

SAN FRANCISCO ITALIAN COMMUNITY

CATHERINE ACCARDI

Foundation of the Etruscan City – The Example of Bologna

When we think of where all roads lead, we might think of Rome. There are, of course, any number of other outstanding *città* in Italy and one of those is Bologna, a city whose origins began, in part, as an Etruscan city.

This would be why, on May 25, the San Francisco *Istituto Italiano di Cultura* hosted, in conjunction with the Municipality of Bologna and *Cultura Italiana*, a conference entitled “The Founding and Development of Etruscan, Roman and Medieval Cities-The Example of Bologna.”

Massimo Maracci, Director of *Cultura Italiana*, Italian Language School of Bologna, Italy, led a conversation with Mary Tolaro-Noyes, author of the book *Bologna Reflections: An Uncommon Guide*, and Lisa Pieraccini, Professor of Classics at UC Berkeley, about the developmental elements of the Etruscan city.

Director Maracci shared details of the event with *L'Italo-Americano*. “Director Barlera from IIC of San Francisco agreed to host the conference and the Mayor of Bologna supported the event. The aim of the conference is to promote in San Francisco the school *Cultura Italiana Bologna*, which works to spread the Italian culture by teaching our beautiful language.”

Tell us more about *Cultura Italiana*.

“*Cultura Italiana* is a school specializing in the diffusion of the Italian language and culture. It has organized language courses in Bologna since 1981. We collaborate with the University of Bologna and Siena, University of Stockholm, Uppsala, Bard College and Keisen University of Tokyo and



Conference participants (left to right) Professor Lisa Pieraccini, Professor Massimo Maracci & Mary Tolaro-Noyes. Photo: Catherine Accardi

different American Universities: Johns Hopkins, Spring Hill College and College of the Holy Cross. *Cultura Italiana* welcomes 1,400 foreign adult students every year who stay in Bologna an average of four weeks getting to know the Italian way of life and learn the language.” Learn more about *Cultura Italiana* by visiting their website at <http://www.culturaitaliana.eu>.

What are the special attributes of Bologna and its rich

history?

“Those who come to Bologna are selected tourists because they have chosen a beautiful city, not yet discovered by mass tourism that invades Renaissance cities like Florence, Rome and Venice. Bologna has a medieval type of beauty, mystic and deep. The building of the school is Palazzo Pepoli, ancient castle which names the street ‘Via Castiglione’ (big castle).

“In Bologna the first University of the Western world was born in 1088 (after Beijing, in China), and it still has a fundamental place for knowledge. In history it’s the most famous city in Italy for the quality of its food and way of life, besides its excellent museums.”

Could you elaborate on the Etruscan connection with Bologna?

“Bologna is an Etruscan city. The Etruscan name was Felsina. Destroyed by the Celts, was rebuilt by the Romans with the name ‘Bononia.’ In the suburbs of Bologna, in Villanova di Castenaso, the first remains of the Etruscan natives were found who lived in the VIII century in the region of Bologna (Emilia Romagna), Tuscany, part of Lazio (the region of Rome, also an Etruscan city), and part of

Campania. Close to Bologna there is the only Etruscan city in open air, Kainua (today Marzabotto). It’s the only one because all the other Etruscan cities are covered by modern cities which were built on top of them.”

The conference included a PowerPoint presentation that highlighted the importance of

Marzabotto. The PowerPoint is actually available online by going to http://www.culturaitaliana.eu/about/publications_and_lectures. Professor Pieraccini described the evolution of the ancient Etruscan city and the origin of modern day Bologna. The presentation illustrates that it is possible to see the organization of space, the organization of infrastructure (streets, water channels), the squares, the temple and the “ara” (altar for sacrifices). Those who walk in Bologna and in many Italian cities walk on places that used to be sacred. Beneath today’s streets, there are Roman streets, under the Roman streets there are the Etruscan streets with their definite directions from the cosmos.

L'Italo-Americano asked speaker and author, Mary Tolaro-Noyes, for her thoughts on Bologna’s origins. “While

preparing for this event I realized the importance of ‘sacredness,’ or spiritual energy as it applies to the foundation of the city we know as Bologna—the Etruscan, Roman, and Christian elements. I had discovered during my research for the chapter “Pilgrimage” in my book *Bologna Reflections* that in the fourth century both the spiritual and civil structures that rescued the city were owed to the Catholic Church, and centered at the basilica of Santo Stefano. The following excerpt describes the spiritual energy that fascinated me then and still does whenever I enter the holy place:

I am always a pilgrim at Sancta Jerusalem Bononiensis, as the Sanctuary of Santo Stefano is sometimes identified, a reverent traveler to this holy place where tranquility reigns. I ask myself why I, too, often wander here, drawn to the spot that has been a sacred site for millennia. I come to feel close to Bologna’s spiritual center. Even now the Bolognesi consider it the holiest place in their city. I come here to contemplate the past and to feel connected to it. I come to refresh my spirit, to enjoy the silence that allows me to touch my own soul.”

(*Pilgrimage*, pgs.119-20)

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