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TRAVEL HISTORY CULTURE PEOPLE FOOD

ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE

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Cocullo. Read the story on page 13.
Photo by Anna Lebedeva.

LEFT:

Cocullo. Photos by Anna Lebedeva.

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.

We are back after a little winter break — although, it is still not quite wintery in Abruzzo. The snow on the mountain peaks is almost gone as temperatures are fluctuating between 14 and 19 degrees Celsius, making it feel more like spring than winter.

This month we take you to visit Cocullo, a fascinating small town famous for its ancient festival of snake catchers in honour of San Domenico. You will also learn about the beautiful Valle Giumentina and its ancient history, the elaborate murals in Pacentro that take you back in time, and an artisan who uses 300-year-old looms to handweaver magnificent textiles. On page 21 you will find Linda Dini Jenkins' beautiful story about a young Welsh expat who is dedicated to helping the stray cats of Abruzzo and has spent all her savings to build a cat sanctuary (if you can, please, make a small donation via the link in the article).

Because February is Carnival time, we are treating you to a story about the delicious, fried, greasy and, oh, so tasty, *dolci di Carnevale* and a recipe for *mignozzi*, a typical Carnival delicacy from Abruzzo.

I am really excited about this year and have many interesting stories planned for you: we will explore little-known towns, meet artisans dedicated to preserving Abruzzo's traditions and people reviving small mountain towns, visit magnificent churches, and walk along spectacular nature trails.

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Enjoy the February issue!

Anna Lebedeva
Founder & Editor

CARNIVAL RETURNS TO FRANCAVILLA AL MARE

Francavilla al Mare is gearing up for the much-anticipated 69th edition of *Carnival of Abruzzo*, from February 4th to the 13th. The town will be awash with vibrant colours and lively music as locals and visitors come together to celebrate.

At the heart of the festivities is *Patanello*, a character based on an old mischievous local shoemaker. Three masked parades with music and colourful floats will take place on February 4th, 11th, and 13th, winding their way through the streets from Piazza Stazione to Piazza Sirena.

Since 1958, this annual extravaganza has evolved into a cherished tradition and is cementing its status as a must-see event on the global carnival calendar. The full programme is published here.

ABRUZZO EXPORTS SURGE

Regional news outlets have reported that Abruzzo's exports surged, with a notable 13.7% growth (an increase of €906 million) in the first nine months of 2023, placing it fourth nationally. The automotive and pharmaceutical sectors emerge as key contributors, constituting 85% of the region's total exports. While the overall growth aligns with the national trend due to the increasing popularity of Made in Italy goods, industry leaders in the region assert that there is a strong possibility to extend this success to sectors such as food, wine, and fashion.

WORK TO RESUME ON PESCARA PORT IMPROVEMENTS

Construction of the new port in **Pescara** is scheduled to re-start this month, according to assurances by the city's mayor, Carlo Masci. Outcomes of the €50-million project will be the diversion of the terminus of the Pescara river to allow construction of new piers, and construction of new commercial and fishing docks.

The improvements will enhance the look of the port, making it more appealing to commercial entities and tourists, and will improve the ability of ferries and ships to carry passengers to and from **Pescara**.

SKI SLOPES REMAIN WITHOUT SNOW

In Abruzzo, only 23 out of 112 ski slopes across the region's four main resorts are currently open, constituting just a fifth of the total due to absence of snow. Even though many of the closed slopes are equipped with snow cannons (in photo), the exorbitant energy costs and their high water consumption do not help. As the government continues to allocate significant public funds to ski infrastructure, the region's environmentalists question the long-term viability of the ski-dependent tourism and call for more sustainable alternatives.

ABRUZZO GOES TO HOLLYWOOD — AGAIN

The recently released film *Ferrari*, directed by Michael Mann and starring Adam Driver in the lead role, features one of Abruzzo's most spectacular locations. The film's climactic scene, in which Enzo Ferrari participates in the 24th *Mille Miglia* event to redeem his flailing personal and business lives, unfolds against the backdrop of the road between **Fonte Cerreto** and the heart of the **Campo Imperatore.** The film's crew of 500 people worked on the location for a week last summer.

The film is bringing positive attention to Abruzzo as a film location, in particular because of its well-received showing at the 2023 Venice Film Festival.

NEW ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM UNVEILED

A new Ethnographic Museum has opened in **Torrevecchia Teatina** where visitors can see traditional Abruzzese costumes (original and replicas), old textiles, engravings, and painted terracotta figurines dating back to 1800-1920. The rich collection — owned by Professor Francesco Stoppa, renowned for his contribution to preserving the region's folk traditions and ethnographic research — recounts various aspects of life, traditional culture, and Abruzzo's rich heritage. The Museum is registered in the National Network of Small Museums. **Address:** Via Castelferrato, 2, Torrevecchia Teatina.

DID YOU KNOW?

THE ANCIENT TRADE OF SELLING SNOW

In Abruzzo, an ancient trade once thrived, yielding substantial profits and shaping local economies: the sale of snow. The snow was collected in the mountains and pressed into straw, which acted as insulation, then placed inside a refrigeration chamber known as *neviera*. There the blocks of snow lasted throughout hot summer months and were either sold or used for preserving food. Many noble families had their own *neviere*.

Historical records from the 1600s reveal the significance of snow sales in Abruzzo Citra (the province of Chieti at the time). Acts of the *Parlamento teatino* (a legislative body in the 17th century) document the administration and regulations of snow trade overseen by local committees and by the Royal Head of Snow in bigger municipalities. In 1761, there were even street protests demanding more reliable management of snow trade, as many contractors failed to deliver on time.

Snow sales experienced a surge in demand in the late 18th century, particularly within the military sector for medical purposes. Like any big, profitable business, snow trade had its difficulties. Despite efforts to regulate the trade, instances of theft and inefficiency persisted, prompting municipal interventions and contract revocations.

Pescara emerged as a key market for snow, where it was used to preserve food and for making summer sorbets and beverages.

By the early 1900s, the trade of selling snow began to decline with the advent of factories producing artificial ice. Today, some old *neviere* can be still found in Abruzzo. One of them, in the *La Tachinella* restaurant in **Canzano** (TE), is used as a wine cellar and a venue for romantic candle-lit dinners.

NEW THREADS, OLD LOOMS

By Anna Lebedeva

Valeria Belli is a passionate artisan who is dedicated to keeping Abruzzo's traditional craft of handweaving alive. Her story is one of dedication, rediscovery, and a deep connection to her roots.

In the old days, women in Abruzzo spent long hours weaving wool blankets, hemp and linen sheets, and textiles for making clothes. It was more about making necessities than creativity. When a girl was born into families fortunate enough to own land, they would cultivate hemp or linen in anticipation of her future needs. This ensured that she would have the necessary yarn when she reached adulthood. Young girls learnt the weaving techniques from their mothers and nonnas and started saving up for their dowry long before they met the man they would marry. The tradition of bringing handwoven textiles to the bride's new home was still alive up until the 1960-70s in small villages but, eventually, the nonnas' old looms were left in the basements to gather dust.

Photo above: an old loom in Valeria Belli's workshop

LEARNING THE ART

Valeria Belli is an artisan who started learning the art of handweaving at the age of fourteen when she attended the Art Institute of Chieti. She was mesmerised by the colourful threads and rhythmic clacking of looms, tapestries, and fabrics. Graduating with a diploma specializing in textile art, Valeria's fascination with weaving only grew stronger with time, but the prospect of setting up her own business seemed overwhelming, so she continued studying and pursued a degree in medieval art history. Finally, in 1999, she decided to follow her calling and opened her own weaving workshop, embarking on a mission to reconnect with Abruzzese traditions.

“I took refresher courses in Florence and Milan, but a whole new world opened to me when I went to visit two elderly ladies in a small town at the foot of Gran Sasso who were still weaving using traditional Abruzzese techniques,” recalls Valeria. “In school, I had learned to design fabric and express myself creatively with my personal ideas, but what they taught me was completely different: everything was measured, planned, and done in a specific way. Their lessons added an ancient flavour to my work, the technical and decorative heritage that had been passed through centuries. I felt like what I learnt from them truly completed me.”

Valeria brings her own creativity to the loom: she designs her fabrics, infusing them with a touch of medieval inspiration gleaned from her studies, but she always finds a way to weave Abruzzo into her work. “I always remain anchored to Abruzzese traditions, whether by reviving an ancient technique, using local wool, or dyeing yarns with walnut husks and plants found locally,” she says.

Photos: Valeria Belli working on one of her old looms

ANCIENT LOOMS

Central to Valeria Belli's craft are her two antique looms, each with its own story to tell. One — dating back to the late 1700s — she bartered with a local restorer; the other, a cherished heirloom from Caramanico Terme, was a gift from a generous villager. “It was his grandmother's loom, and his mother had also worked on it. So, instead of leaving it to rot in his old house where no one lived anymore, he generously gifted it to me. I cleaned and repaired it and now it works beautifully,” remembers Valeria.

Valeria weaves blankets, scarves, and table runners and placemats, each piece a labour of love and craftsmanship. Her biggest order so far has been making blankets, sheets, and towels for Sextantio, a scattered hotel in Santo Stefano di Sessanio. They were all handwoven using traditional techniques and centuries-old decorative patterns found in the town and the surrounding area. “My students helped me, and I also involved women from my village for the finishing touches, such as the embroidery for the sheets,” explains the weaver. She adds that her work was as historically accurate as possible: “I made both the sheets and the blankets the way they were made in the past, not in a single piece but in three separate pieces that were then sewn together.”

Photos (below): one of the blankets made by Valeria Belli for Sextantio Albergo Diffuso in Santo Stefano di Sessanio; (right) textiles handwoven by Valeria

THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT

Valeria also designs her own, more modern, styles for blankets and says that depending on the thickness of the yarn and weaving technique it can take up to three weeks to finish one.

Her clientele includes both locals and admirers from afar, drawn to her handwoven treasures. As Valeria reflects on the future of traditional weaving in Abruzzo, she remains optimistic. With a growing appreciation for local heritage and a resurgence of interest in artisanal crafts, she believes that the ancient art of handweaving will continue to thrive. “Everything related to Abruzzo’s past and traditions, including weaving, has been rediscovered recently. Now my clients want sustainable textiles made in Abruzzo, connected to the territory.” Through her weaving courses and workshops, Valeria Belli passes on her skills to a new generation, ensuring that the legacy of Abruzzese weaving endures for years to come.

For more information about Valeria’s handwoven textiles, private commissions, and workshops, see the Facebook page FiliForme tessitura - Valeria Belli.

NARRATING PACENTRO IN MURALS

By Teresa Mastrobuono

In the quaint village of Pacentro, three-dimensional murals by a local artist have become an integral part of the town's charm, celebrating its heritage and people.

Sara Galtiero's unique murals are impossible to miss when you visit Pacentro, a small medieval village in the province of L'Aquila. Known as *muri parlanti* — talking walls — the murals illustrate and celebrate the village's cultural traditions of the past.

"Each mural tells a story, preserving our cultural heritage and celebrating the spirit of Pacentro," says Galterio, who has been dedicated to the project for

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