

TRAVEL HISTORY CULTURE PEOPLE FOOD

ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE



**The Outlaws
of Abruzzo**

page 5

**The Feast of San Martino:
Fires, Wine, and Chestnuts**

page 9

**Morino: Old and New
Standing Together**

page 16

CONTENTS

02. EDITOR'S NOTE

03. NEWS AND EVENTS

04. EUROPE' S HIGHEST HOSTEL

05. THE OUTLAWS OF ABRUZZO

**09. THE FEAST OF SAN MARTINO: FIRES,
WINE, AND CHESTNUTS**

**12. THE BURNING GLORIE DI SAN
MARTINO**

**16. MORINO: OLD AND NEW STANDING
TOGETHER**

22. OUR LIFE IN GABBIANO

**25. A FAMILY STORY AT THE FOOT OF
THE MAJELLA**

28. QUICK STOP, EASY TRAILS

**29. BEST EATS: TRADITIONAL BREAD
SNACKS**

**30. RECIPES: spaghetti alla Faruk, zuppa
di farro e cicoria**



ON THE COVER:

Morino. Photos by Anna Lebedeva.
Read the story on page 16.

LEFT:

Morino. Photos by Anna Lebedeva.
Read the story on page 16.

ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE

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Editor's Note

Fierce winds tear the bright leaves from the trees, olive presses are busy turning out the new season's oil, and the air smells of wood smoke. The seasons are shifting, and Abruzzo enters what was once called *Capetiempe* – "the head of time." This period, spanning the first half of November, marked the close of the agricultural year and culminated in the **Feast of San Martino**, Abruzzo's own Bacchus, celebrated with young wine and roasted chestnuts. Read more about the region's traditions honouring the beloved saint on page 9.

Anyone who loves Abruzzo will know of the *briganti*. Bandits or heroes, their story is woven into the region's history. We explore the violent movement of the 19th century and speak with explains Fabrizio Fanciulli, an author who has devoted his life to researching the *briganti* in **Pretoro (CH)** and beyond.

Have you heard of **Morino (AQ)**? Its location – by a waterfall and beneath towering mountains – makes it a striking place to explore. The old *borgo*, **Morino Vecchio**, is one of my favourite corners of Abruzzo, and I take you there to discover its past and present on page 16.

Did you know that Abruzzo has a dish created for the deposed King Faruq I of Egypt, who reportedly visited **Francavilla al Mare (CH)** in the late 1950s? We share the recipe on page 30 and invite you to try it at home. Let us know how it turns out!

We also explore simple, hearty bread snacks that were once a staple in Abruzzo, a stunning yet easy trail in **Bosco di Sant'Antonio**, and a fascinating, museum-like second-hand shop that can easily fill hours of browsing.

Enjoy the November issue!

Anna Lebedeva
Founder & Editor

DIGEST OF RECENT REGIONAL NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS FROM ABRUZZO NEWSPAPERS



EUROPE'S SATELLITE HUB IN ABRUZZO

Abruzzo is set to play a starring role in Europe's bid to challenge Elon Musk's Starlink. Leonardo, Airbus, and Thales Alenia have launched a €10 billion joint venture, codenamed Bromo, to build a European satellite powerhouse. With factories and operations in the region, including Telespazio's Fucino (in the photo) control centre, Abruzzo will be central to both civil and military satellite production for telecommunications and Earth observation.

The alliance comes as Europe seeks greater independence in space technology. If all goes to plan, the new company could be operational within 18 months, positioning Abruzzo and Italy at the forefront of the continent's rapidly expanding satellite market.

SHARP BIRTH RATE DECLINE

Abruzzo records sharpest drop in births across Italy. In the first seven months of 2025, births in Abruzzo fell by 10.2% compared with the same period in 2024, the steepest decline in the country, well above the national average of 6.3%, according to Istat's 2024 report on birth rates and fertility.

Istat points to two main factors: a shrinking population of women of childbearing age and economic uncertainty that discourages couples from starting families.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE TRADESPEOPLE GONE?

In just ten years, Abruzzo has lost 10,735 artisans, echoing a nationwide decline of nearly 400,000. Trades once at the heart of local life — plumbers, carpenters, mechanics — are thinning out, raising alarms for the region's economy. The figures are based on INPS (Italy's social security agency) and Infocamere/Movimprese (the business registry of the Chambers of Commerce).

Not all is bleak, though: hairdressers, tattoo artists, web experts, and food businesses from *gelaterie* to take-away pizzerias are on the rise, especially in towns with a strong tourist pull.



ABRUZZO IN THE SPOTLIGHT IN TIMES SQUARE

A commercial promoting the region's new approach to travel has appeared on the screens in New York City's Times Square. The campaign coincides with the launch of a new travel platform offering 200 tours and experiences across Abruzzo — from wine tastings and private *palazzo* visits to archaeological walks — and encourages year-round, slow travel as a new form of luxury for those seeking off-the-beaten-path adventures. Supported by the Region and the Municipality of L'Aquila, the platform provides small local operators with a unified digital showcase and will be shared with over 1,000 foreign tour operators and agencies to help attract visitors to the region. We especially like the final line of the video — “Come to Abruzzo, we'll feed you well” — which sums up the region's spirit better than any slogan ever could.



TRABOCCO COULD BECOME A LEGO SET

Andrea Lattanzio, one of the world's top Lego designers, is aiming to turn a symbol of the Abruzzo coast into an official Lego set. His latest creation, a detailed model of a *trabocco* — the iconic stilted fishing platforms of the Adriatic — could hit stores if it reaches 10,000 votes on the Lego Ideas platform.

Lattanzio already made history in 2022 by turning one of his designs, a mountain cabin, into a set. With over 3,800 supporters so far, the Adriatic *trabocco* is well on its way to joining his growing Lego legacy. All Abruzzo lovers can vote and support the project [here](#).

FRANTOI APERTI IN VALLE ROVETO

On November 8-9, San Vincenzo Vecchio (AQ) fills with the scent of new olive oil as the annual *Frantoi Aperti in Valle Roveto* festival returns. The town's oil presses open to the public, offering tastings of freshly pressed oil from the area's renowned Monicella olives. Visitors can also enjoy local dishes and wine in historic cellars, enjoy live folk music concerts, and take part in hands-on bread-making workshops by the renowned chef Lucia Tellone. See the full programme on the organisers' [page](#).

DID YOU KNOW?

EUROPE'S HIGHEST HOSTEL



At 2,115 metres above sea level, the Ostello Campo Imperatore holds a rare distinction — it is the highest in all of Europe. Perched on the windswept plateau of the Gran Sasso, it faces the kind of weather that tests both humans and structures. Gusts of 200 kilometres per hour are not uncommon here, freezing doors solid and forcing staff to wield blowtorches just to open them.

Linked directly to the Gran Sasso cable car station through an underground tunnel, the *ostello* occupies the terminal point of the old Gran Sasso cable car, decommissioned in 1988, whose arrival station has been transformed into both the hostel and a small museum. Inside, visitors can see the preserved machinery of the original *funivia* — including its motor, cabins, and archival photographs tracing the lift's story from its 1934 inauguration to its final journey more than half a century later.

The restored building combines its mountain-shelter spirit with state-of-the-art technology and a design that honours its rugged surroundings.

Inside, there are twelve rooms — some private, some shared — and a 100-seat restaurant where snowbound evenings often turn into impromptu gatherings. When winter storms cut off the road, the team that manages the hostel has enough supplies to sustain up to twenty guests for as long as two weeks in complete isolation.

In winter, guests step out of the door straight onto the slopes, skiing over a landscape that feels closer to the sky than the earth. Come summer, the snow melts into trails that lead across the high pastures of Campo Imperatore.



THE OUTLAWS OF ABRUZZO

By Teresa Mastrobuono

In the rugged hills of Abruzzo, rebellion once ran through the mountains like a hidden river. In the mid-1800s, bands of *briganti* challenged authority, evading capture and leaving behind stories that were hidden for generations. Today, their lives are being re-examined, revealing a history far more complex than legend or folklore suggests.

The *briganti* (brigands) were mostly men — though some women joined their ranks — who formed loosely organised bands to rebel against the unification of Italy. “Bandits, called *briganti*, were in fact peasants, shepherds, and woodcutters who rose up against authority and the newly unified Italy,” explains Fabrizio Fanciulli, author of *Papè. Storie di Briganti e Brigantesse*, who spent five years researching the subject in the State Archives of Chieti, Naples, and Turin.

They roamed the hills, towns, and mountains of Abruzzo in the 1860s and 1870s, driven by a sense of injustice, the mistreatment of the rural poor, and the harsh economic conditions that followed Italy’s unification.

Photo: Captured brigands posing for a photo. Archivio di Stato di Torino, raccolta Caviglia

THE ROOTS OF REBELLION

The background for *briganti* formation has long and twisted roots in the lead-up to the founding of the Kingdom of Italy. As late as the mid-1800's Italy comprised of separate geographical areas, each with its own political structure and even language. By the time of the unification, there were two major factions at work: the House of Savoy and its Piedmontese connection, and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, ruled by the Bourbon monarchy. These essentially existed along a north-south divide of the peninsula.

The defeat of the Bourbons and establishment of a unified Italy brought about major discontent in the south. The cultural and economic differences between a predominantly industrial north and agrarian south were exacerbated by the new rulers of Italy. There was a dramatic increase in taxes and shortage of basic goods, which led to widespread hunger and even famine in the south. Those loyal to the Bourbon monarchy viewed the Savoy and its Piedmontese supporters as usurpers and the cause of the suffering of their people. Many in the south wanted the Bourbon monarchy restored. They saw the new constitution of Italy as an attack on the sacred figure of the king. It helped that the Church of the time shared some of their beliefs. The rebellious groups saw resistance as the path to restoring the upheaval of their former way of life. The movement fought to push back against the Savoy army. The bands were made up primarily of former soldiers and loyalists of the Bourbon army, former prisoners, peasants, and farmers, although several well-educated persons were also among them.

DEFENDING THE POOR

While brigands operated in many parts of Italy, Abruzzo was home to some of the most active and prolific bands. Its rugged landscape favoured rebellion: the *briganti* could move and hide with ease among the region's caves, valleys, dense forests, and remote plateaus. From these natural strongholds, it was relatively easy to ambush the Savoy troops, who were unaccustomed to fighting in such terrain. It is no surprise, then, that some of the most notorious figures of the *brigantaggio* emerged here.



A 19th-century print depicting a brigand from Abruzzo

"When they needed to plunder a village, the bands would gather and carry out a raid," says Fanciulli. "They never harmed the poor. They targeted the homes of wealthy families — the mayor, the pharmacist, the doctor — and took what they could. In my village, Pretoro, for example, there was a raid on 6 June 1861, carried out by about fifty men led by Pasquale Mancini, a *brigante* from Pacentro. The villagers were ordered to stay in the church and left unharmed, while the bandits looted the homes of the local notables, taking oil, wine, bread, flour, clothes, coats — whatever they needed to survive."

The brigands, however, were far from peaceful. "During the Pretoro raid," Fanciulli continues, "a former Garibaldian soldier named Domenico Di Pietro, a member of the local National Guard, tried to resist and was killed. That same day, an elderly man returning home encountered the *briganti*. When asked *Chi vive?* — a question they often used to test whose side someone was on and which king they recognised — the expected answer was Francesco II of Bourbon. But many didn't know this. The old man, confused, replied, God,

the Madonna, and Jesus Christ... And who else? the briganti pressed. Vittorio Emanuele! the elderly man exclaimed, bewildered. They beat him savagely, leaving him permanently crippled. All these stories come from direct testimonies I found in the State Archives," says Fanciulli.

THE STRONGHOLDS OF THE MAJELLA

Cells existed in nearly every corner of Abruzzo, though the most active and renowned operated in the Maiella. Their leaders – both famous and infamous – included Angelo Camillo Colafella of Sant'Eufemia, Pasquale Francescantonio Mancini of Pacentro, and Nunzio Tamburrini of Roccaraso. Each was driven by different circumstances. Colafella, for instance, took part in an 1850 uprising against the looming unification of Italy and was imprisoned for "causing injuries." After his release, he struggled with poverty and, in 1859, broke into the home of a newly wealthy landowner, stealing a valuable object. Imprisoned once again, he escaped by digging a hole through his cell wall and fled to the mountains – thus beginning his life as an outlaw.

"The local population supported them," explains Fanciulli. "They supported them because the *briganti* were their husbands, brothers, brothers-in-law. When they took refuge in the mountains – the safest place for them – the families would bring them bread and wine and warn them if the National Guard was coming. They were, in a way, accomplices." Their loyalty came at a cost. The government responded with the 1863 law, which punished not only the briganti but anyone who helped them.

THE LEGEND OF NUNZIO TAMBURRINI

One of the most colourful and also one of the last of the brigands was Nunzio Tamburrini, a person who has attained almost legendary status among the many brigands. Born in Roccaraso, he spent his early life as a shepherd in the Marsican mountains. One of the eccentricities that defines his larger than life status is that he always carried with him a fine pen and notebook to keep track of his various exploits. He, like Colafella, attempted to resist what he saw as the conquering of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. He participated in the fight against Garibaldi's entrance into Naples, the



Nunzio Tamburrini, right, in prison; Museo Centrale del Risorgimento di Roma

Kingdom's capital at the time. This pro-Bourbon uprising was quelled after four days. Tamburrini was forced to flee. In 1861, shortly after the unification, he resurfaced in Abruzzo setting up his headquarters outside Rocca Pia (AQ) in an area known as Bosco Paradiso. This area was particularly inaccessible and inhospitable, but Tamburrini was able to survive by virtue of his previous experience roaming with flocks of sheep. The raids he undertook in service to what he perceived to be championing "common folk" took place in and around Sulmona, Avezzano, and Chieti. He evaded capture and was admired by many of his supporters for his crafty disguises. Tamburrini cleverly used the ruse of a humble friar or traveling musician. His clashes with the Savoy army became increasingly violent, however, placing more urgency on his capture. In 1864, he was declared "the worst gang leader infesting Abruzzo." A bounty of 4,250 lire (about €26,000 today) was placed on his head. The *brigante* once again fled - this time to Civitavecchia. He was captured there in 1865. His trial lasted three years, moving from L'Aquila to Teramo, where it was concluded. Tamburrini was

originally sentenced to death, but a Royal decree brokered by the Church had it commuted to "forced labour for life". He died in exile on the Island of Elba in 1874 at the age of 46.

SAINTS OR SINNERS?

This is a story particular to one of the *briganti* but typical of many. Some were not so lucky as to live out even a short life in relatively benign surroundings. Many were hunted down and killed, their bodies put on display in town squares. Their causes can be romanticized, and they are often depicted as folk heroes but their role in Italy's history was more complex. For survival and in service to their cause, they engaged in theft, killing of livestock, and extortion of small sums of money and goods from local wealthy landowners who they believed had taken advantage of local peasants. The extortions could be whimsical and random – notes sometimes demanded "ten bottles of rum", "a piece of March cheese" or "ten packs of Cavour brand cigars".

Whether defined as angels or demons, *briganti* remain a significant part of Abruzzo's lore. "They killed, yes, and fired their weapons," Fanciulli says, "but so did the State – decimating villages, raping women, executing men. It was no act of democracy in the name of Italy's unity. These men were no saints, but they were defending themselves and it's time to look beyond the label of 'bandits' and understand who these men truly were; they fought with little but courage, hunger, and the idea of freedom."

For many years, access to the State Archives was restricted, and documents about *briganti* could not be freely published. It wasn't until a century later that discussion began to emerge, and for a long time the brigands were dismissed as mere criminals. Today, however, historical scholarship is revisiting their story, offering a more nuanced perspective on their lives and actions.

Teresa Mastrobuono is a professional actress, voice over artist and ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine's regular contributor. Originally from the US, she now lives in Abruzzo.

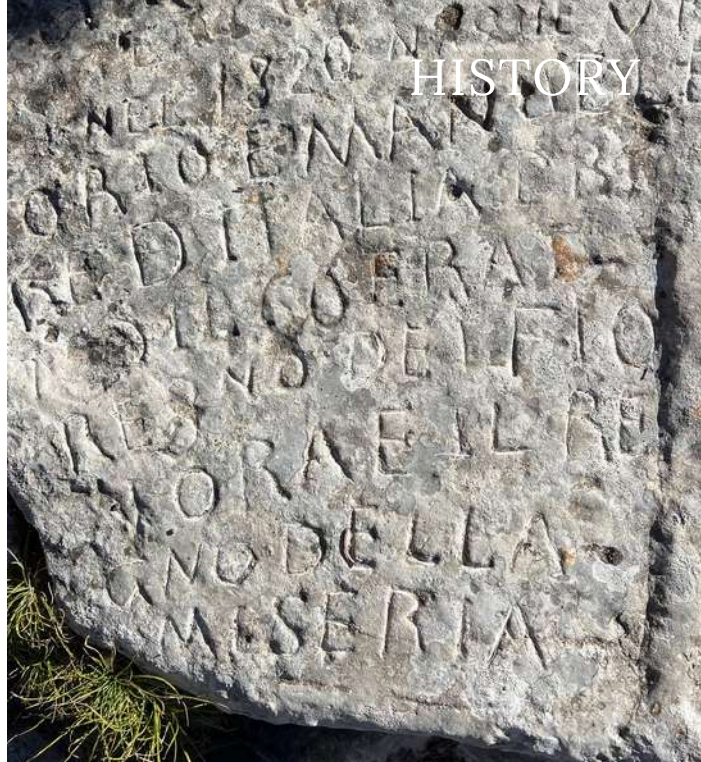


Tavola dei Briganti in the Majella mountains

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE BRIGANTI

For those who want to trace the paths once roamed by Abruzzo's outlaws, the ***Cammino dei Briganti*** offers an unforgettable experience. This 108-kilometre route winds through 18 villages between Abruzzo and Lazio where the brigands were known to operate, from remote mountain hamlets to hidden valleys. Hikers can choose to tackle the entire trail over several days or complete individual stages as day trips, each revealing landscapes that shaped the lives – and escapes – of these outlaws. Along the way, you pass through forests, rocky ridges, and small settlements, imagining the strategic hideouts and secret routes used to evade the Savoy troops. More information is available on the walk's dedicated [website](#).

For a shorter excursion, the walk to ***Tavola dei Briganti*** offers a glimpse into the brigands' world in a single day. This 10-kilometre round trip begins at Rifugio Pomilio in the Maiella Mountains, passes the summit of Blockhaus – where Piedmontese soldiers once built a small fort, now in ruins, to control the mountains and suppress brigands – and leads to a rocky outcrop carved by shepherds and *briganti*. The most striking inscription reads: "In 1820 Vittorio Emanuele, King of Italy, was born. Before 1860 it was the kingdom of flowers; now it is the kingdom of misery." See the details of the trail [here](#).

A FAMILY STORY AT THE FOOT OF THE MAJELLA

By Anna Lebedeva

When love meets geography, stories like this take root. What began as two young professionals — one from the hills of Atri, the other from a mountain village beneath the Majella mountains — grew into a family business shaped by place, patience, and pride. From their century-old farmhouse, Paola and Lino have built more than an agency: they've become guides for those seeking a new life in Abruzzo, helping newcomers find not just a house, but a home.

Paola Savini grew up among the artichoke fields near Atri, a landscape of red earth and sea winds. Her parents were farmers, people of the soil, who taught her the discipline of hard work and the pride of small things done well. Trained as a *commercialista*, she spent years working with numbers — until love and circumstance rewrote her path.

She met Lino Ciccotelli, a young man from Scagnano, at a disco. Lino, who was learning the craft of a *geometra*, would later spend years drawing up plans, measuring old walls and new dreams.

When they married, Paola left Atri for Scagnano. The distance made her old job impractical, and little by little, she began helping Lino — first with accounts, then with paperwork, and soon with everything to do with houses. “It happened almost naturally,” she recalls. “One thing led to another, and before long, I realised I wanted to do this professionally.” In 2008, she passed her exams with the Chamber of Commerce and became a licensed estate agent.

A HOUSE WITH STORIES

Their office isn't a showroom or a glass-fronted branch. It's the house where Lino was born, a Majella-stone farmhouse that has belonged to his family for over 150 years. Once, it was his grandfather's cantina, where local men came to drink a glass of wine and



Paola Savini (right), Lino Ciccotelli, and their daughter Irene

exchange stories. Later, it became a family home. Today, its ground floor has transformed into Majellacase headquarters.

There are eight people working here now, a small hive of steady activity: phones ringing, the rustle of deeds, the whirr of the printer, and always, the comforting toll of the church bell nearby. Outside, the village dog, Cimi (or Biscoff, depending on who you ask), sunbathes by the door. Lino keeps a special bag of dog food for him, and even Paola — despite her allergies — admits to being fond of him.

Life here flows between work and community. When the bakery truck honks its arrival, Paola and her colleagues join their neighbours to buy bread or peaches from the back of a farmer's car. At lunchtime, they often cross the road to the local



Lino's family home; Cimi snoozing in front of the office

trattoria, where the owners feel like extended family. "Their grandson sometimes runs straight into the office," Paola smiles. "Lino just scoops him up and takes him back over the road." Once a year, the local priest blesses the office, and Majellacase staff join in the village festas and parades. This is not just where they work — it's where they belong.

ITS ABOUT THE FAMILY NAME

Majellacase was born with a clear sense of place. "We chose the name because at first all our properties were around the Majella mountains," says Paola. "And perhaps," she adds thoughtfully, "we put in a bit more heart, a bit more care, because it's the family's good name. We all feel responsible for making sure everything goes well."

That shared sense of purpose now extends to a new generation. Their daughter Irene, who recently graduated, has joined the business, bringing what Paola calls "a fresh breeze of ideas." "She made us realise that people don't just want to see houses," Paola says. "They want to understand the villages, the rhythm of life, what each place offers. That's what led to the idea of our house-hunting tours."

NOT JUST THE HOUSES

Majellacase Experience Tours (MEXT) are not the quick dashes from one property to the next typical of the industry. Instead, they invite clients to walk through

old town centres, to pause for a coffee in the square, to feel what it's like to live there, pop in for a cooking class with a local chef, taste wines in a small family-run cantina. "We realised that many people asking about houses didn't really know Abruzzo yet," Paola says. "They would ask about homes in completely different places — Caramanico Terme, Pineto, L'Aquila — without understanding how varied the region is. That's when we thought: instead of just showing them houses, why not help them discover the territory too?"

"It's not a bus tour where we take thirty people to see every house on the market," Paola explains. "Each tour is personal — two, maybe four people at most. We plan everything around their needs: budget, lifestyle, and the kind of community they're looking for. Some want a small village with a cosy bar, others prefer somewhere with more services or a hospital nearby. The tour helps them understand what truly suits them."

The tours have proved remarkably effective. Many clients who joined one return months later with a clearer vision of where they want to live. "Just today," Paola says, "someone who had been on our tour is signing an offer."

THE EVOLVING MARKET

Abruzzo's property market, she explains, has changed in recent years. Buyers are better informed and often come with a stronger sense of what they want. "A few years ago, many preferred



Photos: (top) Majellacase clients on an experience tour; one of the locations visited on during their tours

complete ruins to restore. Now, they still want authenticity — the exposed brick, the Majella stone — but many prefer homes that are already habitable.”

The region’s allure lies in its geography: “Where else can you have mountains, hills, and the sea all within an hour’s drive?” Paola asks. “And then there’s the hospitality — people here truly welcome newcomers.” MajellaCase has helped find homes in Abruzzo for clients from over 15 different countries. Among their international clients, Americans now make up the largest group, followed by northern Europeans and Britons drawn to the balance between quality of life and affordability. They have also had a few Chinese buyers.

BEYOND THE SALE

Majellacase’s work doesn’t stop at signing the contract. They help clients navigate the maze of Italian bureaucracy — applying for tax codes, transferring utilities, even paying local property taxes on their behalf. They ensure every document checks out before any deposit changes hands. Their in-house geometras go further than most, cross-referencing cadastral maps with local planning records to ensure no hidden surprises. It’s this sense of thoroughness — and family pride— that keeps clients returning, recommending, and writing messages of gratitude.

For more details about the three types of Majellacase Experience Tours — short, five-night, and personalised — visit the agency’s [website](#).

TRADITION

THE FEAST OF SAN MARTINO: FIRES, WINE, AND CHESTNUTS

By David Ferrante

Outside, November's fog wrapped the bare trees, a damp and silent cloak spread across the brown fields. But inside, in the kitchen lit by the fireplace, it was another world. The warmth of the fire heated and illuminated both the stones and our hearts.

My grandfather came in while my grandmother was kneading *pizze de randigne* (corn bread) for dinner. "Sande Martine!" he said to his wife. Then he sat down by the fire next to me, placed some chestnuts on the embers that he pulled from his jacket pocket, and poured wine the colour of dark blood into his usual glass with a handle. And he began his story, which I listened to in a silence that felt sacred.

"*Ci sta lu Sande Martine!*" Did you hear how I greeted your grandmother?" he began, after taking hold of his glass. "It's not just a saying. It's a wish. Today is the 11th of November, Saint Martin's Day, the feast of the harvest that ends



13th-century fresco of Saint Martin in the Oratorio di San Pellegrino, Bominaco

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