

In Bologna, and Elsewhere, Muslim “Art Appreciation” Continues

by Hugh Fitzgerald



In Bologna, the Catholic diocese recently decided that for the Feast of San Petronio this year, there would be no pork-filled tortellini. Though these tortellini are the pride of Bolognese cuisine, Archbishop Matteo Zuppi (just chosen by Pope Francis to be a cardinal) decided that the Church did not want in any way to offend Muslims, as would happen, apparently, if Muslim guests had to endure even the sight of such pork-based foods.

The possibility of keeping the traditional pork-filled tortellini but also offering an alternative for Muslims, such

as cheese-based tortellini, or spaghetti Bolognese, was apparently deemed insufficient to assuage Muslim sensibilities. And years before this tortellini brouhaha, a desire in Bologna to placate Muslim demands of a quite different sort led to a similar surrender

In 47 years, from 1970 to 2017, the Muslim population in Italy, both of citizens and migrants, has gone from 2,000 (in 1970) to 1.6 million, at the beginning of 2017, and should reach 2 million by the end of 2020. In other words, the number of Muslims in Italy will have increased more than one thousand times in a half-century. Should we care? Consider just the art works – Italy is one vast repository of Western art – that are threatened, and those that already have been damaged, or made impossible to see, by the Muslims who have settled in Italy. Now that the Diocese of Bologna has insisted that the Feast of San Petronio be celebrated with pork-free tortellini, perhaps it's time to remind ourselves of what else has been done to placate Muslims in Bologna. And that has to do with Giovanni da Modena's celebrated fresco, in a side chapel of the Basilica di San Petronio itself, illustrating Dante's *Inferno*, and including a figure, labelled "Mahomet," who is shown being tormented by devils, just as Dante describes him in the 8th circle of Hell.

Italy has always been a welcoming country, open to the world, with a tradition of hospitality that is part of Italian culture, and a destination for people who come to admire the cradle of so much of Western civilization. But now, instead of those who come to admire its art and architecture, a new set of visitors has arrived, intent on remaining in Italy, but not on integrating into Italian society. This very different group of people display no interest in the history, the art, the architecture, the music, the literature of Italy, no interest in the foundations of the culture that defines the West, with the artifacts of that culture, from Roman antiquity to the Renaissance, everywhere tangible and present. Instead, these

new visitors have arrived in Italy completely indifferent or often positively hostile to all of these achievements, and have not changed their view. They came not to visit, but to settle, uninvited guests who arrived not to contribute but to help themselves to whatever benefits the generous Italian state makes available. And in taking and taking, these Muslim migrants leave less for the Italians themselves.

We know, thanks to Oriana Fallaci's memorable eyewitness description in *The Rage and the Pride (La Rabbia e l'Orgoglio, 2002)*, how Muslim migrants disported themselves in Florence, until finally dispersed after several horrific months: They "set up their tents on the sidewalk right by the Duomo (Cathedral), where they kept their shoes and slippers that in their own countries would be lined up outside the mosques. And along with those shoes and slippers, bottles of water to wash their feet before prayer. A tent placed right in front of the cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, beside the Baptistery with the golden doors of Ghiberti ... with little seats and little tables and chaise-longues and mattresses to sleep on and to have sex on, and little portable burners to cook their food, poisoning the Piazza with smoke and stink, and with a recording device always blaring at full blast, enriched with the loud nasty vulgar voice of the muezzin that punctually called the faithful to prayers, deafening the Infidels, and overwhelming the sound of the church bells...And with all that, the yellow streams of urine that defiled the marble of the Baptistery walls" – here Fallaci is referring to the the gilded bronze doors of the Baptistery, Ghiberti's famous "Gates of Paradise," one of the great masterpieces of Western art. And that was not all Oriana Fallaci saw and reported on: there were still more "yellow streams of urine, and the fetid stink of the defecations that blocked the door of San Salvatore al Vescovo, the exquisite 11th century Romanesque church in back of the Cathedral that the Sons of Allah had transformed into a latrine." It's a hellish picture, as only Fallaci in her full fury could paint, of Muslim migrants

demonstrating their special contempt for Christianity and for the Christians who had given them refuge and succor.

And there are other memorable examples of Muslim appreciation of Italian art. Perhaps you remember those Muslims, connected to Al Qaeda, who plotted in 2002 to blow up that 15th-century fresco of Muhammad by da Modena in the San Petronio Cathedral. A similar plot by Muslims, again to bomb the Basilica in Bologna, was foiled in 2006.

Even though the two plots by Muslims to bomb the Basilica were foiled in time, other Muslims have since called for the Catholic Church itself to demolish, or if not that, at least to “remove,” this fresco. This calling on the Church to do away with the fresco, rather than trying again to blow up all of San Petronio, might be considered by some as an improvement in Muslim behavior. The Church did not yield to this demand (this was before Pope Francis), and the fresco remains where it was. But in order for the fresco to be safe from attack, visitors must now stand at a greater distance from it than before, and a metal grate has been installed, too, so that it is now impossible to enter the dark side chapel where the fresco depicting the Inferno is located, and this obscures the view of this masterpiece even further. Thus the Muslims in Bologna have won; the hated fresco is still where it was, but now it is a part of Italy’s art heritage that can no longer be seen and admired because it has to be protected from Muslims. They didn’t blow it up, but they have managed to render it scarcely visible.

Even works of art in Europe whose subjects – unlike the fresco of Giovanni da Modena – have nothing to do with Islam, are still in danger for two reasons. First, given the Hadith that reports Muhammad’s statement that “angels do not enter a house that has a picture in it,” and that the word “picture” has been held to include statues as well as painted depictions of humans, much of Western art (with such obvious exceptions as landscapes and abstract art) is in permanent peril from those

Muslims who take to heart, and at any moment may decide to act upon, Muhammad's words. How much of the art in Italy – statues, frescoes, paintings – is potentially a target of Muslim attacks because of the prohibition on “pictures”? Surely a great deal. Second, even where there is no “picture” involved, such artifacts found in churches as crucifixes, reliquaries, candlesticks, hymnals and prayer books, are all Christian works and therefore have been, and always will be, targets for Muslim vandalism and destruction.

And that is exactly what happened in 2016, as in years past. Muslims continued to leave intermittent reminders of their contempt for their Christian hosts, as with the statue of San Petronio (patron saint of Bologna), vandalized in June 2017. The Christmas season in Europe is now routinely marked by Nativity scenes destroyed or even set on fire (and of course not only in Italy), along with the by-now standard destruction and desecration of precisely those “crucifixes, reliquaries, candlesticks, hymnals and prayer books,” which signify Christianity and thus deserve to be destroyed whatever the season. Urination and defecation in churches, on altars, seems to be a continuing aspect of these attacks. From the scene Fallaci described in 2002, through to 2013 where a group of Muslims defecated on an altar, and up to January 2015 when, after attacking a man praying in the chapel of San Barnaba in Perugia, five Muslims smashed and then urinated on a statue of Mary, this kind of nauseating behavior is meant to express contempt for Christianity and for Christian Infidels. Such attacks have not been limited to Italy; churches have been vandalized by Muslims on Sweden, in France (where a priest was also decapitated while saying Mass at the altar), in the U.K., in Germany. There are now more guards outside churches in Europe, at great expense to the parishioners.

Crucifixes, which can themselves be venerable works of art, have been destroyed in many different places all over Italy, and not only those found in churches. At the end of 2015, and

again, ten months later, in 2016, the imposing crucifix at Lake Fimon in the Berici Hills was smeared, the first time with green paint, the second time with red paint. Locals who pray at the crucifix every day were heartbroken. On one day in Rome, a Ghanaian Muslim went on an orgy of destruction in four different churches in Rome, at the Basilica of Santa Prassede, San Martino ai Monti, the Basilicas of San Giovanni de' Fiorentini and the San Vitale, destroying not just crucifixes, including one that dated back to the 9th century, but statues, too, and reliquaries. When caught, he insisted that "it was not right that we worship in this way." And of course, for Muslims, it isn't.

The attacks on churches in Italy, and in France, and in the rest of Europe, too, have steadily increased. By now the public is inured, rather than outraged, at what is happening. That's a dangerous development: accustoming oneself to, rather than fighting against, the sheer evil of these malign "guests." Church doors are smashed in, baptismal fonts chipped, stained glass windows broken, statues of Mary broken, even attempts to set fire to church organs, as happened to the beautiful Church of Saint-Sulpice, mark the civilizational degrading. Every day in France, according to the German news site PI-News, at least two churches are desecrated. They report 1,063 attacks on Christian churches or on such symbols as crucifixes, icons, and statues in France in 2018, marking a 17 percent increase from the year before. In February 2019, at Saint-Alain Cathedral in Lavour, congregants found their altar cloth burned and the church's crosses and statues of saints broken. And in the city of Nimes, individuals vandalized the church of Notre-Dame des Enfants (Our Lady of the Children) and drew a cross on the wall with human excrement. In March 2019, an attempt was made by Muslims to burn down the Church of Saint-Sulpice. These are just a handful of what are now more than one thousand attacks on churches in France each year. Yet how few are reported on, and fewer still arouse the outrage they deserve.

Similar increases in attacks by Muslims on churches and Christian symbols, though not quite so dramatic as in France and Italy, have been recorded in Germany, the U.K., and other parts of Europe.

But don't expect Pope Francis to bring any of this to the world's attention. He has something much more important to occupy his time. As pontifex maximus, he's been building Catholic bridges to Islam like nobody's business, now that the pesky truth-telling Pope Benedict is out of the way, and Francis is not going to let any amount of physical destruction of churches and Christian artifacts stand in his way. He has interfaith conferences to address, philo-Islamic archbishops to promote to being cardinals, solemn joint statements about "fraternity" and "harmony" to sign with Islamic clerics like Ahmed el-Tayeb, and then to solemnly announce to the world. And as long as Pope Francis sits smugly in the Vatican, steadfast in his imperviousness to Islamic reality – a regular Podsnap, forsooth! – there will be no change in the appeasement that has become under Francis the Catholic party line, no matter what atrocities Muslims continue to commit or what the Qur'an commands them to do.

In Bologna, that means the diocese banning pork-free tortellini on the Feast of San Petronio, in order not to offend Muslims. It means not making any fuss when Muslims vandalize the statue of San Petronio himself. And it means making sure that no one – Muslim or Christian – can any longer see the famous fresco of Giovanni da Modena, containing an unflattering depiction of Muhammad, that has so inflamed Muslims. The cardinal rule of the Church today is not the combative "*in hoc signo*" that these times demand but, rather, a limp-wristed "do nothing that might offend Muslims," no matter what violence we must then do to our own traditions, to our own history. We will see just how much more violence the Europeans put up with, before they finally come to their senses and cease to mollify their Muslim tormentors.

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