



# THE CRACO SOCIETY

## MARCH IN CRACO VECCHIO

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American communities, thanks are given to St. Joseph for preventing a famine during the Middle Ages. According to legend, there was a severe drought and the people prayed for rain. They promised they would prepare a large banquet. The fava bean was the crop which saved the population from starvation, and is a traditional part of St. Joseph's Day altars and traditions.

In the US, New Orleans, Louisiana, which was a major port of entry for Sicilian immigrants during the late 19th century, the Feast of St. Joseph is a city-wide event. Both public and private St. Joseph's altars are traditionally built. There are also parades in honor of St. Joseph and the Italian population of New Orleans, which are similar to

the many marching clubs and truck parades of Mardi Gras. In the Mid-Atlantic regions, St Joseph's Day is traditionally associated with the return of anadromous fish, such as eels and striped bass, to their natal rivers, like the Delaware. St Joseph's Day is also celebrated in other American communities with high proportions of Italians such as New York City; Buffalo, NY; Chicago, IL; Kansas City, MO; Gloucester, MA; and Rhode Island. St. Joseph's Day is also the day when the swallows are traditionally believed to return to Mission San Juan Capistrano after having flown south for the winter.

March in Craco was a time of reawakening. In keeping with the seasonal cycle followed by the inhabitants of Craco Vecchio they tended to the fields and to their spiritual needs.

**The Earth:** As the earth re-awakens, life is renewed in the fields. The warm March sun begins to caress the grain. In the fields, grain was tended and fertilized, and people began preparing the soil for vegetables and fruit to be planted.

**The Church:** March 19th—San Giuseppe, was celebrated on this saint day by having large bonfires – the largest one in the piazza. It was also customary to make “fecazzolè” – flat fried dough pieces – and bring these to the church to be offered to the poor people.

Interestingly, this feast day is also celebrated as Father's Day in Italy (as it is in Spain and Portugal). But the day also has other far reaching connections to customs and celebrations throughout the world.

In Sicily, where St. Joseph is regarded by many as their Patron Saint, and many Italian-

A common element to these events is St. Joseph's Bread (Pane di San Giuseppe). But it takes many forms from the fried “fecazzolè” of Craco or zeppole of Sicily to baked breads that are elaborately shaped and sculpted to represent crosses, staffs, wheat sheaves, braids or images of St. Joseph.



## BASILICATA – A BRIEF HISTORY



Basilicata, also known as Lucania, borders Campania to the west, Apulia (Puglia) to the north and east, and Calabria to the south. The regional capital is Potenza. The region is divided into two provinces: Potenza and Matera.

Basilicata is the most mountainous region in southern Italy, with 47% of the area mountainous, 45% hilly and 8% is made up of plains. Geological features include the volcanic Monte Vulture and the seismic faults in Melfi and Potenza in the north and around Monte Pollino in the south. Much of the region was devastated in an 1857 earthquake. There was another major earthquake in 1980. The combination of the mountainous terrain with the rock and soil types makes landslides prevalent but the problem is compounded by the lack of forested land. The area, while originally abundant with dense forests, was made barren during the Roman era.

The variable climate is influenced by the coastlines (Adriatic, Ionian and Tyrrhenian) and the region's physical features. The climate is continental in the mountains and Mediterranean along the coasts.

Human presence in Basilicata dates to the late Palaeolithic Age. From the 5th millennium BC people built settlements on rivers leading to the interior (Tolve, Tricarico, Alianello, Melfi, Metaponto). The first known stable market center of the Appennine culture on the sea is near Maratea, dating to the Bronze Age. The first Iron Age communities lived in large villages on plateaus bordering the plains and the rivers, in places fitting their agricultural activities. In ancient times the region was known as Lucania, named for the Lucani tribe, the first known settlers. Their name was derived from *lucus*, Latin for forest. The first colonists, coming from the Greek islands and Asia Minor, date to the late 8th century BC. The Greeks established a settlement first at Siris and then Metaponto which led to the conquest of the whole Ionian coast. After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, Basilicata fell to German rule, which ended in the mid-6th century

when the Byzantines reconquered it. They also renamed the region as "Basilicata", from the Greek term *basilikos*, meaning "imperial".

In the 11th century Basilicata, together with the rest of southern Italy, was conquered by the Normans. Later it was inherited by the House of Hohenstaufen, who were ousted in the 13th century by Angevine domination. This led to the establishment of a feudal system that hampered economic growth. After a century or so under the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, Basilicata autonomously declared its annexation to the Kingdom of Italy on August 18, 1860 with the Potenza insurrection. It was during this period that the State confiscated and sold off vast tracts of Basilicata's territory formerly owned by the Church. Since the owners were a handful of wealthy aristocratic families the average citizen did not see economic and social improvements after unification and poverty continued unabated. This gave rise to the phenomenon of brigandage when the Church encouraged the local people to rise up against the nobility and the new Italian State. This strong opposition movement continued for many years.

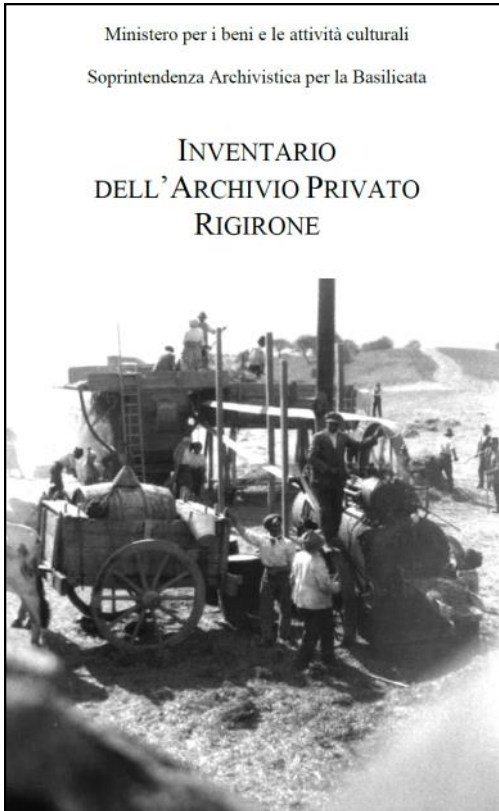
After the Second World War things slowly began to improve due to land reform but many of Basilicata's population had emigrated or were in the process of emigrating, which led to a demographic crisis from which it is still recovering. Meanwhile, Fiat Italian automobile manufacturer established a huge factory in Melfi, leading to jobs and an upsurge in the economy. In the same year the Pollino National Park was established. Agriculture consists mainly of grains (especially wheat), which represent 46% of the total land use. Potatoes and maize are produced in the mountain areas. Olives and vines are also commonly found. A quality wine called "Aglianico del Vulture" is produced. Among industrial activities, the manufacturing sector contributes with 64% economic activity while the building sector contributes 24%. Recently, new production of oil provided 11% of Italy's domestic demand.



**Greek Influence**—The ruins of the [Temple of Hera at Metaponto](#) on the Ionian Coast are signs of the Greek influence in the area that is also known as [Magna Graecia](#).



## THE RIGIRIONE ARCHIVES—CRACO REPORTS ABOUT THE BRIGANTI



The Rigirone Archives, a gift from Don Andrea Rigirone, provide us with amazing historical insights into Craco Vecchio. Among the items in it is a handwritten report covering events from 1864-1872 by Archimedes Rigirone, who was the Mayor during that period. He provides correspondence relating to threats and violence perpetrated against Craco. It includes references to attacks of the “Cappuccino Band”, headed by Giuseppe Padavano who was from Craco and other individuals that encountered brigands.

Rick Rinaldi reviewed the documents and provided an extract of some key elements which follow:

*Pasquale De Bona was a self-admitted informant of the Briganti led by Cappuccino. A witness, Nicola Matera tells of how 4 or 5 years earlier, while hunting, he found himself away from the rest of his group of hunters and encountered De Bona. As he arrived near Contrada Terra di Croce, a man appeared above where he stood. The man asked Matera if he was alone or with the rest of the group. Not knowing who the man was the hunter paid no attention to the question. A year later, while at the farm "Masseria" belonging to Costantino Rigirone, he saw the man again and the man told him that when he asked him the question,*

*the brigands were hiding behind him and some of them wanted to come out to kill him.*

*Nicola Parziale also talked about Pasquale De Bona and his relationship with the briganti. Parziale told me that, having rented land from the boss of De Bona, Signor Maronna, and due to a matter involving a gun, he was threatened by the briganti, hence wanted to give up the rent. De Bona assured him that under his responsibility he wouldn't be harmed and moreover De Bona would endeavor to have any ill feelings ended. In fact, one day Cappuccino and others, after the conventional signaling from De Bona, appeared and met with them.*

*Similarly, another witness Magistro attested that De Bona confessed to have always had relations with the Briganti to protect "the Padrone" that he served from harm. Not dissimilar is the testimony of Iacovini who also attributed De Bona's influence behind the fire that was started at a goat pen.*

*Nicola Matera, a priest, on various occasions along with others, while they were returning from the hunt at Contrada Serra di Croce, encountered the above-mentioned De Bona on top of a ditch where 13 briganti were hiding. De Bona was acting as a spy for them and after a few days he told the priest that it was because of him that they were spared. He claimed to have advised the briganti not to come out of the ditch, since there was a large group of hunters.*

*Giuseppe Baldassare alias "Cocciuto" (Stubborn), says that Pasquale De Bona had brought revolvers and ammunition to the briganti. Lastly, the witness Giuseppe Baldassare, indicated his awareness of the relationship that De Bona had with the "malfattori" (malefactors, criminals). While going to Ferrandina for judicial examination four or five years prior, together with De Bona, the latter started saying that at the inquiry, if they egged him on too much, he would reveal more, but he didn't explain what he would say nor about whom.*

*Leonardo Episcopio said the briganti on various occasions had De Bona summoned, since he was the only one trusted by Cappuccino. I add that Pasquale De Bona is viewed by all as a trusted keeper of the briganti and because we are aware of the details it*

*remains for the interrogation of him by the Signori on the matter. Nothing else remains to be acted on, so we forward these documents to those responsible for safe-keeping, in proceeding with the interrogation of the accused by the magistrate of Ferrandina.*

*Additionally, there was mention about Vincenzo Melidoro, Francesco Antonio Celano, Giuseppe Umbellone, Giuseppe Gesualdi, and Carmine Gorgoglione who were suspected due to various and notable clues. These arise from commentary of D'Ambrosio, Manghise, and Mormando who evidently saw them with the band of Cappuccino. This was also corroborated by the witness Armento, who while adding to the facts, affirmed his desire for discretion for fear of harm in his own domicile.*



### **Cappellacci dei briganti - The Brigand's Hats**

The briganti era had a tremendous impact on Italy that would be expressed in many ways. The most enjoyable is of course food and that is best expressed by Italians as pasta. The word cappellaccio comes from cappello (hat). The suffix has a negative connotation, which matches the idea that they are worn by lawless characters. According to [Zanini De Vita](#), this pasta is typical of Molise, the Italian region sandwiched between Abruzzo and Puglia. The name of this pasta shape evokes tales of travellers being ambushed and robbed by men wrapped in dark cloaks, their faces shadowed by tall hats.

## PRAYER CARDS OF OUR TRADITIONAL SAINTS

The people of Craco have long venerated many saints. Some of the saints are recognized by many other people and celebrated widely.

But unique to Craco are two saints that have been much beloved and cherished over the centuries in the town and in America. When the people immigrated, feast day celebrations for these two saints, the Madonna della Stella and San Vincenzo, have continued in Craco and New York City to this day.

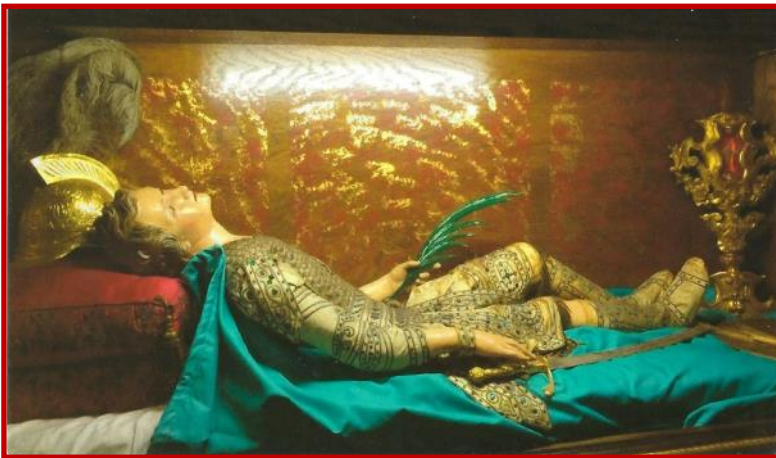
Now, available to members are new prayer cards representing the images of these saints. Two versions of San Vincenzo cards were created. The new version of the prayer card (top image below) shows the statue of San Vincenzo in the Shrine Church of the

Most Precious Blood in New York City and has the English version of the prayer on the reverse. The card with the upright image of the processional statue that exists in Craco (below right) has the prayer to San Vincenzo in Italian on the reverse side.

The new Madonna della Stella card (below left) shows the newly restored statue in Craco with the English and Italian language prayer on the reverse.

Copies of these cards are available to all members. To request them please contact us at:

[memberservices@thecracosociety.org](mailto:memberservices@thecracosociety.org)



### Prayer To San Vincenzo

Patron of Craco – Lucania, Italy

O strong and glorious San Vincenzo our distinguished patron, who had the honor of giving your life for loyal testimony to Jesus Christ, turn your loving gaze on us who by wise design of providence, are, the unworthy, fortunate guardians of your relics. Teach us, oh, generous Martyr, the tenacity to do good in the way in which you serve as model, having preserved good intentions even when you were violently torn from the quiet life of our family. Communicate with our souls a little of the great love which you showed evidence of in your lifetime. Pray to the Lord Jesus that because the generosity of your love of the Cross, that our hearts will be evermore enkindled. Present to Jesus, sweet friend of our souls and crown of Martyrs our earnest desire to support courageously, like you, every suffering of our lives.

Amen

*Courtesy of The Craco Society*

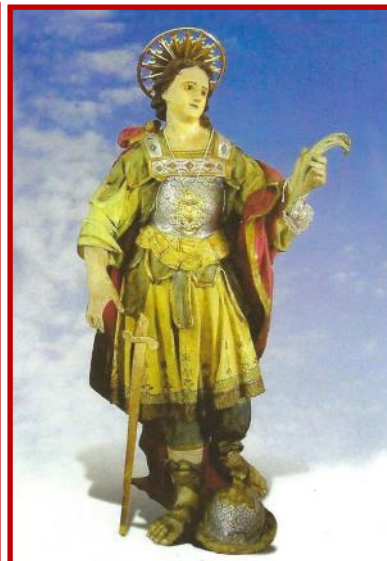


### MADONNA DELLA STELLA CRACO (Matera)

You are Divine Majesty  
Have mercy on me  
And grant to me  
The grace I ask of you.  
You are the fountain of mercy  
You are the pure Virgin  
To the Heavens you can raise us.

Sei divina Maestà  
La grazia che ti chiedo  
Fammela per pietà.  
Fammela tu Maria  
Che sei fonte di pietà  
Sei Verginella pura  
E fino al cielo ci puoi portar.

MADONNA DELLA STELLA  
CRACO (Matera)



### San Vincenzo Martire Venerato in Craco

O glorioso Martire  
della Chiesa  
San Vincenzo  
Luce di Santità  
ed esempio di grande  
fede e di forza,  
pensando alle Tue  
sublimi virtù  
nasce in noi  
il grande desiderio  
anche se ci sentiamo  
così deboli e fragili.

Perciò a Te ci rivolgiamo,  
o grande Martire San Vincenzo,  
e ti preghiamo di ottenerci  
da Dio, sommo bene,  
di essere sempre fedeli  
alla Sua volontà  
e di professare e praticare  
la nostra fede  
con grande coraggio e fermezza,  
in modo da conseguire  
del Paradiso  
dove tu vivi,  
coronato dalla gloria  
del Martirio.

Amen

*Courtesy of The Craco Society*

- San Vincenzo -

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