

TRAVEL HISTORY CULTURE PEOPLE FOOD

ABRUZZISSIMO

MAGAZINE



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Peter Tom-Peteresen, *Porta Fiora* staircase in Civita d'Antino, Imago Museum, Pescara. Read the story on page 5.

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Abbateggio. Photos by Anna Lebedeva. Read the story on page 14.

ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE

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*Periodico diffuso in via telematica non
soggetto a registrazione ai sensi degli
artt. 3 e 3 bis della legge n. 103 del 16
luglio 2012.*

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Ciao a tutti!

Easter time is always special in Abruzzo. It still has a strong religious meaning for many here and the solemn processions of the *Settimana Santa* are attended by both young and old, especially in rural areas. But you don't need to be religious to appreciate the joy of spring celebrations. *Pasqua* here is as much about devotion as it is about merry traditional feasts. The shops are filled with chocolate eggs, fragrant *colomba* cakes, and various baked goodies with cheese and more cheese. Restaurants are busy taking bookings for *pranzo di Pasqua* and bakeries are churning out trayfuls of *fiadoni*.

In our Spring Special issue you will find four traditional Easter recipes you can try at home (be warned, some of them are not for the faint-hearted!). We also talk about a beautiful, little-known festival, *La Festa dei Talami*, that has been celebrated in **Orsogna** for many centuries. I invited the mayor of **Abbateggio** to tell us about the past and future of his town, and we recommend a few things to do and see, so you can plan a visit to this beautiful corner of Abruzzo. Very few people know that for two decades, in the late 1800s-early 1900s, the town of **Civita d'Antino** was a thriving artists' colony where many Scandinavian artists came to find inspiration and create masterpieces. Read our story about it on page 5.

Ever wondered what it would be like to move to **Sulmona** and live your Italian dream? We interviewed an American couple who did just that. Read their story on page 21.

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Happy Spring and enjoy the issue!

Alla prossima!

Anna Lebedeva, Founder & Editor



EASTER EVENTS IN ABRUZZO

Some of the most beautiful and oldest traditional festivals in Abruzzo are celebrated over Easter. *Madonna che scappa in piazza* in **Sulmona**, *Processione del Venerdì Santo* in **Chieti**, *Festa dei Talami* in **Orsogna** and many others attract thousands of spectators. Many small towns and villages (e.g., **Roccamorice**, **Gessopalena**, **Arischia**, **Atessa**) will host *La Passione di Cristo* performances – theatrical re-enactments of the Passion of Christ, staged by local youngsters during the Easter week. See [our round-up](#) of events to include in your festive plans this year.

WATER CRISIS IN AGRICULTURE

The year 2022 was the driest in the last 500 years and cost Abruzzo's agriculture about 180 million euros in damages, reports the regional farmers' association Coldiretti. It registered a decrease of more than 40% in maize and animal fodder production, 20% for vegetables, especially potatoes, up to 60% for olives, and 50% for honey production in the region. The drought situation is worsened by water losses through inefficient, outdated infrastructure in the region.

700-KILOMETRES HIKING TRAIL AROUND ABRUZZO LAUNCHED

Another spectacular walking itinerary, *Il Cammino d'Abruzzo*, has been launched (we wrote about the Grans Sasso hiking trail last month). This one covers the entire region: 700 kilometres on the hills, mountains, and coast passing through villages, hamlets, and the big cities of **L'Aquila**, **Chieti**, **Teramo**, and **Pescara**. The region's three national and one regional parks are also included in the itinerary, as well as many nature reserves. The trail has been mapped and divided in 38 legs which can be done as one walk or separately on foot or mountain bike. So far, 450 kilometres, from Pescara to Scanno, have been waymarked with the rest to be completed soon. For more details see [Il Cammino D'Abruzzo website](#).



THE MOST POPULAR MUSEUMS

A study of visits to the region's museums conducted by Openpolis named the most popular among 84 in total in Abruzzo. The Fortress of **Civitella del Tronto** (30,000 visits per year), Hermitage of Santo Spirito a Maiella (20,170 visits) in **Roccamorice**, Piccolomini castle in **Celano** (17,767 visits; photo above), and the Museum of Bizantine and Medieval Abruzzo in **Crecchio** (15,000 visits) are the only four structures that exceeded the national average number of visitors. Overall, Abruzzo is the second-to-last in Italy (before Molise) in terms of visitors in relation to the number of museums. Even though the numbers were for 2021, the pre-pandemic figures were still significantly below the national average.



EUROPE'S LARGEST FENNEL FACTORY

A new impressive agricultural facility for the transformation and processing of fennel has opened in **San Benedetto dei Marsi**. Its 6000 square metre floorspace, with a processing capacity of about 150 tonnes per day, makes it the largest factory of its kind in Europe. The family-run business *Opoa Marsia* founded 30 years ago will employ 180 people at the new facility. Italy produces about 80% of the world's fennel with the cultivations on the Fucino Plain (on the photo) among very few in Europe producing the fragrant bulbs all year round.



BIG PIANO FOUNTAIN IN PESCARA

Pescara has a new "phantasmagorical work of international standing," as it has been called by the media. The new Big Piano fountain is nine metres in diameter with giant piano keys at its base that lets you create tunes by stepping on them. The music will be paired with cascading water and changing lights. The fountain consists of six kilometres of electric wires, 200 LED lights, 100 sensors, 200 valves, 14 pumps, 100 water jets, nine computers, and eight loudspeakers. Designed by Italian-American designer and inventor Remo Saraceni, who was born in Pescara, the new interactive structure has become an instant hit with locals and tourists alike. Read more [here](#).

DID YOU KNOW?

THE GHOST TOWN OF LUCREZIA BORGIA

Castiglione della Valle is an abandoned village in the municipality of Colledara, in the province of Teramo. A picturesque medieval square, 20 small houses damaged by the earthquakes of 2009 and 2016-17, and magnificent views – very little remains from the former glory of the *Castrum Leonis Vallis* fortified hamlet. Spectacular frescoes by the revered Renaissance masters Andrea De Lizio and Pompeo Cesura, a student of Raphael, are slowly decaying in the crumbling church of San Michele Archangelo.

The hamlet's history is linked to the famous Lucrezia Borgia and her turbulent life of palace intrigues and vendettas. It is possible that, pursued by the army of her brother, Duke Cesare Borgia, Lucrezia – together with her second husband Alfonso of Aragon, son of the King of Naples – arrived to **Castiglione della Valle** in 1499. The Duke's soldiers besieged the hamlet, but the neighbouring castles of Castelli, Arsita, Isola del Gran Sasso, and Tossicia sent reinforcements, defeating the aggressors. The couple's sojourn in the safety of the hamlet was brief and Alfonso of Aragon was killed in Rome in 1500. The story about a blonde princess and her husband staying in the hamlet was found by a local doctor and history enthusiast Ulderico Martelli in an old manuscript. While it doesn't align with the generally accepted versions of Borgia's and Alfonso of Aragon's lives, it is not impossible that the notorious noblewoman, alone or with her royal husband, visited **Castiglione della Valle** at some stage.

In the early 1990s until 2008, a beautiful festival with a re-enactment of the battle for Lucrezia Borgia was held in the historical hamlet, but the earthquakes put an end to any hope to revive this beautiful corner of Abruzzo.



THE SCANDINAVIAN PAINTERS OF CIVITA D'ANTINO

By Antonio Bini

In the late 19th century, the small mountain village of Civita d'Antino in L'Aquila province became an important destination for many talented Scandinavian artists. Their paintings offer a fascinating glimpse of the village, traditions and a way of rural life that is long gone.

It all began with Danish painter Kristian Zahrtmann. Like other artists of his time, Zahrtmann sought to enrich his education by travelling in Italy, looking for places beyond Rome and the Roman countryside. Back then, Abruzzo — with its rugged picturesque landscapes, the myths of brigands, ancient customs, and popular beliefs — was shrouded in somewhat of a mystery. It is probable that Zahrtmann's young model, Ambrose, suggested that the Danish artist visit his Italian homeland; he jumped at the opportunity to explore something new.

Photo above: Civita d'Antino.

HOME OF THE DANISH PAINTERS

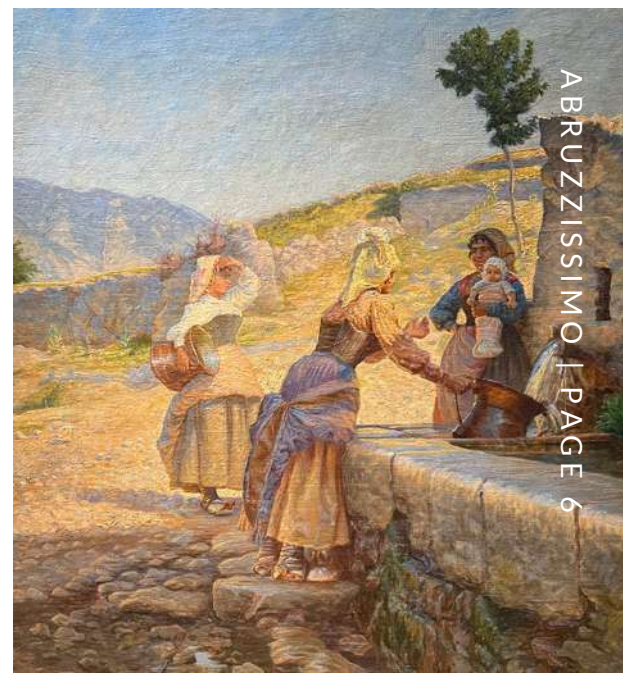
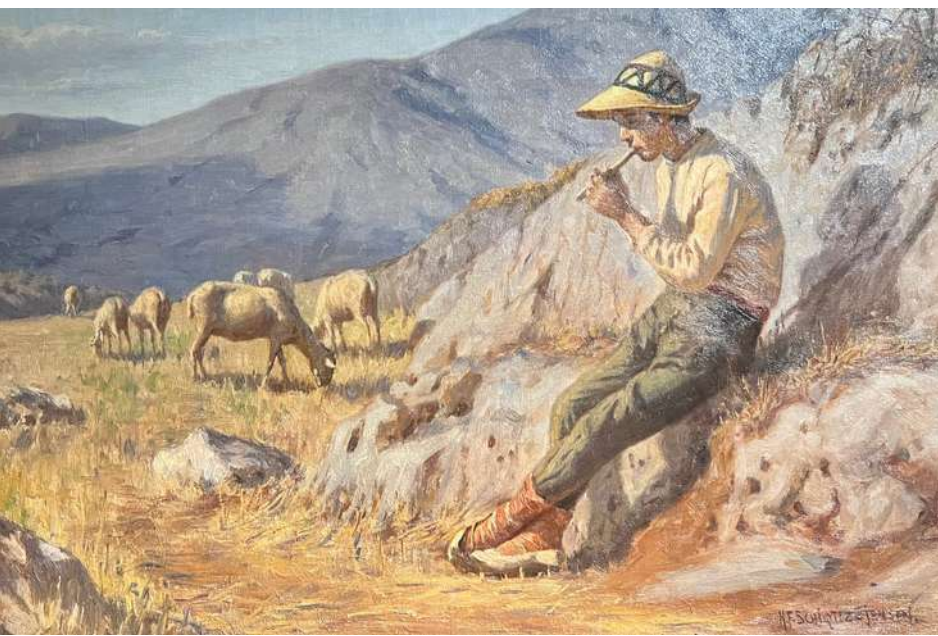
He arrived in Civita d'Antino in the early summer of 1883 taking lodgings at the Cerroni guesthouse. Immediately, he felt welcomed by the small community, which then numbered around 2,000 people, establishing a close connection that lasted for many years to come. Zahrtmann returned to the village year after year, always accompanied by old and new art students and artist friends. The Cerroni's house, overlooking the scenic Porta Flora entrance to the village with picturesque stone steps, over time became known as the "home of the Danish painters."

In his letters to friends, Zahrtmann revealed a warm affection for the village and even favourably compared it to Paris and Greece. "I love the mountain and the temperament it gives to its inhabitants. You should watch the young workers coming back from the fields, carrying the hoes on their backs and singing the Saltarello melodies. You would agree with me that such a marvellous chorus has never been heard in a theatre. This happens because everybody sings from the heart, and their joy rises in the air like a gleaming bubble..."

OPEN AIR ART SCHOOL

Civita d'Antino, sitting atop a natural terrace among the mountains, gave him a chance to disconnect from the world and stay in contact with nature. He enjoyed being far from

Photos (from top): Kristian Zahrtmann, *Self-portrait*, 1914; Knud Sinding, *A girl by the window* (in the Cerroni house), 1910; J. M. Fasting Wilhjelm, *Young women at the fountain in Civita d'Antino*, 1894; G. F. Clement, *Shepherd playing the flute in Civita d'Antino*, 1900-1902. All in the Imago Museum, Pescara



the weight of his family affairs and the conformism of the art elite in his native Denmark, which considered him in opposition to the educational system approved by the Copenhagen Academy.

Coming from Denmark, where the highest altitude rose to about 200 metres, Zahrtmann was attracted by the mountains, which surround the village at 360°. He also related to the multimillennial history of human presence here, which over time had built the village where traces of the past met with the ruins of the original walls of ancient Antinum, an ancient watchtower, the church of Santo Stefano, and the secluded hermitage of the Madonna della Ritornata, a spiritual sanctuary for the communities of the entire valley below. There were paths and trails, the colours of the wheat fields, the vineyards, the pastures – they all filled the small world of Civita with life.

Knud Sinding, Porta Flora staircase in Civita d'Antino, 1911. Imago Museum, Pescara

The village was transformed into a sort of workshop where artists painted en plein air, from morning to dusk, while the local community lived its everyday life, with women bringing water from the fountain outside Porta Flora, children playing, peasants heading to work in the fields, shepherds with their flocks, religious celebrations, and traditional rites.

Young women turned into models, wearing their traditional costumes, simple and richly coloured, posing for the artists. And it was enough just to lift your head to see the crown of the mountains above the Roveto Valley, which often ended up on many canvases of the visiting Scandinavian artists.

Thanks to Zahrtmann, from year to year the number of Danish and Scandinavian artists in Civita was steadily increasing, becoming the Italian location of an art school. This is the reason why Civita d'Antino stands out from other Italian towns that influenced artists – even the famous Portofino – which were just one-time stops on the Grand Tour.



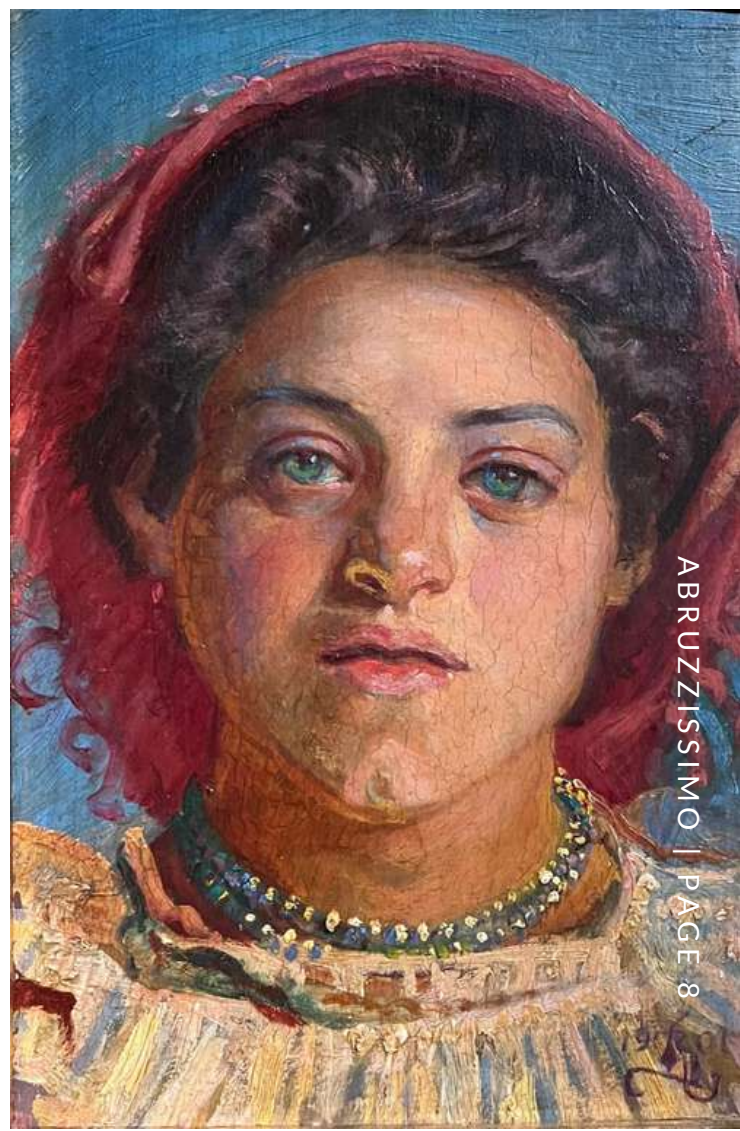
The connection with the Abruzzese village grew stronger and, in 1902, the municipality of Civita gave Zahrtmann honorary citizenship. At that time, the village was still isolated and could only be reached along a mule track. The proper road was built in 1910.

CIVITA D'ANTINO IN COPENHAGEN

Zahrtmann's productive 25-year-long love affair with the village spurred the artist to organise an exhibition dedicated to his Italian summers. "The Selected Collection of Works from Civita d'Antino by Danish Painters" opened in Copenhagen in February 1908, displaying 124 works by the artist himself as well as his friends and students. It was an unprecedented cultural event linked to the period of the Grand Tour of Italy, where the fable of a small mountain town was told, describing Civita in every detail, from every angle, reflecting personal interpretations of the individual artists. Zahrtmann, by now at the height of his artistic maturity, extolled the Civita d'Antino of the Danish painters, pushing aside his other works inspired by more famous Italian locations of the time, including Portofino, Pistoia, Sora, and Ravello.

In those years, in the Danish capital, Zahrtmann started the construction of his new house-studio, which he named Casa d'Antino, as an external plaque still reminds us today.

Photos (clockwise from top): Kristian Zahrtmann, Wedding procession in Civita d'Antino, 1896; Portrait of a little girl, 1901; Outside of the Seminary walls in Civita d'Antino, 1904; Imago Museum, Pescara



IMAGO MUSEUM IN PESCARA

In 1906, a fundraising campaign was launched to “improve the beauty of the town” and to realise Zahrtmann's ideas, who contributed financially, to having trees planted in the village's main square and near the public washhouse.

The devastating earthquake of 1915 brought the Scandinavian art school tradition to an abrupt end and the decline of Civita d'Antino set in. Kristian Zahrtmann died in Copenhagen in 1917, but he did not forget the people of Civita in his will, leaving Diomede Cerroni, the owner of his beloved boarding house, 15,000 crowns. Every winter, until the World War II, small payments were given to the town's poor families with children from the interest accumulated on the donated sum.

Today, Civita D'Antino counts just a few dozen inhabitants. The trees planted during the golden years of Zahrtmann's art school are still growing strong and there is a square named after the Danish artist, but the splendid Cerroni house that once hosted Scandinavian painters, remains closed for most of the year as the current owners live in Rome and only return for a week or two in summer.

In recent years, numerous works by Zahrtmann and other Scandinavian artists of his school have been brought back to Abruzzo. An important collection of 130 works created in Civita d'Antino is on display in the Imago Museum (address: Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, 270, Pescara). The paintings by Kristian Zahrtmann, P.S. Krøyer, Peter Hansen, Joakim Skovgaard, Knud Sinding, and others artists, at a distance of so many years, offer a thrilling illusion of the village and its people coming back to life. They represent the disappeared beauty of the peasant and pastoral world of Abruzzo's hinterland.

For more information, see the Civita D'Antino website and the books about the village and the Scandinavian art school: *Negli anni del sole e della luce* by Antonio Bini and *Anders Trulson è qui. Breve storia del pittore svedese rimasto per sempre tra le montagne abruzzesi* by Antonio Bini and Sergio Bini. Both books (in Italian and English) are available on Amazon.it or on the publisher's website.

Antonio Bini is the author of several books on history and traditions of Abruzzo.

P, S. Krøyer, Threshing in Abruzzo, 1890. Imago Museum, Pescara





FESTA DEI TALAMI OF ORSOGNA

By Anna Lebedeva

Twice a year, the town of Orsogna celebrates the Festival of *Talami*. What started as a humble devotional ritual in the Middle Ages, continues to this day as a heart-felt tradition loved by both old and young.

On the morning of Easter Tuesday (*martedì in albis*) the town of Orsogna fills up with a lively buzz. Thousands of spectators gather along the main street waiting for the *Festa dei Talami* to begin with a parade. Six floats, or *talami*, move along the streets, cheered on by the ecstatic crowds. Each *talamo* is a *tableaux vivants*, a re-enactment of a Biblical scene. They might seem naïve and even crude to the modern eye of an outsider, but this tradition of theatre and popular devotion goes back to medieval times. Some say the festival has been celebrated annually for 500, maybe even 700, years and has been only interrupted by the two world wars and the global pandemic.

Photo above: a *Madonnina* on a *talamo* float in Orsogna

ORIGINS

The feast of Our Lady of Refuge, more commonly known as the *Festa dei Talami*, began in the medieval church of *Madonna del Rifugio*, which has a fresco depicting the Virgin Mary with a black face and her cloak wrapped around devoted parishioners. The fresco was considered miraculous: at dawn, every Easter Tuesday, the Madonna performed the same miracle: her eyes moved and the dark face changed colour from black to white. Every year, the faithful gathered in the church for a vigil, praying and anxiously awaiting the miracle. Here, according to some historians, the first *talamo* was born, when a small group of devotees posed motionless, re-enacting the moment of the Madonna's apparition. The church was destroyed during World War II, but the rite of *talami* continued.

At first crude and simple, this devotional tradition gradually became a sort of popular Christian theatre. Over the centuries, these liturgical dramas moved outside the church, as the

vernacular language used by the ordinary illiterate folk during the performance was considered unsuitable in a place of worship. Eventually, the festival has taken the shape of the *Talami Tuesday* and became an unmissable event for everyone in Orsogna.

In 1907 Anne Macdonell, an English noblewoman and author, travelled through Abruzzo and saw the *Festa dei Talami*. She later described the parade in her book *In the Abruzzi* (for more see page 23). "In the foreground are the personages of the scriptural story to be represented – nowadays nearly always children. As the *talami* are carried on the shoulders of men, who wear the robes of their confraternities, the little actors are tied on securely, though, indeed, they sit or stand with much solemn dignity, and would never disgrace the occasion by toppling over," she wrote. "...After the procession of these living pictures there commonly follow a pair of oxen drawing a cart laden with sheaves, while youths mounted on it throw handfuls of ears of corn among the people. There is a wild scramble for these *sacre spighe*, which bring luck to all, and which mothers hold to be of special efficacy in

A talami procession, 1961



certain children's maladies. In old times – there are still men and women who remember it – bands of peasants used to follow with picks and spades, pretending to dig, and to scatter grain in imaginary furrows, and hunters, too, with guns, who feigned to follow the game, and fired blank shots.”

MEMORIES

Orsogna is a small town, which means most locals, at some point of their lives, have participated in the *Festa dei Talami* either as actors or platform bearers. Every true Orsognese has a memory of the festival from the past. “I remember, when I was little, before the 1960s, all *talami* were carried on the shoulders by men,” recalls Angelo Catano, an artist who has lived in Orsogna all his life, in a video recording posted on the festival’s Facebook page. “All children on the *talami* were dressed in their best clothes, often sent by relatives who emigrated to the United States. Each town district has an *osteria*. The owners would come

Alpini veterans carrying a *talamo*

out to greet the procession and ply the *talami* bearers with wine, so the platforms became more shaky after each stop... I recently came across a photo from 1962 or 1963 where I am at the centre of the *talamo*, with my hands raised. On the left of the float, on a balcony, there is a little girl, Valeria, who later became my wife. Behind me, you can see a building being constructed, which some years later became my home.”

TODAY

The parade of *talami* has remained largely unchanged, although now tractors are being used to pull the wooden platforms with the actors. Every year, six town districts choose a scene from the Old and New Testaments and give a meaningful title to their *talamo*: “Tobias and Sara. The courage to open up to love”, “David and Jonathan. The fidelity of friendship”, “The young Mary visits her elderly cousin Elizabeth. The meeting of two generations”, “Esau and Jacob. The difficult task of growing



up together: physical strength and astuteness". The preparations start weeks before the event: actors are chosen, costumes are made, backgrounds are painted by local artists. The central element of each *talamo* is the Virgin Mary, or *Madonnina* as she is affectionately called, observing the scene from above impersonated by a little girl. "The girls who are not afraid of heights and comfortable standing on the little ledge are chosen for this role. They are securely tied up to prevent them from falling," the mayor of Orsogna Ernesto Salerni said, reassuring me, when I spoke to him to learn more about the history of the festival.

The tractors slowly move along the streets with the last, seventh, *talamo*, carried by the *Alpini* veterans (the Italian Army's mountain infantry). When they reach the central square in front of the town hall, the meaning of each scene is explained to the public.

The *Festa dei Talami* is held twice a year: Easter Tuesday and the evening of *Ferragosto*. The detailed programme is published a few days before on the festival's Facebook [page](#). If you can't make it to the event this year, [watch this](#) recorded live broadcast from 2017 to enjoy the cheerful atmosphere of the celebration.

Photos courtesy of Talami Orsogna - Quadri Biblici Viventi.

Festa dei Talami processions from different years





SAVING ABBATEGGIO

By Gabriele Di Pierdomenico

Clinging to a rocky spur, the small town of Abbateggio in the province of Pescara boasts some of the most beautiful panoramic views in the region. With a population that's dropped to just a few hundred people over the last century, it has seen better times, but the future is looking up.

Abbateggio was first mentioned in the *Chronicon Casauriense*, a precious manuscript that allows us to reconstruct the medieval history of central-southern Italy. It was composed in 1182 by the monk Giovanni di Berardo to tell the story of the monastery of San Clemente a Casauria. The foundation of the village can be traced back to the early Middle Ages, between 983 and 987 CE, when fortified settlements were being built across the territory.

Photo: Abbateggio

Throughout the centuries, it was under the Normans, the counts of Anjou, and the Crown of Aragon. It was ruled by the powerful families of Acquaviva, Orsini, the De Phrygiis Poenatibus de Tolfa counts, until, in 1583, it was purchased by Margaret of Austria, the daughter of Emperor Charles V, and remained under the rule of the Farnese family until 1731 when it returned under the rule of the Kingdom of Naples. During the Fascist dictatorship it was suppressed as a municipality, regaining its autonomy after World War II.

Abbateggio was the birthplace of the monk follower of Celestine V, Mariano d'Abbateggio, an educated man, trained in theology and philosophy. He held the office of general of the Celestine congregation and in 1316-1317 ruled the city of L'Aquila with the title of the Camerlengo of the Holy Roman Church.

SHEEP, SILK AND BITUMEN

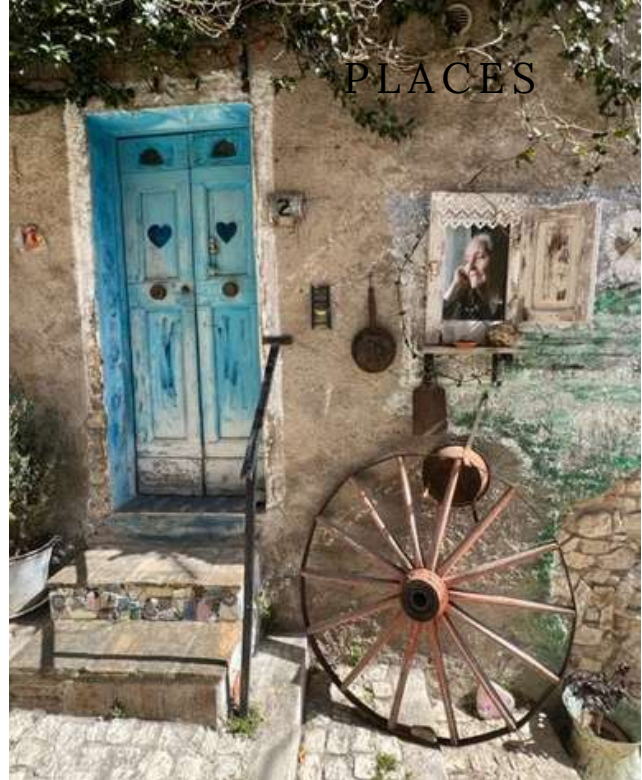
Until the end of the 19th century, Abbateggio's economy was essentially linked to agriculture and sheep farming. But few people know that in the 1600s-1700s, silkworm farming for silk manufacturing was a flourishing business there. A street called Via Filasetta (Silk Row) still exists in the historic centre of the town as a reminder of those days.

At the end of the 19th century a number of natural tar mines opened below the village, along the valley of Fosso Pilone, which provided secure jobs. Many locals worked there mining tar which was used for making asphalt for pavements and roads all over Italy. Even today in Milan, there are still some streets with asphalt bricks produced in Scafa – the bitumen extracted in the mines of Abbateggio and neighbouring municipalities – which have the SAMA – *Società Abruzzese Miniere Asfalto* – marks stamped on them.

Today, in the old part of the village, photographic boards are displayed telling about this important part of our history and a small open-air museum, *Ecomuseo della Valle del Lejo*, has been set on Piazza Majella where visitors can see the original rail tracks, a train, and a wagon used in the mines to transport the bituminous rock to the surface.

Photos: (from top) the church of the Madonna del Carmine; a street in the town; a square with a *belvedere* viewing point





HARD TIMES AND BRIGHTER FUTURE

In the late 1950s, with sheep farming in decline and the asphalt mines shutting down, villagers started emigrating to Belgium, France, Canada, and the US. Our miners were in high demand in Belgium where the coal mining industry was growing fast and the salaries were good. Depopulation of Abbateggio continued until the 1970s, emptying the historic centre of the town where only older people remained. Later, declining birth rates added to the problem.

Over the last twenty years, many things have been done to reverse the trend. Today, many houses in the old part of town have been bought and renovated by the British, Americans, Swedes, Russians, and Italians from big cities as second homes. Tourism has helped to revive our local economy: we have ten hospitality businesses that can accommodate up to 160 visitors. Cultural initiatives such as the Majella National Nature Literature Prize, now in its 26th edition, have contributed to making Abbateggio known across the country and around the world. The town's entry into the Club of the Most Beautiful Villages (*I Borghi Più Belli d'Italia*) in 2011 has brought many tourists. We have a strong hope that the town will stay alive, new residents will arrive, and we will be able to save our centuries long traditions.

Gabriele Di Pierdomenico is the mayor of Abbateggio.

The church of the Madonna dell'Elcina; the 16th century statue of the Madonna



RETURNING TO THE ROOTS

By Anna Lebedeva

When I went to Abbateggio to take photos for this article, I stopped at Café Abba on the central piazza. Samanta, the chatty barista, told me that she had moved to the village from Montesilvano for the job and is loving the people, the views, and tranquillity. The bar had closed a year ago, but a wealthy businessman, Donato Parete, stepped in to reopen it. "He is doing a lot for Abbateggio," Samanta told me. "He is renovating that palazzo over there," she points at a beautiful building across the road, "To open a luxury spa."

Abbateggio-born, Milan-based Parete, has invested generously in his native land and envisions a big future for this small village. His grandfather, *nonno* Donato Parete, started producing extra virgin olive oil more than 100 years ago in this area. Today, their family farm, La Valle dei Parete, apart from oil, also produces wine and farro.

"I have seen Abbateggio change, grow in an extraordinary way," says Donato Parete, who spends a lot of time in his native village. "There is still much to be done as we need to make the village more alive all year round." He has bought a dozen houses and has a lot of projects on the go to revive Abbateggio.

I don't think I have ever seen a village with so many *belvedere* terraces and benches. In Abbateggio, they are around every corner, inviting you to sit down and admire the vistas. And, while the streets were quiet when I visited, they didn't look abandoned or neglected. The whole village felt like it was just resting before the busy summer days, when part-time residents return, festivals recommence, and the streets fill with bright geraniums and a lively buzz again.



THINGS TO SEE AND DO IN ABBATEGGIO

Compared to many other places in Abruzzo, the town doesn't have exceptional landmarks, yet wandering along its old windy streets you will discover some little treasures that will take you back in time. There are many *belvedere* terraces (viewpoints) with benches, from which you can take in spectacular vistas. The one in Piazza Celestino V is the best from which to enjoy the panoramic view of the valley below, as well as the magnificent Gran Sasso and Morrone mountains.

OLD CHURCHES

Walking in the historical centre you will find the recently renovated small **church of the Madonna del Carmine** that once stood outside the fortified walls of the town. The **church of San Lorenzo** dedicated to the town's patron saint is awaiting reconstruction. It has a 14th century façade and portal while the interior is Baroque (like so many other churches in the area that were destroyed or badly damaged in the devastating Majella earthquake in 1706). The highest point of the town is crowned with the **church of the Madonna dell'Elcina**. It was built in local stone in 1927 on a place of an older chapel, but inside you will find a beautiful 16th century painted terracotta statue of the Madonna. The street leading up to the hill is called *Salita dei due pastorelli* to remind us of the local legend about two mute children who, while grazing a flock of sheep, saw the Virgin Mary sitting on a tree. She wished a church to be built on the hill. The children ran home where their mother was delighted to hear them speak for the first time, spreading the news of the miracle. The trunk of the legendary tree and the painting of Madonna found on the spot of apparition are still preserved in the church.

PALAEOLITHIC MUSEUM IN VALLE GIUMENTINA

One of the most important prehistoric sites in Italy – Valle Giumentina – is just a short drive from Abbateggio. This large plateau, at an elevation of about 700 metres above sea level, was a lake until



A street in Abbateggio

it dried up about 40,000 years ago. Archaeologists found numerous flints made by Neanderthals who hunted and lived in the area. A small open-air museum with six dry-stone huts displays a collection of prehistoric tools found on the site and illustrates the lifestyle of local farmers in the 18-19th century. There are several picnic tables where you can chill out surrounded by spectacular landscape and history. The museum is open on weekends in summer.

FESTIVALS

Since 1992, Abbateggio hosts *La Festa del Farro*, a festival that celebrates the local grain *farro* (Emmer wheat) that has been cultivated here since the pre-Roman times, and which has been rediscovered in recent times. The festival takes place in August, on the feast day of San Lorenzo, and attracts thousands of visitors that come to the village to enjoy traditional *farro* dishes, fireworks, and music. For future festival's detailed programmes see the organisers' Facebook [page](#).

You can buy local *farro* all year round from one of the producers, family-run farm [Sapori di Bea](#). (Via Scalelle, 23, Abbateggio. Tel.: 0039 085 8572359) or in the Abba Café on the central piazza.

On September 8, a religious procession walks from the church of the Madonna del Carmine through the historical centre with women dressed in traditional costumes carrying copper vessels filled with grains. It is a small, but heartfelt festival that fills the town with a lively buzz.

Every first Saturday after January 17, the feast of Sant'Antonio Abate is celebrated with a traditional performance of Lu Sant'Andonje. Local youngsters dress up to re-enact scenes from the saint's life finishing the evening with a pyrotechnical dance of a giant papier-mâché doll (*Il Ballo della Pupa*) to the delight of the town's kids.

WALKS

There are some spectacular walks in the municipality of Abbateggio that combine history with the natural beauty of the area. The circular walk around Valle Giumentina is suitable for anyone and runs for about six kilometres through pastures, wheat fields, and woods. This area is part of the Maiella National Park and sightings of roe deer, red deer, and wolves are not unusual here. On the trail you will spot a few old *capanne* (dry-stone huts) once used as shelters by shepherds and farmers.

Directions: follow the signs for Valle Giumentina from Abbateggio; park at the end of the paved road and continue towards the Palaeolithic Museum. From there follow the waymarks *Anello di Valle Giumentina*. You can make a deviation to visit the medieval hermitage of San Bartolomeo in Legio (signs for *Eremo di San Bartolomeo*; but it requires sturdy shoes and some fitness, as there are a few steep climbs).

Photos by Anna Lebedeva.

Photos: a street in Abbateggio; a door of an old palazzo





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ABRUZZISSIMO
MAGAZINE

LEAVING LAS VEGAS . . . LOVING ABRUZZO

By Linda Dini Jenkins

Clair and John Fareio are both originally from Las Vegas (Nevada, USA). After long careers in the United States, they decided it was time to pack up and move to Italy where they would put down new roots and enjoy “their time.”

For more than 25 years, Clair owned and managed Social Register, a private professional business organization that hosted monthly business, social, and philanthropic events. John had been in the construction industry for over 40 years, and also owned an Italian restaurant. But the lure of returning to the land of his ancestors – and gaining citizenship – brought the couple to Abruzzo.

“We had both travelled extensively throughout Italy for many, many years, and moved to Abruzzo in 2020,” says Clair. “We came for three reasons: to enjoy it as tourists, to reconnect with John’s family, and to help him obtain his Italian citizenship.”

THE JOURNEY BEGAN IN ROME

Before arriving in Abruzzo, they spent six months in the Monteverde neighbourhood of Rome, working with an attorney to help finalize the documents needed for John’s citizenship and, obviously, enjoying all the wonders of Rome. Like many Americans who seek Italian citizenship via *juris sanguinis*, John was advised to bring his documents to a local town hall, rather than go through a US Consulate office, so they eventually headed for Pettorano sul Gizio, where John’s grandfather was born and raised. In fact, John’s genealogy chart shows that his family (the Trombettas) was living in Pettorano sul Gizio as early as 1758.

“That’s how we stumbled upon Sulmona. We needed to go to the municipality in Pettorano sul Gizio, which is just about 10 minutes away,” recalls Clair. “And Sulmona just felt right.”



Clair and John Fareio

They rented a B&B from a gracious woman named Martha and during their stay began to discover all that Sulmona has to offer. “We instantly fell in love with the community,” says John. “So much so that several months later we moved here.”

SULMO MIHI PATRIA EST

Martha introduced them to a family who had a beautiful home in the historic centre of Sulmona. “We met this family and fell in love with them, their apartment, and the people of Sulmona,” says Clair. “We moved from Rome and signed a lease to rent their fantastic place. Since then we have met many people in our new community, both expats and locals.”

When they first arrived, and John was working on his citizenship, he was required to have a minimum of a four-year lease. So they decided to rent for the first four years (with a four-year renewal option) in



Sulmona

A NEW ITALIAN FAMILY

“We have met so many amazing folks here,” observes John. “You meet one ex-pat who introduces you to other ex-pats who introduce you to even more people. It’s a fabulous way to organically meet many fun and like-minded people from all over the world. They become your Italian family.”

Because they both have a passion for traveling — and especially for the communities, streets, and villages that are off the beaten path — they started a Facebook page called [Backstreet Destinations](#), where they can include family and friends in their journey of exploration.

While neither was fluent in Italian when they arrived, they immediately hired a private tutor who came to their home once a week and gave them private Italian classes which have been extremely helpful; it’s an ongoing process.

They are living life on their own terms here. John got his citizenship, they feel the stresses of their old lives falling away, and some days the biggest decision is where to have lunch or dinner. Welcome to Paradise, they say.

Linda Dini Jenkins is a freelance writer and travel planner. She is the author of [Up at the Villa: Travels with my Husband](#), and an upcoming memoir, [Becoming Italian: Chapter and Verse from an Italian American Girl](#).

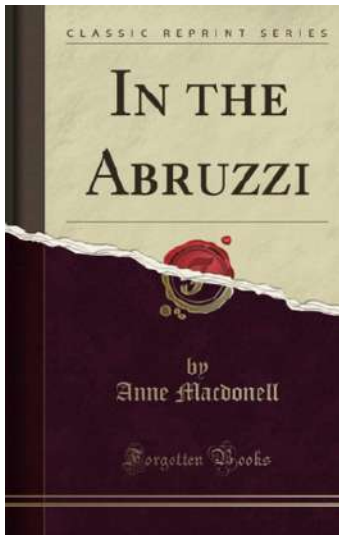
order to have some flexibility in case they decided to move elsewhere in Italy. But they’re staying put for now.

The exit from Las Vegas was not entirely smooth. Deciding where to spend your retirement is a very personal decision, and uprooting is not for everyone. Some friends and family (they have six grown children between them, and a few grandbabies) were sure they had gone off the rails. But they ignored the sceptics and decided that Abruzzo was where they wanted to spend “their time.” They sold their cars and their house and had a limited-time-offer on their furnishings to the kids, after which things would be sold or donated to a veteran’s charity. When they departed for Sulmona, they had 12 suitcases full of belongings and a feeling, like the poet Ovid (who hails from this city), that it was their country.

PLAN B

Clair and John consider themselves fortunate to have found a beautiful home in the historic centre of Sulmona. But soon after, they purchased a small Italian apartment just a few minutes away from the one they live in, also in the *centro storico*. “We did some remodelling and added all new appliances, a new bed, linens, and a completely stocked kitchen,” says Clair. “We have a very large family in the US, so this [apartment](#) is ideal for family and friends — and we also rent it out occasionally.”

The couple extols the benefits of living in Sulmona to anyone who will listen. They are walking distance to absolutely everything — restaurants, cafés, an opera house, all kinds of shops, and even grocery stores. Every Wednesday and Saturday there is a large market in the Piazza Garibaldi. Easter celebrations and the summer *Giostra* festival there are indescribable, they say. And, importantly, the city is a perfect jumping-off point to get to the beaches, the mountains, and even Rome.



IN THE ABRUZZI by Anne MacDonnell

Written by English noblewoman and traveller Anne MacDonnell, the book describes her trip through the lands of Abruzzo in 1907. In the first few chapters, McDonnell writes about the region's turbulent history, brigands, saints and religious traditions, folklore

and superstitions. She takes the readers to Tagliacozzo, Celano, Sulmona, Ovindoli, Castel di Sangro, and Scanno to meet the frugal and hard-working people living there, who preserve their centuries-old traditions passed on through generations. McDonnell tells old legends, recounts local poetry and songs, visits religious festivals, and recalls the wisdom that the old farmers shared with her.

At the time MacDonnell authored her book, the Abruzzi still carried a reputation for banditry, but she debunks it showing that the region is safe, yet still untouched by the modern world. "What the future has in store for a people of hardihood and vigour, but limited ambitions, who can prophesy?" she wonders and insightfully predicts that, "the Abruzzesi will be much less easily turned into a nation of hotel-keepers than the Swiss."

While more than 100 years have passed since MacDonnell's visit, some things have changed little and many passages in the book still ring true. "This mountain people, courteous and dignified, have none of the expansiveness we are wont to think of as Italian. They are proud and diffident, not given to explaining themselves, and not at all ready to believe that a stranger can be interested in them. They are more curious about you than they can possibly conceive you to be about them – though their curiosity is mainly limited to one point, namely, What have you come for? Your presence in their midst is a perpetual surprise," writes MacDonnell.

It is a fascinating read for those who love Abruzzo that documents the region's past with a reverence toward its untamed beauty and magic.

Black and white reprints of the book are available on [Amazon](#), but, unfortunately, they do not offer quality reproductions of the 12 watercolour illustrations by Amy Atkinson.

Antonio Del Beato Corvi

“Lu Principe Licche”

Traduzione in vernacolo sulmontino
del romanzo
Il Piccolo Principe
di Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
con le illustrazioni originali



LU PRINCIPE LICCHE by Antonio Del Beato Corvi

Most of us have read *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint Exupery. But have you read the novella's version in the dialect of Sulmona (*sulmontino*)? Dialect is one of the most distinctive elements of a community's culture. In Abruzzo, including the Peligna Valley, local dialects have been slowly disappearing, being replaced with Italian. New generations are losing the use and understanding of the language spoken by their grandparents. *Lu Principe Licche* is an attempt to recover the half-forgotten dialect of Sulmona and demonstrate its richness and beauty.

The translation is by Antonio Del Beato Corvi, a dialect poet and author from Sulmona. It adds to the list of more than 300 languages and various dialect versions of Antoine de Saint-Exupery's novella, one of the world's most popular texts, along with the Holy Bible and Koran.

Available from the [publisher](#) and on [Amazon](#). A version in the dialect of Teramo, *Lu Principe Zulle* has been also [published](#).



Easter

RECIPES



CORATELLA, TORCINELLI, AND MAZZARELLE — OFFAL DELICACIES FROM ABRUZZO

By Anna Swann

Quinto quarto, or the fifth quarter, is normally associated with Roman cuisine. Apparently, in the past, a slaughtered animal was divided in four parts: the noble cuts went to the tables of aristocracy and clergy, less expensive bits were sold to the lower social ranks. The working class could only afford the offal, *quinto quarto*.

Similarly, in Abruzzo, offal dishes remind us of the times when the noble cuts of slaughtered animals went to the rich sharecroppers, while the peasants were left with nothing but scraps and entrails. These ancient dishes, despite their humble origins, have become delicacies nowadays and are served not only in traditional *trattorie*, but in some of the most sophisticated restaurants in the region, especially, around Easter time.

Look for *coratella*, *torcinelli*, and *mazzarelle* on the menu if you want to try offal dishes. They are not unique to Abruzzo, as you can find similar recipes in Calabria, Molise, Puglia, and Lazio, but would have different names as well as variations in cooking methods depending on the location.

Coratella is a mix of lamb or kid's heart, liver, lung, kidneys, spleen, trachea, and sweetbreads, all cut into small cubes and quickly cooked in a frying pan. In the province of L'Aquila some *giardiniera* (pickled vegetables) and a splash of white wine vinegar are added to make *coratella di agnello all'Aquilana*. It is traditionally eaten as an appetiser at Easter. *Coratella* mix can be bought in supermarkets or at local butcher shops (*macelleria*) to cook at home.

Torcinelli (or *tuncenelle* in the Chieti area) are sausages made from natural casing stuffed with *coratella*, herbs and chilli pepper and tied up with intestine lining used as string. Certainly, not the prettiest-looking dish around, but if you like strong, gamey flavours you will enjoy this one. In the old



days, it took a long time to prepare *torcinelli*: the intestines had to be cleaned and soaked in a salt and vinegar solution for several hours. Today, many traditional butchers sell the natural casing and can also prepare *torcinelli* to order. Pan fry them, cook in a tomato sauce and white wine or grill — as always, each family here has its own method, which they believe to be the most authentic.

Mazzarelle is another offal dish, typical for the province of Teramo, with a long history. Read more about it and see the recipe on page 27.

WHERE TO FIND TRADITIONAL OFFAL DISHES

LA SQUISITA

This vendor from the Teramo province is famous for its excellent *porchetta* but also makes *mazzarelle* during the Easter period. Their stall at the covered Mercato Muzii in Pescara is open on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday morning. **Address:** Mercato Coperto, Piazza Muzii, Pescara

RISTORANTE PODERE MARCANTÒ

An excellent traditional restaurant where you can taste *mazzarelle* at Easter. They also serve *coratella*. **Address:** SS80, 26, Mosciano Sant'Angelo.

AZIENDA AGRICOLA COLLE ROSA

This small family-run farm makes all kinds of local delicacies, but only those in the know place their orders for *torcinelli*, which are sold frozen for most of the year. Contact Claudia or Cristiana via [Facebook](#) or WhatsApp at 0039 338 4136254 to inquire. **Address:** Via Colle Rosa, 5, Serramonacesca.

AGNELLO CACIO E UOVA

By Terri Mastrobuono

I was curious to learn a traditional Easter recipe and chose this one – lamb and eggs prepared *in umido*. Although its origins are unknown, its use of two symbolic representations of Easter and rebirth – lamb and eggs – are noted. To find an authentic version of the recipe, I went to a master: my neighbour Manola. She is consummate artist. Not only in her official capacity as hairdresser, but as a cook, baker, and avocational painter. Her desserts and breads are especially beautiful presentations, even if created only for friends and family. Manola resides with her husband and daughter in the *centro storico* of the small hilltop town of Castiglione Messer Raimondo, where her shop is also located.

Agnello cacio e uova can be eaten as part of the *secondo* part of a meal or included in small portions as part of an *antipasto caldo* (hot appetizer).

Recipe courtesy of Manola Giancola, proprietor of *Parrucchiera Manola*.

INGREDIENTS

Serves 6

- 1 kg lamb meat from the leg or shoulder, cut into small cubes
- 1 onion, chopped
- 7 eggs
- 1 cup of white wine
- Seasonings to taste: can be any combination of rosemary, parsley, bay leaf, salt and pepper
- 170g *pecorino* cheese, grated



- Olive oil for frying (but not too much, as lamb meat can be fatty)
- 1 – 2 cups of water

PREPARATION

Fry the onion in olive oil until it starts to turn slightly golden.

Add the seasonings (adjust later to taste).

Add the meat to fry and mix all well as meat is frying.

After the meat browns, add the wine and cover and allow the meat to absorb the wine.

A few minutes later, when the wine is absorbed, add the water and cook slowly on low heat – you want it to cook long, but stay moist. Meat should not dry out.

While the meat is cooking, whisk the eggs lightly and add cheese. When the water is absorbed, add the egg mixture.

Mix well, stirring often so that egg coats the meat. Dish is done when the eggs are well cooked.

MAZZARELLE OFFAL ROLLS FROM TERAMO

By Anna Swann

Mazzarelle (not *mozzarella* cheese!) are lamb offal rolls wrapped in endive leaves and tied with lamb intestinal casing. Don't be confused by its meaty contents – this dish is supposed to be served as a first course for Easter lunch, not as a *secondo* like other meat dishes. There are two schools of thought on how *mazzarelle* should be cooked – in a frying pan or stewed in a tomato sauce – and disciples of both insist that their method is the best for emphasising the texture and flavour of the dish. Try cooking *mazzarelle* both ways and decide which one you prefer.

Finding lamb casings might be a challenge unless you live in Abruzzo. So you can use cooking string instead or secure the roll wraps with tooth picks (I am running a risk of being declared a heretic by the people of the Teramo province if they read this suggestion!).

INGREDIENTS

Makes about 10 mazzarelle

- 400g lamb heart, liver, and lungs, chopped into small pieces
- 200g lamb casing, cleaned and washed
- 10 leaves of endive or lettuce (choose stronger, thicker leaves)
- 400ml white wine
- 1 medium onion
- 2-3 garlic cloves
- A small bunch of parsley and marjoram
- A few sage leaves
- Some olive oil
- Optional: a sprinkle of nutmeg



PREPARATION

Finely chop the aromatic herbs, garlic, and onion, adding nutmeg (if using) and add to the lamb offal, mixing well. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Leave the offal in the fridge for 20-30 minutes to absorb the flavours.

Meanwhile, separate and wash the endive or lettuce leaves. Dry them with a paper towel.

To make rolls, place 1-2 tablespoons (depends on the size of the leaf) of the offal mix in the centre of each leaf. Wrap the leaf around the filling to form a roll and tie it with a few strings of casing and make a knot. Repeat procedure for each leaf.

Generously drizzle a large flat pan with olive oil and place the *mazzarelle* in it, making sure they don't sit on top of each other and have a little space between them.

Start cooking over a low flame, so that the rolls brown on each side.

Pour in the white wine and let it evaporate while cooking. Continue cooking for 45 minutes, adding a few splashes of water to make sure that the rolls don't stick to the pan. Serve hot.

Alternatively, you can cook the *mazzarelle* in a tomato sauce.

PIZZA RUSTICA DOLCE

By Anna Swann

I came across this recipe some years ago in a Facebook group dedicated to Abruzzo's traditional cuisine. Someone posted a photo of a handwritten page saying it was an old family Easter recipe from the Teramo province. The group has since closed, but I still have the recipe and make the pizza on special occasions. It might seem strange to the modern palate, but combining sweet dough with a savoury filling of cheese, *prosciutto*, and *mortadella* was not so unusual in the old days in Abruzzo. The savoury *pizza rustica* is more common and easier to find in bakeries, while its sweetened version is rare nowadays.

Like many old recipes, the original list of ingredients includes lard, but you can replace it with unsalted butter.

Optional: For a heartier filling and more texture, add small pieces of Italian-style sausage and chopped up green olives.

INGREDIENTS

For the dough:

- 400g flour
- 3 whole eggs and 3 yolks (keep the egg whites for the filling)
- 2 tbsps sugar
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 200g lard (or unsalted butter), melted

For the filling:

- 50g *mortadella*
- 50g *prosciutto*
- 200g *ricotta*, drained and softened with a fork
- 100g Parmigiano Reggiano (or pecorino) cheese, grated
- Egg white, whisked (for brushing)



PREPARATION

Add three whole eggs and three yolks, lard, sugar, a pinch of salt, and baking soda to the flour and knead the dough until it is smooth and elastic. Divide it in two parts, wrap them in a dish towel and leave to rest for an hour.

Prepare the filling: finely chop the *mortadella* and *prosciutto*, add the *ricotta* and Parmesan cheese and mix everything.

Slightly beat the egg whites that you set aside earlier. Add to the filling, mixing well. The mixture should be homogeneous and spreadable. If you want to make it a little softer, you can add a drop of milk.

Roll out the dough into two disks (make one slightly thicker than the other).

Grease a pan with lard and line it with the thicker disk of dough. Spoon in the filling and press down lightly. Cover with the remaining dough and pinch the edges to seal. Poke with a fork in the top of the pastry and brush with egg white.

Bake it at 160°C for about an hour. Eat it hot or cold.

SOFFIONE CAKE

By Abruzzo With Gusto

Cheese is one of the main ingredients for celebratory Easter dishes, and *soffione* is one of the most popular traditional cakes made with ricotta. While you can find *soffione* all year around in many traditional bakeries, it takes centre stage during Easter feasts.

You can make mini-*soffioni* using muffin tins, but the traditional version is the large ring-shaped cake like in this recipe. You will need a non-stick tube cake pan 26 centimetres in diameter.

Want to learn about traditional recipes and foods? Join one of Abruzzo With Gusto's food tours! See more details [here](#).

For more Easter recipes see our e-book Recipes from Abruzzo available in our [online shop](#).

INGREDIENTS

For the dough:

- 300g unbleached all-purpose flour
- 100g sugar
- 60 ml extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 large eggs
- 2 tablespoons of milk
- a pinch of salt
- Some icing sugar for dusting

For the filling:

- 4 large eggs, separated
- 100 g sugar
- 450g *ricotta*, well-drained
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- Zest of 1 lemon
- 1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- a pinch of salt



PREPARATION

In a bowl combine the flour, sugar, and salt. Add the olive oil, milk, and eggs. Mix and knead the dough until smooth. Form it into a ball, cover with a plastic wrap and let it chill in the fridge while you make the filling. Pre-heat the oven to 180° C.

To make the filling, whisk the egg yolks, sugar, and salt. Add the drained *ricotta*, lemon zest, vanilla extract, and baking powder and beat until the mixture is fluffy.

Beat the egg whites until they form stiff peaks. Fold the egg whites into the *ricotta* mixture, one spoonful at a time.

Butter a tube cake pan. Roll the dough into a circle 2-3 cm bigger than the pan and about 3mm thick. Place it over the pan. With sharp scissors cut a cross in the centre of the circle, over the tube part. Press the dough to line the pan. Spoon the filling over the dough, distributing it evenly. Finally, fold the flaps of the pastry inward, avoiding covering the central part.

Bake for 45-50 minutes, until slightly browned and the filling has puffed up. Let it cool and dust with icing sugar.

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