

A Tale of Two Cities

Judith Harris (January 08, 2016)



After a wave of scandals dubbed “Mafia Capital” has forced the mayor of Rome to resign, a police chief from Milan will tend city hall until new elections in city hall next year. In this, some see Rome as the “immoral capital” of Italy, and Milan, its moral capital. True or not, shaped by diverse history and geography, each city in its way is profoundly Italian

The match in Milan’s San Siro stadium, Italy’s largest, was slated for Halloween day, Oct. 31. It pitted the giallorossi of the Roman soccer team, Roma, so called for its yellow and red uniforms, against A.C. Milan, pronounced MEE-lahn. Entering the playing field, Roma held every advantage, for it far bested Milan with its recent average of 2.5 goals per game. But as 59,200 spectators watched, Milan’s defensive midfielder Gary Alexis Medel Soto, 38, of Chile, scored, blocking the Roman team 1 - 0. His lone goal was Medel’s first after 45 games, moreover.

No less importantly, that game took place unmarred by any nasty incident in the bleachers. Rome and Milan may be rivals, but despite their long and diverse histories, they are also comrades. On the other hand, the two cities remain rivals in other, gravely serious spheres. Writing in the leftist daily *il Manifesto* Oct.30, literature professor Alberto Asor Rosa, 82, assailed Rome as “the immoral capital” of Italy, thanks to the wave of scandals nicknamed “Mafia Capital,” which has sent dozens of City Hall politicians and ranking bureaucrats to jail.

A police chief to babysit Rome



The irony, concluded Asor Rosa, is that Rome, world capital of the cultural heritage, is so corrupt that its mayor, Ignazio Marino, albeit himself innocent of serious charges, was forced from office and replaced by a prefect not from Rome, but from Milan, Francesco Paolo Tronca, 63. Tronca, named special commissioner to babysit Rome until new elections next June, was chief of police in Milan and security overseer at Expo in Milan.

Similarly, Italy's national anti-corruption overseer Raffaele Cantone recently dubbed Milan the "moral capital of Italy" at Rome's expense. Rome, Cantone added, lacks the antibodies required for the Jubilee Year called by Pope Francis, which begins Dec. 8. Rome's Interior Minister Angelino Alfano agrees: "The Jubilee Year must function as well as Expo did." Is Milan truly the moral capital of Italy and Rome its immoral capital? The comparative histories of the two cities are widely divergent. Rome, population 2.63 million, is and always has been a Mediterranean capital, its leaders of church and state cosseted by both those from all over Italy and the far corners of the world.

Smaller Milan, with 1.25 million inhabitants, is a crossroads reaching across northern Italy and into North Europe. Milan's Celtic origin and Roman conquest Its history is generally less well known than Rome's. In the 6th century BC, Celts crossed down through the Alps to seize control near the Po River of a settlement they named Medhelan, from medhe (middle or center) and elanon (sanctuary). Later, as scholars know only now, the city came under Etruscan dominion, as Livy wrote, but was not believed. The Roman conquest followed in 222 BC, and the name Mediolanum.

Ancient Roman towers dating from the 1st to the 3d Centuries AD still survive in the heart of town. In 569, the Scandinavian-Germanic Lombards seized Milan, sacking it and ousting the Romans before pushing southward, to Umbria. Rome remained outside their reach for two centuries, but even then papal Rome fell only briefly. After the wars of the 1600s and 1700s Austria ruled, leaving a signal imprint upon the whole Lombard region surrounding Milan. The church ruled Rome as an absolute monarchy, during which the Baroque arts conquered all Europe. In Milan Habsburg rule was secular: its economy prospered, the local bureaucracy grew more efficient.

The advances in the arts were spurred by Rome, however. With the French revolution Napoleon controlled Milan, but this ended in 1815 with a return to Austrian rule, which lasted until unification of Italy. Ruling Celts, Germanic Scandinavians, Lombards, Austrians, French— no cultural comparison can be made with Rome. Even Italian unification in 1870, given Milan's geographical location, continued to foster the city as Italy's economic center. Milan and Rome in WWII In 1919 the Italian Fascist Movement was founded in Milan, with grievous results. My late friend Camilla Cederna, a courageous investigative reporter from Milan (though she called herself an "amateur"), once told me of standing outside her family's apartment building there to watch, aghast, as flames from a bomb blast spread from P { margin-bottom: 0.08in; }

Room to room, now her bedroom, now the kitchen. And it was later in Milan's Piazzale Loreto that Benito Mussolini was hanged upside down in August 1944. In June of that same year, 1944, the Allies had entered Rome, until then the famous "open city," where men and women, including Allied servicemen hunted by the occupying Nazis, found refuge in the officially neutral Vatican City.

That same year Pope Pius XII, albeit much criticized later for not being more outspoken, had appealed to the government of Hungary to stop deporting Jews. As capital of unified Italy, Rome and its bureaucracy have ruled the nation since 1870, making it particularly subject to efforts from all over the rest of the nation, and abroad, to trade favors for money; that some in the Catholic church participated is well documented. Milan meanwhile expanded its role in commerce, finance, communications and fashion. In surveys Milan's Bocconi University is still named tops of all Italian universities and, among business schools, one of the top 10 universities in all Europe. But albeit the most recent Milan mayor, the retiring Giuliano Pisapia, 66—a lawyer and an exponent of a local left-leaning coalition—is admired as exemplary, the city also has its less moral recent political history. Silvio Berlusconi helped significantly to wither away idealism when he was the dominant political figure in Rome for two decades.

Now hounded by magistrates for corruption, Berlusconi grew his media empire in Milan, thanks to his close association with Bettino Craxi, then head of the Socialist party (PSI), whose brother was Milan mayor. Their sly creation of Berlusconi's national TV network is well documented. Kickbacks were the



norm, and the judicial investigation into corruption called Operation Clean Hands (Mani Pulite), which began in Milan, led to Craxi's prosecution in 1994, and his flight to Tunis to escape jail.

Towering figures What unites both cities is, however, love for their country. Two emblematic figures illustrate this. Camilla Cederna's brother, the late Antonio, was an archaeologist from Milan who died in 1996. Cederna was the pioneering environmentalist of his time, working with all his might and intelligence for the preservation of the arts, culture and landscape of Italy. He fought indifference: "If the Colosseum trembles, everyone writes about it while the dangers to Italy, ancient and modern, are born in silence, and kept locked inside offices." What he wanted was for all citizens to be taught to understand and to care for their country.

Working in Rome in the same era was the towering figure Federico Zeri, who died in 1998. Art historian Zeri, for a time a functionary in the Culture Ministry and then director of Rome's Galleria Spada museum, was a connoisseur who resigned from the board of the Getty Villa because he objected to the purchase of an ancient statue he recognized as a forgery. A professor at the University of Rome, former visiting professor to Harvard and Columbia Universities, Zeri bequeathed his entire personal collection to the University of Bologna. In his words, "Only those who are modern respect the ancient, and only those who respect the ancient are ready to understand the necessities of modern civilization."

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