

Wise Men Melchior and Balthazar Banned in Northern Italian City

Joey Skee (January 04, 2010)



A story about racism in contemporary Italy so absurd it could be true.



Just when the ugliness and absurdity of [contemporary Italian xenophobia and racism](#) [2] have reached an all-time low, a northern Italian city has banned the Wise Men Melchior and Balthazar. Padaniapoli passed a town ordinance on November 27, 2009, two days before the first Sunday of Advent, ordering the removal of all representations of the two royal figures believed to have visited the Christ Child in Bethlehem.

Mayor Fiorenzo Bava Beccaris, of the Northern League party, stated in a town hall press conference, "Italy is being overrun by illegal immigrants who are undermining our culture. Head scarves, kebabs, drumming. [We don't want a multi-ethnic Italy!](#) [3] We must act to save Italy and Italians from this onslaught, from this contamination. And that is why the city of Padaniapoli has taken this bold action to prohibit these two from Africa and the Middle East. They are not welcome in our city."

The names of [the Magi](#) [4] were first mentioned in the eighth century. Over time, Western art came to depict Casar as white, Melchior with a turban, and Balthazar as black.

The ordinance bars the public display of Melchior and Balthazar in all public institutions and places. Miniature crèche (presepio) figures were no longer sold in local shops and the city's famed Nativity scene set up Piazza Maggiore consists of the Holy Family and a solitary Caspar bearing his gift of myrrh.

"We don't want immigrants for the Epiphany!" read a recent headline of the local weekly Il Grido della Stirpe (The Cry of the Race). In his front-page editorial, Domenico Trombetta, a self-professed racist and admirer of Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, wrote, "A [Nativity scene with a black Jesus and Holy Family is a useless act of provocation](#) [5], just like the suggestion not to have a Nativity scene at all, in order not to offend Muslims. We will keep our traditional presepio and it will be all-white!"

Since the Northern League took political power of this medieval city in 2007, it has implemented laws that many in Italy have seen as xenophobic and racist. The first act was to officially change the town's name from Civitavecchia di San Benedetto to Padaniapoli. [Saint Benedict](#) [6], also known as "The Moor," was a black slave born in Sicily in the sixteenth century. The Northern League has used the name Padania, the name of the Po River valley, as part of [its separatist agenda](#) [7].





including [banning restaurants and shops serving non-Italian cuisine](#) [9] in the historical center, [separate buses](#) [10] for Italian citizens and immigrants, the use of the vigilante [Italian National Guard with its Fascistic uniform](#) [8], and most recently, “[Operation White Christmas](#) [11],” in which police have been carrying out house-to-house searches for illegal immigrants. Mayor Beccaris has even requested that [Catholic priests be Italian citizens](#) [12]. The [constructing of mosques is banned](#) [13] within city limits.

The approaching Feast of the Epiphany is presenting vexing problems for Padaniapoli. Its ruling on the two Wise Men has received international condemnation and ridicule. And now a theater group named Compagnia Teatrale Modotti is preparing a mass rally of costumed performers dressed as Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar to enter the walled city through its seven medieval gates on January 6th. The performance is being billed as a simple gesture of imagination reaffirming the reality of a multi-ethnic and multi-racial Italy.

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