

TRAVEL HISTORY CULTURE PEOPLE FOOD

ABRUZZISSIMO

MAGAZINE



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ON THE COVER:

Pacentro. Read the story on page 5.

LEFT:

Goriano Valli. Read the story on page 14. Photos by Anna Lebedeva.

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www.abruzzissimo.com
editor@abruzzissimo.com

EDITOR & PUBLISHER

Anna Lebedeva
editor@abruzzissimo.com

COPY EDITOR

Linda Dini Jenkins

CONTRIBUTORS

Rosanna Tuteri
Tommaso Paolini
Marinello Mastrogiuseppe
Linda Dini Jenkins
Anna Swann

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Summer holidays are over, and we're back with new stories. In August, Abruzzo's small towns and villages were alive with laughter and the voices of families returning to visit their parents, *nonni*, and relatives. Festivals and *sagre* filled the days, while the evenings were spent enjoying long al fresco dinners with the mouthwatering aroma of *arrosticini* wafting through the air. But now, the silence is returning. But now, the silence is returning.

Every time I visit a mountain village in Abruzzo and ask about its population, I'm given two numbers: the number of residents in winter and the number in summer, including returning extended families. In **Goriano Valli**, for example, I was told, "In winter, there are 80 people living here, but in summer we have around 600."

This small town has recently opened a fascinating museum dedicated to preserving its old buildings and memories of the past. Don't expect grand palaces or frescoed ceilings; instead, you'll find humble peasant houses, haylofts, and wine cellars that tell stories of everyday life. **Goriano Valli** is hoping to find a way to boost its resident numbers, and the museum is just a small part of their larger project. Read the story on page 14.

For grander historical ruins we take you to **Amiternum** that once was a bustling Roman politico-administrative hub with spectacular entertainment buildings, baths, and impressive wealth.

This month, **Pacentro** hosts its annual barefoot race that combines devotion, courage, and pain into a few exhilarating minutes, attracting thousands of spectators. Read our story about this centuries-old tradition on page 11.

Have you tried the *cocociata* from the Marsica area in Abruzzo? We share the recipe for this humble, yet delicious peasant dish on page 28.

I would like to remind you all that ABRUZZISSIMO is a reader-supported publication. If you are enjoying reading the magazine, please share the [subscription link](#) with other Abruzzo lovers, consider [upgrading](#) to the premium version, or [make a donation](#) to help us keep this publication going. It doesn't happen without your support. Thank you!

Anna Lebedeva
Founder & Editor

RECENT REGIONAL NEWS FROM ABRUZZO'S LOCAL NEWSPAPERS AND UPCOMING EVENTS



HONEY FESTIVAL IN TORNARECCIO

Tornareccio (CH) is gearing up for the 18th edition of Regina di Miele to celebrate Abruzzo's honey producers on September 21-22. The festival will feature a local produce market, tastings, guided tours of the town, and live music. One of the highlights will be the prestigious national competition awards for the Abruzzo section of the Tre Gocce d'Oro – Grandi Mieli d'Italia honouring the region's best beekeepers and finest honey. See the full programme on the festival's [page](#).

WATER CRISIS IN ABRUZZO

This past summer, many areas in Abruzzo faced frequent water shutoffs due to severe water waste issues. Fenimprese, an Italian federation representing small and medium-sized enterprises, sent a note to the regional government highlighting that over 60% of water is lost in the region's distribution network, impacting residents, farmers, and industries. The group calls for immediate reforms, including advanced leak detection, network modernization, and sustainable practices like wastewater reuse. They also advocate for marine desalination to alleviate pressure on internal sources. Without a coordinated plan, Abruzzo risks ongoing crises and future uncertainty.



ART MEETS SCIENCE AT CAMPO IMPERATORE

A striking 2.30-meter wooden sculpture of an astronaut with a helmet reflecting the surrounding landscape has been installed near the Campo Imperatore Observatory of the National Institute of Astrophysics in the Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga National Park. The installation by Fabiano De Martin Topranin, a young artist from Belluno, is part of an exhibition curated by [Dolomiti Contemporanee](#). Italy's highest professional observatory, a research hub for nearly 60 years, adds powerful context to this installation, merging art and science and embodying the spirit of exploration. The sculpture will be on display until September 30.

PASTA AND WINE EXPORTS SURGE

The world loves pasta and wine from Abruzzo. While other Italian pasta regions face a decline in sales, the town of Fara San Martino (CH), home to renowned brands like De Cecco and Delverde, is shining, with an impressive 8.8% rise in exports for early 2024 in the US and Germany. The Montepulciano d'Abruzzo wine also stands out, with a 5.1% growth, beating the national average. Overall, Abruzzo's exports surged 13.8% to €204 million, with standout performances in the US (+19.2%) and Switzerland (+190.5%) and sales also growing in South Korea and China.



JOIN US IN OPPOSING ABRUZZO'S CONTROVERSIAL DEER CULL

The Abruzzo regional government has approved the selective culling of 469 red deer, citing overpopulation, agricultural damage, and road safety risks.

According to the official statistics, between 2019 and 2023, deer caused significant damage to agriculture in Abruzzo, amounting to €895,340. This figure is expected to exceed one million euros when damages from 2024 are included. Additionally, 806 road accidents involving deer were reported during the same period.

The government's decision has been met with disbelief and outrage, sparking a heated debate in both regional and national media. While Abruzzo's farmers' associations are pleased with the announcement, environmental groups, conservationists, and many citizens are calling for alternative methods. They insist that the culling of almost 500 deer is unnecessary and damaging to Abruzzo, a region known for its wildlife and where resident deer populations attract many tourists.

The culling season will start on October 14 in several areas of the L'Aquila province: around Avezzano, Sulmona, Valle Subequana, L'Aquila, and Barisciano. Ispra, the National Institute for Environmental Research and Protection announced that the selective deer hunting is only permitted when the deer density is at least 2 per square kilometre. In the areas selected for the culling the density is slightly above this threshold, at 2.58 per square kilometre. The WWF have brought to the media's attention the fact that the hunters will have to pay between €50 (for each young fawn killed) and up to €600 for a stag. However, the collected funds will not be going to support local farmers but to the *Ambiti Territoriali di Caccia* to the benefit of the hunting organisations involved.

We at ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine strongly believe in an Abruzzo capable of coexisting with wildlife and, while we always support local farmers, promote them, and encourage our readers to buy local products, we also believe in sustainable practices that ensure harmony between agricultural activities and natural ecosystems. We invite you to sign the petition – that has already gathered over 80,000 signatures – launched by the WWF calling to revise the region's decision.

DID YOU KNOW?

D'ANNUNZIO AND THE DISASTROUS OCCUPATION OF FIUME

Gabriele D'Annunzio, an Italian poet, writer, and nationalist born in Abruzzo, played a leading role in the *Impresa di Fiume*, or the "Fiume Expedition."

After World War I, the Treaty of Saint-Germain assigned the port city of Fiume (now Rijeka, Croatia) to the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia). Many Italians, including D'Annunzio, were dissatisfied with this decision, feeling that Italy's wartime sacrifices had not been adequately rewarded.

On September 12, 1919, D'Annunzio led around 2,600 Italian nationalist troops in a bold move to occupy Fiume. D'Annunzio's forces quickly took control of the city, and he declared himself the leader. The occupation was marked by D'Annunzio's flamboyant and theatrical style, blending politics with performance art.

D'Annunzio established the Italian Regency of Carnaro, a self-proclaimed state with a constitution. This constitution was notable for its progressive and eclectic mix of ideas, including elements of anarchism and proto-fascism. It also celebrated music and culture, reflecting D'Annunzio's own artistic inclinations.

The occupation of Fiume lasted for 15 months. It came to an end in December 1920, when the Italian government, under pressure from the League of Nations and facing internal political instability, negotiated the Treaty of Rapallo with Yugoslavia. This treaty declared Fiume an independent Free State. When D'Annunzio refused to recognize the treaty, Italian military forces moved in to oust him during what became known as the "Christmas of Blood" (*Natale di sangue*) and during which 30 people were killed including several civilians and a child.

The events in Fiume had a profound influence on Italian nationalism and the emerging Fascist movement. D'Annunzio's militant nationalism, charismatic leadership, and theatrical politics provided a model that Mussolini and the Fascists would later adopt and refine. Despite this bloodshed and controversy, Gabriele D'Annunzio is still celebrated and admired in Abruzzo.



AMITERNUM: THE FORGOTTEN JEWEL OF ANCIENT HISTORY

By Rosanna Tuteri

Amiternum is one of Abruzzo's most important archaeological sites, which tells the story of an ancient Sabine town that became an important hub for local governance and commerce in the times of Roman Empire.

If you travel along State Route 81 north of L'Aquila, beneath the small hilltop village of San Vittorino, you will see the monumental ruins of an ancient Roman theatre and, across the road and the Aterno River, you will spot an amphitheatre. This is Amiternum, a city founded by the Sabine people, an Italic tribe, and later became an important Roman settlement.

To understand why Amiternum was so important more than 2,000 years ago, you need to climb the hill of San Vittorino and gaze over the plain: the village dominated the Aterno Valley and the junction of ancient roads that, running north-south and west-east, connected the Tyrrhenian coast

Photo: The amphitheatre in Amiternum.
Via <https://cultura.gov.it/>

with the Adriatic Sea. Amiternum's strategic position meant that the city retained its important role after the Roman conquest in 293 BCE. A trace of the millennia-old route – running across the valley and known in Roman times as Via Caecilia – is still visible. Amiternum grew where the road met the important Via Claudia Nova, and two branches of the Via Salaria.

IMPORTANT CENTRE

Between the 3rd century BCE and 4th century CE, the city was sparsely populated, as its main purpose was serving as the seat of the praefectura, a political-administrative centre, where the prefect (sent annually from Rome) exercised his jurisdictional powers over villages around the valley. We can safely assume, based on some historical documents from that period, that the fortune of many families in Amiternum derived from trade and commercial relations established both in the Italian peninsula and in the East. Landowners and entrepreneurs, members of the high Sabine

The theatre in Amiternum. Photo by Ra Boe, [CC BY-SA 3.0 de](#)

aristocracy, also made fortunes from livestock and transhumance as well as military campaigns, in which many of Amiternum's prominent figures were involved. A significant number of stone inscriptions that have survived to these days provide information about the wealthy municipal upper class of the city, which included members of the equestrian order and even the senatorial aristocracy in Rome.

Today, only fragments of Amiternum's glorious past remain: a stretch of Via Caecilia that traverses it, the ruins of the theatre and amphitheatre, fragments of a large domus (among the largest found in Italy), and a temple. You need some historical knowledge and a lot of imagination to picture the thriving, rich Roman city it once was with its paved roads, riverbanks and bridges, hillside terraces, the porticoed forum, the basilica, the curia with its tribunals, temples and sanctuaries, taverns, fountains, and thermal baths.

In the second half of the 1st century BCE, Amiternum underwent significant territorial development that profoundly influenced its urban structure and road network. A road which traversed the river plain and the city in a long, straight path, became the central axis around



which the urban organization was built. This road served as the spine of the city, with key public entertainment buildings strategically placed along its course. The theatre, situated on the northeastern hill, and the amphitheatre, located on the southwestern plain, likely marked the urban peripheries, creating a monumental and scenic boundary that defined the city's layout and brought people from the nearby villages to the city.

IMAGINING THE CITY

Walking less than a meter below the current ground level 2,000 years ago, you would have admired the forum area with its porticoed square, the road crossing, the magnificent basilica, and the curia on the northern side. From the eastern side of the forum area, you could have followed a 15-meter-wide street connecting the forum to the theatre, a large porticoed pool and a grand domus, a residence of palatial proportions, with an atrium and two peristyles (continuous porches with columns) covering nearly five thousand square meters.

The theatre, constructed during the Augustan age (43 BCE – 18 CE), once held around 2,000 spectators, with the lower sections of the cavea, orchestra, and stage still visible today. In contrast, the amphitheatre was a much larger venue, accommodating up to 6,000 spectators.

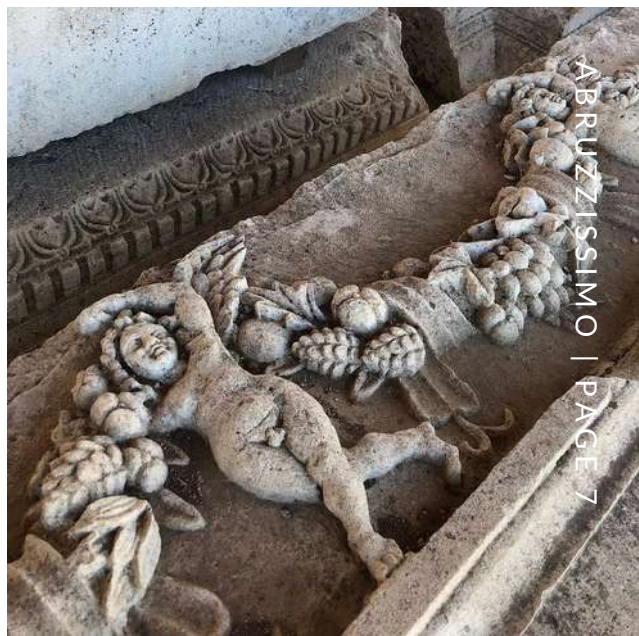
Photos: (below) areal view of the theatre, via [Musei archeologici nazionali di Chieti-Direzione regionale Musei Abruzzo](#); (right) carved stone fragments in Amiternum

It was designed and constructed with arches, vaults, corridors, and internal stairs for the entrance and distribution of spectators in the cavea (the seating section). Such a large, imposing structure signalled travellers the importance of Amiternum from afar.

Today, 48 arches of the amphitheatre still stand defining its perimeter. If you enter the imposing shell of the amphitheatre ruins through the triumphal gate, the elliptical space of what remains of the cavea and arena suddenly opens up before you: you sense the age of the stones with the silence being broken only by the chirping of crickets in summer.

SILENCE OF THE PAST

When you enter, Amiternum envelops you in silence, but you can imagine the sounds of the ancient city, thinking that some urban spaces must have been reserved for the productive activities of potters, sculptors, and stonecutters. Its streets echoed the voices of lanipendae (slave women overseeing the weighing of wool for spinning), butchers, cobblers, bakers, carpenters, blacksmiths, weavers and dyers, barbers, tavern keepers, and innkeepers. The city also served as a marketplace where you could buy local olive oil, fruit, and vegetables that were much appreciated in the ancient Rome. There were not many homes in Amiternum, as its main purpose was providing



public services, while most people lived in the villages scattered across the valley, but the streets were bustling with various commercial activities.

From the 4th century onwards, the landscape with small villages, villas, and farms scattered in the valley began to change. Amiternum might have been hit by a devastating earthquake in 346/7, the Roman Empire fell, a new era had begun and the city was gradually abandoned. Over time, many architectural elements from Amiternum were repurposed in the construction of nearby early Christian and early medieval settlements. One prominent example is the catacombs of San Vittorino, where the martyr of the same name was laid to rest, where archaeologists found many stone materials from Amiternum.

And while the ancient city is long gone, it can be still experienced as an island of memory within the modern landscape: as an archaeological park. Amiternum shows that the past lingers and time never truly fades away.

Rosanna Tuteri is an archaeologist and the author of the book [Amiternum. Guida archeologica](#).

Photos: (below) ruins of the amphitheatre in Amiternum; (right) the map of the site



IF YOU GO

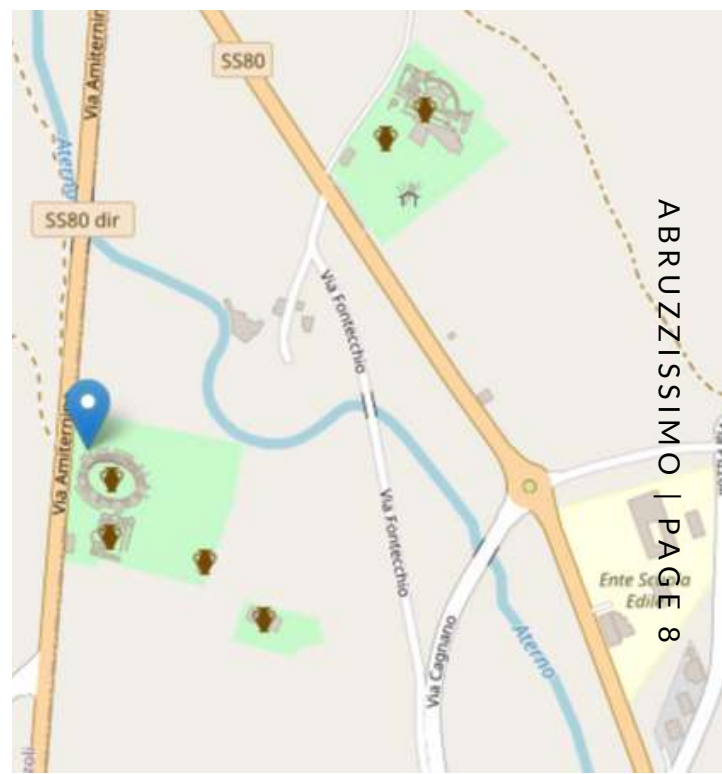
To reach Amiternum enter “Area archeologica di Amiternum Frazione San Vittorino” in your Google Maps navigator.

The archaeological site is open in summer on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday from 8.30am to 1.30pm, Thursday 2.30pm-7.30pm. Closed on Sunday and Monday. Make sure to check the opening hours via this [link](#) as they vary depending on the season. Free entrance.

On the site, you will find information boards in Italian and English.

Occasional guided tours of the site are organised for the national days of archaeology and other special occasions. Private and group guided tours in English can be booked via the [tourist information office](#) in L’Aquila.

Even if the access gates are closed you will be able to see the theatre and some other ruins from the road. See the map of the archaeological site below or by clicking [here](#).



ARCHAEOLOGICAL GEMS FROM AMITERNUM

Despite being one of the region's most important archaeological sites, Amiternum remains largely unknown to the wider public and has not been developed to its full potential. Over the years, many artifacts have been excavated in Amiternum: fragments of theatre masks, statues, bronze military eagle insignia, emperors' marble heads. Many of them are displayed in the *Museo Archeologico Nazionale d'Abruzzo* in Chieti.

IL SIGNORE DI AMITERNUM

During an excavation campaign in 2007 a statue was found known as *Il Signore di Amiternum*, a slightly larger-than-life marble portrait of a standing male figure, measuring 2.09 meters in height (it is one of the largest Roman statues found in Italy). Discovered in the southwest corner of the *domus*, the statue likely fell during the building's destruction, possibly due to the earthquake of A.D. 346/7. Crafted from rough, white crystalline marble, likely sourced from the Greek islands, the statue depicts a mature man clad in a chlamys cloak, holding a sheathed sword in his left hand with a spear resting on his right arm. The statue's weathered features suggest it originally stood outdoors in a public space before being relocated to the atrium of a large, wealthy *domus*. The detailed portrayal of the man's aged face and the statue's prominent position indicate that it likely represents a significant member of the municipal aristocracy, underscoring the importance of the family that resided in the *domus*.

In 2009, *Il Signore di Amiternum* gained international prominence when it was featured in an exhibition at the G7 Summit held in L'Aquila, showcasing its historical and artistic significance.

The statue is housed in the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo in L'Aquila.



Il Signore di Amiternum

FUNERARY BRONZE BED

The funerary bronze bed dating to the late 1st century BCE to early 1st century CE, is a remarkable artifact discovered in 1905 in a male burial plot at an underground chamber tomb near Amiternum. This luxurious bed, the only bronze example of its kind found in Abruzzo, symbolizes the wealth and status of its owner. The bed's design features a double headboard, intricately decorated with full-round and relief figures, as well as finely detailed geometric and floral patterns. The upper ends of the headboard display realistic mule heads, with their necks turned outward. Medallions on the headboards are embellished with busts of male figures in relief. The bed's opulent design reflects the broader cultural trend in ancient Rome of using such funerary beds as a statement of aristocratic refinement. The bed is displayed in the Archaeological Museum, Villa Frigerj, in Chieti.

POOL

One of the most recent finds is the remains of a large rectangular pool, or *natatio*, measuring approximately 12 by 30 meters dating back to the Augustan era (27 BCE to 14 CE). Its walls were likely lined with marble or *opus signinum*, a waterproof cement used by the Romans, and the pool may have been part of a public bathhouse or a grand private residence.

FUNERARY MONUMENT

Dating to the first half of the 1st century CE, is an exceptional example of Roman funerary art and architecture. This monument, featuring elaborate sculpted reliefs, was dedicated to an *Augustal triumvir*, a local magistrate responsible for overseeing the imperial cult and public spectacles.

Photos: (bottom) the funerary monument;
(below) the bronze bed from Amiternum; both
photos via Musei Archeologici di
Chieti/Facebook

The reliefs, originally placed on the inner walls of a semi-circular atrium in front of the burial chamber, depict a range of ceremonial scenes, including a *pompa circensis* (circus procession) and a *munus gladiatorium* (gladiatorial games). Crafted from local limestone, the monument showcases intricate decorative elements, such as the procession with a chariot bearing a winged Victory and detailed scenes of combat, emphasizing the high social status and economic power of the individual commemorated. Despite some blocks being repurposed in later periods, the monument's reconstruction in 1966 has restored its historical and artistic context, reflecting the sophisticated narrative techniques and the prominence of public and funerary rituals in provincial Roman society.

See this short [video](#) showing a 3D reconstruction of the ancient Amiternum.



TRADITION



LA CORSA DEGLI ZINGARI: THE BAREFOOT RACE IN PACENTRO

This month, Pacentro (AQ) hosts the historic annual La Corsa degli Zingari, whose origins have been lost in the mists of time. The barefoot race, held in honour of the Madonna di Loreto, is deeply felt by the local community and draws thousands of spectators from the region and beyond.

On the first Sunday of September, as the bell at the church of Madonna di Loreto rings, a

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