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# La Voce della Dante

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Momma Manx as Christmas Reindeer

**Ciao a Tutti!**

**E Buon Natale!!**

As we greet the month of December, I hope you and those you love are well and warm. My husband Rodger and I are spiraling headlong into our Nutcracker Season, which, seemingly impossibly, begins tomorrow. (What would Christmas be without it? Oh yeah- we found that out a couple of years ago. Let's not go there again.) Being a professional musician at Holiday Season has its own strange energy and gets a leeeettle crazy...we're both well past 2500 performances of Nutcracker in our careers, not to mention Christmas Pops concerts, Handel's Messiah, etc...but it is truly wonderful, every year, to be part of the creation of dearly-held holiday memories for so many people. I hope you can go out and enjoy whatever entertainments make your family's best memories this month!

Dante's Festa di Natale Potluck is just around the corner and I hope many of you will be able to attend this year. Please plan to gather on Wednesday December 14 for great food, tombola game with prizes, and the best company! Mark your calendar and see the info further inside this edition of La Voce.

Looking ahead to our winter season offerings, be sure to read Program Chair Dan's latest information in this issue. Dante's Wednesday night presentations on January 11 and 25, February 8 and 22, and March 8 will all take place on ZOOM, instead of in-person. So, those of you in outlying areas from Seattle, and those wanting quiet evenings at the computer in the cold weather, GET READY! A variety of engaging and interesting programs will be offered. In-person presentations resume in late March.

Please consider sharing a story, travelogue, recipe, photo, or other snippets of

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Italian-Community-Interest with our wonderful La Voce editor, Stacey Howe-Lott at [stacey@danteseattle.org](mailto:stacey@danteseattle.org). This newsletter always has room for more input from our Dante members, and sharing our stories is another way we can strengthen our friendships within the community. Also, do you have a lead on someone you think would be a good presenter? Or an idea for a presentation of your own for next year? Don't be shy.... New voices and subjects welcome.

Meanwhile, I wish you the Blessings of the Season and hope to see you December 14!

A presto,

Joyce Ramee



Dante Presepio at St. Clement's 2021

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## Festa Di Natale Potluck



### **Dante Alighieri Society's Festa di Natale Potluck 2022!**

**Wednesday, December 14, 2022**

St. Clement's Church, 1501 32nd Ave S., Seattle 98144

Doors open at 6:00

**Si prega di portare cibo e vino da condividere!**

(Please bring food and wine to share!)

Our December 14 meeting is our traditional potluck *Festa di Natale* with good food and wine, sparkling conviviality (all supplied by our members!) and a game of tombola. Reconnect with your Dante friends on this festive evening. Bring a family favorite dish to share! The beloved Dante Society Prespio will grace the meeting room.

**Tombola begins as dinner concludes - with Giuseppe Tassone calling the numbers in his inimitable way! Prizes will be awarded.**

It is not necessary to make a reservation for the potluck.

**PLEASE JOIN US!**

*Dante is abiding by current Washington Covid-19 protocols. Masks are encouraged except while eating. Persons with known recent exposure to or symptoms of COVID-19 should not attend.*

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## Italian Language Program News

### By Giuseppe Tassone

The first quarter of our language program is approaching the end. Last day of class is scheduled for December 13th . After the winter break, classes resume on January 5th for the second quarter of the school year. Students continuing on from fall quarter should enroll in the same level as in fall quarter. For example, if a student is enrolled in A1 for fall quarter, he/she must enroll in A1 for winter quarter.

New students can still join our program according to their proficiency. However, we recommend new students contact me, the director, for guidance and placement. Registration is already open and several students have already registered to continue. Although, for various reasons, it is normal for a few students not to continue, we encourage everyone not to interrupt their journey of learning Italian and/or improving their skills. Learning a language takes time, passion and dedication but it is absolutely gratifying and rewarding.

Going back to fall quarter, while in October we celebrated the XXII Settimana della lingua italiana nel mondo. In November, students were exposed to two other important events: SIFF – Cinema Italian Style and the VII Settimana della cucina italiana nel mondo with the theme: “Convivialità, sostenibilità e innovazione: gli ingredienti della cucina italiana per la salute delle persone e la tutela del pianeta”.

For the first one we created a Canvas page with information about our sponsorship, tickets discounts and trailers and for the other one a Canvas page with links to the official presentation from the MAECI (Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale), interviews, videos, recipes and access to a free course created by the Università di Scienze Gastronomiche di Pollenzo in cooperation with MAECI called “A Bite of Italy” dedicated to the culinary traditions of the twenty regions of Italy. [Here is a link to one of the lessons.](#)

For the end of Fall quarter instead, each instructor typically dedicates some class time to illustrate and involve students with the Italian Christmas and New Year traditions. The few examples above show how students, by taking our language courses in addition to a well-structured language preparation, are immersed into the culture of Italy that is intrinsically related to language acquisition, providing them a gateway to understanding and embracing our culture.

To conclude, I want to wish our students, instructors, members and everyone Buon Natale e Felice Anno Nuovo. Don't miss the Tombola's game on December 14th that I'll be delighted to lead.

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## A Look Ahead to Winter, Spring 2023 Programs

We have put together what we believe is a fascinating and varied lineup of speakers for our Dante meetings in 2023, January through May. For starters, we'll be stopping in Southern Italy, then on to Ravenna, Perugia and Florence, ending up in the Veneto. We'll give some thought to the power of the Italian media in January and to the cultivation of olives in the New World in February. Finally, our Italian Language students will present another one of their engaging programs on Dante, appropriately enough in March which has special significance in Italy for the celebration of all things Dante.

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Here's the lineup. We hope you'll find some things of interest:

**January 11 - English Meeting (Zoom)**

Donald De Santis, Dante Member and Lecturer, Azamara Cruises  
The Many Cultures of Southern Italy

**January 25 - Italian Meeting (Zoom)**

Prof. Sergio Mauro, Former Professor at UNESP in Brazil  
Il nuovo populismo mediatico

**February 8 - English Meeting (Zoom)**

Heather Stoven, OSU Extension Service - Yamhill County  
Olives in the New World: An Agricultural Perspective

**February 22 - Italian Meeting (Zoom)**

Elizabetta Valentini, Germán Rodríguez - Seattle-Perugia Sister City  
The Migration Project

**March 8 - English/Italian Meeting (Zoom)**

A end of the school year presentation on Dante by the students of our  
Language School

**March 22- Italian Meeting**

Mario Cazzanti, Seattle  
Ravenna and the Perpetual Reading of Dante's Comedy

**April 12 English Meeting**

Annual General Meeting along with a pasta dinner

**April 26- Italian Meeting**

Annalisa Bellerio, Italian journalist, editor, and writer  
The Conquest of Space in Renaissance Art

**May 10 - English Meeting**

Claudio Mazzola, French & Italian Studies, UW  
The Villas of Veneto

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## Cookbook Review: Bitter Almonds

by Joyce Ramee

**BITTER ALMONDS: Recollections and Recipes from a Sicilian Girlhood**

By Maria Grammatico and Mary Taylor Simeti, c. 1994, Wm. Morrow & Co.  
...one of our favorite cookbooks!

*"Bitter Almonds is the true story of a woman's extraordinary courage, and a gift from the past of an almost-lost tradition. At the Heart of the book are 46 recipes, written down for the first time, of unique Sicilian specialties..."* – so begins the fly-leaf of this wonderful little cook-and-story-book.

We found this book after our 2019 trip to the magical world of Sicily – specifically, after visiting the tiny village of Erice, which sits atop the mountain above Trapani, on Sicily's northwest corner. Erice, in case you haven't been there, hasn't modernized too much to the eye since its founding in about 1000 AD. The streets are still cobblestones, and so narrow you can almost touch the buildings on both sides on some blocks. No cars are allowed – you have to park down the hill and walk up, or take your chances with the cable car schedule. The shops and buildings are modernized inside – sort-of - at least enough to have indoor plumbing, electricity and – in some cases –

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internet. But the wonder and charm of the town hasn't been compromised by this.

We arrived on Epiphany Sunday in 2019, just after dark. Walking up the hill into town, our first greeting was a darling man who popped out and handed us each a free vino caldo, which was very welcome, as it was quite chilly. The whole town was lit by flickering Christmas lights and every shop had its Presepio display up in full splendor – that night was the competition to decide which was the best display.

It was a magical evening. In our wanderings through town, we came upon the **Pasticceria Grammatico**, thought to be the most popular tourist attraction in the town. Founded by Maria Grammatico, this amazing shop sells all kinds of treats made from the traditional recipes of her (not at all idyllic) childhood in the convent\*\*. The pasticceria still makes everything from scratch with recipes that are several hundred years old. The showcase held gorgeous marzipan, filled pastries, and cookies, cookies, cookies.... The crown jewel of all was the pistachio-filled **Genovesi Ericine**. We selected one of these and a few cookies. They were the best sweets either of us had ever tasted. We promised ourselves we'd come back in the morning and buy gift packs to take home. Sadly- Erice closes most businesses after Epiphany, so - oh horrors! – we lost our chance.

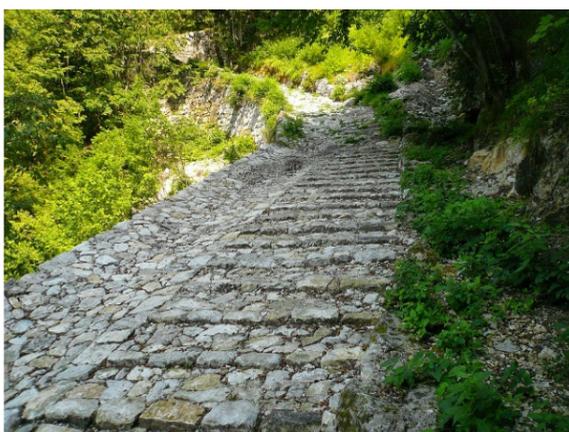
We found the cookbook **Bitter Almonds** online after our return. The book is a compilation of conversations between Signora Grammatico and author Mary Taylor Simeci, one of her faithful customers. Sig.ra Grammatico's stories are told in a personal tone and give glimpses of what that convent life was like. The recipes range from really-easy to crazy-challenging (I haven't tried to make Genovesi Ericine yet) so there's something for everyone. See attached recipe for Biscotti al Fico, one traditional Christmas Cookie. **Bitter Almonds** is available through Barnes and Noble, Amazon, and likely other sources.

\*\*from the fly-leaf: ***"In the early 1950's, Maria Grammatico and her sister were sent by their widowed, impoverished mother to a cloistered orphanage run by an order of lay Franciscan nuns, in Erice. It was a spare, harsh existence, but here, Maria learned to prepare the beautifully handcrafted pastries that were sold to customers outside the convent walls. At the age of 22, Maria left the convent with no personal possessions, minimal schooling, and no skills other than what she carried in her head and hands – the knowledge acquired during a childhood spent making pastries for other peoples' celebrations. Today, Maria is the successful owner of her own pastry shop in Erice, a mecca for travelers from the world over."***

[Here's a link to her biscotti al fico recipe](#)

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## Scalini Valstagna by Janet Lenart



Scalini Valstagna

A trail of 4444 steps near Valstagna, Italy

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The trail, known in Italian as “I 4444 Scalini della Calà del Sasso”, begins in the high plateau of Asiago and descends to the small town of Valstagna on the Brenta River.

Paolo Rumiz, a journalist and travel writer describes the trail as “long like purgatory, dark like a thunderstorm... one of the most fantastic trails in the alps”.

### **The trail**

This moderately difficult trail of 2400 feet elevation gain or loss is 8.7 miles round trip. It passes through a beautiful valley which at times is a narrow gorge. The hiker may begin the trail in Sasso, the meadows of the high plateau and proceed down through a forest of hornbeam and beech trees. Or the hike may be started at the lowest point in Valstagna and the hiker quickly warms up on the steep uphill trail.

### **The legend**

It is said that in 1638 Loretta and Nicolo’ were expecting the birth of their child. Loretta became ill and Nicolo’ walked down the mountain path to Padova to find a miraculous ointment. By dark he had not returned and the inhabitants of Sasso decided to descend the trail with torches to meet him. But halfway down there were other lights ascending, coming toward them. It was Nicolo’ accompanied by people from Valstagna, carrying the miraculous ointment that saved the life of Loretta who then married Nicolo’. Since then the trail is considered to bring good luck to couples who walk it. In addition, every year on the second Sunday of August there is a commemorative torch-light walk in the late evening.

### **History of the trail**

The trail is among the oldest works on the high plateau of Asiago and considered the longest man-made stone stairway open to the public in the world. The work began at the beginning of the 1300s for a noble man from Milan, Gian Galeazzo Visconti who governed the high plateau of Asiago. In 1403 the area and the trail became part of the Venetian empire (the Serenissima) and became essential to the building of Venice.

The trail allowed tree trunks harvested from the plateau to be moved down to the Brenta River where they were floated to Venice. The trunks were used to create the foundation pilings of palaces, the Arsenal building in Venice and to build ships.

The Calà del Sasso trail consists of 4444 stone steps 20 inches deep and 6 inches high. The steps are bordered by a gutter large enough to allow a tree trunk to slide down the incline while being controlled by 10 men using harpoons and ropes to prevent the trunk from catapulting down the mountain. Special openings in the retaining walls at the hairpin turns allowed the trunk to come out and rotate to continue the descent.

It is reported that the workmen made two trips up and down the trail in a day, with wooden shoes, a humid slippery surface in a dark shady forest.

Women used the trail for commercial purposes. They carried a gerla on their backs in which they took products down to Valstagna (e.g. berries, herbs, milk products, items made of wood) and back up to Sasso (e.g. salt, tobacco, flour, pasta, rice). In fact, Valstagna became known for its market in which items from the north were available was named the gateway to the high plateau of Asiago.



The people of Valstagna were known for their creativity. They developed the

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zattera (a raft) by tying together the tree trunks and loading it with products to sell downriver in Bassano, Padova and Venice. The Calà del Sasso sustained the economy of the plateau and river valley for hundreds of years.

### **Calà del Sasso today**

In 1956 the Costa highway was completed providing access by car to the high plateau of Asiago. The Calà went into decline and only in 1998 did the Comunità Montana start a restoration project.

### **Helpful links**

<http://www.valstagna.info/index.php/geositi/143-cala-del-sasso/1028-sentiero-cala-del-sasso>

<https://www.magicoveneto.it/altipian/asiago/cala-del-sasso.htm>

[https://www.asiago.it/it/itinerari\\_escursioni\\_passeggiate/art\\_itinerario\\_per\\_la\\_cala\\_del\\_sasso-altopiano\\_di\\_asiago/](https://www.asiago.it/it/itinerari_escursioni_passeggiate/art_itinerario_per_la_cala_del_sasso-altopiano_di_asiago/)



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### **Connect with us!**

You can find past meetings on [our You Tube channel here](#).

You can find [our website here](#).

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The Dante Alighieri Society of Washington is a nonprofit corporation organized to promote Italian language and culture within the state of Washington. Membership is open to anyone interested in the goals and ideals of our society regardless of ethnic origin. La Voce della Dante is published eight times a year by the Dante Alighieri Society of Washington. All rights reserved.

Dante Alighieri Society of Washington  
*Società per la diffusione della lingua e della cultura italiana nel mondo*

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