



# Italian Historical Society of America Newsletter

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## **Tutto Italiano** **Benvenuto a *Tutto Italiano***

Scattered throughout the mountainous border between the regions of Piemonte and Lombardia in northwest Italy, [nine historical religious sites](#) – constructed between the late fifteenth and early eighteenth centuries – retell accounts of Christen faith. Stretching across about 120 miles, the sanctuaries and chapels, each with a different but sometimes overlapping theme, offer religious retreats providing exquisite scenic views of each area, as well as stunning architecture amid wooded hillside paths.

Most were built over ancient ruins, two dating back to religious grounds established by [Saint Eusebius](#), the mid-fourth century Bishop of [Vercelli](#) (located about halfway between Torino [Piemonte] and Milano [Lombardia]); and one attributed to Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, during his theological rule from 374 to 397. Another is built on an expansion of ancient sacred grounds. One site is noted as being built on the ruins of a fortified village that may date back to the late Bronze Age (around the twelfth century BC); and relics found at another location date back to late Roman and early Lombard times.

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2003, the nine properties form [Sacri Monti of Piedmont and Lombardy](#), with an “Outstanding Universal Value” of “symbolic spiritual meaning, ... great beauty by virtue of the skill with which they have been integrated into the surrounding natural landscape of hills, forests and lakes, ... [and] house much important artistic material in the form of wall paintings and statuary.”

A map from UNESCO shows the [locations of the nine Sacri Monti](#). The most northern is in Domodossola, about 60 miles northwest of Milano. About 20 miles directly south of Domodossola, a foothill overlooking Varallo is the location for the first and the largest Sacro Monte. Oropa is around 25 miles southwest, and 25 miles further southwest is Belmonte (Belmonte is 30 miles north of Turin). Sacro Monte di Crea is around 40 miles southeast, and completing the loop forty miles north is Sacro Monte di Orta. Sacro Monte Ghiffa is 15 miles northeast, on the shore of Lake Maggiore, and the last of the sites in Piemonte. Almost 20 miles across the lake, in Lombardia, Sacro Monte Varese winds its way up the hillside, and about 25 miles northeast, Ossuccio – the eastern most Sacro Monte offers stunning views of Lake Como. (All mileage was calculated directly over land; driving to each destination will increase the distance.)

In the late 1470s, [Bernardino Caimi](#), a Franciscan, traveled to the Holy Land to oversee management of the sacred sites in Jerusalem. Realizing the threat to the safety of the pilgrims, and the difficulty and high cost of traveling, Friar Caimi sought to make it easier for Christians to participate in a pilgrimage, and proposed building a “New Jerusalem.” Several locations were considered, and a [foothill of the Western Alps](#) was selected.

[Sacro Monte di Varallo](#) includes a Basilica and forty-four chapels that expanded on Friar Caimi’s original plan to recreate the holy sites of Jerusalem. Instead, the chapels house hundreds of life-size costumed figures and thousands of frescoes that present – in addition to Adam and Eve and the Annunciation – the life of Jesus from His birth to His death. Clustered at the end of a path that leads up the side of the foothill, each chapel reveals a segment of religious history, and together they form an ancient

religious city. Cable car service is available on a seasonal schedule.

[The Sacred Mount of Varallo: An Exciting Journey, Between Faith and Great Art](#)

[Sacro Monte di Varallo](#) (Brochure, PDF)

[Sacro Monte di Varallo](#) (In Italian)

[Come and Discover the Wonders of Varallo](#) (YouTube)

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Driving though the mountainous terrain, heading south, west, and then north, Oropa is 38 miles from Varallo. [Sacro Monte di Oropa](#) was built on the grounds where Saint Eusebius hid the statue of the Black Madonna in a cave (or among the rocks) to protect it against religious uprisings. The statue, said to be carved by Saint Luke, was [brought to Italy from the Middle East](#). The Black Madonna on view today was carved in the late thirteenth century.

Sacro Monte di Oropa is the “[largest Sanctuary dedicated to the Virgin Mary to be found in the Alps](#).” The Old Basilica dates to the Middle Ages, with a shrine for Eusebius from the ninth century and frescoes from the thirteenth century. The twelve chapels, the first built in the early 1600s, chronicle the life of the Virgin Mary – from the Immaculate Conception to her Coronation – through “polychrome terracotta statues and frescoes ...” Construction on the Upper Basilica began in the late 1880s and was completed in 1960, built to accommodate the large crowds of pilgrims. Located in a valley in a Nature Reserve (founded in 2005), the Sanctuary is surrounded by numerous mountain streams and contains a botanical garden.

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Crossing the border from Piemonte to Lombardia, [Sacro Monte di Varese](#) is about a 65-mile drive northeast. (It’s around 37 miles northwest of Milan.) In 1604, a ceremonial path was assembled leading to an ancient worship site established by Saint Ambrose in the fourth century. The Via Sacra – or the Holy Way – traveling up the slope of Mount Velate for a little over one mile, is lined with fourteen chapels, built in the early 1600s in the Baroque style, each symbolizing the [Mysteries of the Rosary](#). Scenes recreate the joy, sorrow, and glory of the rosary through life-size figures and colorful frescoes.

The path leads to the [hilltop village of Santa Maria del Monte](#), and a fifteenth chapel – decorated with elaborate carvings, frescoes and architectural details – dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The entire sacred site is within the [Campo dei Fiori Regional Natural Park](#), over 15,000 acres that includes nature reserves, caves, bogs, and a variety of flora and fauna. On weekends, a [funicular](#) offers rides from the first chapel to the top of the Sacro Monte.

[A Day Trip to Sacro Monte di Varese](#)

### Italian American Press

The Italian American Press offers a great selection of books – culture, history, memoirs, art, family, food, the supernatural, the natural beauty of Italy, and more – for every interest. Help preserve Italian American heritage and history. Support authors of Italian heritage who write about Italian American and Italian culture and let them know you found their books on the Italian American Press.

### *On the IAP in the months ahead ...*

Murder mystery on the Riviera: new English translation by Kazabo Publishing.

A tribute to Bensonhurst, New York by Joseph C. Polacco.

The life of an Italian brigand and folk hero by Dan Possumato.

### Author News

Earlier this year, [With Tears and Laughter](#), written by John Alessio, was published in

Italian; and this past summer, John was in Italy on a scheduled promotional book tour. On the day before his first signing at a book fair in Genoa, John suffered an eye injury resulting in emergency surgery in Italy, and a second procedure back home in America.

Because of the seriousness of the accident, he was not able to participate in two book tours – the second being held in Calabria, where part of his book takes place – and he had to cancel several promotional events in Puglia and also a presentation in [Joppolo](#) (mentioned in the book's prologue and epilogue).

John is still in recovery, and adjusting to the changes in his life. Although a setback, he has been able to reschedule part of his book tour in Italy, and feels confident additional opportunities await. He writes, "I'm looking forward to returning to Italy where I will once again participate in some book promotional activities."

[Read my review of \*With Tears and Laughter\* on \*La Gazzetta Italiana\*.](#)

### **Italian American Heritage Project**

Keep your Italian heritage alive. An excellent source for learning about Italian American culture and heritage is a museum specifically established to focus on the Italian American experience. Many have virtual exhibits and tours available on their websites. [List of Italian American Museums](#).

Talk with your children (no matter what age), grandchildren, other family members, friends, and educators. Tell them about the significant contributions people of Italian heritage have made to America ... and the world. [List of more than 70 contributors on \*Thirty-One Days of Italians\*](#).

Learn about Columbus. It's difficult to correct over 30 years of misinformation, and the rapid spread through digital sources is disheartening. In 2018, the Italian American Heritage Project was established to provide educational resources about Italian American history, heritage, and culture. The website also addresses the Columbus Controversy by providing facts about Columbus, how the controversy started, and why it continues. Read [What is the Truth About Columbus?](#) To understand how Columbus became an important part of American history, read [Christopher Columbus: When Did the Hero Become a Villain?](#) (Some links are no longer active.)

[Lesson plans developed from the letters Columbus wrote after his first voyage.](#)

The groups opposing Columbus Day have an organized agenda to eliminate it from America. Although the statements of truth and facts posted on Italian American websites are filled with historical facts, they are not very effective in reaching and educating the intended audience. Columbus Day has lost much of its relevance in American history; but battles for his legacy in American history are being won. Even so, the war against Columbus and our Italian heritage continues. Indigenous People already have a designated day, and Native Americans have a day and a month to celebrate their culture.

Indigenous Peoples Day – August 9

Native American Month – November

Native American Heritage Day – Friday after Thanksgiving

Visit the [IAHP website](#) to read my articles, learn about the lesson plans, see the resources I've used, and support my work. Donate for a cause – preserving Italian heritage and Italian American history and culture through education. [All donations are tax-deductible.](#)

### **On Exhibit**

[Artemisia UpClose – Artemisia in the Museum of Michelangelo](#)

Florence, Casa Buonarroti, to January 8, 2024

[The 'Artemisia at Michelangelo Museum' Show](#)

[Read my article about Artemisia Gentileschi on the Italian Historical Society of America.](#)

### **Italian American News**

[Judge Oks Saying "Italian Organized Crime" at Pharaoh's Trial but Puts Limit on "Mafia"](#) (buffalonews.com; November 6, 2023)

[Why Trump and His Allies Keep Comparing Him to Al Capone](#) (msnbc.com; November 3, 2023)

[The Meaning Behind Nick Sirianni with Italian Flag on Shirt and Hat](#) (eletees.com; October 29, 2023)

[Gaslighting: The Final Insult](#) (italic.org; October 29, 2023)

[NYC Dem Justin Brannan Faces Ouster from Italian Caucus Unless He Fights for Columbus](#) (nypost.com; October 28, 2023)

[From Agriculture to Politics, Italian-Americans Make Many Contributions in Connecticut](#) (nbcconnecticut.com; October 27, 2023)

### **News About Italy**

[Ares Modena Hypercars Reveal What Luxury Design Is Today](#) (domusweb.it/en; November 7, 2023)

[What's Going on with Italy's Supervolcano?](#) (deseret.com; November 2, 2023)

[Worldwide, Women Cook Twice as Much as Men: One Country Bucks the Trend](#) (npr.org; October 30, 2023)

[Mother Wins Court Case to Evict Two Sons in Their 40s](#) (cnn.com; October 27, 2023)

[Italian Prime Minister's Split with TV Anchorman Grips Italy as Mediaset Refrains from Firing Him after Leaked Lewd Clips](#) (variety.com; October 26, 2023)

['Leaning Tower' in Italy Closed Off Amid Subsidence Fears](#) (cnn.com; October 25, 2023)

[Giorgia Meloni's Scorecard: What Has the Italian PM Achieved During Her First Year in Government?](#) (euronews.com; October 21, 2023)

[Venice's New €5 Entry Fee Explained](#) (bbc.com; September 28, 2023)

[Italy's Battle Against Mass Tourism](#) (dw.com; August 9, 2023)

*Buon anno, buon tutto, buona vita,*  
Janice

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