Da De e r

In this zoom talk, members attended from home, and, I am sure, most will have had a glass of Italian wine in their hands. I know I had a red produced not far from Florence, home of the Medici, as Ian Morgan, former banker and Medici expert revealed to us the reasons for Medici financial successes and failures!





was persecuted and killed. In 1646 she was prayed to during the plague and believed to have saved the population from starving. In Tuscany, the ascetic St Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), a tertiary, and tireless worker for charity, wrote to Pope Gregory XI in Avignon during the Schism, requesting his return to Rome. 'Use your power – or else resign!' He returned. She is one of the most influential writers in Catholicism and a Doctor of the Church.

Raphael was a super star! On commission to paint the Vatican Stanzas, Margarita, a baker's daughter, became his muse, portrayed in many of his works, eg the Madonna of the Chair and the Madonna Velata, both now in the Pitti in Florence. He died at 37 unmarried, but the La Fornarina portrait, now in Palazzo Barberini, hints that they were secretly married – a sprig of myrtle, a symbol of love, her armband which carries his name. If Simonetta was of divine inspiration to Botticelli, Margarita was for Raphael the embodiment of romantic love.

The third muse is Vittoria Colonna, Marchesa di Pescara (1492-1547), Michelangelo's soul mate, revered for her mind as much as her beauty. Their friendship – passionate, of mutual admiration – dated from her widowhood at 48. He was 63. She, a well-known poet, he a recluse, sullen, difficult. She was very devout, as was he. In the Sistine Last Judgement, Vittoria is depicted as the Virgin Mary. Michelangelo puts himself among the damned. He treasured her writings, which were by his bed when he died. To him, she was his equal in intellect, his peer in spirituality.

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Spain, Southern Gaul and Italy. It was more than a few centuries later however when pasta recipes arrived.

Travel between England and Italy was instrumental in the exchange of culture and food. Anyone who had a flight to Italy cancelled due to coronavirus may have felt slightly less aggrieved after learning that the journey of Sigeric, Archbishop of Canterbury, to Rome in 993 to confer with the Pope took three months each way. At about the same time dried pasta was brought by the Arabs to Sicily (fresh pasta came from ancient Greece).

'The Forme of Cury', a recipe collection from the 14<sup>th</sup> century created by the chief Master Cooks of King Richard II, contains instructions for a type of lozenge-shaped pasta that Diego advised was probably consumed dressed with butter and cheese, with a pinch of cinnamon on top.

### **Italian food fit for an English king**

Italian food was most definitely fit for a King, as Diego noted that in 1511 when the Pope sent galleys to London to collect tin to repair the roof of St Peter's he sent 100 wheels of parmesan with wine etc. to King Henry VIII. In 1556 the Pope sent 8 wheels of parmesan to Queen Mary. Parmesan



A. J. C.

### And not just for banquets

The lecture conveyed that Italian food was not just for banquets and tables of the wealthy. Pasta was a valuable food for the British navy, promoted by Sir Hugh Platt in the 17th century, as supplies of flour and dried pasta could be cooked with salty sea water. "I'm not sure the British navy ever had a designated Master Lasagne Maker onboard, like some Genoese merchant ships in the 13th century," Diego commented.

### Pizza?

A lecture on Italian food must mention pizza. Diego highlighted the absence of pizza throughout recipe books and although the entry in John Florio's 1598 Italian-English dictionary for pizza referred to a flaky pastry with sugar and cheese, it was around the mid-18th century in Naples that pizza, as we know it, was evolving.

The lecture included an anecdote about the inventor Guglielmo Marconi's experience with the stringy cheese at *Pizzeria di Brandi* in Naples in 1899, before he headed to America. It was the immigrants from Naples who introduced pizza to America and other countries where it became popular.

In mid-20th century post-war Britain, in response to the decline in interest in the quality of food, Raymond Postgate launched the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Food. This became the Good Food Club. Italian waiters latched on to the idea of dining out as a less formal experience than was usual, and opened trattorias and restaurants to provide good quality food in enjoyable atmospheres. These venues were appropriate as, to quote Diego, "Food is sharing the joy of living."

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The significance of food, from the basic need for survival, through the pleasure of eating it, to the messages conveyed by giving it, as well as the intricacies between language and food, were all areas that this lecture touched on.

As Diego explained, the word 'companion' comes from the Latin *panis*, and the notion of someone whom you share bread and food with. In these times of uncertainty, where a new sense of camaraderie has evolved, it seems appropriate to take a moment to think

about the importance of foods like pizza and pasta, and the comfort and happiness brought by preparing it and sharing it.

I've ordered a copy of *How We Fell in Love with Italian Food* by Diego Zancani and can't wait to reacquire myself with the information from this most delicious lecture.

*How We Fell in Love with Italian Food* Diego Zancani, 2019, 256 pp. Bodleian Library.

Diego Zancani is Emeritus Professor of Medieval and Modern Languages, Oxford University and an Emeritus Fellow, Balliol College. His talk charted the extraordinary progress of Italian food from the legacy of the Roman invasion to today.

Chloe Challis fell in love with Italy on a school trip to Florence, studied History of Art at university and now works for the Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET). She is a member of the BIS.

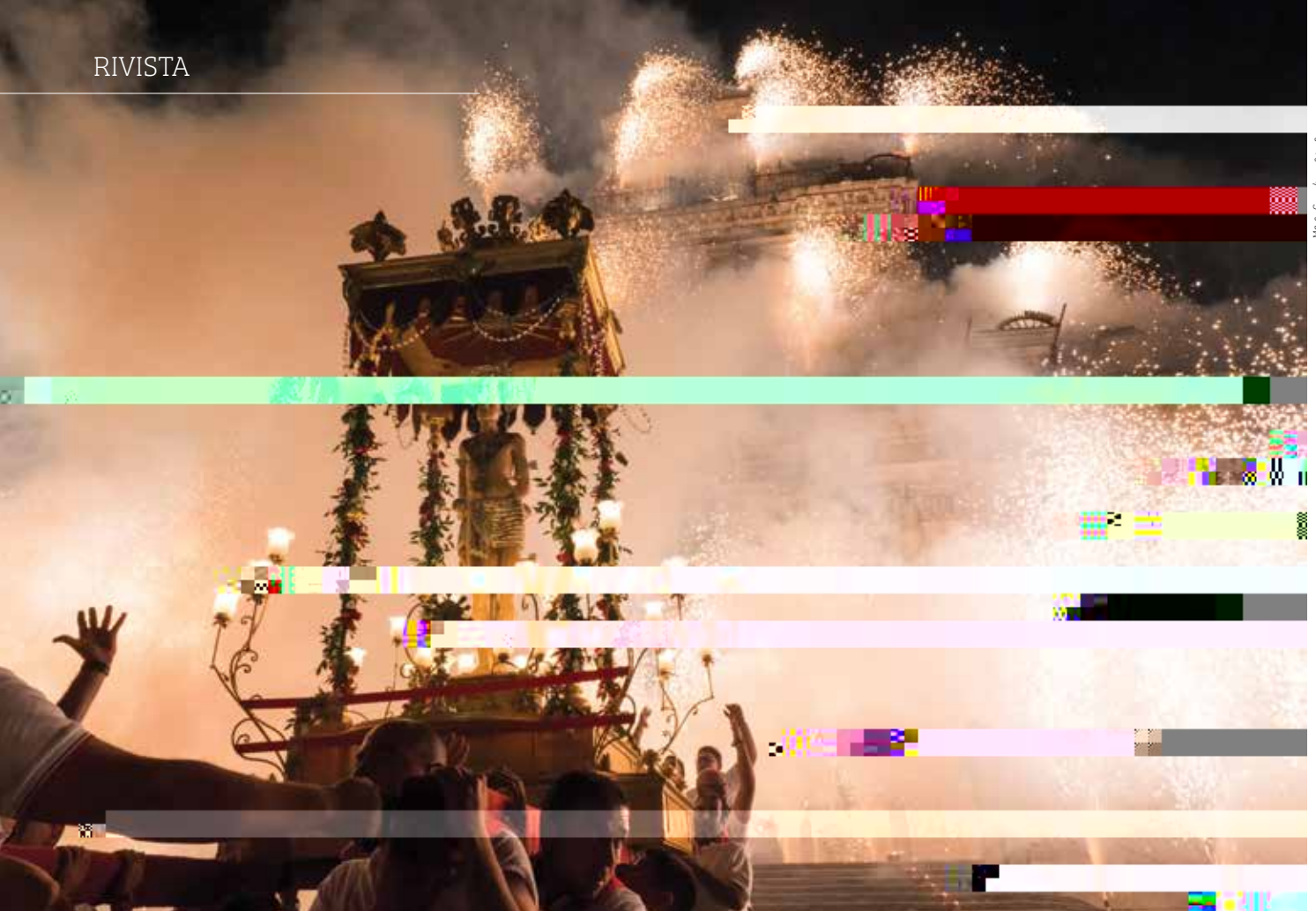


Foto: C. A. - E. - E.

# 'D

## A 3 2020

Ja E e r a r e ca !

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Susan has had contacts with south eastern Sicily for many years, and explained that in the inland villages and towns of the province of Siracusa, the traditions, customs and culture are marked by the rich and varied history of Sicily. These range from archaeological sites dating from the Greeks – and, like the Greek theatres, still used for performances – through the invasions of Arabs, Normans and Aragonese, each bringing new elements of culture and tradition, to the poverty, exploitation and mass emigrations of the 19th and early 20th centuries which in turn exported the culture of these Sicilian borghi to many parts of the world.

Susan focussed on the town of Palazzolo Acreide, a World Heritage site

and runner-up for 'il borgo più bello d'Italia': Acreide comes from the Greeks who founded a defensive settlement there in 663 BC. In the surrounding area there's a carved relief known as I Santoni but probably a prehistoric artefact showing a Phrygian deity such as the Great Mother or Demeter, invoked for a good harvest. Not far away is Pantalica, the largest necropolis in Europe: some of the tombs date from the 13th century BC.

Over the centuries Palazzolo Acreide has been destroyed and rebuilt several times, from the destruction by invading Arabs in 827 to the catastrophic earthquake of 1693, after which the town was substantially rebuilt in the Baroque style.

### D t t a a t a a t t

Religious festivals in the life of the towns in the province are very significant, with annual celebrations for Saints Paul, Sebastian, Michael, Lucy, and the Madonna, of whom the first two are the most important in terms of emotional attachment. Devotion to one of the saints was a matter of feeling a personal connection, a sense of identity with something that had happened in the locality, some way in which the saint had intervened in the past life of the community and was thus felt to be 'one of us'. Among the instances mentioned was the miracle of the Madonna delle Milizie in Scicli, which took place during the Norman campaigns against the Arabs, and the intervention of Saint Lucy during the plague in Siracusa in 1646, when she was credited with saving the starving



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population. But it is Paul and Sebastian who are the rival saints of Palazzolo Acreide. They inspire a fierce loyalty in their opposing adherents.

Interestingly neither Paul nor Sebastian is buried in Sicily. Paul stopped briefly in Siracusa on his journey from Malta to Rome and is believed to have miraculously revealed a spring of water. Sebastian's only contact was through a statue of the saint washed up from a wreck in the 15th century, which the townsfolk of Mililli carried to their church for veneration. The rivalry between the two saints was sparked by the Pope who in 1690 approved Paul as the patron of Palazzolo Acreide, replacing the Madonna and the patronal church. But in the earthquake of 1693 the statue of Sebastian was miraculously unscathed, while Paul was seen by the Sebastiano faction to have failed to protect the town. The rivalry continued until the 19th century with contrasting social classes supporting one or the other. Nowadays the devotion to the two saints provides for double celebrations, indeed four in the year, since each saint is honoured with two feasts, one in winter and one in summer: and both groups annually try to outdo each other in the celebrations.

### The St Paul / St Sebastian rival factions continue to this day

The contrasting merits of the saints are visible in the very different images conveyed by the two statues: Paul, fierce, old and strong, with a sword in one hand and a book in the other; Sebastian, young, handsome and vulnerable. Similarly, the two churches provide a strong contrast: simplicity for Paul; ornate and heavy for Sebastian.

The festivities each year in honour of the two saints share similar patterns: processions, celebrations, a carnival atmosphere, fireworks. They begin with the unveiling of the saint's statue, normally hidden from view, and a procession from the church into the town where it is greeted with great cheers, massed bands, homemade coloured streamers and even babies stripped naked and offered up to the saint, often as fulfilment of a vow. The first procession takes place around midday, in the evening a second, which continues late into the night and culminates in massive fireworks displays.



Among the festivities for Saint Paul are those connected with the 'ceraldi', individuals with power over poisonous snakes, who occupy a special position in the procession in gratitude for the role they once carried out protecting workers at harvest time. For Saint Sebastian, a most impressive moment comes when the procession with the statue reaches one of the town's steepest streets, and the men link arms and race up the slope as fast as they can.



Alas, because of the coronavirus, in 2020 these wonderful celebrations could not take place. But the talk ended by putting us into the middle of the festivities of 2017 in a specially made video, allowing us to share in the excitement and amazement of the moment when the statue of Saint Sebastian emerged from the church into the waiting crowds, to be greeted by such an outburst of fireworks that the smoke almost obscured the view. A truly dramatic and exciting conclusion to a wonderfully rich talk.

Not surprisingly there were many questions which showed just how engaged the audience had been. Questions covered the material used for streamers; whether there was any link with the devotion of Sweden to Saint Lucy; whether there were colours especially associated with each; how the celebrations were financed;

whether any particular foods were eaten as part of the festivities; and the extent to which the form of the celebrations in many ways reflected pre-Christian veneration of the pagan deities.

Richard Northern thanked Susan for 'a wonderful and rich discussion providing inspiring evidence of how communities in Sicily are bound together by shared traditions.'

Susan Kikoler has been the Honorary Director of the British Italian Society since 2004, promoting Italian culture. She has served as co-ordinator of the events programme for a number of years, is a former editor of Rivista, and a regular contributor to the journal. Writer and critic, Susan taught English in Syracuse for five years and it remains her second home.

Jane Everson is Emeritus Professor of Italian  
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Journal of the Venice Society

Richard Northern, President, welcomed all and thanked Venice in Peril for their sponsorship of the event. He introduced Dr Claire Judde de Lariviere, who opened her talk explaining that Venice has handed

between power (the Doges) and the populace (the ordinary people) was created. Venice in the 15th and 16th centuries was one of the largest European cities. It was a city state, the capital of an empire, governed by the Doges – the patricians representing 5% of the population, aided by families from the Libro d'Oro; other nobles and merchants worked 'for the state' in various ways, while those below that level had no political role at all.

#### **Social unrest in Murano**

But within Venetian society there were outbreaks of restlessness. On 27 January 1511, an incident took place at Murano, a separately governed island. Every 18



## A talk by Dr Silvia Angeli, Dr Valentina Signorelli, Dr Cecilia Zoppello

A talk by Silvia Angeli, Valentina Signorelli, Cecilia Zoppello

The film tells the story of a Sicilian worker, Mimi, who loses his job for refusing to vote for a mafioso. Unemployed, he is forced to leave his young wife and emigrate to Turin, where he weaves a passionate relationship with Fiore, a progressive communist, who challenges his ideas and gives him a son.

### Logical and modern but with an ancient revenge

When Mimi returns to Catania, he discovers that his wife is pregnant from an affair with a married Neapolitan brigadier. Because he has travelled to the industrial



S e A q (1974)



themselves marooned on a remote island, where Raëlla has to rely on Gennarino for survival. They rather predictably fall in love, but once rescued, go their separate ways – attesting that their love wouldn't survive in 'the real world'.

Of all Wertmüller's films, this is where private and public, sexual and class politics are bound together in the 1970s (and 1980s), and it is almost impossible to distinguish them. It reflects the Italian socio-political context of the time, a period that witnessed the height of the feminist movement: divorce was approved in 1970, and foundations were laid for the legalisation of abortion, passed in 1978.



*the cinema of Lina Wertmüller in the 1970s):*

'Who do they take me for, Jesus Christ? I'm not Marx, Christ or even St Francis (...) I'm a court jester, a joker, a clown. I'm a storyteller. Instead of entertaining the king I entertain everybody, or maybe I try to get them to think.'

Dr Valentina Signorelli is Senior Lecturer in Media and Communication at the University of East London (UEL) and a professional screen writer.

Dr Silvia Angeli is Visiting Lecturer, University of Westminster, London. Her research focuses on the relationship between religion and film, especially Italian cinema.

Dr Cecilia Zoppelletto has worked as a news producer for the Italian national broadcasting company RAI and as TV host for Antenna Tre Nordest. She is Visiting Lecturer at the University of Westminster.

Silvia Badiali is a professional adviser on art and finance based in London. She is a newly elected Trustee of the BIS.



Those of us living in Rome for decades are spoiled by being able to see ancient statuary in Roman and Vatican museums, in courtyards and even atop a palazzo

Bartolomeo Cavaceppi. Subsequently they acquired collections that once belonged to the Giustiniani and the Caetani. For this reason an exhibition sponsor is the jeweller Bulgari, whose interest in collections of antiquities dates from the same period and explains why the current exhibition is subtitled *Collezionare Capolavori* (To Collect Masterpieces). In the words of art historian Salvatore Settis, "This is less an exhibition of individual pieces than a collection of collections."

The Torlonia bankers also acquired many properties, and within some of their lands on the Appian Way and near Fiumicino, handed over to them by debtors, were exceptional Roman ruins, which the Torlonia had excavated.

For Stendhal, who knew the family well, they were "Miserly bankers and a bit mischievous... incapable of enjoying the beautiful things they have surrounded themselves with." Nevertheless, in the late 19th century Alessandro Torlonia (1800-1886), upgraded from duke to prince by a pope, decided to exhibit this enormous collection. A grain storage building they owned on Via della Lungara in Trastevere was transformed into a 77-room museum. It was open to select visitors only. Photographs of the works were taken, and a huge leather-bound catalogue was prepared in 1884; a selection of those early photos and a copy of the catalogue, which today belongs to the Ashmolean Library in Oxford, are in the exhibition.

During World War II the collection was concealed for safety reasons within storage rooms in that same Trastevere palazzo. In 1947 it was still hidden, and the famous archaeologist Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli is said to have dressed up as a street sweeper in order to have a peek at it. After 1960 the then Prince Torlonia, without

consulting any authorities, had the museum spaces converted into 93 flats, which are still rented to tenants.

**Creation of the Torlonia Foundation**

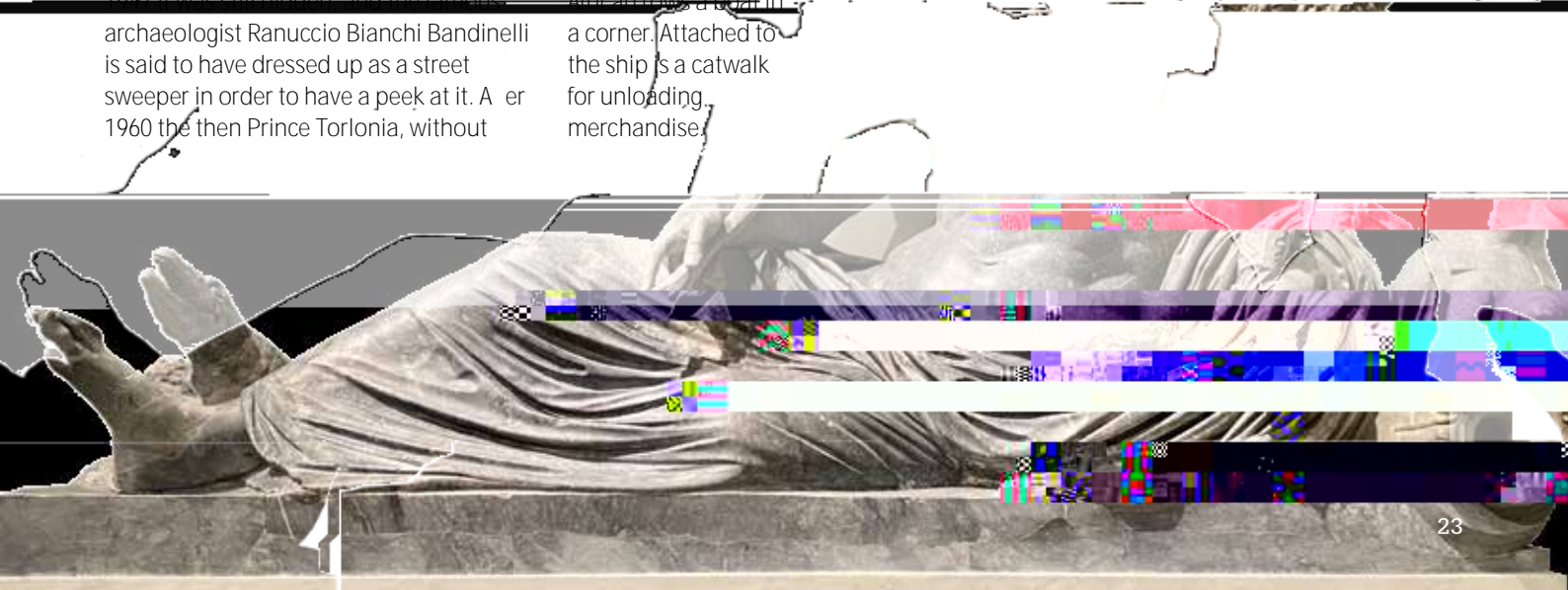
So until today no-one has been able to see the collection, which gathered dust in part of the old grain storage area converted into a strongroom. Finally the family, long engaged in inheritance disputes, have created the Torlonia Foundation, which currently works together with Italy's Ministry of Culture for the conservation of the whole collection.

The antique marble statuary in the current exhibition includes – besides Greco-Roman busts, sarcophagi, giant basins, nymphs, warriors, and gods and goddesses – two particularly unusual panels, unusual because they amount to vivid photographs of daily life in ancient Rome. One is a marble frieze of a woman at her table in a butcher shop; behind her, dangling from pegs, are the goods she sells – a hare, pigs, and geese. The reason this panel, measuring 2.18 M wide by 1.40 M tall, exists is uncertain; it may have been a sign or a funeral monument. It bears an inscription taken from a verse in Virgil's Aeneid.

The second frieze, discovered in the vicinity of Trajan's Port, shows a merchant ship and extraordinary details, including the rope knots tied by sailors in the ancient Mediterranean world. The *Bas relief with a scene of the Portus Augusti* measures 1.22 M by 0.75 M and has been long studied for what it reveals about the history of navigation. Traces of the original red colouring emerge in several places including from the flame of the lighthouse which guided ships into the port of Rome at Ostia. Neptune stands in the centre, beneath a chariot drawn by elephants, while a sailor or slave who looks African rows a boat in a corner. Attached to the ship is a catwalk for unloading merchandise.



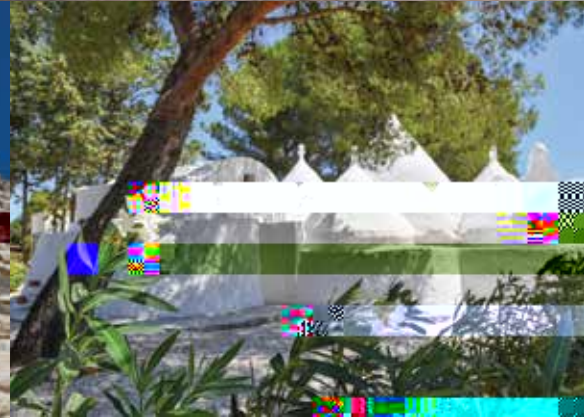
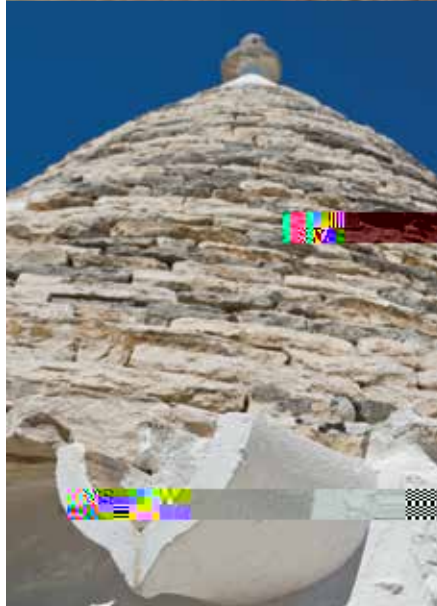
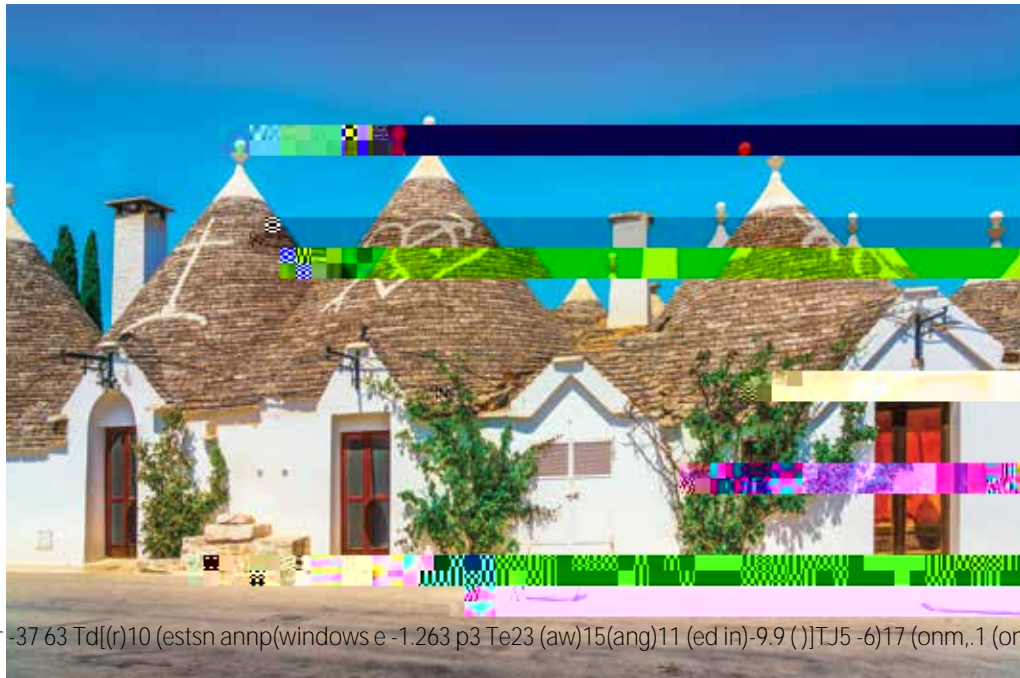
The exhibition is on the ground floor of the renovated Villa Ca'arelli, which was erected on top of one of Rome's most important archaeological sites, a renowned temple to Jupiter. Built by Ascanio Ca'arelli in the 16th century, it is physically attached to the Capitoline Museum. After the Nazis' arrival in Rome, the villa was used as a residence for the German ambassador. It was then used by the Prussians as a residence for the German ambassador.







central compartment. The cone rested on the thick walls, narrowing to the top, indicated externally by a pinnacle (decorative element with esoteric, spiritual or propitiatory motifs that served as a real keystone). Externally, the cone was covered with limestone slabs called *chianche* (or *chiancole* or *chiancarelle*) which guarantee that it is waterproof. They are arranged in overlapping rows, with a slope towards the outside, to facilitate the flow of rainwater. The considerable thickness of the masonry and the few and narrow windows ensure an optimal thermal balance, and the type of stones used for the construction guarantee a comfortable environment – warm in winter and cool in summer. The internal plastering, in lime milk on a layer of *bole* (red earth) containing straw, prevented insects from getting in and ser17.1 (ovon typ2)r



The *trullo* has undergone an accurate conservative restoration, and a ventilated space inside has been created, which eliminates rising damp and leads to a comfortable living space. The original tradition of the *trullo* was kept intact, and the old fireplace was recovered – the only heat source during the harsh winters.

Alongside the more recent star-vaulted building, in full respect for the tradition with which it was built, a significant expansion with the same material, finish and construction type as the existing one, has allowed for the creation of a comfortable home.

So we find three artifacts, made at different times, but with a function that the architectural recovery of each wanted to retain. The particular value of this kind of restoration is demonstrated in the respect for this tradition of construction in stone typical of the 'Valle d'Itria'.



The Catholic Church has great familiarity with notorious pandemics of past centuries. The magnificent baroque church of the Salute in Venice was built to commemorate the end of the devastating outbreak of bubonic plague of 1630 which may have killed more than a million people in Europe.



Q. r e q e: S d e . . . T S P e e ' ;  
 ab e: T e P e ' T , e q e; Da d W e  
 e e . . . r b . . . *The Promise of Francis: The Man, the Pope, and the Challenge of Change*

at the end of the previous year, complete with pie charts and detailed statistics.

It showed a shortfall of eleven million euros (that is, ten million pounds), significantly less than in 2018, when the figure was 75 million (or over 68 million pounds). Most of the expenditure went on communications, including the maintenance of a large international diplomatic corps. The deficit refers only to the bureaucracy which runs the central government of the Catholic Church. It excludes the operations of the Vatican's own bank, long suspected of money laundering (although never proven) and of the pension fund providing for an ever-expanding retired senior priesthood. It also excludes the financing of the City State, which has to provide essential services and utilities for the 49-hectare (120 acre) territory.

The Jesuit priest who now heads the Vatican's economic affairs department points out that, relatively speaking, the whole Vatican patrimony, including extensive real estate and shareholdings, amounts to about four billion euros (3.6 billion pounds) – not a large sum, he says, by comparison with the financial resources of many international corporations, or even some individual American or British universities.

Pope Francis is clearly rattled by the failure of his collaborators inside the Vatican to deliver the accounting transparency he had requested from the very start of his reign. The "pope from the ends of the earth", as he memorably described himself on his first appearance on the balcony of St Peter's in 2013, called to Rome from Australia, another distant

point of origin, his friend Cardinal George Pell, former Archbishop of Sydney, who had an excellent record as financial administrator. Cardinal Pell, according to insiders, created intense disquiet among various heads of department in the Vatican, when he insisted on normal business budgeting and accounting methods to enable him accurately to calculate total income and expenditure.

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**K**atia Pizzi, the energetic recently appointed Director of the Italian Cultural Institute in London is fully occupied at present with the consequences of the lockdown for the Institute and all those who are touched by it – from students to academics to visiting celebrities from all cultural avenues to stay within.

However, she kindly gave time to respond to our questions for those who are yet to discover the delights of this institution and started with a brief reminder on the background to the establishment of the Institute. In 1949 the Duke of Westminster had given the property in 39 Belgrave Square to the Duke Gallarati Scotti, Italian Ambassador at the time, for it to become the Italian Cultural Institute and

it was inaugurated in the same year. The Institute, since then frequented both by Italians and those wishing to know more about Italy in all its aspects, has provided a respected resource for keeping the public informed on many aspects of Italian life, history and culture.

Switching to today, Katia notes that by the end of 2019, there were about 700,000 Italians in London, many young and highly educated, but that Italians in London are not a homogeneous group in terms of age, educational qualification and cultural orientation. She sees that Italians of ancient immigration appreciate geopolitical issues and those related to their territories of origin and its beauty. Younger people love academic-scientific initiatives, fashion, 'made in Italy' and movies, TV and pop stars. But, she says: 'Common to the different categories that follow us is the love of literature, the attention to the Literary Awards, translation and media – for example, the English translation of Elena Ferrante's novels and related television series.'

She reels off the offerings which always attract reliably large audiences: the extensive library, language courses, music concerts, exhibitions and conferences. Until March of 2020, these were constant events.

Katia regrets that since the beginning of the pandemic, the Institute has been unable to host the events that were once a staple of its programming. She notes that the Institute has been able to continue its work through digital means, but she misses the physical presence of the Institute and the interactions that take place there.



In a small 'fattoria' outside Florence, a traditional artisan skill – handmade and hand painted ceramics – continues much as it has done for over a hundred years. The factory is in Ginestra Fiorentina, a small village close to Montelupo Fiorentino, which is the traditional town of ceramic artisan workshops in Tuscany.

The artisan company has been creating quality handmade pieces since the beginning of the First World War. It was, and still is, owned and run by the same founding family. The current members are Claudio Biagiotti, who runs the company and has worked in the factory since he was a boy, with his two sons, Christian (who runs the shop in central Florence) and Philip (who manages production, moulding and burning). The ceramicist specialist, Maria Paola, is Claudio's mother. She runs the lab and oversees all the painting. The designer and painter is Sabine.

Today, the company works on both classic and contemporary pieces. Christian, who handles sales and representation, explains: 'There are always clients who seek quality and refinement. And we have some secrets in the workmanship that have allowed us to distinguish ourselves over the years.'

### The artisan process

He describes how their artisan process works: 'We use clay slip for small and simple

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ceramic body for imparting colour, opacity) or glazed ceramic.

'With the desired biscuit we proceed to the decoration stage. There are many techniques. Decoration can be applied freehand by skilled artists. Or repetitive and geometric motifs may be applied. For example, in the dusting technique, the main motif is traced on special tissue paper.

The sections are then pierced with a tool. By repeatedly applying a 'sock' filled with charcoal onto the perforated paper sheet, the charcoal transfers the design, providing a guide for picking up the motif on each item. It is an age old practice. The colours we use can be lead-based or lead-free, depending on the type of decorated piece. We purchase them in powder form from specialised Italian companies in the sector.

### The design element

'The decorations for our pieces are so many that each one has its own story. For example, we have a decoration which we have called 'Fiesole', because the inspiration for this design was found in frescoes in a Medici villa in Fiesole. Another classic decoration is Raphael's grotesques, reproduced in a modern key and open there are the great classics, such as blue background lemons, olive decoration,



sunflowers, poppies. Unfortunately we are copied everywhere, but there is nothing we can do about it, except excel at what we do!

'Each region has its own style, forms and colours. For example, Deruta has its own Umbrian style, as do Bassano del Grappa, the Ligurian ceramics.'

He observes: 'Regrettably, many artisan ceramics companies have closed. It is also difficult to find young people outside the family who want to learn this type of

'Thanks to the internet we are able to sell and make ourselves known to specialised shops all over the world, although our uniqueness, our strong point, remains the historic shop in Florence. But unfortunately covid has meant a reduction in sales and is putting us to the test, like most Italian artisans. However, we hope to carry on this tradition for as long as possible.'

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in construction and development was accompanied by corruption and speculation, and the disaster at Vajont in 1963 was a tragic example of what could go wrong. Hydroelectric power was an important source of energy in a country with limited supplies of coal. In the late 50s the SADE company decided to build a dam in the Vajont area of Friuli.

In a stimulating and informative talk,

There were many warnings about the unsuitability of the site, but the project went ahead regardless. In October 1963 part of the mountain against which the dam was being built collapsed and water poured into the valley below. The town of Longarone was washed away and nearly 2000 people lost their lives. Further disasters were to follow: in 1966 overdevelopment in Agrigento in Sicily caused a series of landslips leaving thousands homeless and, later in the year, the forces of nature triggered catastrophic floods in Florence and Venice. The collapse of the Morandi bridge in Genoa in 2018 is a timely reminder of the need for maintenance of essential infrastructure.

to become prime minister in 1994 but his first government was short-lived due to investigations into his tax affairs. He would return as prime minister for two further terms in the 21st century.

These are only a few of the themes and events that John referred to in his talk. His remarkable book contains many more and provides the reader with a very accessible path to understanding the complexity of Italy after 1945. I cannot recommend it highly enough.

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At the suggestion of fellow Trust member Christopher Woodhead – the grandson of Lt. Col. Hubert de Burgh, the camp's Senior British Officer – I translated Minardi's book into English under the title *Bugle Call to Freedom*. There was personal motivation too, as my father, Captain Anthony Simkins, was an inmate of Fontanellato. I also welcomed the opportunity to test



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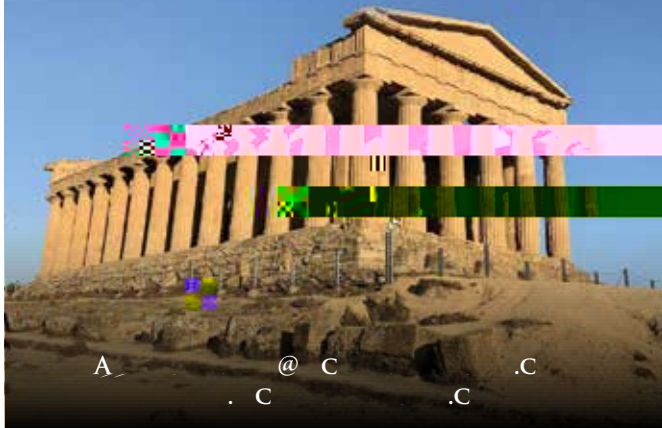
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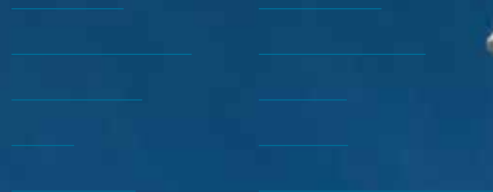
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