

September 11, 2012

Italian Time

September 10, 2012

Last evening I entered Italian time. Not the time zone, but the way of the clocks, pace and general absence of preoccupation with efficiency. I have yet to find a clock working in a train station.

Following a day of travel by bus and ferry boat, I arrived in Nuoro in the afternoon. I spent the afternoon on the bus with Elna, a traveler from Ireland, in English conversation, my first in over a week.

Nuoro is a surprisingly large city in the interior, served by many roads and the little narrow gauge rail. About four o'clock, after snack, I made my way with typical and cheerful difficulty to the station, "la stazione", to find the door open and no person available. Paper schedules posted within the station posted times and places, by all appearances my planning was correct. Finding the "Hotel Grillo", proudly listed as established in 1960, within a convoluted quarter mile from the station, I made residence for the evening.



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Following refresh, the evening began in Nuoro about six, at which time I made my way back to the station, retracing my steps and citing landmarks to avoid getting lost the next morning. The ticket office was now staffed by three guys my age, no doubt railway lifers. Pointing at maps and naming my city of destination the fellows looked quizzically at each other, while I began to get that “uh-oh” feeling. One fellow went to the phone, while the two others spoke in rapid staccato, interrupted with an occasional “Americano”.

All three then converged to inform the American tourist that the train would not be leaving the next day, despite any printed schedules or Internet information. The guys could see my disappointment and went to lengths in support.

OK. This is Sardinia and there is really no schedule, that part was planned properly. The evening moved into Italian time, the promenade up and down the cobbled streets, no cars. The people of Nuoro were all out for the evening, old folks watching children play in the park, teenagers flirting and playing with phones, parents relaxing while grandmother rocks the baby buggy.



Time must mean something different to these people, surrounded by old and sometimes ancient buildings, with history that dates for five millennia. In the American west, time is marked by the short history since the Gold Rush of 1849, a building of one-hundred years is old. Here everything is old, one-hundred years is new, not remodeled. One looks at a crumbling building that may be five hundred years, a church that may be one-thousand years, remodeled or repaired each century. The buildings are stone and

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mortar, not wood, fire proof with slow, slow decay. Growing up in this environment must affect their concept of time, just as it does in California, where time is business and business is religion.

